

Town Hall Meeting on Aging – SeniorAge

Meeting Date: March 7, 2024

Sponsoring Agency: SeniorAge

Location: Southside Senior Center, 2215 S Freemont Ave, Springfield, MO

Attendees: 168

Total Comments:

Main Topic	Comment Counts
Daily Life and Employment	172
Family Caregivers	172
Housing and Aging in Place	164
Long-Term Services and supports	155
Safety and Security	142
Transportation and Mobility	139
Whole Person Health	142
TOTAL:	1,084

Purpose:

The purpose of this town hall meeting hosted by the SeniorAge Area Agencies on Aging (AAA) in Springfield, 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 are experiencing challenges related to employment and maintaining a daily routine. Their current needs include an increased financial stability, access to information and resources, and support for seniors in the workforce. Some future needs involve adapting to technology, expanding job opportunities in rural areas, and addressing age-related challenges (transportation to employment, medical appointments, need for part-time employment, etc.). Participants thought programs at senior centers focused on computer education, employment information, exercise, healthcare, etc. could help address many of the challenges to daily life and employment experienced by older adults.
- **Family Caregivers:** Participants discussed the many challenges faced by family caregivers in providing care for their loved ones, including access to knowledge of who can help them, quality care, lack of affordability for those facing long-term care, and burnout. Current needs identified by participants include more support services, respite care options, and financial assistance. Some future needs involve better training for caregivers, increased funding for support programs, tax breaks, and improved resources. Participants would like Missouri to develop a framework to show how providing in-home caregiving can be more effective and efficient than other alternatives (e.g., nursing homes).
- **Housing and Aging in Place:** Participants find the limited affordable housing options, lack of housing with accessibility features, and difficulties finding suitable living arrangements a challenge. Some current needs include increased availability of accessible housing options, resources for aging to help with home modifications, and other financial help that supports housing seniors and aging in place. Builders should have incentives to provide more affordable housing opportunities geared towards seniors' needs and enhanced accessibility measures. This includes making apartments affordable and accessible for seniors.
- **Long-Term Services and Supports:** The challenges related to accessing long-term care services such as in-home healthcare or nursing home facilities are affecting participants. The current needs identified by participants include better funding for long-term care programs, expanded access to services in rural areas, skilled workforce availability, improved caregiver training, ensuring quality of care provided in facilities, and increased availability of supportive resources such as counseling services.
- **Safety and Security:** Participants discussed some challenges involving scams targeting older adults, safety concerns at home or in the community, elder abuse or neglect issues, and lack of security measures like proper lighting or personal safety devices.

Current needs that were identified by participants focus on fraud prevention education, improved security measures such as cameras or alarm systems, expanded safety measures like fall prevention, and improved awareness and access to elder abuse reporting mechanisms. Future needs include stronger legislation and enforcement against scams targeting seniors, and increased awareness campaigns on safety issues.

- **Transportation and Mobility:** Participants expressed concerns about transportation options for elderly including limited availability or lack of affordability, particularly in rural areas, mobility limitations affecting independence, and difficulties with driving due to aging-related changes. Current needs relate to improving public transportation systems including specialized services, ensuring transportation has accessibility features necessary due to mobility limitations (e.g., wheelchair ramps etc.), expanding transportation networks into rural areas particularly where medical facilities are scarce, and improving education programs focused on training drivers to serve older adults with compassion and understanding.
- **Whole Person Health:** Participant discussions during this topic encompassed various aspects related to overall well-being including physical health, mental health, socialization, and nutrition. Some key challenges noted by participants include access barriers (e.g., medical deserts, food deserts), inadequate nutritional food and drinks, lack of mental health resources, social isolation, and difficulties navigating the healthcare system. Current needs involve access to affordable healthcare services, nutrition and wellness programs, mental health support services, and initiatives to combat social isolation through community engagement from senior centers and retirement communities. Participants identified future needs that include increased funding for comprehensive healthcare coverage including dental, vision and hearing, improved coordination of care between healthcare providers using advocates, better integration of physical and mental health services, and greater emphasis on preventative care and education on healthy aging.

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.