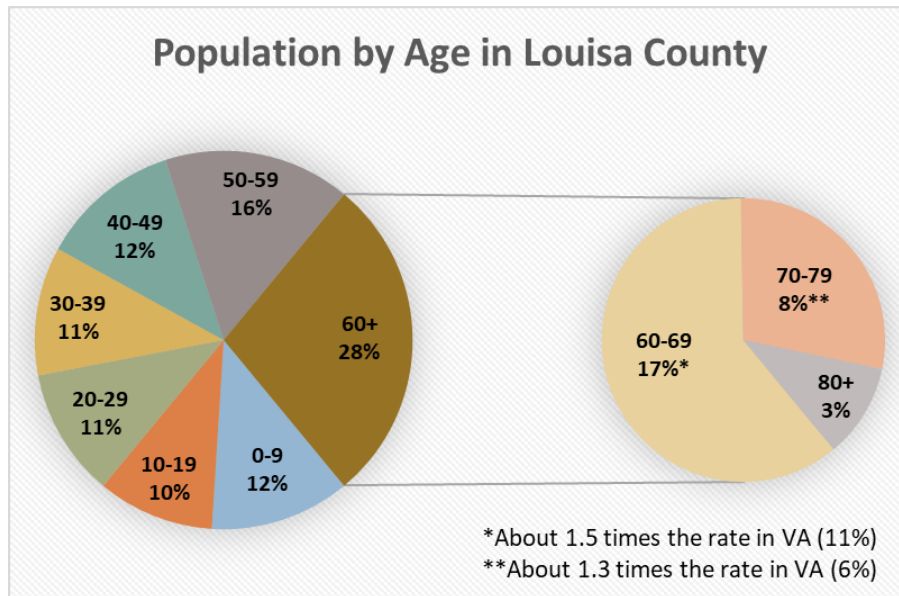


**LOUISA COUNTY
COMMISSION ON AGING (LCCOA)
ANNUAL REPORT (2020)**

SUMMARY

About 28% of the Louisa County population are seniors age 60 and older. The breakdown of the population is shown in the graphs below. The segments greater than 60 years old are expected to continue increasing nationwide.



Louisa County, VA - Profile data - Census Reporter 2019

Like many organizations, COVID restrictions significantly impeded the functioning of the LCCOA in 2020. The restrictions forced the cancellation of five (April – August) of the regular twelve public meetings of the LCCOA.

Although our activities were curtailed last year, the COA continued to carry out our mission to understand and inform the community about aging services and supports systems that make it possible for older adults to age well at home and in the community. Accomplishments this year included finalizing the new COA website, revising and publishing the Little Yellow Book (Louisa Services Directory) and preparing holiday gift bags for homebound seniors. The COA continued to collect information on the needs of older adults by interfacing with local officials and organizations. Networking has helped the LCCOA stay informed so that we can accurately assess the changing needs of the aging population in our community. This report documents our 2020 activities and presents our findings for the Board's consideration.

LCCOA 2020 ACTIVITIES

Website

The LCCOA website was completed and with the support of JABA staff and volunteers. The website contains information relevant to the Commission on Aging activities and to older adults in general. The website is located at: <https://louisa-county-coa.github.io/>.

Yellow Book

LCCOA did a complete update and reformat of the Yellow Book this year. The Yellow Book is now available in printed form and on the LCCOA website (<https://louisa-county-coa.github.io/Little-Yellow-Book.pdf>). The book contains information and contact numbers specifically for senior-related organizations. Approximately 1500 copies of the Yellow Book were distributed to government agencies and local organizations and businesses throughout the county.

Annual Luncheon and Resources Exhibits

Unfortunately, because of the COVID restrictions, we could not hold our annual holiday event for older citizens in 2020. During this event, the LCCOA serves a holiday meal and provides the opportunity for seniors to socialize and become acquainted with the services available to them.



In 2019, we invited several agencies and organizations to set up stations to describe services they offer to older adults. We hope to continue that event when COVID restrictions are lifted.

Rather than holding the luncheon, LCCOA and JABA volunteers assembled 200 gift bags to be distributed to homebound seniors. The gifts included food, information, masks, sanitizer, and social activities.

Data Collection and Needs Assessment

During 2019, the members of the LCCOA were able to gather data through churches, civic organizations, and government agencies such as the Resource Council, and the Louisa County Parks, Recreation and Tourism Department (LCPRT). In 2020, many of those sources were not available because of COVID restrictions. The reduction in normal information sources was offset by increased input from JABA and outreach to key representatives of local organizations that provide services used by seniors. Since restarting meetings in September, we have worked to schedule speakers (live and by remote presentations). Our goal for 2021 is to continue these presentations monthly.

LCCOA FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Getting older is a profoundly serious business. Approximately 25% of seniors over 65 live alone and may have health or mobility problems. Unfortunately, many caregivers, family, fellow citizens, and community agencies are unaware and/or inexperienced in understanding the many challenges that seniors face. These challenges, if properly addressed, would make aging easier for the largest growing segment of our population. Aging adults can still enjoy quality lives, even when faced with significant challenges, providing they have access to resources to meet those challenges. In addition to comprising a large part of our population, seniors are also the most vulnerable of our citizens.

Below is the list of major issues for Louisa County seniors as distilled from our information sources, current efforts to address those issues, and our recommendations for going forward.

1. Social Isolation

While technology and social media may help connect seniors in some ways, a recent survey from the AARP Foundation has found that nearly one-third of adults 45 years old and older feel lonely. Experts believe that number will grow as the senior population grows. The top predictors of loneliness identified in recent studies were the extent of their social networks, physical isolation, age, depression, anxiety, and overall health. Social isolation and loneliness can have profound effects on physical, emotional, cognitive and financial well-being.

The Jefferson Area Board for Aging (JABA) is an extremely valuable resource for our Louisa seniors. To directly address isolation, JABA's Community Centers provide an opportunity for community members who wish to gather and participate in activities either individually or with other older adults. Although physical locations were closed last year in compliance with state and local directives, alternative activities and opportunities were created to promote connectedness and involvement. Virtual events, conference calls, weekly calls, and monthly activity packets helped to provide more innovative opportunities for engagement and has increased the number of new members.

JABA offers various programs to not only combat social isolation directly, but also to alleviate some of the root causes and consequences of the prolonged absence of socialization. The COVID-19 pandemic has shown increased needs of older adults because circumstances that led to feelings of confinement and loneliness were multiplied. Insights from JABA are critical to understanding more about the elderly in the County.

Caring Connections, sponsored by the Louisa County Resource Council, is another program addressing the issue of isolation. This organization has partnered with JABA to identify seniors who need additional social connections and are using food deliveries as an opportunity to meet that need. Volunteers are hosted and recruited by the LCRC and JABA provided the training materials on working with seniors directly. This program was in its infancy before the pandemic began. It is currently suspended and will resume when conditions permit.

The LCCOA will continue to work closely with the JABA representative to identify ongoing or new needs and work collaboratively to share data. We also plan to collaborate with and support the Caring Connections initiative with the Resource Council when that program is able to continue.

2. Abuse

Elder abuse can include neglect, emotional, financial or sexual abuse. About 1 in 10 Americans over 60 have experienced abuse, and we become more at risk for abuse as we age. Elder abuse creates health care and legal costs that are often carried by public programs like Medicare and Medicaid.

Although often underreported to police or social services, elder abuse, whether physical, financial or self-neglect, is unfortunately quite prevalent.

In addition, the LCCOA plans to investigate a new initiative to use Supports and Tools for Elder Abuse Prevent (STEAP), from the National Center on Elder Abuse and USC. STEAP is an effort to educate and empower communities by creating a structure for noticing, reporting, and preventing abuse. The customizable toolkit includes brochures and fact sheets, an outreach guide and presentation materials.

3. Nutrition and Food Security

The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated the fundamental inequities that have long existed in our food system. Food insecurity is a symptom of poverty. Food is not a fixed cost so it is often sacrificed, in terms of both quantity and quality, to accommodate other basic needs. Studies have shown that food insecurity is associated with decreased nutrient intakes, increased rates of mental health problems and depression, and a host of other issues. A study from the Weldon Cooper Center's survey in 2019 shows 22% of the population deals with some type of food insecurity, nearly double the state average.

In past years JABA has provided healthy balanced meals through the federally and state supported home delivered meals program. During the pandemic, JABA's Home Delivered Meals (HDM) program has been a lifeline for homebound seniors unable to engage their social supports to help with shopping and meal preparation.

The Louisa County Resource Council (LCRC) operates the Community Cupboard program, the only food bank of its kind in the county. The Community Cupboard provides monthly allotments of food at no charge to income-eligible Louisa County residents. Basic staples, like canned fruit, vegetables, peanut butter, and protein-rich beans are supplemented with fresh meats, produce, and dairy so that clients have enough variety to create their own nutritious meals. Last year, the volunteer-run operation distributed more two-million pounds of food to people who need it. The food council's executive director, Lloyd Runnett, says the nonprofit has a hard time breaking down the stigma that comes with hunger. "We're only serving about half of the population that needs the services in Louisa County. One of our biggest challenges is getting people to come and take advantage of this wonderful program that we have here."

The LCRC also operates the Emergency Food Pantry provides a week's worth of groceries to those faced with an unexpected crisis, such as job loss, or medical emergencies. Families may receive an emergency food supply at no charge two times during a six-month period.

The LCCOA recommends that further attention needs to be paid to issues surrounding hunger and access to nutritional resources.

In addition, the LCRC has a policy of making each food package the same for each recipient with the exception that larger families get more food and the elderly get an additional nutrition box. The food does not always meet the needs of some recipients. For example, people with diabetes are given sweets and high calorie items. These items must be discarded. The LCCOA recommends that the LCRC develop a way to determine a client's medical dietary needs and individualize the boxes as much as possible or remove items that may be problematic for some recipients.

4. Transportation

About 600,000 older adults stop driving each year making it difficult for seniors to receive medical care, shop for necessities, visit family or attend social events. Mobility dependence increases isolation, negatively affecting seniors' health and well-being. Transportation can become one of the biggest responsibilities for family caregivers and providing transportation is not always easy or convenient. In rural areas it can be incredibly difficult to meet the needs of a growing older population.

JAUNT is Louisa County's only public transportation service. JAUNT transports passengers within Louisa County and to Charlottesville on demand, and to the Betty Queen Senior Center on specific weekdays. JAUNT is invaluable to seniors who no longer drive and need transportation. However, public transportation is increasingly becoming an issue. Many of the elderly in the county no longer drive or have a vehicle. Some individual services will transport County residents to medical appointments in Charlottesville, but at a cost many elderly citizens cannot afford. As a result, patients often skip appointments.

The LCCOA recommends that organizations serving older citizens in the community work together to generate creative ideas and new approaches to serving senior's transportation needs. As the population grows, so will the demand. Positively expanding transportation for one group also improves access for the entire community.

5. Housing

Aging at home extends and improves overall quality of life by postponing institutionalization and preventing premature decline. By encouraging independence and self-care, aging adults stay in charge of their own lives for as long as possible.

Fluvanna-Louisa Housing Foundation (FLHF) helps senior residents stay in their homes longer. FLHF offers a loan and grant program for Essential Home Repairs such as roofing, HVAC, septic, well, hot water heater, plumbing and electric that are otherwise cost

prohibitive. Income eligible residents benefit with up to half of a repair paid in grant funds and the remaining balance repaid in a 0% interest loan. FLHF also provides handicap accessible ramps or help residents to obtain a ramp. The FLHF owns 30 affordable rental units, many with handicap access features and occupied by seniors. FLHF has built homes for those in need in the past and plans on creating new opportunities for Senior housing in the future. The Additionally, other groups such as the Resource Council and RuraLove also have connections with many faith-based groups looking for home repair projects for the elderly.

Epworth Manor is a small apartment compound with subsidized rents for the elderly and disabled in the town of Louisa. There is a waiting list for a one-bedroom apartment. There is one assisted living facility that is part of a privately owned corporation. It is moderately expensive and does not have a memory care unit or other specialized care. The Louisa Health and Rehabilitation Center is a nursing home that provides primarily short-term care.

A regional housing summit, similar summit, "Opening the Door," was held in Charlottesville in 2019. The LCCOA recommends that Louisa County consider sponsoring a similar summit within the next two years to assess the housing needs in the County. The Department of Housing and Community Development has planning grants and would advise on the way to proceed with the Summit. The LCCOA will partner with the Housing Foundation to determine the correct path to accomplish this.

6. Access to Information

Although aging at home extends and improves overall quality of life, it is difficult to find the information and resources needed to be healthy, safe, and active as you age. Older adults should be able to readily reach out to organizations for general information on many areas that have an impact on their life. The most utilized searches are for public benefits available pertaining to healthcare, food, home heating and financial assistance.

In addition to the LCCOA's Yellow Book, which was mentioned earlier, there are a number of services that provide information to the County's older population.

The JABA Senior HelpLine provides information on programs and services and links persons 60 years of age and older and their caregivers to local services. Resources are designed to keep people connected and now help people find pandemic related services. Professional staff briefly assess needs, send literature, and write referrals for a range of services such as options counseling, the Long-Term Care Ombudsman program, legal services, transportation, employment and nutrition services, as well as referrals to other agencies within the County.

7. Caregiver Support

Caregiver fatigue occurs when the caregiver feels physically, emotionally, and physically exhausted, often leading to a change in attitude. Negative feelings toward the job and the care recipient sometimes cause feelings of resentment and frustration. When caregivers don't take care of their own physical and emotional needs, it becomes impossible to properly take care of

someone else's. It can be difficult to grasp the idea that caregiving efforts may not result in better care. Unpaid family caregivers have a heightened risk of suicidal thoughts.

JABA's adult day care helps to remedy these issues by offering older adults a place to go every day and receive care, nutritious meals, mental and physical stimulation, and companionship. This all occurs with a good ratio of trained staff to members, as well as monitoring by a licensed nurse. Caregivers' experiences reduce stress, improved participant and caregiver relationship and reduced anxiety or guilt. At the end of the day, the member returns home to family, and 70% report that the client's mood is improved. Adult daycare eliminates or puts off the need for an assisted living or nursing home facility placement thus removing people from their homes. Families report that loved ones using adult day care have a positive reaction to such as being generally more active and alert and demonstrating improved dementia related behaviors.

Family caregivers are extremely positive when evaluating the adult day care programs. They report that their relatives enjoyed the social interaction, the physical activities and cognitive stimulation. Common concerns of families are difficulty transporting the person to and from the facility as well and costs if services are not covered by Medicaid.

Other services, such as in-home care, also assist older adults in maintaining their independence and ability to remain at home. The main goal of companion care is to provide social and emotional support to seniors living alone or with a spouse only. The companion can help with daily activities, like running errands or accompanying the senior when they go shopping. Companion and other in-home care are typically provided by paid providers. Although these services are often vital to remaining at home, they are often affordable. Subsidized programs are poorly funded on the state and federal level. Some care can be provided through Medicare or Medicaid services on a physician's order. In these cases, nurses visit clients with medical needs on a regular basis. However, this service is not as prevalent as it was 20 to 30 years ago. Some private companies provide these services, but rarely in rural areas.

Supporting caregivers is a vitally important part of supporting seniors as they age in place. Services like adult day care and companion programs are needed, but in some cases have limited availability or are unaffordable. Affordable caregiving and caregiving support remain one of the largest deficits in care for seniors and will be a focus of the LCCOA.

SUMMARY

To ensure that the County is informed of the needs of the elderly, the LCCOA will:

- Continue to work closely with JABA
- Collaborate with and support the Resource Council's Caring Connections
- Explore a possible initiative using STEAP materials
- Identify issues surrounding hunger and access to nutritional resources
- Generate creative ideas and new approaches to serving senior's transportation needs
- Partner with the Housing Foundation to determine the correct path to convene a regional housing summit
- Continue to produce and distribute the Yellow Book
- Prioritize caregiving and caregiving support

The LCCOA looks forward to continuing to assess the needs of the older citizens in Louisa County in 2021.