

Creating an Age-Friendly Jefferson County, Colorado

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Introduction and Problem Statement

The United States is experiencing a significant shift in demographics, with longer average lifespans and more adults aging in their community as long as possible (Comlossy & Walden, 2013). Most people state they want to age in place, and remain living in their homes rather than entering a care facility (Jaffe, 2014). As more Americans live longer and strive to age in place, communities are working to develop policies and initiatives to support them (Ball & Lawler, 2014). In recent years, AARP and the World Health Organization have emphasized the importance of creating age-friendly communities, where people of all ages, across demographics, location and level of need can thrive (Plouffe & Kalache, 2010). AARP's Network of Age-Friendly States and Communities focuses on achieving this through eight domains of livability:

- outdoor spaces and buildings
- transportation
- housing
- social participation
- respect and social inclusion
- civic participation and employment
- communication and information
- community and health services (AARP, 2019a)

Colorado has the third fastest growth rate in the United States of residents 65 years and older (Colorado State Demography Office, 2016). Jefferson County, which spans the western Denver suburbs into the foothills, is currently home to the biggest group of older adults in Colorado (O'Connor, 2014). As of 2019, Colorado is one of six state members in AARP's Network of Age-Friendly States and Communities, and 13 local counties and cities across the state are also members (AARP, 2019a). In 2019, Jefferson County joined the Network in an effort to leverage and build upon previous work around aging issues. Members submit five-year strategic plans, following significant data collection to assess gaps and highlight successes, and stakeholder engagement to ensure representation across demographics (AARP, 2019b). Part of

this initiative is emphasizing the value of older adults, by including them in the planning, guiding dialogue about ageism and investing in programs that support people across the lifespan.

Jefferson County Human Services (JCHS) and the Jefferson County Council on Aging are leading the county's age-friendly project. For this project, JCHS is the primary partner agency. Prior to beginning their strategic planning process in early 2020, JCHS needs to better understand what is known about the state of aging in the county, and what resources and gaps exist across AARP's eight domains of livability. This analysis also aligns with AARP's recommended steps to creating an age-friendly community:

- Form a group of experts and community members to provide feedback throughout the process
- Conduct a local needs assessment
- Create a project timeline and plan and include evaluation strategies throughout
- Review the age-friendly project plan with AARP
- Adjust and implement the age-friendly plan
- Provide updates to AARP about project strengths and challenges
- Conduct an evaluation of the plan
- Continue implementation long-term and identify sustainability strategies (AARP, 2019b)

This report will discuss the findings of a thorough analysis of state and local reports to help JCHS create an intentional, evidence-informed strategic plan. The primary research questions for this report are: what quality information is available about the status of resources and services within AARP's domains of livability in Jefferson County, and where is more research needed to help address gaps? This research will benefit JCHS in assessing the state of services and systems for older adults and future generations across the county, and making informed decisions about investing in any new research and programs. Furthermore, this age-friendly planning will help make Jefferson County a desirable place for people of all ages to live.

Literature Review

Need for Innovative Policies on Aging. It is widely reported that most American adults hope to age in their communities rather than in a facility (Jaffe, 2014). Many researchers and leaders fear that the existing infrastructure for healthcare and human services for older adults is already insufficient, and the needs will only increase as demographics continue to shift (Avanzino et al, 2016). As demographics change, states and communities need to create long-term plans to ensure adequate resources and policies for people of all ages. Building age-friendly communities is a proactive approach that looks at a broad scope of residents' needs (Ball & Lawler, 2014). Several journal articles note the growing need for policies in the United States and internationally that proactively plan for longer lifespans and the impact on needed resources such as health services, housing and opportunities to stay engaged in the community (Comlossy & Walden, 2013). Some note that as people are living longer than ever before, there is not a clear roadmap for comprehensive policymaking. However, local pilot programs can help inform broader policy changes at state and federal levels (Ball & Lawler, 2014). Furthermore, a 2015 piece urged community leaders to dream big when looking at age-friendly efforts, particularly since much of this work is unprecedented, or has only occurred on a small scale (Lawler, 2015). Based on the literature, JCHS and their partners should consider strategies to engage policymakers and leaders to emphasize the importance of aging issues in the region and state.

When looking at policymaking, funding for older adult services must be acknowledged. In the United States, the Older Americans Act, Medicaid and Medicare are the primary funding sources for older adult services. These funds can help keep older adults at home by providing nutrition support, caregiver resources and other support services. Despite the growing number of older adults in need of supports, Older Americans Act funding has remained somewhat stagnant,

increasing 1.1 percent since 2001 (Fox-Grage, House & Ujvari, 2019). There are several federal and state groups working to address major gaps for older adults, including funding and ideas for innovative solutions. The United State Senate Special Committee on Aging works to address the national needs of older adults (United States Special Committee on Aging, n.d.). The Colorado Commission on Aging was created through the Older Coloradans Act (Colorado Department of Human Services, 2019a). The Colorado Strategic Action Planning Group on Aging was developed as part of House Bill 15-1033. Members meet monthly to brainstorm ideas to push Colorado forward in supporting older adults (State of Colorado, 2019). These efforts, like JCHS', can help inform the need for consistent and sustainable funding for older adults.

Extensive research has been conducted on strategies for supporting aging in place, including federal, state and local policies that have been implemented in recent years (National Conference of State Legislatures and the AARP Public Policy Institute, 2011). A 2011 report outlined policies that have been enacted across the United States, nearly all of which fall within AARP's domains of livability. The report also evaluated the number of age-friendly initiatives nationwide and highlighted the importance of these efforts, specifically noting the need for cross-sector collaboration and participation from community members across all walks of life. By including a diverse set of perspectives, the report notes that age-friendly initiatives can help the community or region shift from a culture of reacting to residents' needs into more proactive planning (National Conference of State Legislatures and the AARP Public Policy Institute, 2011). Looking at common elements of age-friendly initiatives around the nation can help JCHS learn from their successes and challenges in their own development processes.

A unique shift in the age-friendly initiative model is that it pushes those involved to look at strategies that work well for the population as a whole, rather than how a system can support

one individual or family. This macro-level approach, though it can be challenging, creates a broader lens for long-term policies and strategies (Greenfield et al, 2015). Overall, when age-friendly initiatives are successful, the result is a community that genuinely values people of all ages, engages and involves older adults and creates and sustains infrastructure for support services (Avanzino et al, 2016).

Themes of Age-Friendly Communities. A 2010 study assessed how cities across the world can prepare for the shifting demographics in aging. Utilizing the World Health Organization's Checklist of Essential Features of Age-Friendly Cities, the researchers noted the need for intentional planning that emphasizes how many factors play into healthy aging. For example, a successful age-friendly model should not focus solely on one issue such as food security, but rather look at how housing costs can impact other determinants of health and access to services that help individuals age in place. The researchers argue that coordination and collaboration is crucial in developing sustainable age-friendly communities (Plouffe & Kalache, 2010). As JCHS and other communities begin their planning, it is vital to identify diverse partnerships and engage community leaders across sectors. During the planning process, it is also critical for communities to consider long-term sustainability (Clark et al, 2014).

As previously mentioned, research consistently shows that the majority of people want to stay in their communities as they age (Jaffe, 2014). A 2015 article highlighted the growing need for coordinated, local initiatives to help more adults achieve this. It is important for communities to come together and support the population as a whole by implementing efforts to develop plans to ensure their region is a healthy, safe and inviting place to age (Greenfield et al, 2015).

Cross-sector collaboration is emphasized as a key factor for successful age-friendly initiatives in many articles. A 2015 report on age-friendly efforts around the United States notes

that policymakers should be active in the planning process, as well as community leaders such as business owners (Steels, 2015). Furthermore, these efforts can be led by other groups such as community-based organizations, faith communities and neighborhoods, and the leadership role should not fall solely on government entities (Scharlach et al, 2014). Successful age-friendly initiatives feature consistent feedback and engagement from a diverse and representative group of community leaders and members (Steels, 2015).

Creating Age-Friendly Communities. Creating age-friendly communities means ensuring supports that apply to all populations, including across demographics and geography. One author argues that policymakers around the nation have underinvested in key elements of aging in place, specifically access to affordable housing options for lower and middle income older adults. This 2017 piece states that by developing policies and programs to improve existing housing infrastructure, and developing neighborhoods that center around supportive services, communities will be better positioned to support changing demographics. This argument aligns with the interconnectedness between AARP's domains of livability, and how one area may influence another, such as health care providers located near low-income housing options (Stone, 2017). Also of note, a 2010 report highlighted the unique challenges in rural communities. Many rural communities have a higher percentage of older adults, as well as limited service options such as transportation, health services, etc. (Battisto, Dye & Willoughby, 2010). As JCHS and other regions develop age-friendly plans, it is important to consider how plans may or may not succeed in rural communities that are more isolated, and where there are gaps.

There is currently limited research available on how to effectively sustain age-friendly initiatives. The bulk of the research focuses on the need and strategies to get started, but more is needed on the economic implications of such efforts, and how to evaluate and adapt them in the

long-term. Additionally, long-term evaluation processes are often overlooked in many age-friendly projects and should be included in JCHS' strategic plan (Clark et. al, 2014).

Methodology

Data Collection. Research leveraged national and local reports and data from the past several years. The data sources included a mix of qualitative and quantitative data, and many reports feature data specific to Jefferson County. The data sources were selected in partnership with JCHS. The 2018 Community Assessment Survey of Older Adults (CASOA) conducted by National Research Center, Inc. was a primary data source. The report covers major aspects of life in Jefferson County, including housing, transportation, health and overall livability. The survey results are specific to older adults living in Jefferson County and the report compares responses with results from the same survey in 2010 and 2015. It is important to note that the majority of responses came from the more urban areas of Jefferson County, which is a limitation.

The 2020 United States Census will provide updated results for many categories discussed in the report, and should be reviewed when available. A comprehensive literature review was also conducted to evaluate the need for age-friendly work and make recommendations using lessons learned and evidence from other age-friendly projects. Cumulatively, all of the data sources helped inform the findings and subsequent recommendations for JCHS' strategic planning process.

Key Variables. The primary variables for this project were AARP's eight domains of livability and current data on strengths and gaps within the domains in Jefferson County. Table 1 shows the key elements of each domain. Age-friendly communities can assess strengths and gaps within each domain, and how they work together collectively.

Table 1: AARP's Eight Domains of Livability

Domains of Livability	Key Factors
Outdoor spaces and buildings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community has adequate number of clean, safe, well-maintained and accessible public areas • Walkways and spaces are well lit • Public safety is monitored
Transportation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Public transit is affordable, reliable and accessible • Alternative transportation options are available for people with disabilities • Roadways are well lit and in good condition • Transportation related signage is clearly marked
Housing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A range of affordable housing options exist • Residents have access to services to keep homes safe and well-maintained, including home modifications
Social participation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community activities are regularly available, affordable and accessible • Activities are relevant to diverse groups and appeal to various interests • Efforts are made to include people who may be isolated
Respect and social inclusion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community seeks feedback from diverse populations • Adequate number of community programs and services that support all groups exist • Value of older adults is embraced
Civic participation and employment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Older adults have many choices for work options, job training and volunteerism • Workplaces value older adults • Leaders appreciate importance of aging issues
Communication and information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coordinated communication is available to all residents • Information is provided in multiple mediums to residents frequently, and through channels that reach diverse populations • Residents are able to access Internet and technology to find information
Community and health services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wide range of support services are available for health and basic needs • Health and community services are convenient and accessible • Options are not limited by financial means • Emergency planning efforts include residents of all needs

Note: Adapted from “Checklist of essential features of age-friendly cities” by World Health Organization, 2007. Retrieved from https://www.who.int/ageing/publications/Age_friendly_cities_checklist.pdf.

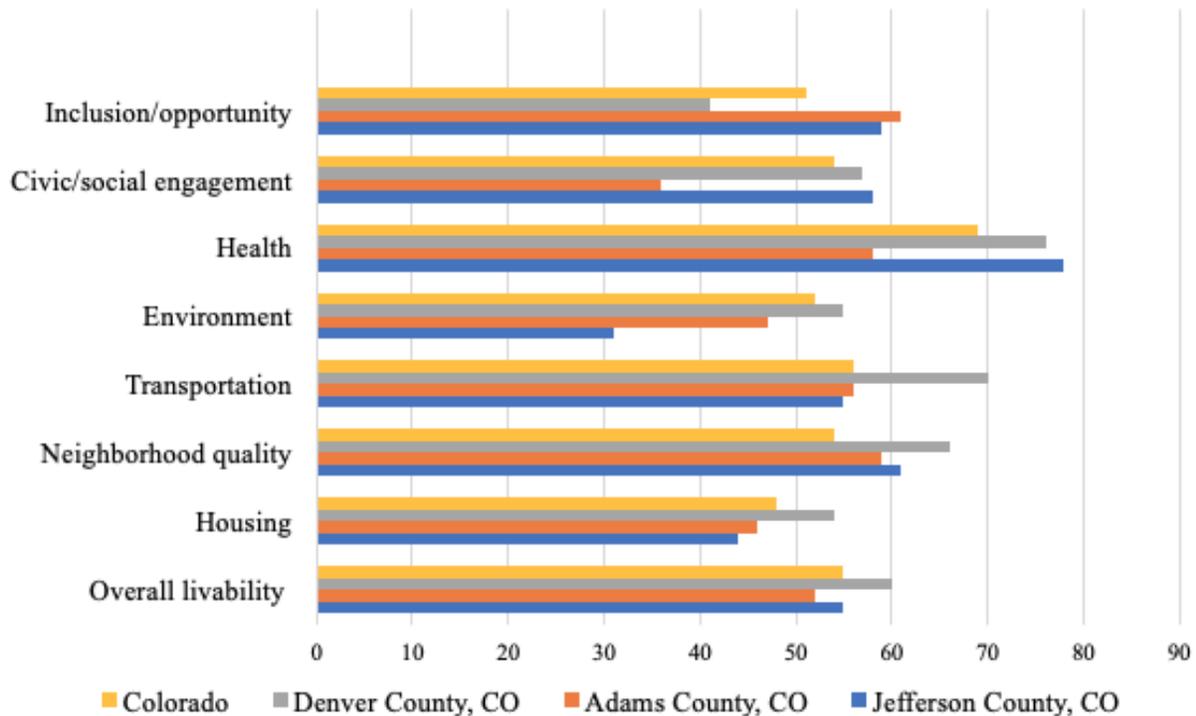
Analysis Plan. In order to begin creating a strategic plan for an age-friendly Jefferson County, JCHS must evaluate and understand the strengths and opportunities that exist within the framework of AARP's Eight Domains of Livability. The research approach is aligned with AARP's steps to building an age-friendly community, as well as recommendations and lessons learned from around the nation and globe as found in the literature review. JCHS has achieved success in previous projects with similar models of combined research, data collection and stakeholder engagement. Although the domains overlap in some areas, communities should assess the status of each domain individually and collectively to determine what new research is needed, and where the focus areas should be (World Health Organization, 2007). The literature review helped to inform the analysis approach, and provide evidence-informed recommendations. Upon analyzing the data sources to inform strengths, gaps and priority areas, the findings were broken out across the domains. Within each domain, available data was paired with innovative service models and key needs. Areas for future research are also indicated. The data informed the findings and recommendations, and required a balance of academic research and data provided by other age-friendly projects. Recommendations were developed and presented through a SWOT analysis, highlighting Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats. This method was chosen based on its use by other age-friendly projects (State of Hawaii Executive Office on Aging, 2013).

Findings

In addition to its domains of livability, AARP has an online livability calculator for communities. The scoring categories are weighted equally and align closely with the eight domains of livability, and are rated up to 100 points. A community that has an overall score of 100 has achieved a fully livable region for people of all ages. Overall, Jefferson County,

Colorado has a total livability score of 55, which is very comparable to many cities and counties across the United States and is considered average by AARP. As a state, Colorado also has a score of 55, with health rated highest and housing lowest (AARP, 2018). Figure 1 and Table 2 show how Jefferson County compares with two other Denver metro counties and Colorado as a whole in overall livability and across specific categories. Jefferson County's scores align with the other regions for the most part. One area of note is that Jefferson County scores significantly lower than the other areas in environment, which is primarily based on water and air quality concerns and should be further examined. Jefferson County has the highest health score of the regions (AARP, 2018).

Figure 1: AARP Livability Scores 2019



Note: Adapted from “AARP livability index - great neighborhoods for all ages” by AARP, 2018. Retrieved from <https://livabilityindex.aarp.org/>.

Table 2: AARP Livability Scores 2019

Areas	Colorado	Jefferson County	Adams County	Denver County
Inclusion/ opportunity	51	59	61	41
Civic/ social engagement	54	58	36	57
Health	69	78	58	76
Environment	52	31	47	55
Transportation	56	55	56	70
Neighborhood quality	54	61	59	66
Housing	48	44	46	54
Overall livability	55	55	52	60

Note: Adapted from “AARP livability index - great neighborhoods for all ages” by AARP, 2018. Retrieved from <https://livabilityindex.aarp.org/>.

Outdoor Spaces and Buildings. Jefferson County spans 773 square miles, 653 of which are unincorporated, and it is home to more than half a million people (Jefferson County, Colorado, n.d.). With 26 parks maintained by the county, including a vast number of trails and open spaces, there are many options for outdoor recreation (Jefferson County Colorado Open Space, n.d.). Overall, use of public outdoor space by older adults has remained fairly consistent in the past decade. Forty two percent of older adults surveyed in 2018 had used a local recreation center at least once in the past year, and 81 percent had been to a local park (National Research Center, Inc., 2018). There is clear interest in recreational programming, as 54 percent surveyed attended at least one recreational program either individually or in a group setting in the past year (National Research Center, Inc., 2018). The outdoor spaces and buildings domain focuses on access to public outdoor areas as well as accessibility within the spaces. Given the number of well-maintained parks and close proximity to the Rocky Mountains, the primary focus area should be accessibility. Without an emphasis on accessibility for all populations and levels of mobility, the county cannot ensure adequate access to its wealth of outdoor spaces (World Health

Organization, 2007). Currently there is limited data around how accessible residents feel their outdoor spaces are, which is an opportunity for future research.

The City of Philadelphia surveyed older adults about their perceptions of local parks and reasons they may not visit them while planning Age-Friendly Philadelphia. They used this research, which showed that parks were extremely underutilized by older adults, to develop a plan to improve accessibility and encourage social interaction through community gardens (Clark et al, 2014). This strategy may be an idea for future research to better understand any barriers in utilization, and develop programs to increase participation.

Transportation and Mobility. The vast majority of Jefferson County residents, including older adults, rely at least partially on their own vehicles to get around. More than half of households have two or more cars, slightly lower than the Denver region as a whole. Only four percent of Jefferson County households do not have access to a car (Jefferson County Planning and Zoning Division, 2010). There is not sufficient data to fully determine how these transportation numbers apply across age groups and demographics, so that is an area for future research. Nearly 80 percent of residents drive themselves, and only four percent report utilizing public transportation (Jefferson County Planning and Zoning Division, 2010).

When older adults lack adequate transportation options, research shows they may become more isolated which can impact their overall health (Ball & Lawler, 2014). Another area of concern is walkability, or how accessible and safe pedestrian transit is in an area. OV Consulting and Jefferson County Public Health conducted a “walk audit” in targeted communities in 2016 (OV Consulting and Jefferson County Public Health, 2016). Although their audit was not fully representative of the whole county, it showed that walkability is a gap area. Moving forward,

JCHS should seek more information about walkability throughout the county and how communities could address gaps by centralizing these locations or improving accessibility.

Housing. In 2010 the median price of a single-family home in Jefferson County was \$232,400 (Jefferson County Planning and Zoning Division, 2012). In October 2019, Zillow listed the median home value at \$430,100, with an average rent of \$2,095 per month (Zillow, 2019). Rising housing costs are a concern across Colorado, as the state currently boasts the fifth most expensive housing market in the United States (Brandt & Hoffower, 2019). The vast majority of 2018 survey respondents own their home and nearly four in 10 have paid off their mortgage (National Research Center, Inc., 2018). Only 20 percent of older adults surveyed believe they have “excellent” or “good” access to affordable housing. This number has plummeted from 39 percent in 2010. 38 percent reported experiencing stress about the cost of their housing, defined by housing equaling 30 percent or more of their income (National Research Center, Inc., 2018). Affordable housing options, particularly for older adults with a fixed income or minimal assets, are limited in many areas of the country, and this gap can have a serious impact on older adults’ ability to age well in the community of their choice (Stone, 2017).

While local efforts may help improve education and awareness of housing options and financial preparation, this issue will likely not be solved or significantly changed by the age-friendly initiative. However, JCHS can learn from other communities facing housing challenges. In 2006, Portland, Oregon began its age-friendly initiative, as part of a project called VisionPDX. They recommended developing a plan to ensure affordable housing options, particularly centered around hubs of supportive services such as health clinics and public transit. Another recommendation was to work to improve access to affordable housing for more at-risk populations. Their ideas included increasing education about housing discrimination, growing

collaboration with agencies that help with solutions and considering potential new policies related to housing accessibility (Carder, DeLaTorre & Neal, 2014).

Additionally, the majority of rural older adults own their home, but they often experience more challenges with deteriorating elements and need more maintenance and repairs (Battisto, Dye & Willoughby, 2010). Ensuring access to home modification and improvement resources in urban and rural communities will be important.

Social participation. Roughly 31 percent of older adults live independently in Jefferson County, and having access to regular social interaction either with their own social network or in the community is important (National Research Center, Inc., 2018). Isolation and loneliness have been shown to negatively impact physical and behavioral health (Denver Regional Council of Governments, 2019b). As communities strive for increased social participation, it is important to look at accessibility and barriers (World Health Organization, 2007).

Older adults in Jefferson County have consistently reported positive feelings about their options to participate in cultural and recreational activities. One area of note is in 2018, only 35 percent reported interest in attending such events, and the discrepancy between interest and participation should be further assessed (National Research Center, Inc., 2018). The 2018 survey results showed a slight decline in participation in clubs and older adult centers, but an increase in faith-based activities (National Research Center, Inc., 2018). There may be a need to gather feedback from older adults about activities they are most interested in.

There are many ways to integrate social participation in an age-friendly community. Age-Friendly Philadelphia conducted research on interest in public gardens among the city's older adults and is using this data for future programming. This effort is a strong example of increasing

social engagement through a shared activity while also encouraging use of outdoor space and increasing access to healthy food, spanning multiple domains (Clark et al, 2014).

Respect and Social Inclusion. There is limited data available about how many culturally appropriate and competent services for older adults in Jefferson County. Although not fully comprehensive, key groups identified by JCHS to be evaluated are the LGTBQ+ community, minority populations, Spanish speaking individuals, veterans and individuals with disabilities. As JCHS moves forward, it will be important to stay tuned in with efforts for inclusion across demographics and interests and evaluate gap areas, and seek input from residents about biggest gaps. To help inform future efforts, JCHS should ensure that a diverse group of older adults is represented to build culturally appropriate supports, including programs for veterans and active military and non-English speaking communities. Some regions have been quite creative in improving this domain. The University of South Florida Sarasota-Manatee partnered with Age-Friendly Sarasota to debut a series of short theatre performances about aging and ageism. The segments were based on findings from interviews with local residents to tell a story about aging, and promote inclusion of diverse perspectives (Fanning, 2019).

Civic Participation and Employment. Jefferson County is home to a highly educated population and workforce. More than 43 percent of residents hold at least a bachelor's degree. In 2018, 133,313 members of the county's workforce were 60 years of age or older, equating to 23 percent overall (Jefferson County Economic Development Corporation, 2018). According to the Colorado Department of Labor and Employment, the county's unemployment rate was 2.5 percent in 2017, lower than rates across the metro region and Colorado (Jefferson County Economic Development Corporation, 2018). 60 percent of older adults surveyed were fully

retired, while 36 percent were working. More older adults worked in 2018 than in 2015 or 2010, matching the national trend of adults working longer (National Research Center, Inc., 2018).

One area of concern in creating age-friendly communities is ensuring opportunities for older adults to rejoin or remain in the workforce. Although multiple factors are likely at play, 27 percent of older adults surveyed think finding work in retirement may be a challenge, and 20 percent are at least somewhat concerned about strengthening or developing the skills needed to work (National Research Center, Inc., 2018).

In 2018, 85 percent of older adults surveyed in Jefferson County considered local volunteer opportunities “excellent” or “good”. This number is slightly higher than reported in similar surveys from 2015 and 2010. However, despite positive feelings about the opportunities to get involved, only a third had recently volunteered, which is quite a bit lower than the United States average. More research is needed to better understand this discrepancy and identify strategies to address it (National Research Center, Inc., 2018). One possible cause to evaluate is how income and education levels impact how local older adults volunteer. Generally, older adults with higher education levels seek out volunteer roles, so awareness of opportunities across demographics could be a way to improve participation (Morrow-Howell & Tang, 2008).

Communication and Information. Even when resources are available, if older adults are not aware of them or how to access them, barriers still exist. A 2018 community needs assessment by the Kirkland Lake age-friendly community planning group in Ontario, Canada, identified communication as the number one issue, noting that without proper dissemination of information, attendance and usage of vital resources could be negatively impacted, even potentially effecting their long-term funding (Sherratt, 2018). Roughly 60 percent of older adults surveyed believe they are “somewhat” or “very” aware of the resources and services available to

them, which means many residents are missing key information (National Research Center, Inc., 2018). Communication involves a coordinated effort to share information with all populations. Information should be provided through multiple mediums, be accessible for people with different needs and be easily found (World Health Organization, 2007). Simple things like access to the Internet and computers at public libraries can help. Television, radio, digital and print mediums all aid in the dissemination of information to older adults and the broader population, but gaps likely still exist. Focus groups may help better understand which communication methods are most effective, and which populations are being missed.

Having a centralized access point for information is a key component of this domain. Coordination among groups that serve older adults, such as government entities, community based organizations, faith-based groups and neighborhoods can help increase points of access to information (World Health Organization, 2007). More data is needed to fully assess current coordination, and identify strategies for improvement. Furthermore, as groups create plans that impact older adults and their families, they should seek input from those affected.

Community and Health Services. The social determinants of health are a recognized framework for assessing the factors that influence how well people live and age. The World Health Organization's Commission on Social Determinants of Health recommends that communities strive to address the social determinants of health by closing gaps in equity, continually working to improve quality of life and health for people of all ages and evaluating progress (Commission on Social Determinants of Health, 2008). As JCHS continues to evaluate this domain, using the social determinants of health may be a valuable broader framework.

In the CASOA report, roughly half of respondents had a positive response to their access to health care. The majority of respondents also viewed their health at the time very positively.

One area of concern is the significant drop in how local older adults view accessible and affordable behavioral health services, which has dropped from 52 percent in 2010 to only 31 percent in 2018 (National Research Center, Inc., 2018). Respondents have also expressed a change in accessibility of preventive services such as immunizations, dropping from 73 percent in 2015 to 66 percent in 2018 Utilization of oral health care services has also decreased. Feelings of loneliness and isolation increased very slightly, which should be watched in future surveys (National Research Center, Inc., 2018). Although these survey results are based heavily upon the number who respond, and may not be fully representative of all older adults in Jefferson County, they are valuable in determining potential gaps and should be leveraged.

Future research is needed to better understand how populations such as low-income households, minority populations and at-risk individuals access health services. Research shows that when older adults access health care services, there may be multiple benefits. A 2018 study found evidence that older adults' social networks strongly influence how and if they utilize oral health services, and increased usage of community services can help provide additional social settings for patients, potentially reducing isolation (Jin, Metcalf & Northridge, 2018). Furthermore, access to long-term services and supports is often more limited in rural communities, which should be evaluated further (Battisto, Dye & Willoughby, 2010). Another area of concern is the growing shortage of health care providers across the nation. The American Nurses Association has expressed serious concern about the growing need for more nurses, and estimates at least one million more professionals will be needed by 2022. Given the growth in Colorado's older adult population, this is a critical gap area (Daniel, 2018).

Table 3 outlines innovative organizations and programs currently addressing facets of the domains, as well as the key gap areas for JCHS to address based on the data analysis.

Table 3: Assessment of Domains in Jefferson County

Domains	Innovative Efforts	Key Gaps
Outdoor spaces and buildings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clement Park (Littleton) playground (Leary, 2019) • Carmody Recreation Center (Lakewood) (City of Lakewood, 2019a) • City of Lakewood gardens (City of Lakewood, 2019b) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Physical accessibility • Need to better understand gaps in utilization and identify major barriers
Transportation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • RTD bus and rail (Regional Transportation District, 2019) • Lakewood Rides (City of Lakewood, 2019d) • Seniors' Resource Center ride programs (urban areas and Evergreen) (Seniors' Resource Center, 2019) • City of Golden Street Improvement Program (City of Golden, 2019) • City of Arvada signage improvement efforts (City of Arvada, 2019) • City of Lakewood bike boxes (Lotus, 2018) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limited transportation options in rural and mountain areas • Consistent, affordable ride options for people who do not drive • Walkability of communities
Housing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sunshine Home Share Colorado (Denver Metro) (Sunshine Home Share Colorado) • A Little Help (Denver Metro) (A Little Help, 2019) • Harmony Village (Golden) (Harmony Village Cohousing Community) • Metro West Housing (Lakewood) (Metro West Housing Solutions) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Affordability • Need to better understand availability of home modification and improvement resources, particularly in rural areas
Social participation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Apex Park and Recreation District adult education and recreational classes (Arvada) (Apex Park and Recreation District) • Jefferson County libraries (Jefferson County Public Library, 2019) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Disconnect between reported interest in participation and utilization of local opportunities • Need to better understand barriers to access

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Golden Community Center Front Porch gathering place (Golden) (City of Golden, 2016) • Bessie’s Hope (Bessie’s Hope, 2019) • The Generation Exchange (Denver Metro) (Generation Exchange, 2019) 	
<p>Respect and social inclusion</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mountain Community Pathways (Evergreen) (Mountain Community Pathways) • Easterseals Colorado (Lakewood) (Easterseals Colorado, 2019) • SAGE of the Rockies LGBTQ+ program (Denver Metro) (The Center on Colfax, 2019) • Lutheran Family Services Rocky Mountains – African American caregiver support, refugee and asylee programs (Lakewood) (Lutheran Family Services Rocky Mountains, 2019) • Changing the Narrative ageism training (Denver Metro) (Changing the Narrative) • Latino Age Wave (Denver Metro) (Latino Community Foundation of Colorado, 2019) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of data available • Need to better understand residents’ desired improvements • Need for more culturally appropriate supports
<p>Civic participation and employment</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Senior Community Services Employment program (statewide) (Colorado Department of Human Services, 2019b) • Changing the Narrative ageism training (Denver Metro) (Changing the Narrative) • AARP Back to Work 50+ Smart Strategies classes (Denver Metro) (AARP Foundation) • Senior Heroes older adult volunteer program (Seniors’ Resource Center, 2017) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Perception of opportunities to rejoin or remain in the workforce as residents age • Need for more information about what job skills residents need help building • Ageism in the workplace • Disconnect between interest in volunteering and participation

<p>Communication and information</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • City of Lakewood Senior Support Specialist (City of Lakewood, 2019c) • Bemis Library Aging Well Resource Center (Littleton) (Littleton, Colorado, 2019) • Prime Time for Seniors newspaper (Prime Time for Seniors, 2019) • 9News’ Senior Source (9News, 2019) • No Copay radio (No Copay Radio) • Network of Care database (Denver Metro) (Denver Regional Council of Governments, 2019a) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Need to better understand what gaps exist and how residents access information • More centralized locations resources and services to reduce silos
<p>Community and health services</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Jefferson County Public Health (Jefferson County Public Health) • Mental Health First Aid trainings (Jefferson Center, 2019) • Senior Reach program (Denver Regional Council of Governments, 2019b) • Jefferson County Aging Well project (Jefferson County Human Services, 2019) • Lift the Label drug program (statewide) (Paul, 2018) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Perception of available and affordable behavioral health services • Access to oral health care • Increased feelings of isolation and loneliness • Health care provider shortage

Note: Innovative efforts list provided through email communication with Jefferson County Age-Friendly project advisory committee, 2019

Discussions, Recommendations, and Conclusions

The research indicates there are many opportunities for JCHS to strengthen areas within the domains. It also shows that innovative work is already occurring in several areas that can be leveraged and possibly expanded. Using a SWOT analysis, strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats are shown in Figure 2. The SWOT analysis model has been used by other age-friendly initiatives and provides a digestible overview of opportunities and gaps. The State of

Hawaii utilized this approach for their 2020 aging strategic plan, and conducted multiple SWOT analyses focused on the state programs that serve older adults, and brought in nearly 200 stakeholders for input (State of Hawaii Executive Office on Aging, 2013). Including diverse perspectives may help JCHS identify unknown or unrecognized factors.

It is important to note that issues of access issues were found in multiple domains. Accessibility is defined as “being able to be reached or obtained easily” and “the quality of being easy to understand” (Cambridge English Dictionary, 2019). For this project, access challenges can include a variety of barriers, including economic, physical and cultural. For example, services may be unreachable due to transportation or because they do not align with their values or preferred language. As JCHS moves forward, all aspects of accessibility should be considered.

Figure 2: SWOT Analysis

<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Strengths</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strong existing partnerships with advisory committee • Current efforts including Jefferson County Commission on Aging and Aging Well Project • Number of innovative programs already within region • Support from county leadership • Strongest domains: Community and health services, civic participation and employment 	<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Weaknesses</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Need for more representation and input from rural communities and minority populations • Need for more data, particularly about gaps between interest and utilization of services • Gaps in availability of resources outside of urban areas • Weakest domains: Housing, transportation, respect and social inclusion (need more data)
<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Opportunities</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cultivate new partnerships across sectors and strengthen existing relationships • Show value of older adults in community • Increase coordination of resources and communication across Jefferson County • Identify and execute action items and show progress to residents and leaders 	<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Threats</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Long-term sustainability • Need for funding to implement new programs or services • Lack of long-term buy-in from county and community leadership • Cultural perceptions of aging • Lack of inclusion or representation across needs and demographics

Preparation for 2020 Strategic Planning Process. Potential data to be collected in the future has been noted across the domains of livability. In several areas, there is a gap between interest in participation or usage and actual utilization. Only 60 percent of respondents feel informed about available supports in Jefferson County, which is a significant gap area (National Research Center, Inc., 2018). This could be due to a breakdown in information, or due to other causes, and should be a priority to better understand through stakeholder engagement. In addition to more research, JCHS should determine which, if any, partners are missing from the conversation. As noted in much of the literature, intentional and coordinated partnerships are key for long-term success, and partners should span across sectors and geography (Plouffe & Kalache, 2010). Possible additions include business leaders, health care professionals and faith community members, as well as under-represented minority groups. Additionally, JCHS should utilize other age-friendly communities' strategic plans and reports as models as they begin developing their own. Each community has a unique process and goals, even within Colorado. For example, Boulder County took the approach of identifying 17 goals and action items to become an age-friendly community in their strategic plan (Age Well Boulder County, 2019). Larimer County took a narrower approach and selected four key priority areas to focus on in their first few years (Partnership for Age-Friendly Communities in Larimer County, 2017). JCHS' strategic plan and process should be representative of the county's needs, and learning from other communities will likely be helpful. Otero County is early in its planning process and plans to focus efforts on creating a comprehensive website for the community that lists resources and information across the eight domains (J. Collins, personal communication, September 16, 2019). It may benefit JCHS to meet with other age-friendly sites to learn what has worked well, and where there have been challenges. AARP has several helpful resources for planning and

brainstorming ways to address gaps, including their *Where We Live* book which highlights innovative programs from communities across the nation (LeaMond & Stanton, 2017). JCHS should also reference and try to align their plan with the 2015 Colorado Aging Framework.

Lastly, communication is absolutely key for success. AARP recommends hosting listening sessions, which can be achieved through focus groups or larger town hall style gatherings (AARP, 2019b). As previously noted, in several of the domains, there was a disconnect between interest in services and activities and utilization of them, which is an important point to better investigate. Regardless of the stakeholder engagement methods JCHS selects, it is important to encourage attendance from a broad representation of residents, including but not limited to, rural communities, minority groups and isolated older adults. JCHS should also share their planning progress with local groups and ensure they are not duplicating any efforts. These groups may also be a resource for community feedback, by inviting their clients to attend in-person sessions or collecting information through surveys or other sources.

Potential Challenges. Portland's initiative, Vision PDX, reported ageism as a barrier in implementation. Working with leaders and decision makers may be challenging if there is not a shared value for older adults and aging issues in the community (Carder, DeLaTorre & Neal, 2014). Additionally, ensuring that older adults across demographics and across the county are equally represented will require intentional and continued effort. Vision PDX regularly heard concerns from community members about how their strategies may not reach or be appropriate for the diverse group of older adults in their area, and this may be a concern in Jefferson County as well (Carder, DeLaTorre & Neal, 2014).

One of the most crucial recommendations is to identify strategies for long-term sustainability, whether this means consistent funding, staffing capacity and/or a clear home for

continued work on this project (Clark et al, 2014). Although more research is needed in the future to assess the impact of the many age-friendly initiatives across the country and globe, it is reasonable based upon existing research to state that without a strong sustainability plan, the age-friendly efforts may struggle to gain and maintain momentum (Ball & Lawler, 2014).

Summary. The United States is facing a major shift in demographics, with people living longer and more aging adults in need of supportive services and communities where they can age in place. Developing an age-friendly community means taking a holistic view of how everything from housing to social inclusion impact how well residents can live, work and play through AARP's eight domain of livability. Access, including affordability, physical barriers and inclusiveness, is a key element across domains. JCHS and its partners are well-positioned to enter their strategic planning process and work toward making Jefferson County an age-friendly community. By reviewing the current needs and resources across the domains of livability, and looking at the region as a whole, there are many strength areas to leverage, and opportunities to address gaps. Currently Jefferson County ranks comparably in livability to other similar regions around the United States and Colorado, and JCHS' efforts will likely benefit other areas as they begin their own age-friendly initiatives. Throughout the strategic planning and implementation processes, JCHS and its partners should seek feedback frequently from residents, ensuring representation across demographics and from rural and mountain communities, and provide updates to residents about the efforts. Long-term sustainability and cultural attitudes toward aging and the value of older adults will likely be challenges, but with proper planning and evaluation, may be mitigated. Overall, JCHS has a significant amount of work ahead, but should feel positive about the possibilities for helping Jefferson County become an ideal area for individuals of all ages to live and age in place.

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