

Aging in Central Texas

A Mixed Methods Approach to
Understanding the Lives of Middle and
Low-income Older Adults in Central Texas



By 2040 more than half a million older adults (+65 years old) will live in the 5-county Austin-Round Rock metro area, comprising **nearly one-fifth of the Central Texas population** (18%).¹

This persistent growth in the aging population proves that Central Texas has a draw for many retirement age folks. Some seniors seek to engage with the vitality within the Austin city limits and others seek the peace and community found in the more rural counties. Regardless, all older adults are a valuable and treasured resource to our community, and it is important that we understand their experiences and needs so that we can better serve this growing population.

To help us understand the realities for our 60+ year old, middle and low-income (<\$65,000 per year) neighbors, St. David's Foundation partnered with the Aging Services Council (ASC) to release a survey of 849 older adults in our five-county area and work with SUMA Social Marketing who facilitated a series of four focus groups in Travis and Bastrop counties.

The survey focused on assessing the gap between challenges, experience, and services offered while the focus groups were used to contextualize the survey findings and to understand specific experiences around social isolation, caregiving, accessing information, and establishing advance directives.

Together these studies answered these important questions:

1. What is it like to age in Central Texas?
2. What services are most needed? How do older adults access information about those services?
3. Do older adults feel enabled in establishing advanced directives?
4. How do older adults in Central Texas maintain social connection?



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What Is It Like to Age in Central Texas?

Participants in the focus groups made clear that there is a lot to love about aging in Central Texas. They spoke about treasuring their independence: being able to travel, not having children to care for, spending time with family, grandchildren especially, and pursuing hobbies like volunteering, creative pursuits, and joining social and physical activity groups.

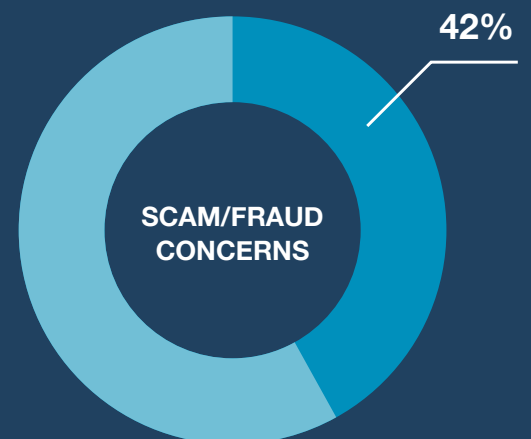
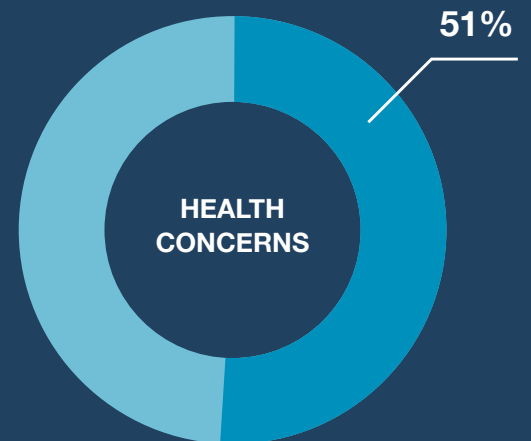
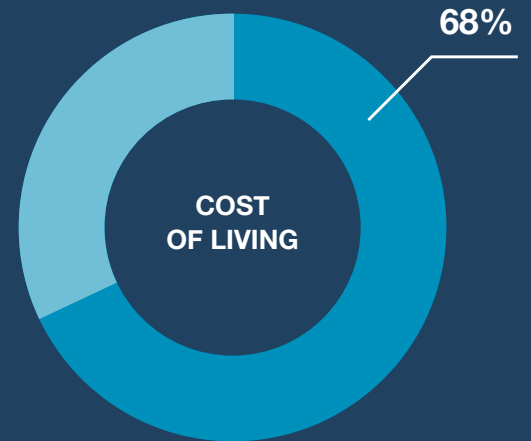


Respondents **treasure their independence**, with some challenges

Nonetheless, there remain challenges that are particularly concerning for the elderly population. A total of 84% reported that **cost of living** impacted them *highly, somewhat, or slightly*. It was also the most cited challenge from focus groups in both Travis and Bastrop.

Additionally, more than half of survey respondents said that they are concerned for their **health**. Rural survey respondents were two to three times more likely to report not having **access to medical care** than urban respondents. The participants in the Bastrop County focus groups listed a few **healthcare** related concerns that rural residents face, like slow ambulance response times, limited specialty care access, and few hospitals nearby.

Top 3 Most Impactful Issues for Seniors in Central Texas



- Issue impacts respondent *highly or somewhat*
- Issue impacts respondent *slightly or not at all*



What Services Are Most Needed?

And How is Information About Senior Services Accessed?

Our findings suggest that seniors in Central Texas lack financial assistance resources, senior-focused services, personal care assistance resources, and information regarding advanced directives.



49% of respondents indicated that they were **at least slightly impacted by a lack of information** on available services

As the community commits to meeting these needs, it is important to know how seniors are accessing information.

The survey and focus groups alike highlighted that seniors are increasingly technologically savvy: **85%** of survey respondents **use a smartphone, computer, internet, or email.**

Facebook and **NextDoor** were noted as the top resources for learning about news and local events by focus group participants in both counties. While those in Bastrop did seem to rely more heavily on “word of mouth” communication through text, email, and in-person conversations to keep up with community happenings.

Do Older Adults Feel Enabled in Establishing Advanced Directives?

To hone in on an especially important service for older adults, the focus groups were asked about their knowledge and experience with establishing advanced directives.

We discovered that about half of the participants did not know what advance directives were and others did not understand the various documents that qualify as advance directives: living will, durable power of attorney for health care, and do-not-resuscitate orders. Both studies found that about half of respondents did not have an advance directive.

Participants cited challenges with setting up these documents including cost, complexity of legal documents, and choosing the will executor.



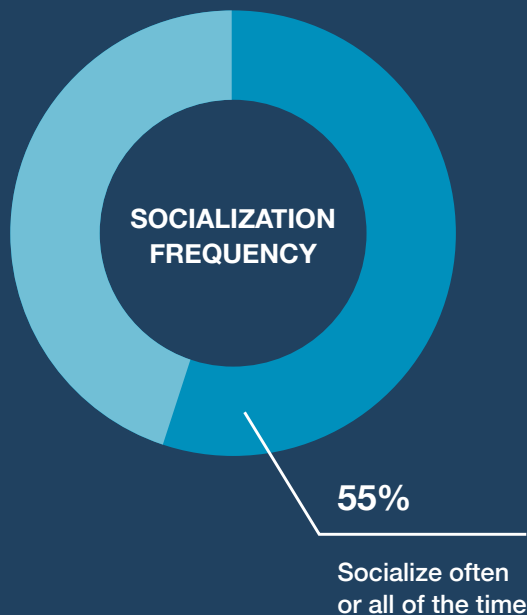
About half of respondents did not have an advance directive

As organizations seek to expand advance directive information and services, it is important to know where older adults go for this information. Seniors cited lawyers and doctors as their primary sources for information on advance directive materials. Though, some expressed a desire for more guidance and sources of information and mentioned they would like to get this information from a lawyer or advocate in either group or individual settings.

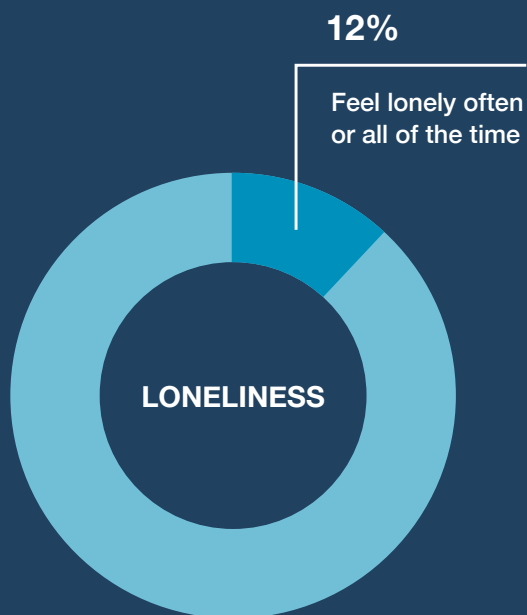


Engagement and Loneliness in Central Texas Seniors

Prior to COVID-19



At the same time, a group of older adults do feel socially isolated on a regular basis.



How Do Older Adults in Central Texas Maintain Connection?

Both studies highlighted that **older adults in Central Texas are highly engaged**. Of survey respondents, 58% respondents said they *never or hardly ever feel lonely* and 55% said they socialize *often or all of the time*.

The focus group members mirrored this sentiment, speaking of the plentiful number of activities in their communities, enjoying their hobbies, and treasuring their alone time, when they have it.

But participants did speak of having periods of loneliness, usually connected to the passing away of a loved one.

"I feel lonely, most vulnerable, when one of my friends checks out. Then it works with me for a little bit until I can regroup and get that positive energy and get going again."

Austin Resident

While most adults in these studies did not regularly feel socially isolated, there remains a group of older adults, 12% of survey respondents, who feel lonely *often or all of the time*. **This percentage is likely higher in the presence of the COVID-19 pandemic** and social distancing orders. It is important, now more than ever, that we understand the realities, challenges, and service needs of our older adult neighbors.

Acknowledgments

Citations

¹ U.S. Census Bureau, 2015 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates, K200104

Collaborators



St. David's Foundation is committed to strategic grantmaking through its **Older Adults Age in Place portfolio**.

Led by Andrew Levack, MPH, Senior Program Officer, **the Foundation seeks to increase support for older adults to live safely and independently in their own community by:**

- Helping them to remain safe and independent in their homes as they age;
- Having honorable and improved end of life care;
- Helping them to engage and contribute as a vital part of the community;
- Ensure adequate supply of accessible, high quality services.

Note: this report focuses on a portion of the full report findings. To obtain a copy of the full report including additional information on research tools, please contact:

Andrew Levack, MPH

Senior Program Officer

St. David's Foundation

alevack@stdaidsfoundation.org

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