

Town Hall Meeting on Aging – Region X

Meeting Date: March 8, 2024

Sponsoring Agency: Region X Area Agency on Aging

Location: Joplin Senior Center, 2616 S Picher Ave Joplin

Attendees: 157

Total Comments:

Main Topic	Comment Counts
Daily Life and Employment	217
Family Caregivers	220
Housing and Aging in Place	244
Long-Term Services and supports	187
Safety and Security	210
Transportation and Mobility	197
Whole Person Health	226
TOTAL:	1,501

Purpose:

The purpose of this town hall meeting hosted by the Region X Area Agencies on Aging (AAA) in Joplin, Missouri was to gather input from older adults, caregivers, and other stakeholders on the challenges and opportunities of aging in Missouri. The feedback will be used to inform the development of a state Master Plan for Aging (MPA), which aims to improve the quality of life for all generations of Missourians as they age.

The focus of discussions during the town hall centered on the overarching goal of Missouri's MPA that all Missourians, regardless of age or ability, will have access to person-centered programs and services necessary to help them age in their environment of choice in a safe and healthy manner.

Key Themes/Challenges/Identified Needs by Topic:

The town hall meetings consisted of a brief presentation on the Master Plan for Aging initiative, followed by facilitated discussions on seven main topics: daily life and employment, family caregivers, housing and aging in place, long-term services and supports, safety and security, transportation and mobility, and whole person health. The key themes, challenges, and identified needs from the discussions are summarized below:

- **Daily Life and Employment:** Participants have experienced challenges with work/life balance, ageism in the workplace, inadequate access to flexible work options as they transition into retirement. Older adults need more flexible work arrangements and phased retirement. The need for flexibility extends into volunteering opportunities that allow seniors to stay active. Some participants wanted greater access job training and skills development for older adults. Participants discussed how there may be a loss of social networks post-retirement making it difficult to maintain social connections in retirement. Participants stressed the importance of maintaining active lifestyles through daily activities dedicated to seniors, working until retirement, and staying active with volunteering in the community.
- **Family Caregivers:** Participants expressed concerns about the emotional and physical strain of caregiving, lack of support, training, and resources for caregivers, and the financial burdens of caregiving. Participants shared the difficulties of balancing caregiving with personal life and other responsibilities. Participants would like the state to provide financial assistance programs for caregivers to help adapt homes for accessibility and to provide financial support so caregivers can afford items to take care of family member (incontinence supplies, medications, ointments, etc.). Having respite care options was also noted as important for the emotional well-being of caregivers, to allow balancing caregiving responsibilities with other commitments, and to give caregivers a much-needed rest to help prevent burnout.
- **Housing and Aging in Place:** Participants discussed several challenges for housing and aging in place including affordable housing options for seniors, housing for homeless seniors with mobility or medical needs, accommodating for aging needs when staying in home, and social isolation due to housing location or lack of community support. Participants thought builders of new construction should be required to follow universal design with accessible housing features to accommodate disabilities or mobility limitations. They also want regulations that ensure home safety for older adults. Participants identified the need for more affordable community housing options in a neighborhood setting with shared support and a community center for older adults, including those with low incomes.
- **Long-Term Services and Supports:** Availability, affordability, and quality of long-term care services was a concern of participants. A specific concern related to the quality of care in facilities, such as nursing homes and home care agencies, was how older adults can afford a quality senior facility providing long-term services and supports. Participants also asked if the state can financially help pay for assisted living services to

prevent seniors from leaving their homes. Expanding home-based services, including home health care or personal care assistance, is important to participants. They indicated that inadequate staffing in nursing homes and home care agencies leads to concerns about adequate care. Participants would also like programs that educate people, including family caregivers, earlier about continuing care needs for the aging and long-term care insurance benefits and costs.

- **Safety and Security:** Concerns of participants related to safety and security include preventing falls, accidents, and elder abuse/exploitation. Participants discussed that seniors need to be better protected against scams, fraud, and financial exploitation. Protections should include training so seniors can see the signs to prevent abuse. Participants would also like safer communities for the aging that address crime rates. Related to home safety/security, participants discussed enhancing security in homes and medical alert systems or assistive technologies.
- **Transportation and Mobility:** Participants noted the need for more accessible transportation options for seniors with limited mobility. Participants discussed different transportation solutions that should be more affordable and accessible for aging individuals, such as public transportation, trolley routes, ridesharing services tailored to older adults, volunteer drivers, rides to medical appointments, and emergency transportation. Participants also identified a current need for helping seniors with physical limitations to navigate public transportation systems, especially those in rural areas.
- **Whole Person Health:** Participants focused their discussions related to whole person health on ways to promote physical, mental, and social wellbeing for older adults. Participants would like to increase the availability of preventive health screenings, including in-home medical service options, to reduce hospitalizations. Participants also noted the need for education on managing chronic conditions. More education is needed on food and nutrition, exercise, socializing, etc. targeting healthy aging. They would like to see more holistic approaches to healthcare emphasizing more education about mental health issues, support through counseling or therapy, and additional resources to help.

Next Steps:

The town hall meeting is one of several ways to provide input for Missouri's Master Plan for Aging. Other methods will include online surveys, focus groups, and written submissions. The feedback collected from various sources will be analyzed and synthesized by the Master Plan for Aging Advisory Council and Sub Committees, which consists of representatives from state agencies, local governments, and community organizations. The Advisory Council and Sub Committees will develop a draft Master Plan for Aging by the end of 2025. The goal is to create a 10-year framework that supports senior communities and empowers older adults and individuals with disabilities to live safely and independently in their chosen environment.

For more information on the Master Plan for Aging, please visit [the official website](#) or contact the Missouri Department of Health and Senior Services at 573-526-4542 or MoStatePlanonAging@health.mo.gov.

Thank you for your participation and contribution to this important initiative.