



**2021 • PITKIN COUNTY
AGE-FRIENDLY
INITIATIVE**

March 11, 2020

RE: Support for the 2020 Pitkin County Age-Friendly Initiative

To the Pitkin County community:

On behalf of AARP Colorado, this is to express gratitude and support for this update of the Pitkin County Age-Friendly Initiative (PCAFI).

In 2017, Pitkin County became the 149th member of the AARP Network of Age-Friendly States and Communities, a network currently numbering 445 communities and growing rapidly. One of the fundamental tenets of community level age-friendly work is to have a deliberate strategy for what AARP calls a “continuous cycle of improvement.” The enclosed update of the 2014 AWCPI plan represents precisely this kind of ongoing commitment to planning Pitkin County’s future through an age-friendly lens.

After reviewing (and approving) this plan, AARP’s Senior Advisor on Livable Communities William Armbruster characterizes it as “very thoughtful and well written.” He goes on to specifically compliment the emphasis on diversity and inclusion, so important to the plan that actually holds the special status as one of the “8 Domains of Livability.”

It is one thing, as 445 communities have done, to indicate an initial desire to commence age-friendly work. But this action plan demonstrates the kind of higher level of ongoing dedication that now results in a renewed Pitkin County certification of membership in the AARP Age-Friendly network through 2022.

We look forward to working closely with you to help carry out the goals and action steps outlined in the plan.

Respectfully,



Bob Murphy
State Director, AARP Colorado



April 12, 2021

Pitkin County recognizes that the encouragement and promotion of age-friendly planning and policies benefit our growing population of older adults. Our community is enhanced by programs and activities that encourage and favor aging in place. Pitkin County is committed to providing ongoing support for active and healthy aging, economic and social vitality, and a thriving Age-Friendly community.

Pitkin County launched the Pitkin County Aging Well Community Plan in November 2014, facilitated and executed by Pitkin County Senior Services. This comprehensive community plan was the culmination of a 20-month effort including community input sessions, monthly workgroups, steering committee meetings and a community-wide presentation of findings and results. These addressed older adult needs and programs, including the recognition of well-developed resources, as well as identification of gaps and inconsistencies. With this 2021 revision we now move forward as the Pitkin County Age-Friendly Initiative, utilizing the framework of AARP and the World Health Organization's 8 Domains of Livability, to refine and enhance the previous plan. The community has been working diligently on these tasks and accomplishments and reports on them annually. The overall goal of the Age-Friendly Initiative is to make Pitkin County a place where residents and visitors, through all stages of aging, will have access to the activities and services they need, as well as those they desire to thrive.

We look forward to continuing our collaborative efforts toward creating an Age-Friendly Pitkin County, for residents and visitors of all ages.

Pitkin County Board of County Commissioners

Kelly McNicholas Kury, Chair

Patti Clapper, Vice-Chair

Greg Poschman

Francie Jacober

Steven F. Child

LETTER FROM SENIOR SERVICES

The Roaring Fork Valley is a beautiful place, full of fascinating people with unlimited experiences in life. Being 'age friendly' recognizes the value in each of those experiences, to honor the stories and find the wisdom in perhaps unlikely places. My hope with this Age-Friendly Initiative is for all of Pitkin County to continue to be a leader around aging and to push to be even better. I am humbled, honored and excited to be part of a wonderful and caring community while striving to make it even more age-friendly every day.

Chad Federwitz

Manager, Senior Services



WHAT'S INSIDE

Following the Executive Summary and Background, pages 10-25 provide the 2019 information for each domain. Detailed information on What Exists Today, Significance to an Aging Population, Accomplishments and Next Steps, Goals, and Opportunities for each domain are included.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The 2020 Pitkin County Age-Friendly Initiative (PCAFI) restructures the county’s 2014 Aging Well plan into the framework of the AARP Age-Friendly Communities Program and furthers the county’s support for people to thrive in place as they age. This plan intends to describe and address the needs of Pitkin County residents.

The 2020 PCAFI aligns with AARP’s 8 Domains of Livability:

1. Outdoor Spaces and Buildings
2. Transportation
3. Housing and Supportive Living Options
4. Wellness and Enrichment
5. Diversity and Inclusion
6. Civic Engagement and Employment
7. Communication and Information
8. Health and Community Services

Within these 8 Domains, the 2020 PCAFI sets forth goals for future consideration by the community at large as a guide for addressing both the opportunities and challenges presented by aging to Pitkin County and the region. Focusing on and exploring these areas demonstrates an ongoing commitment to improving and enriching the lives of residents in specific ways.

It is expected that dedicated and passionate members of the Pitkin County community will champion this initiative and motivate influential partners so that the goals set forth in this report may become a reality.



BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

The Pitkin County Public Health Improvement Plan¹, completed in December 2012, established a plan of priorities for Pitkin County. One of those priorities was to “address the needs of a growing older adult population” by conducting a community-wide strategic planning process to identify and implement strategies for an aging well community.

In 2013, Pitkin County Senior Services (PCSS) became the lead entity and convener of the planning process. In February 2013, PCSS initiated discussions with the Executive Service Corps (ESC) to engage ESC to help facilitate the community strategic planning process. Between March and June 2013, PCSS and ESC together identified individuals, roles and responsibilities for a Project Management Team (PMT) and a Steering Committee. Following a July 2013 community event coordinated by ESC, leaders and organizations were asked to develop, and later implement, the identified goals. These teams worked to develop the plan, objectives, and action steps for a year alongside the PMT.

The Aging Well Community Planning Initiative (AWCPI)² was presented and introduced to the community at the 2014 Senior Summit on June 24, to an audience of more than 100 community members. The AWCPI plan can be accessed at www.pitkinseniors.com. Accomplishments since then include increased awareness and promotion of programs and services for older adults, expanded days and hours for transportation, increased lunch service at the Senior Center, new programming reaching areas of the county Redstone and Basalt, and more.

At the same time Pitkin County’s AWCPI was developed and implemented, AARP and World Health Organization (WHO) were developing the Age-Friendly Communities program³. In 2017, Pitkin County became the 149th U.S. community to achieve this designation (there are currently more than 440 such communities, 13 in Colorado)⁴. The framework of the Age-Friendly network provides details and tools for communities to assess their unique needs and leads to improving the lives of thousands of older adults around the nation. The initial Aging Well Plan received strong support from the community and the Board of County Commissioners. The elements of the new Age-Friendly structure complement the original plan.

Supportive research and resources were used extensively while compiling and updating this plan including:

- AARP
- The Alpine Area Agency on Aging (AAAA) and its Four Year Plan
- The 2019 Colorado Strategic Action Planning Group on Aging (SAPGA) Report
- The Colorado State Unit on Aging (SUA) and State Four Year Plan on Aging
- The 2018 Pitkin County Community Assessment Survey for Older Adults (CASOA)



A PLAN FOR THE NEXT 5 YEARS

Pitkin County Senior Services began planning an update and revision of the AWCPI in the fall of 2017. The plan was reframed with a more manageable and user-friendly structure under AARP's 8 Domains of Livability,⁵ while honoring the work and time of the 2014 Aging Well Community Planning Initiative (AWCPI). PCSS consulted with the project management team and steering committee for perspective and input.

Following draft presentations to the Board of County Commissioners (BOCC) and local municipalities for feedback, additional suggestions came from community input sessions held in Basalt and Aspen, as well as an online survey in May 2019. These outreach efforts sparked robust discussions and ideas. Several new concepts were adopted into the plan based on this input; chief among them was improved communication between community entities and the public they intend to serve.

AGING DEMOGRAPHICS

The changing demographics of an aging population in the United States will reshape communities for years to come. In 2034, the number of people over the age of 65 is expected, for the first time in U.S. history, to outnumber those under the age of 18⁶. This historic shift of national demographics will create both challenges and opportunities.

The population of Colorado is aging. Currently, one in seven Coloradans (14.2 percent) is 65 or older. By 2050, this is estimated to increase to one in five (20 percent)⁷.

Pitkin County is also seeing increasing numbers of adults over 65, and projections show this trend until 2035. Between 2020 and 2045 however, the percentage of older adults (over age 65) in relation to the total population will stay between 16-21 percent⁸.

For a closer view of where older adults are within Pitkin County, registered voters over age 60 are plotted on a map (see map⁹ on next page). This demographic distribution supports the need for the Pitkin County community to plan for and support an aging population.

VISION STATEMENT

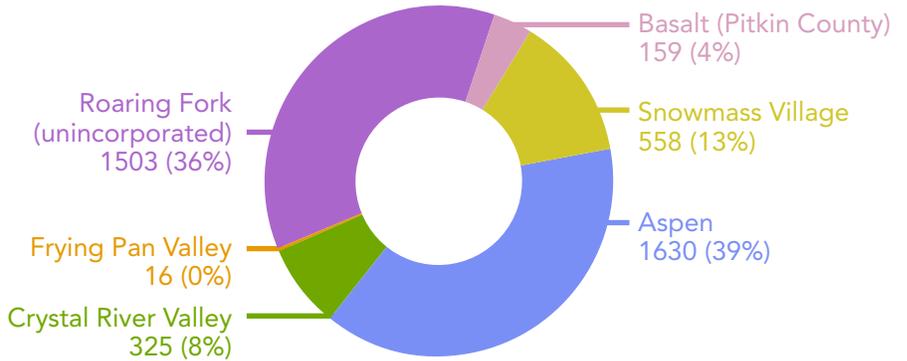
The 2020 Pitkin County Age-Friendly Initiative (PCAFI) will assist and support the community in developing strategies to build resources and lead changes so that, into the next decade and beyond, Pitkin County achieves its full potential as a thriving community for aging well.

This Initiative will produce a viable long-term community-wide plan, including goals, objectives, and action steps to address the needs of a growing older adult population.

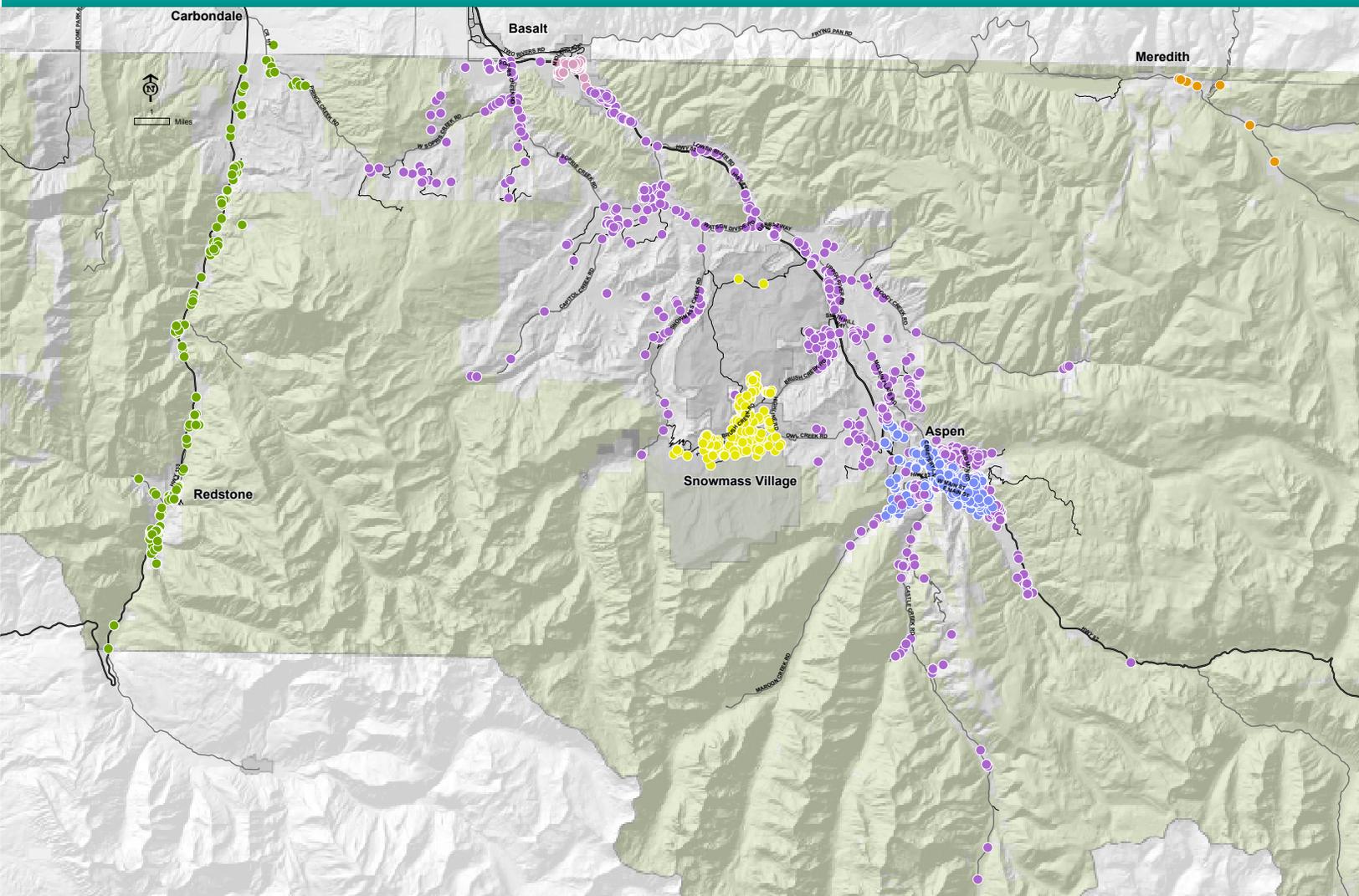
PITKIN COUNTY OLDER ADULTS BY LOCATION

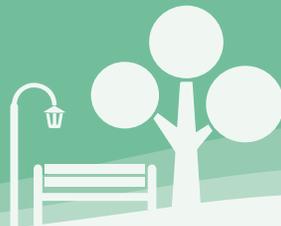
- City of Aspen
- Crystal River Valley
- Frying Pan Valley
- Roaring Fork (unincorporated)
- Town of Basalt
- Town of Snowmass Village

- County Road
- State Highway
- ▭ Town
- ▭ Private Property
- ▭ Federal Land



NOTE: 4,218 records are illustrated on the map. Source data 6/2019.
MAP DATE: July 24, 2019





OUTDOOR SPACES & BUILDINGS

The ability to conveniently and safely navigate in the natural and built environments. To what extent does the outdoor and built environment encourage active community engagement for an aging population?

WHAT EXISTS TODAY

Covering 975 square miles, Pitkin County is located in the heart of the White River National Forest. It is known for its four world-class ski resorts (Aspen Mountain, Aspen Highlands, Buttermilk and Snowmass) and year-round outdoor recreation, arts, and cultural events.

Within Pitkin County, the Parks and Recreation Department of the City of Aspen manages more than 30 parks, ranging from small neighborhood parks with playgrounds to over 1,300 acres of open space, and over 22 miles of hard surface, soft surface, and single-track trails.

Pitkin Open Space & Trails preserves, maintains, manages and acquires open space properties in the county for recreational, wildlife, agricultural, scenic, and access purposes. The Aspen Snowmass Nordic Council operates over 55 miles of groomed ski trails connecting Aspen, Snowmass, and Basalt, one of the largest free cross-country trail systems in the country.

For cyclists and pedestrians, a comprehensive network of trails – both improved and unimproved – provide additional ways to navigate throughout the county and adjacent communities. The Rio Grande trail spans the length of the Roaring Fork Valley (42 miles, linking 2 additional counties) as an improved, mostly paved, pathway. See Domain 2: Transportation for additional information on the topic.

The Community Development Department includes the Building, Planning and Zoning, and Environmental Health departments to preserve, protect, and enhance the natural and built environments.

Pitkin County Senior Services currently operates the Senior Center, a social, recreational, and informational hub for older adults in the community. The Senior Center is open 5 days a week, providing fitness classes, nutritious lunches and home delivered meals four of these days. It also includes educational programming, entertainment, structured and unstructured social interaction, transportation, resources, and referrals, as well as many community programs.

SIGNIFICANCE TO AN AGING POPULATION

Outdoor parks as well as indoor community spaces can provide opportunities for social and intergenerational interaction, reduce the prevalence of social isolation, and create a sense of place and attachment. Within these environments, the “neighborliness” of Pitkin County ranked highest among counties in our region at 77%¹⁰.

Elements for the safe enjoyment of the natural and built environments can benefit an entire community. These include rest areas (benches & seating), ramps, non-slip pavement and/or flooring, lighting, wider doorways and strategically placed restrooms. Adequate signage indicating these amenities give the older population the confidence to explore the parks & open spaces within the county¹¹.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS

- Pitkin County and its many trails, parks and open spaces sets it apart from other communities. Pitkin County Open Space & Trails and Aspen Parks & Recreation consult with older adults to ensure accessible trails and facilities.
- Senior Services disseminates information to older adults and the entire community about seasonal activities and events – both special & ongoing – within the improved parks, open spaces and trails throughout the county.

NEXT STEPS, GOALS & OPPORTUNITIES

GOAL 1: Identify and advocate for age-friendly elements that ensure safety in the outdoor and built environments, and support implementation of age-friendly improvements in Master/Community Plans throughout the county.

GOAL 2: Establish a new Pitkin County Senior Services facility (“Senior Center”) that is properly sized, designed, and located to serve the needs of a growing older adult population. A larger and improved Senior Center, grounded in both best practices and community needs, would allow the county to expand services and programs to prepare for anticipated demographic changes over the next 40 years.





TRANSPORTATION

The opportunities to travel conveniently and safely in the community using a variety of transportation modalities.

To what extent do the available transportation services in the community support and enhance independent living?

WHAT EXISTS TODAY

Roaring Fork Transportation Authority (RFTA) is the main public transportation provider in the Roaring Fork Valley, connecting Aspen to Glenwood Springs, Rifle, and the adjacent communities. RFTA, a popular transportation service for residents of all ages, reports, as of December 2018, that 1466 older adults (Over 65), hold RFTA free passes. Eighty-four percent of older adults found it easy to use public transportation for travel¹².

Older adults in Pitkin County have access to the following additional modalities for travel: Pitkin County Senior Services free Senior Van (serving the upper valley including Aspen, Woody Creek, and Snowmass Village), free Aspen Downtowner, reduced fare taxi program, free Snowmass Village Shuttle, ADA/Paratransit services, Uber/Lyft, WE Cycle (bike rental), and DASH (Drivers Assisting Seniors for Health). ADA Paratransit service is available within .75 miles of the six RFTA fixed-routes in the City of Aspen and between Aspen and the Pitkin County Airport. Snowmass Village also provides paratransit service.

Transportation entities in adjacent communities include Mountain Ride, GEMS Connector, Traveler, Regional Transportation Coordinating Council (RTCC), Bustang, Epic Mountain Express/Colorado Mountain Express, Greyhound, and Amtrak.



RFTA
ROARING FORK TRANSPORTATION AUTHORITY

SERVICE AREA

SIGNIFICANCE TO AN AGING POPULATION

Transportation represents a basic need for people of all ages. Access to affordable convenient transportation is inextricably linked to independence, autonomy and quality of life. Connection to transportation options is critical for older residents, especially in rural parts of the county. When transportation options are available, older adults can stop driving when they feel it is time.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS

- RFTA visits the Senior Center annually to offer on-site sign up for senior passes.
 - In 2017 Pitkin County Senior Services and partners developed the Drivers Assisting Seniors for Health (DASH) program in partnership with Eagle County to pair volunteer drivers with older adults in need of rides to medical appointments. Drivers are reimbursed for mileage.
 - In 2020, RFTA and Senior Services expanded the senior van service to 5 days a week, Monday through Friday.
-

NEXT STEPS, GOALS & OPPORTUNITIES

GOAL 1: Advocate for expanded and optimized transportation options for older adults that include Paratransit and ADA compliant services.

GOAL 2: Connect older adults to pre-planned year-round accessible, affordable transportation options through information, resource development and increased services.



“I no longer drive. Pitkin Senior Services has readily helped me to get around.”



HOUSING & SUPPORTIVE LIVING OPTIONS

The availability of housing options that are safe and affordable.

To what extent are there in-home support options that allow individuals to maintain dignity and autonomy as their needs change?

To what extent is universal design incorporated in housing options?

WHAT EXISTS TODAY

Senior-specific housing, including independent and assisted living facilities, memory care and skilled nursing care, is scarce throughout the valley; many facilities have waiting lists. Whitcomb Terrace, which has 15 private apartments, is the only assisted living care community located within Pitkin County.

The Aspen Pitkin County Housing Authority (APCHA) oversees affordable housing for persons of low, moderate, and middle incomes who are permanent residents and employed full-time within the County. Many older adults in Pitkin County continue to reside in their deed-restricted homes after retirement. Current APCHA regulations allow retirees to vacate their units for up to six months, annually, and to rent their unit to qualified local employees during those absences.

Older adults living outside of urban areas have a high homeownership rate, at 83%; nearly a quarter of them are still paying off mortgages. In addition, rural older adults typically have few residential options other than their own homes, which, in many cases, are not suitable for aging in place¹³.

Locally, only 9% of older residents in Pitkin County felt they had good access to quality, affordable housing. Housing costs are higher than 30% of the income for more than 1/3 of the older adults in Pitkin County. Only 20% of Pitkin County older adults reported having housing that suited their needs¹⁴.

Valley wide, there is a lack of affordable skilled workers for in-home repairs and retrofits which would allow older adults to remain independent in their homes. Nearly 33% of Pitkin older adults identify some problems in maintaining their homes and 42% identify problems maintaining their yards. Additionally, 50% report difficulty doing heavy or intense housework¹⁵.

SIGNIFICANCE TO AN AGING POPULATION

The majority of older adults report they wish to age in place. Unfortunately, because of the age of most homes occupied by older adults in Pitkin County, universal-design features such as wide hallways and no-step entries do not exist, affecting safety and comfort in the home. Due to the lack of downsizing and/or rightsizing options in the valley, many are faced with the dilemma of remaining in unsafe conditions or leaving the region.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS

- Pitkin County Senior Services continues to advocate for affordable, universal-designed, age-friendly housing near public transportation. Several proposed developments down valley are monitored continually for opportunities to include more senior-friendly options.
- Pitkin County Senior Services collaborates with local entities on programs designed to help older adults remain independent in their homes. In 2017, Senior Services presented the AARP HomeFit program, partnering with the local utility, The Northwest Colorado Council of Governments (NWCCOG), the fire department and others, to assist older adults in making their current residences safe, comfortable, efficient and accessible. Future programs on similar topics are planned.

NEXT STEPS, GOALS & OPPORTUNITIES

GOAL 1: Continue to advocate for older adult housing options including opportunities to downsize and/or rightsize.

GOAL 2: Gather and disseminate information and services that are available to support independence and adaptability of physical space for older adults.





WELLNESS & ENRICHMENT

The opportunities to participate in wellness, social, leisure, educational and cultural activities. To what extent do older adults have access to and benefit from these programs, events and activities?

WHAT EXISTS TODAY

Based on the Aspen Idea, the concept of nurturing the mind, body and spirit, Pitkin County Senior Services (PCSS) offers programming and social opportunities for older adults. On-site programs include exercise, nutrition and wellness, benefits education, and arts and literary activities. The unique geographic layout of Pitkin County makes it difficult to have programming at the Senior Center easily accessible to all residents.

PCSS partners with non-profits and community groups throughout the region including Colorado Mountain College, Aspen Skiing Company, Aspen Parks & Recreation, Aspen Elks Lodge, Pitkin and Basalt regional libraries and Eagle and Garfield counties, for wellness and inspirational programming held throughout the county.

“The exercise programs I have been doing for the past 5 years [have] helped me to stay mobile and improved my health.”



SIGNIFICANCE TO AN AGING POPULATION

Loneliness (personal perception of not being connected to others) and social isolation (lack of transportation and access to resources along with a diminished social network) have become a significant public health issues, even more than obesity and heart disease, affecting one in three adults over the age of 45 nationwide. Older adults who are lonely or socially isolated are more likely to have health problems. Medicare reports an additional spending of \$6.7 billion each year on socially isolated older adults¹⁶. Being physically/geographically isolated is one of the top predictors of loneliness. The National Institute on Aging (NIA), has shown social interaction leads to reduced risk of high blood pressure, Alzheimer’s disease, heart issues, depression and others. Older adults who stay busy with a lot of social interaction are some of the happiest and healthiest of their age group, and live longer than those who become isolated. Relationships and social interactions help protect against illnesses by boosting the immune system¹⁷. Likewise, The World Assembly on Ageing lists a person’s spiritual well-being as a basic human right; this can be faith, religion or something that touches a person in a meaningful way. Taking care of one’s ‘spirit’ is vital to well-being. This is equally important to consider when discussing the overall well-being and health of people of any age, including older adults.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS

- The Senior Services department provides opportunities for the older population to interact through exercise classes, interactive educational and cultural activities, and lunch.
- Special events and activities developed by PCSS and partners include: The Senior Health Fair, Senior Law Day, Summer Day Soirée Open House, and HomeFit for Seniors, which have become recurring events.
- Pitkin County Senior Services has developed programs for all ages on dementia, Alzheimer’s, healthy brains and brain fitness, and caregiver perspectives.
- In 2018, Pitkin County Senior Services expanded its programming in Redstone. The twice-monthly sessions include exercise classes, lunch, and after-lunch programming.
- In 2018, a 4th lunch day was added each week on Thursday, giving additional opportunities for older adults to have nutritious meals and socialize.

NEXT STEPS, GOALS & OPPORTUNITIES

- GOAL 1:** Continue to provide education on the importance of exercise, brain fitness, nutrition, cultural programs, socialization and spirituality as part of the aging process. Develop new programs throughout the county to engage new participants.
- GOAL 2:** Increase opportunities and enrollment in brain fitness programs for older adults.
- GOAL 3:** Identify and promote additional opportunities for older adults in the areas of nutrition and nutritional counseling.
- GOAL 4:** Identify and promote additional opportunities for older adults in the areas of recreation and fitness.
- GOAL 5:** Increase awareness and availability of programs that are potential sources of inspiration, satisfaction, hope, spirituality and connectedness.



DIVERSITY & INCLUSION

The availability of programs that respect and promote all types of diversity including: age, ethnic/cultural background, sexual orientation and socio-economic status. To what extent are there programs and events that encourage intergenerational and multi-cultural interaction and dialogue? Are members of the older population comfortable participating?

WHAT EXISTS TODAY

During the school year "Circle of Friends," a high school service club, pairs Aspen High School students with older adults and supports intergenerational programs for technology assistance. The group participates in an annual Wintersköl celebration and other intergenerational events during the year. In the summer, the Aspen Science Center provides technology assistance intergenerational programs. These programs provide an opportunity for two-way intergenerational engagement between high school students and older adults.

Pitkin County Senior Services offers a variety of after-lunch programs that present multicultural and spiritual experiences and encourage participation and discussion.

Pitkin County Senior Services experiences low participation from the Hispanic and minority communities, accounting for only 3% of the county population¹⁸.



SIGNIFICANCE TO AN AGING POPULATION

Older adults and the whole community benefit from intergenerational programs by addressing ageism, increasing volunteerism, revitalizing public spaces, allowing more free time for overburdened caregivers, and creating financial relief. Seventy-seven percent of adults wish there were more opportunities in their own community for people from different age groups to meet and get to know one another¹⁹.

The LGBTQ community in Colorado accounts for 3.9% of the population, similar to the aging population number. LGBTQ older adults are at greater risk for social isolation, putting them at greater risk of mental and physical health problems, chronic conditions, and even premature death. LGBTQ older adults are more likely to live alone and less likely to be partnered or married, which may result in less social support and financial security as they age²⁰.

NEXT STEPS, GOALS & OPPORTUNITIES

GOAL 1: Encourage respect and appreciation for older adults and their contributions and move the community away from ageist attitudes and criticisms that exist.

GOAL 2: Through educational and training initiatives, Pitkin County will be identified as a safe place for LGBTQ older adults.

GOAL 3: Expand intergenerational opportunities to learn, socialize and connect together.

GOAL 4: Create opportunities for non-English speaking members of the community to connect with and among older adults.



“I live alone but do not feel alone. I am part of an interesting and caring community. I have told people, family, and newspaper that I would not want to be a senior in any other place but Aspen and Pitkin County.”



CIVIC ENGAGEMENT & EMPLOYMENT

The opportunities for older adults to make useful and meaningful contributions by: participating in community decision-making, and sharing experiences and skills through employment and volunteerism. How are older adults recognized as an essential and valued segment of the population?

WHAT EXISTS TODAY

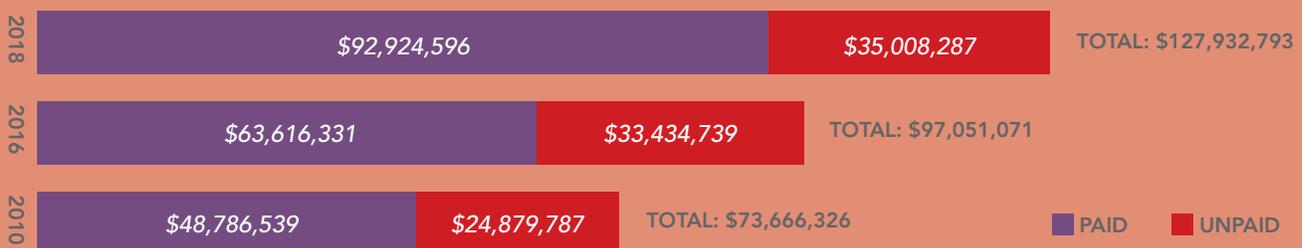
Older adults contribute to Pitkin County’s economy through paid work, volunteering, providing informal help to family and friends, and caregiving. The value of these paid and unpaid contributions totaled nearly \$128 million over a 12-month period²¹.

In Pitkin County, 70-80% of those 45 and older report that they plan to continue working in their “retirement” years for a number of reason including financial stability, the enjoyment of work and the desire to try something new. About 65% of respondents over age 60 in Pitkin County are still working full or part-time²².

A decreasing number of older residents in Pitkin County, 33%, are fully retired²³. For respondents who had not retired, the average age of expected retirement was 73. An equal proportion (35%) identified having at least minor problems with having enough money to meet daily expenses, and 22% reported problems finding work in retirement or obtaining skills for paid or unpaid work²⁴.

Pitkin County has numerous nonprofit organizations with events that appeal to interested older adults for volunteer opportunities. An overwhelming majority, 95% of the older adults surveyed, rank the availability of opportunities to volunteer as excellent or good. Fifty-eight percent of older adults took action and volunteered time to a group or activity in the community, a rate much higher than other communities in the U.S²⁵.

ECONOMIC CONTRIBUTION OF OLDER ADULTS IN PITKIN COUNTY



SIGNIFICANCE TO AN AGING POPULATION

Older adults bring value to the workplace, volunteer settings, civic dialogue and other community roles. Not only is there a significant financial benefit for the community, but continued engagement is a key to a healthy life. AARP reports that a growing body of research reveals that those who volunteer have lower mortality rates and less depression, along with a greater sense of control over one’s life and higher rates of self-esteem and happiness²⁶. Well-educated, civic-minded, and active older adults are more likely to remain employed and/or otherwise connected.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS

- ▣ Pitkin County Senior Services supports older adults in locating volunteer opportunities.
- ▣ PCSS and its partners, such as AARP and the Alpine Area Agency on Aging, recognize engaged members of the older population in press releases, at public meetings and with awards for service benefiting older adults.

NEXT STEPS, GOALS & OPPORTUNITIES

GOAL 1: Ensure access to current relevant information about volunteer and civic engagement opportunities, including employment.

GOAL 2: Encourage an environment in Pitkin County in which members of the older adult community know how to express their concerns and feel that their voices are being heard.

GOAL 3: Encourage cultural organizations, nonprofits, and governmental organizations to have at least one element in their strategic plan that focuses on how they engage with the older adult population.

GOAL 4: Research, promote, and provide community-wide information and education on the benefits of employing older adults; cultivate community work and/or partnerships with existing nonprofits that address older adult employment opportunities and issues.



“Senior Services allows me to connect with other older seniors, and to be a volunteer & advocate for seniors and aging issues.”



COMMUNICATION & INFORMATION

The ability to access information about resources, programs and services in Pitkin County. What technology is available to keep older adults connected? How is community information disseminated to residents?

WHAT EXISTS TODAY

Pitkin County Senior Services (PCSS) provides information in print, via mailers, in person, on the phone, and through traditional media outlets, including local newspapers, publications, radio and television. PCSS produces a monthly newsletter as its primary information-sharing method, along with information for special events or programs. The newsletter is currently mailed and emailed to more than 1,200 households. Additional and updated information is shared online, through pitkinseniors.com and a PCSS Facebook page.

Pitkin County ranks higher (77%) than other communities in the U.S. for older adults being informed about services and activities available for them. In addition, 59% of older adults gave “excellent” or “good” ratings to the availability of information about older adult resources (up from 43% in 2016)²⁷. The geography of Pitkin County does create some communication barriers, particularly in access to broadband internet service.



SIGNIFICANCE TO AN AGING POPULATION

Communication is key to community connections, quality of life, and the ability to live independently. Communication prevents isolation and loneliness and is particularly valuable to older adults who are not in the workforce or exposed to the daily connections they once enjoyed. Innovative technology methods such as telehealth and remote patient monitoring are new ways to connect older adults to the resources they need to age in place.

Communication is vital in times of emergency. The community's PitkinAlert²⁸ and reverse 911 systems help older community members stay informed as emergency situations occur. First responder and other entities provide routine education to the community and to older adults in particular about how to prepare for emergencies, possible evacuations or other critical events.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS

- Effective and increased communication with members of the community via different media has assisted in the increased awareness and usage of PCSS and County services and programs.
- Broadband service progress has been made in some of the more rural areas of the county, particularly the Crystal River Valley and Redstone.
- Older adults down valley from Aspen have responded to increased communication by attending events and programs more frequently. This also includes older adults in the Redstone area.

NEXT STEPS, GOALS & OPPORTUNITIES

GOAL 1: Engage rural communities, through neighborhood groups, religious organizations, first responders, and caregivers to create stronger connections to the services available throughout the county.

GOAL 2: Empower older adults through technological resources. Remove barriers to telehealth and remote patient monitoring systems and educate older adults about how to access innovative programs and critical connections through technology.

GOAL 3: Continue the publication and promotion of monthly newsletters, calendars, and menus. Seek creative and effective marketing and outreach methods to promote the opportunities and activities available through Senior Services. Strengthen efforts to gather community input regarding the needs and interests of older adults.

GOAL 4: Create an annual public relations plan to promote the availability of information through the senior center location, website, and offsite partner programming. Increase marketing and outreach through all media and communication channels.

GOAL 5: Provide information, annually, regarding access to timely information regarding emergency preparedness and fire safety.



COMMUNITY & HEALTH SERVICES

The opportunities to connect with physical and mental health services, as well as community support systems necessary for maintaining independence and quality of life. To what extent do older adults have access to resources for physical and mental health care, and situational safety including prevention of fraud & exploitation, isolation and elder abuse?

WHAT EXISTS TODAY

The valley has a number of general healthcare resources including Aspen Valley Hospital in Aspen, Mountain Family Health Center in Basalt and Valley View Hospital in Garfield County. A limited number of general and specialty medical providers including dental and vision are available throughout the county at different provider locations. Aspen Valley Hospital hosts an annual “Senior Health Fair” in the fall.

Pitkin County ranks high on surveys of healthy behaviors and health outcomes²⁹, which is consistent with their reputation as a physically healthy community. Yet the Community Assessment Survey for Older Adults, (CASOA) found a significant portion of the local older population experiences depression (26% of respondents) and/or confusion or forgetfulness (29%). 21% reported feeling lonely or isolated and 22% revealed they were bored. Almost 20% of the aging population struggles with lack of friends or family upon which they can consistently rely³⁰.

In Pitkin County, there are a limited number of providers who accept new Medicare patients, and even fewer who accept Medicaid. There are several resources available within the county for assistance with Medicare and Medicaid services, although 40% of older adults over the age of 60 still report having inadequate information on these programs³¹.

While 20% of the local older adults report receiving some type of assistance every day, only 8% of Pitkin County’s older residents rated the availability of long-term care options favorably, and 30% felt positive about the availability of daytime care options³². There is only one assisted living facility in Pitkin County, Whitcomb Terrace. Currently there are two larger facility options downvalley, Heritage Park and Renew Roaring Fork, as well as several smaller private facilities.

Mental health providers, referrals and prevention services are available through MindSprings Health, Mountain Family Health, Aspen Hope Center and Aspen Strong.

Pitkin County Senior Services (PCSS) works closely with the Adult and Family Services (AFS) department and local law enforcement to address situations of potential fraud and neglect.

Aspen Community Health Services, Pitkin County Human Services and Pitkin County Senior Services annually hosts an event in Redstone that provides flu shots, blizzard boxes, economic services, care navigation, and dental services among others to older adults in the area.

SIGNIFICANCE TO AN AGING POPULATION

Health is closely tied to wellness, discussed in Domain 4. For members of the older population who are unable to live independently (either temporarily or permanently), having accessible care options are essential to being able to remain in the region.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS

- Pitkin County Seniors Services provides programming regarding benefits and partner programs for physical and mental health throughout the region on a regular basis, such as flu shots, dental care, and educational programs around dementia.
 - In 2019, The Pitkin Area Co-Responder Team (PACT)³³, a collaborative community program between law enforcement and mental health professionals, celebrated its official launch. The co-responder team jointly responds to calls where substance abuse and/or mental health challenges may exist.
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NEXT STEPS, GOALS & OPPORTUNITIES

HEALTH SERVICES

GOAL 1: Promote the availability of affordable, accessible health care including dental, vision, and hearing care for older adults.

GOAL 2: Educate and update local medical providers regarding resources for older adults.

GOAL 3: Advocate for additional mental health programs and services for older adults.

GOAL 4: Support a patient-centered community case management model for chronic care and successful transitions along the care continuum, including transitions to and from hospitals, care communities, and homes.

GOAL 5: Advocate for increased respite care, memory care options and opportunities, essential in-home medical and non-medical supportive services. Communicate the availability of these services.

GOAL 6: Create and distribute resource information on hospice and palliative care.

GOAL 7: Participate in integrated assessment and treatment programs involving older adults such as Care Navigation and Pitkin Area Co-Responder Teams (PACT)

COMMUNITY HEALTH

GOAL 8: Identify and address the support and educational needs of paid and unpaid caregivers in the community.

GOAL 9: Engage public safety officers, Adult Protective Services, and business leaders to focus on prevention and intervention strategies for older adults who are potential victims of criminal activity, fraud, abuse and neglect.

GOAL 10: Advocate for geriatric care education for medical providers and for access to a geriatric specialist.

GOAL 11: Educate and advocate for careers within the aging field.

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