

Age-Friendly Cities Focus Group Questions

The eight domains of an Age-Friendly City are evidence-based categories developed by the World Health Organization (WHO). To insure cross-city uniformity, the eight domains will form the core of the focus group questions.

A. In your experience, what are the greatest unmet needs in your community in the following areas?

- 1. Transportation**
- 2. Housing**
- 3. Social Participation**
- 4. Respect and Social Inclusion**
- 5. Civic Participation and Employment**
- 6. Communication and Information**
- 7. Community Support and Health Services**
- 8. Outdoor spaces and buildings**
- 9. Other...?**

B. In your view what project or program might meet one or more of the above eight unmet needs in your community?

C. Dementia care and services are becoming more important in our communities.

Where do you refer community members who may show early signs of dementia or are diagnosed with early stage dementia?

Santa Clara Focus Group Seniors

Transportation

Seniors observed that there is some neighborhood transportation but it is not nearby; and the transportation does not seem go where you want it to go. Many bus stops don't have shelters.

Outreach takes too long and there is no consistency for regulars. The pedestrian crossings on El Camino Real are very dangerous and there is poor visibility. Some suggested street level blinking lights and red flags to carry while crossing. Pedestrians can wave the flag while crossing and deposit it in a holder on the other side.

Seniors expressed a need for escorted transportation for frail or ill elders; many need "through the door" transportation to a variety of places.

Bikes are becoming more of a mode in Santa Clara and Santa Clara needs more driver and biker education; and law enforcement of risky behavior (one model in Los Angeles recommends that traffic officers ticket risky behavior rather than "fix it" tickets). Bike education needs to start in schools.

Seniors would like to see law enforcement more involved in senior mobility and safety.

Housing

The main issue is that there is not enough affordable housing. Even housing in a non-profit complex, which is below market rate, is still too high and rent increases make costs too high for seniors. Some seniors are having to forego food. Recreational areas are now being impacted by very large housing complexes that don't provide green or park or open spaces for the residents. Residents want housing developers to provide green and recreational spaces in future senior housing.

The City now has some shared housing, 1 or 2 buildings; purchased by the City and seniors are requesting more. The City does seem to have the intent to help seniors age at home and there are some programs for upgrades and remodeling. Seniors need more education about how to access these programs.

The group requested that no smoking rules be enforced in condo and apartment housing complexes for seniors.

Social Participation

Seniors pointed out that as new housing complexes don't have green or common spaces within, social isolation is increasing. Parks need to adapt to the needs of older persons and not so much to the needs of children ...which are decreasing compared to seniors. Some suggested the implementation of the Villages model in regions of the City. One suggestion is Liberty Towers with the addition of ESL classes in order to foster communication and community.

Respect and Social Inclusion

Seniors appreciated the Life Stories program "Write your life story" where a college professor at Santa Clara University assigns students to capture the life story of an elder at the senior center.

The sister cities program offers seniors an opportunity to host and socialize with persons from Japan and Portugal. Many seniors think that inclusion is difficult when engagement is made difficult without transportation. Seniors report being "trapped" in their homes.

Civic Participation and Employment

Seniors noted the AARP website as very helpful regarding employment and making connections. Many seniors reported subtle but real discrimination. Many reported having to jump through a lot of hoops (more than others) in order to be considered for a job. And then, they still were not hired.

Seniors feel so wasted, so much knowledge is not being tapped. Age discrimination is real and companies need an incentive to hire seniors; incentives by county. The city "bends over backwards" to get seniors from in front of their TV sets. There are many seniors involved, but more outreach would equal more civic engagement.

Communication and Information

Many seniors noted the Senior Peer Advocate Program of the Health Trust. Suggestions that youth are taught to speak more slowly and clearly to seniors and less jargon would help.

Suggestion of putting information in multi-unit housing in a central place and still more information in electric bills etc. We are reminded not to assume that everyone is computer and internet savvy.

Channel 15 is a cable TV station that hosts local community information, but many seniors cannot afford cable TV costs.

Community Support and Health Services

Most seniors feel very well served and; there are health clinics “on every corner’ and Palo Alto Medical and O’Connor hospital are just around the border. Valley Medical Center serves low-income seniors; or perhaps the needy can go to Stanford Hospital. Many argue that the cut off point for free medical care is too low, it is still not affordable for the near poor.

Outdoor Spaces and Buildings

Seniors explain that cross walks are set too far apart for disabled or older persons; El Camino Real is the worst. People routinely get stuck in the middle of the highway. Winchester and Steven’s Creek are much the same. Pedestrians are killed.

Another issue is that many seniors are living in buildings with very long halls and they cannot make the journey from one end to the other. Kaiser Hospital is an example of this. And there are not enough bathrooms. The City of Santa Clara has put a restroom in almost every park and it is a real help.

Other areas of need are more push open doors and sidewalks that are not inclined so that walking and wheelchairs are able to navigate. Seniors observe that many doors are too heavy to open. In some cases, it is impossible to push a person in a wheelchair. The raised bumps or “dot” on the sidewalks at Target, for example, make it very difficult to walk or roll a wheelchair or walker. FG members suggest “senior testers” for outdoor spaces and buildings.

Ideas about Programs and Services

Seniors suggested an economical or free internet service in the area, especially a set up for seniors. Perhaps wifi service could be set up in senior only facilities.

Better outreach is needed via VTA and Outreach. Evening transportation is needed in particular.

Seniors suggested ESL classes and training for businesses (staff) to speak more clearly and slowly; especially while using voice mail.

Promote more employment for seniors, be more aggressive in employment development; seek more part time jobs and offer testing help for seniors so they can be more job ready.

Promote programs that allow for neighbor check in on frail elders. Develop some kind of senior ride sharing program and try to work out a special deal with UBER and LYFT. Work out a way to make these services accessible with and without smart phones.

Look into Linkages “time banking” and make it known to seniors in the community.

Seniors need more shelters and benches at bus stops. Place benches indoors where lines form like banks.

One idea is to have a “secret shopper” who would test the age-friendliness of local shops and restaurants and then give them a seal of approval they can post in the window or in the place of business.

Seniors would like to have a more affordable smart phone and instruction on how to use it.

Dementia Question Feedback

For issues around dementia many seniors would go to the senior center for help. Next they would go to the Alzheimer’s Association, Family Caregiver Alliance, or Adult Protective Services.

Kaiser has a support group as does Sunnyvale; and while assisted living memory care may be available in the area, many find it too expensive.