

City Services for Older Adults



Objective

Does the City provide services to older adults effectively and equitably?

Background

Austin residents between 55 and 74 were the fastest growing age group between 2010 and 2020.

The City of Austin has taken several actions to make Austin a more livable city for older adults, including adopting the Age-Friendly Austin Action Plan and hiring an age-friendly program coordinator.

Many departments are responsible for goals and strategies in the Age-Friendly Austin Action plan. These departments provide services to older adults such as senior center programming, technology training, and housing services. The City's age-friendly program coordinator supports these and other departments in providing age-friendly services. The City's age-friendly program coordinator also works with over 30 community organizations that provide services to older adults and work to make Austin more age-friendly.

What We Found

Finding 1: While the City has an Age-Friendly Austin Action Plan with goals and strategies to better serve older adults, the City does not have an effective way to measure progress, establish who will be responsible for goals, or assess if the City's efforts are equitable across all groups of older adults.

Exhibit 1: The City's Age-Friendly Austin Action Plan and Progress Report do not include clear ways to measure progress for the goals and strategies

Example	Goal	Strategy	Status	Indicator to measure progress?
Domain 1: Outdoor Spaces and Buildings	"Increase access to and utilization of parks, open spaces, and public buildings"	"Provide multi-generational programs such as yoga, Tai Chi, art in the park, etc."	"Progress Achieved: PARD has increased intergenerational programming"	None listed

Source: OCA analysis of the 2021 Age-Friendly Austin Progress Report, August 2022

Exhibit 2: The City's Age-Friendly Austin Action Plan and Progress Report do not always clearly assign who is responsible for goals and strategies

Example	Goal	Strategy	Status	Dept. responsible for progress?
Domain 6: Civic Participation and Employment	"Increase employment and entrepreneurial opportunities for older persons"	"Improve awareness and coordination of employment services"	"City staff are coordinating with Texas Workforce Solutions to expand opportunities"	Unclear

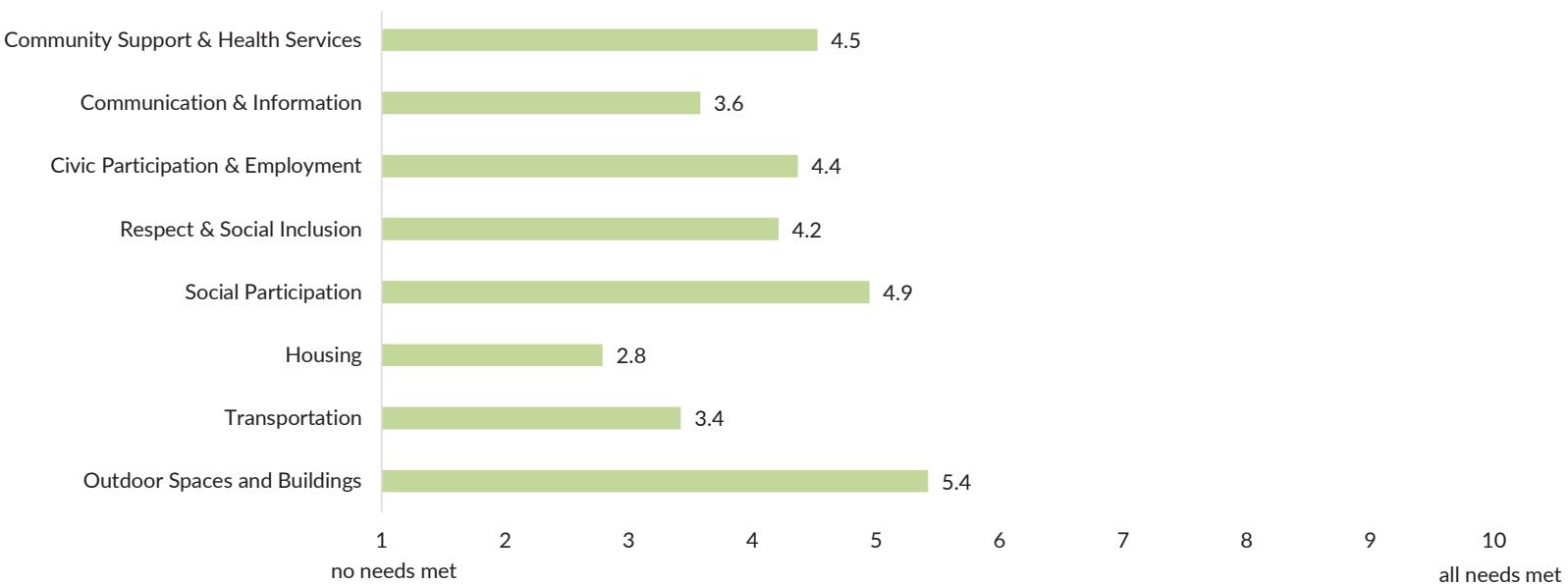
Source: OCA analysis of the 2021 Age-Friendly Austin Progress Report, August 2022

City Services for Older Adults

What We Found, Continued

We surveyed community partners who provide services to older adults and asked them to evaluate how City programs and services meet the needs of older adults across the eight domains in the Age-Friendly Austin Action Plan. We received 19 responses. On a 10-point scale, where 10 is the highest and one is the lowest, the average rating for each domain was 5.4 or below. Housing, transportation, and communication had the lowest average ratings at 3.6 or below.

Exhibit 3: Community partners rated how City services meet the needs of older adults as average or below



Source: Survey conducted by OCA of community organizations that partner with the City on its age-friendly efforts, July 2022

Finding 2: The City does not have clear, consistent outreach about City programs and services for older adults, making it difficult for older adults to find what they need.

- The City’s efforts to communicate about programs and services for older adults are decentralized and vary by department. City information for older adults is located across different City websites and various department webpages.
- 85% of respondents to our survey of community partners disagreed or strongly disagreed that it is easy for older adults to find information about City programs and services in one central place.
- 58% of respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed that older adults are aware of available City programs and services.
- 53% of respondents said the City of Austin’s website was not so useful or not at all useful in helping older adults locate programs and services.

City Services for Older Adults

What We Found, Continued

Finding 3: The City provides services to older adults across several different departments and community partners with one age-friendly program coordinator to align these efforts. Most top age-friendly cities have a more centralized approach with a dedicated aging services function such as an office or department.

- Several respondents to our community partner survey said positive things about the age-friendly program coordinator and noted that staffing this position has allowed for more targeted outreach, effective budget discussions, and better coordination.

Exhibit 4: 70% of the AARP’s top-scoring cities that we reviewed have an aging services function such as a dedicated office or department on aging

City	Dedicated aging services function with more than one staff?	
Austin, TX	No	One age-friendly program coordinator in Austin Public Health
San Francisco, CA	Yes	Department of Disability and Aging Services
New York, NY	Yes	Department for the Aging
Washington, D.C.	Yes	Department of Aging and Community Living
Boston, MA	Yes	Age Strong Commission
Portland, OR	No	One age-friendly program coordinator in the Bureau of Planning and Sustainability
Philadelphia, PA	Yes	Commission on Aging
Denver, CO	Yes	Office on Aging
Seattle, WA	Yes	Division of Aging and Disability Services
San Jose, CA	No	Services provided by Parks Department staff with no age-friendly program coordinator
Milwaukee, WI	No	Aging services provided by County

Source: OCA review of leading age-friendly cities, August 2022

What We Recommend

1. The Director of Austin Public Health should work with the City Manager and City departments to update the Age-Friendly Austin Action Plan to include clear, quantifiable indicators to measure success, clarify and communicate responsibilities for each strategy, and incorporate demographic data to assess equity.
2. The City Manager should ensure that all City departments are familiar with the Age-Friendly Austin Action Plan and that the plan’s goals and strategies are incorporated into how they fulfill their mission.
3. The Director of Austin Public Health should coordinate with the City Manager and other departments to create, implement, and ensure adoption of centralized guidance to help establish clarity and consistency in how the City communicates with older adults about programs and services, which may include a webpage to serve as a “one-stop” information center.
4. The Director of Austin Public Health should assess the resources needed to coordinate the Age-Friendly Program across City departments to effectively implement goals and strategies, evaluate those needs against current resources, develop a plan to address any gaps, and communicate that plan to the City Manager.