

Audit Report

City Services for Older Adults

To Improve Age-Friendliness, City Needs to Measure Progress, Improve Outreach, and Evaluate Resources

October 2022



People over 50 years old are a growing part of Austin's population. The City can do more to make Austin an age-friendly city for older adults. Currently, the City cannot assess how it meets the needs of older adults because the City's age-friendly plan does not include a way to measure progress, assign responsibility, or assess equity. Also, the City does not have clear outreach about programs and services for older adults. As a result, older adults may not be able to find what they need. The City provides services to older adults across several different departments and community partners with one age-friendly program coordinator to align these efforts. Additional resources may be needed to effectively implement and coordinate the age-friendly plan.

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Cover: Program Participants at Gus Garcia Recreation Center (top left, bottom left, top right), accessed from the City of Austin's [Flickr](#). Stock image (bottom right), accessed from [Pxhere](#).

Objective

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

Background

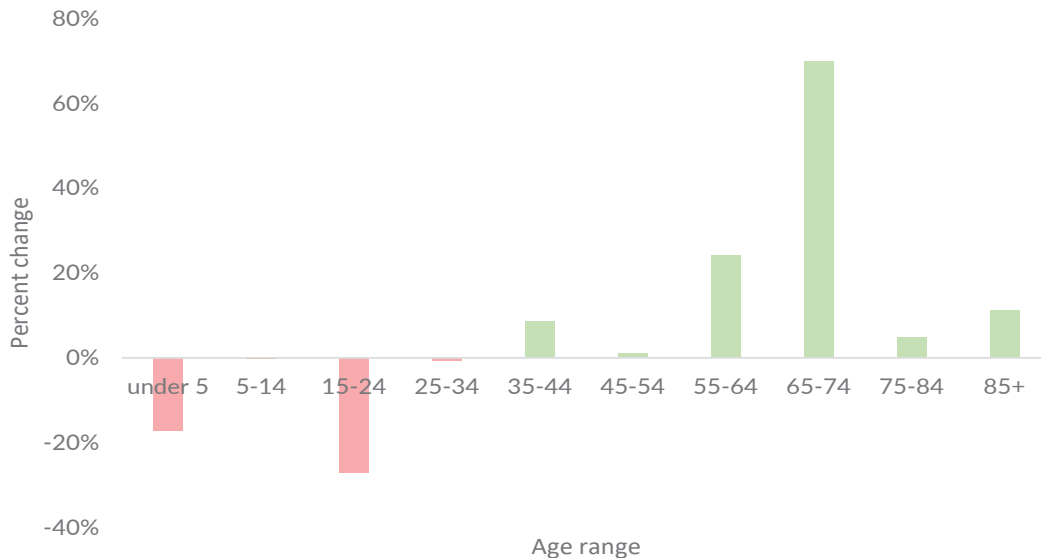
Population aging is a significant trend both globally and locally. Cities across the world are prioritizing how to make their city an inclusive environment for people as they age because older people are a valuable resource for their families and communities. Efforts for cities to be more age-friendly, such as creating more accessible housing, transportation, and community activities, benefit older people as well as people of all ages.

The World Health Organization (WHO) leads the age-friendly global network. The AARP is the national affiliate of this global network. The AARP provides the City of Austin with its age-friendly designation and monitors updates to the Age-Friendly Austin Action Plan. The AARP also scores cities in terms of livability for older adults. In 2018, Austin was identified as one of the 10 top-scoring cities with a population over 500,000. Austin was not selected as one of the top-scoring cities in 2022.

Most older adults in Austin are between the ages of 65 and 74 and identify as white.

Older adults, or people 50 years of age and older, make up an increasingly large portion of the population. The WHO reports that by 2030, 1 in 6 people across the world will be 60 years of age or older. Austin residents between 65 and 74 were the fastest growing age group between 2010 and 2020, increasing by almost 70%.

Exhibit 1: Austin residents between 65 and 74 were the fastest growing age group between 2010 and 2020



Source: OCA analysis of 2010, 2020 US Census American Community Survey data for Census tracts within City limits, July 2022

The City of Austin has taken several actions to support older adults in Austin and make Austin a more livable city for older adults. The City's Commission on Aging advises City Council about the quality of life for older adults in Austin. This Commission was instrumental in creating the City's Age-Friendly Austin Action Plan in 2016, which City Council adopted later that year. Based on a recommendation from the Commission on Aging, the City hired an age-friendly program coordinator in 2019. The age-friendly program coordinator is housed in Austin Public Health and works to implement the Age-Friendly Austin Action Plan. In 2021 the City updated the Age-Friendly Austin Action Plan, noting achievements and areas still in progress. The City has allocated funding for a second position within Austin Public Health for the Age-Friendly Program as part of the fiscal year 2023 budget. This second position was also recommended by the Commission on Aging.

Many departments, including Austin Public Health, the Parks and Recreation Department, Austin Public Library, and the Housing and Planning Department, 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 and aligning with the Age-Friendly Austin Action Plan. The City's age-friendly program coordinator also works with over 30 community organizations that provide services to older adults and work towards a more age-friendly Austin. These organizations include AARP Texas and the region's Area Agency on Aging.

What We Found

Summary

People over 50 years old are a growing part of Austin's population. The City can do more to make Austin an age-friendly city for older adults. Currently, the City cannot assess how it meets the needs of older adults because the City's age-friendly plan does not include a way to measure progress, assign responsibility, or assess equity. Also, the City does not have clear outreach about programs and services for older adults. As a result, older adults may not be able to find what they need. The City provides services to older adults across several different departments and community partners with one age-friendly program coordinator to align these efforts. Additional resources may be needed to effectively implement and coordinate the age-friendly plan.

Finding 1

The City has an age-friendly action plan with goals and strategies to better serve older adults in Austin. However, the City does not have an effective way to measure progress towards these goals, establish who will be responsible for these goals, or assess if the City’s efforts are equitable across all groups of older adults.

We noted that the City does not have clear and measurable performance indicators to evaluate progress towards age-friendly goals, and it is not always clear in the Age-Friendly Austin Action Plan which department is responsible for each goal and strategy. In addition, the Plan does not include the use of demographic data to understand how the goals and strategies in the plan may affect different groups of older adults. A majority of community partners expressed concerns that City programs and services are not fully meeting the needs of older adults.

The City does not have an effective way to measure progress towards goals and strategies in the Age-Friendly Austin Action Plan.

City Council adopted the Age-Friendly Austin Action Plan in 2016. The plan includes over 20 goals and 75 strategies across the eight domains laid out in the World Health Organization’s guide for age-friendly cities. These age-friendly domains include housing, transportation, social participation, communication, and more.

The City updated its Age-Friendly Austin Action Plan in 2021. In this update, the City listed statuses for each strategy in the plan. Of the strategies, 29% (22 of 75) were listed as progress achieved, 61% (46 of 75) were listed as in progress, and 9% (7 of 75) were listed as re-evaluating. However, neither the 2016 Age-Friendly Austin Action Plan nor the update in 2021 included quantifiable indicators to measure progress, and it is unclear how the City determined the status of the strategies.

Exhibit 2: 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	Implementation Status	Indicators 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. in neighborhood parks”	“Progress Achieved: PARD has increased intergenerational programming”	No
Domain 7: Communication and Information	“Promote technologies that help older adults connect to their community, friends, and family”	“Expand technology training at City of Austin facilities”	“Progress Achieved: Austin Public Library provides hotspots and laptops on long-term loan to older adults”	No

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

Clear and measurable performance indicators, defined roles and responsibilities, and demographic data are key components of assessing age-friendliness and evaluating progress.

To maintain status as an age-friendly city, the AARP requires the City to update its age-friendly action plan every five years. The City last updated its age-friendly action plan in 2021.

The World Health Organization recommends using certain types of indicators to measure the age-friendliness of cities. Indicators should be measurable, valid, and replicable, while aligning with local goals and linking to action.

The AARP identified several cities as top-scoring in terms of livability for older adults, including Boston. The City of Boston’s Age-Friendly Boston Action Plan 2017 clearly lists indicators to measure progress that align with the World Health Organization’s recommendations.

Exhibit 3: City of Boston’s Age-Friendly Boston Action Plan 2017 clearly lists indicators to measure progress

DOMAIN: HOUSING CONTINUED			
RECOMMENDATION	ACTION ITEM	PARTNERS	INDICATORS
Recommendation #3: Improve education about housing and housing services available in Boston,	Action Item A: We will educate older adult homeowners about how to access existing housing support services such as the home repair and home modification resources, information about selling a home, reverse mortgages and tax relief programs.	Elderly Commission, Department of Neighborhood Development, AARP, Ethos, community partners.	Number of homeowner educational opportunities completed
	Action Item B: We will educate older adults who are renters about the resources available to assist with remaining housed or finding appropriate housing, as well as their rights as tenants.	Elderly Commission, Department of Neighborhood Development, community partners	Number of renter educational opportunities completed
	Action Item C: We will conduct an inventory of existing programs and services that help older adults stay in their homes and compile them into an easy-to-access, centralized location.	Elderly Commission, UMass Boston Gerontology, AARP	1. Inventory completed 2. Information posted in centralized location

Source: The City of Boston’s Age-Friendly Boston Action Plan 2017, pg. 32, August 2022

In the 2021 update to the Age-Friendly Austin Action Plan, the City identified creating quantifiable indicators as a way the City could improve its age-friendly efforts. City staff said they will work on these indicators in the next version of the Age-Friendly Austin Action Plan. With indicators that align with the World Health Organization’s key criteria, the City could evaluate its progress on goals and strategies more clearly and consistently to make Austin more livable for older adults.

The City does not effectively establish who will be responsible for goals and strategies in the Age-Friendly Austin Action Plan.

The goals and strategies in the Age-Friendly Austin Action Plan mention many City departments, such as the Parks and Recreation Department, Austin Public Library, the Housing and Planning Department, and Austin Public Health. However, it is not always clear in the Age-Friendly Austin Action Plan which department is responsible for each strategy. Without a department clearly associated with each strategy, it is difficult to establish who is accountable for implementing strategies and reporting on their progress.

Exhibit 4: The City’s Age-Friendly Austin Action Plan and Progress Report do not always clearly assign responsibility for the goals and strategies

Example	Goal	Strategy	Implementation Status	Department Assigned?
Domain 5: Respect and Social Inclusion	“Expand programs and services that engage and empower older adults”	“Support AustinUP in development of age-friendly business best practices”	“AustinUP hosted a 2019 business focus group to gather feedback about “age-friendly business” designation. Program design TBD.	Unclear
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 offices and staffing services to expand opportunities for older adults.”	Unclear

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

Washington, D.C., is another of the AARP's top-scoring cities in terms of livability for older adults. It's Age-Friendly DC Two-Year Progress Report clearly lists which organizations are responsible for leading or partnering on the plan's strategies.

Exhibit 5: Washington, D.C.'s Age-Friendly DC Two-Year Progress Report clearly lists which organizations are responsible for leading or partnering on the plan's strategies

AFDC PARTNER ACRONYMS WITH DOMAIN STRATEGY ROLES

35

DC Agencies		
ACRONYM/NICK NAME	DC AGENCY	STRATEGIES THE ORGANIZATION IS LEADING OR PARTNERING
ADRC	Aging and Disability Resource Center https://odr.dc.gov/book/Path/ADRC	8.2.3, 8.3.1
AFDC	Age-Friendly DC Task Force https://agefriendly.dc.gov/	3.1.6, 5.1.2, 6.1.2, 6.1.3
BAC	Bicycle Advisory Council https://ddot.dc.gov/bikes	2.1.3

Source: Washington, D.C.'s Age-Friendly DC Two-Year Progress Report, pg. 37, August 2022

The City of Austin's age-friendly program coordinator is primarily responsible for providing updates to the Age-Friendly Austin Action Plan. However, the age-friendly program coordinator noted that it is difficult for them, as an Austin Public Health employee, to establish a system of accountability and responsibility for departments to make progress towards strategies in the plan without a greater degree of Citywide authority. By clearly assigning responsible departments for the strategies in the Age-Friendly Austin Action Plan, the City could establish a more effective accountability system for making progress on the goals and strategies to make Austin more livable for older adults.

The City does not have an effective process to assess if the City's efforts are equitable across all groups of older adults.

The World Health Organization considers equity as "the absence of systematic disparities in health (or in the major social determinants of health) between social groups who have different levels of underlying social advantage or disadvantage."

The World Health Organization notes that "it is critical to include measures of equity in age-friendliness assessments, monitoring, and evaluation." An important component of measuring equity is collecting and analyzing demographic information. With this information, the City could understand similarities and differences between needs of different groups of people and how City services and programs may affect groups in different ways.

However, we found the City does not consistently collect or analyze demographic data to know how its programs and services are affecting different groups of older adults, such as older adults of different races or ages. The Age-Friendly Austin Action Plan does not include the use of demographic data to understand how the goals and strategies in the plan may affect different groups of older adults.

In 2019, the Commission on Aging noted that the City does not collect sufficient demographic data, which limits the City's ability to understand how communities are being served. The Commission recommended the City capture and analyze demographic data about the populations the City serves and report outcomes in an accessible and transparent manner.

As noted above, many City departments provide services to older adults and contribute to making progress on the goals in the Age-Friendly Austin Action Plan. We reviewed 10 programs in four of those departments: the Parks and Recreation Department, Austin Public Library, Austin Public Health, and the Housing and Planning Department. These 10 programs have many older adult participants or are targeted specifically to older adults.¹

We found that the departments we reviewed collect some type of demographic data, such as age, race, and gender, for the programs we reviewed. For some programs, departments use the demographic data to inform the specific program. For other programs, departments pass the data on to other funding or regulatory agencies. However, the data is not used to inform the City's progress on the Age-Friendly Austin Action Plan in any of the programs we reviewed. For example, for the Parks and Recreation Department (PARD)'s Senior Transportation Program and Congregate Meal Program, PARD collects demographic information and passes it on to a partner organization, which provides some funding for the program. That data is not used to assess progress on the goals and strategies in the Age-Friendly Austin Action Plan.

Additionally, the type of demographic data collected varied across the programs we reviewed, making it more difficult to compare information across multiple programs and inform the City's age-friendly efforts overall.

We noted that it is not always clear to the City staff managing these programs how to provide this data to inform the Age-Friendly Austin Action Plan. This is because the plan does not include using demographic data to understand if the City's efforts are equitable across different groups of older adults. Multiple departments expressed a desire for more centralized guidance on how to incorporate their individual programs into the City's larger Age-Friendly Austin Action Plan.

The World Health Organization recommends "more disaggregation of data by age and by place of residence, socioeconomic status, and other markers of inequality."

¹ Programs reviewed were APH's General age-friendly efforts and the Older Adults Month Event, APL's Conversation Café, Talk Time (ESL Practice), Tech Savvy Seniors, and Older Adult Book Club, HPD's Architectural Barrier Removal Program, and PARD's Congregate Meal Program, Senior Transportation Program, and Senior Center Programming.

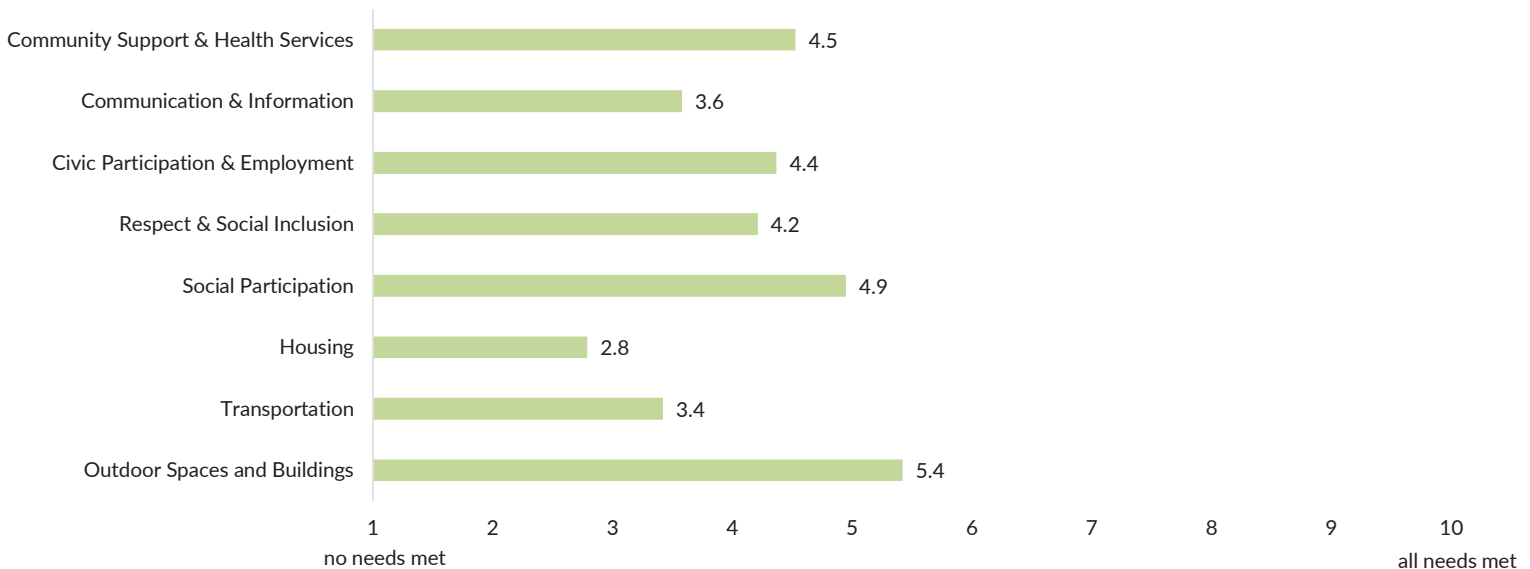
A majority of community partners expressed concerns that City programs and services are not fully meeting the needs of older adults.

Older adults in Austin face significant challenges. The COVID-19 pandemic greatly affected older adults and made it especially difficult for older residents to get what they need. The lack of affordable housing and accessible transportation options are significant challenges for Austin to be an age-friendly city. The City's Commission on Aging conducts an annual survey of older Austin residents. Respondents frequently mention difficulties with accessible transportation and affordable housing. For this audit project, we surveyed community partners that work with the City to provide services to older adults. We sent the survey to 32 partners identified by the age-friendly program coordinator and received 19 responses.²

- 74% of respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed that the City provides access to diverse, affordable housing options and home repair services for older adults with varying income levels.
- 68% of respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed that the City provides adequate access to safe and affordable transportation options for older adults.

We also asked respondents to evaluate how City programs and services across the eight domains in the Age-Friendly Austin Action Plan meet the needs of older adults. 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 6: 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

The City can better meet the needs of older adults in Austin by developing a way to measure progress towards goals in the Age-Friendly Austin Action Plan, establish who will be responsible for these goals, and assess if the City's efforts are equitable across all groups of older adults.

² In our community stakeholder survey, 19 people responded to every question. A 20th person responded, but they did not respond to every question.

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.

Austin's Age-Friendly Communication Plan notes that two of the principles for building trust in communication are clarity and consistency.

Clear and consistent communication is crucial for older adults to be aware of what programs and services the City provides. We found that the City communicates about programs and services for older adults inconsistently across departments, and the City does not provide information about programs and services for older adults in one central place. Both issues create barriers for older adults in accessing City programs and services.

The City has gathered feedback from older adults through multiple surveys over the last several years. In these surveys, older adults frequently mentioned lack of knowledge about existing programs and services as a barrier. Of the 1,460 respondents to a 2018 PARD survey who said they do not attend a senior center, 65% said they do not attend due to lack of awareness of the programs and services. In a survey the Commission on Aging issued to inform their fiscal year 2021 budget recommendations, respondents said they wanted a better understanding of what opportunities are available and recommended providing more communication.

As part of this audit, we surveyed community partners that work with the City to provide services to older adults. We sent the survey to 32 partners identified by the age-friendly program coordinator and received 19 responses.³ 58% of respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed that older adults are aware of available City programs and services. See Appendix B for the full results from our community survey.

Exhibit 7: A majority of community partners disagreed that older adults are aware of available City programs and services

58% disagreed or strongly disagreed that older adults are aware of available City programs and services.

“Most older adults we speak with do not know about paratransit, non-profit programs, or city senior centers.”

“My personal experience in working with older adults in this area is that they are often in the dark about available programs with the city and elsewhere.”

“It’s virtually impossible to find and navigate this information.”

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

To understand how the City communicates with older adults, we reviewed the same 10 programs across the four departments that we reviewed in finding 1.⁴

³ In our community stakeholder survey, 19 people responded to every question. A 20th person responded, but they did not respond to every question.

⁴ Programs reviewed were APH’s General age-friendly efforts and the Older Adults Month Event, APL’s Conversation Café, Talk Time (ESL Practice), Tech Savvy Seniors, and Older Adult Book Club, HPD’s Architectural Barrier Removal Program, and PARD’s Congregate Meal Program, Senior Transportation Program, and Senior Center Programming.

We found that the City’s efforts to communicate about programs and services for older adults are decentralized and vary by department:

- Austin Public Library does not do outreach citywide and instead does outreach at the individual branch level. Staff stated an older adult new to the area would primarily find out about programs by going to their local branch and asking a librarian what programs and services are offered there.
- The Housing and Planning Department’s Austin is My Home outreach campaign promotes home repair programs through TV, radio, and outreach to community organizations.
- The Parks and Recreation Department advertises their senior center programming primarily through social media and fliers. PARD does not advertise their Senior Transportation Program outside of placing a flier at the senior centers because there is limited capacity for the program to handle current demand. PARD advertises its Congregate Meal Program with fliers, bus ads, and providing information at public events.
- Austin Public Health’s Age-Friendly Program does outreach through TV, radio, fliers, tabling at public events, and using community organizations to spread the word. Austin Public Health advertises specific events like the Older Americans Month on their social media.

Because each department’s outreach about programs and services that serve older adults varies depending on the department and the program, there is less clarity and consistency, and it may be more difficult for older adults to find what they need. 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 services in one central place.

Exhibit 8: Community partners disagreed that older adults can find City information in one central place

85% disagreed or strongly disagreed that it is easy for older adults to find information about City programs and services in one central place.

“City initiatives for older adults should have a section of its own on the City’s website. I just did a search for “age-friendly” on the City’s site, and the results weren’t very helpful.”

“I can’t imagine that older adults are able to find the city programs and services pages at all. It is hard for me to navigate, and I know what I am looking for.”

“Information is available everywhere. Older adults have trouble figuring out who to trust and where to go for safe, accurate and helpful information.”

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

The World Health Organization's best practices for communication include coordinating information through an accessible community service that is well-publicized, as a one-stop information center.

The City does not have clear, consistent online advertising for City programs and services for older adults. City information for older adults is located across different City websites and various department webpages. The Age-Friendly Program has a webpage with information and resources for older adults which includes information for some programs in other City departments, and the Austin Public Library also has online information guides for older adults. However, there is little collaboration between the Age-Friendly Program and Austin Public Library on these resource pages. Additionally, the Parks and Recreation Department, Housing and Planning Department, and Emergency Medical Services all have information about programs and services for older adults on their respective webpages. 53% of respondents to our survey of community partners said the City's website was not so useful or not at all useful in helping older adults locate programs and services.

Exhibit 9: A majority of community partners said the City's website is not so useful in helping older adults find programs and services

53% said the City of Austin's website was not so useful or not at all useful in helping older adults locate programs and services.

"I tried to easily find services and it is not readily apparent that you need to "click here" for older adult services."

"I've looked for things that I knew were on the City's website and couldn't find them. At one point I spent 45 minutes going through what I thought were all the possible threads and options. Never found what I was searching for. Someone at the City had to send a link."

"The city's website is not user friendly in any form or fashion for those who are seeking services or recreation. Just the layout and formatting alone (fonts, font size) are not considerate of those who are aging."

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

The City's Age-Friendly Program helped develop an Age-Friendly Communication Plan in July 2021. However, not all City staff and departments are familiar with or use the plan to guide their communications with older adults. City staff may need more specific and clear guidance for how to coordinate communication efforts across the City's many different programs and services for older adults than what is included in the Age-Friendly Communication Plan.

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. Additional resources may be needed to effectively implement and coordinate the age-friendly action plan.

Many different City departments provide services to older adults. The Parks and Recreation Department, Austin Public Health, Austin Public Library, Housing and Planning Department, and other departments provide services such as senior center programming, technology training, housing services and more. The age-friendly program coordinator in Austin Public Health works as an internal liaison to ensure City departments and offices involved in serving older adults provide services through an age-friendly lens and align with the Age-Friendly Austin Action Plan.

The City has an effective age-friendly program coordinator, who partners closely with the City's Commission on Aging and other community partners. 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.

However, these resources may not be enough to effectively coordinate efforts across all City departments and community partners and to fully implement the Age-Friendly Austin Action Plan. 70% of respondents to our community partner survey disagreed or strongly disagreed that the City has sufficient resources provided to programs and services for older adults.

We reviewed 10 cities with populations over 500,000 identified by the AARP in 2022 as top-scoring cities in terms of livability for older adults.⁵ 70% of the cities we reviewed have a dedicated aging services function such as an office or department to provide services to older adults.

Exhibit 10: 70% of the 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

⁵ In 2018, the AARP identified Austin as one of the ten top-scoring cities with a population over 500,000 in terms of livability for older adults. Austin was not identified as a top-scoring city in 2022.

The seven cities that have a dedicated office or department on aging can coordinate and implement these services with more than one staff. The City of Austin has one age-friendly program coordinator to align aging services across departments and implement the Age-Friendly Austin Action Plan. See Appendix A for more information about the top-scoring age-friendly cities.

In their recommendations for the fiscal year 2023 budget, the City of Austin's Commission on Aging recommended funding an additional full-time employee to support Austin's age-friendly efforts, including programs and services at recreation centers, faith-based centers, and senior centers. The Commission suggested the additional staff person could also facilitate trainings related to age-friendly practices, analyze community data, and develop educational materials. This position was approved as part of the budget for fiscal year 2023.

Appendix A - Additional Information about Top-Scoring Livable Cities with a Population over 500,000

Staffing

The number of staff dedicated to coordinating and providing aging services varies across the cities we reviewed. Cities that serve as their Area Agency on Aging receive additional funding from the federal and state governments and typically have much higher numbers of staff in their aging services office or department.

The City of Austin has one age-friendly program coordinator in Austin Public Health to coordinate age-friendly efforts across the City. The City of Austin also has multiple departments that provide services to older adults. The Parks and Recreation Department has an Adults 50+ Program with 23 staff. Other departments such as Austin Public Library and the Housing and Planning Department provide services that are available to people of all ages but may be targeted to or primarily used by older adults.

City	Structure of aging services	Approximate number of staff**	Area Agency on Aging (AAA)
Austin, TX	One age-friendly program coordinator in Austin Public Health	1	External to the City
San Francisco, CA	Department of Disability and Aging Services	400	City serves as AAA
New York, NY	Department for the Aging	300	City serves as AAA
Washington, D.C.	Department of Aging and Community Living	115	City serves as AAA
Boston, MA	Age Strong Commission*	70	City serves as AAA
Portland, OR	One age-friendly program coordinator in the Bureau of Planning and Sustainability	1	External to the City
Philadelphia, PA	Commission on Aging*	5	External to the City
Denver, CO	Office on Aging	2	External to the City
Seattle, WA	Division of Aging and Disability Services	200	City serves as AAA
San Jose, CA	Services provided by Parks Department staff with no age-friendly program coordinator	No staff in a dedicated aging services function	External to the City
Milwaukee, WI	Aging services provided by County	No City staff	External to the City

*Boston and Philadelphia's aging services functions are called commissions. They include full-time City employees.

**Staff numbers as reported by City staff during our conversations with them. We did not do additional verification of these numbers.

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

Noteworthy practices

In our conversations with the cities we reviewed, we heard about several noteworthy practices which may be useful for the City of Austin to consider.

City	Noteworthy Practices
San Francisco, CA	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Conducts regular focus groups for specific aging communities, such as Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC), Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer (LGBTQ+) communities, etc., and town halls for all older adults
New York, NY	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Offers a program where City retirees can do 1 year projects and offers an AmeriCorps program for older adults• Developed an age-inclusive, anti-ageism outreach campaign
Boston, MA	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Has City staff who go door-to-door to provide older adults with information on resources• Supports an initiative for businesses to hire older adults
Philadelphia, PA	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Issues a physical newspaper with information about programs and services for older adults
Denver, CO	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Runs a publicity van that goes through neighborhoods and to events providing resources and information for older adults.• Utilizes “aging influencers” to get information out to older adults

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

Appendix B - Survey on the City of Austin's Age-Friendly Efforts

We distributed a survey to 30+ external partner organizations who assist with age-friendly efforts in Austin. This list of external partner organizations was provided by the City's Age-Friendly Coordinator at Austin Public Health. Many of the organizations are identified in the City of Austin's Age-Friendly Action Plan. Survey questions solicited respondents' agreement with certain age-friendly aspects of programs and services offered by the City and their ratings of livability for older adults. The survey was opened on June 29, 2022, and closed on July 20, 2022. The survey was completed by 19 respondents from external partner organizations.⁶ We have included rounded percentages below.

1. How would you rate the City of Austin as a place for older adults to live as they age?	Response
Excellent	0%
Above Average	5%
Average	58%
Below Average	26%
Poor	11%
Comments	
<p>With the implementation of the Age Friendly Action Plan the City has brought about a number of changes to inform older adults about existing programs and services. The staffing of the Age Friendly Coordinator position allows for targeted outreach, more effective budget discussions and far better coordination with the Aging Services Council. However, these gains have been challenged by the pandemic and the increasing affordable housing crises. as older individuals return to city and aging network services they will find less volunteers, potential staffing issues and changed personal choices and level of engagement, post-COVID.</p>	
<p>This based on my experience working with older adults (not living year) in the region for four years. None of these opinions represent in anyway the position of my agency. The primary reason for my rating is based on rising housing costs (with no rent control helps for persons on fixed incomes) and the fact that paratransit is not available in all parts of the city.</p>	
<p>Many of our seniors have moved to Williamson County due to cost of living.</p>	
<p>There are many senior housing complexes but outside of bus lines. Housing costs are not affordable for someone who is on a fixed income.</p>	
<p>From housing to entertainment Austin focus is on those between the ages of 18 - 40.</p>	
<p>There's not a great deal of entertainment for older austinites all housing that in recent years is two story.</p>	
<p>Affordability is getting worse.</p>	
<p>The cost to live in the Austin area has the impact for seniors deciding on medications, rent and living.</p>	
<p>While there are activities, they're hard to access, either by compounded by traffic or difficult parking. Cost of housing is astronomical. While I do hear about efforts to create affordable housing, those are late in coming. Several friends who moved to Round Rock/Pflugerville now have to move further out (like Taylor), where it's not as geared to older adults and the commute to Austin area activities is crazy.</p>	
<p>It's wonderful to have an age-friendly program coordinator and an engaged commission on seniors - both initiatives are SO appreciated. But I think the city as a whole ranks pretty low on mobility, walkability and affordability for older adults.</p>	
<p>Austin has not been prepared for the growth of the older adult population and continues to lag behind in service provision and housing options particularly for those on fixed incomes.</p>	

⁶ In our community stakeholder survey, 19 people responded to every question. A 20th person responded, but they did not respond to every question.

Limited services at senior centers, poor coverage and reimbursement policies by State Medicaid program, limited resources from Area Agency on Aging. The last two issues are a result of Austin being a part of the State of Texas, but the end result is that Austin is not a good place for older adults to age.

Austin has a number of resources for older adults and caregivers. These include both city services and non-profit organizations that support people as they age. I trust that the city's commitment to being Age Friendly will create continued improvement.

2. Rate your level of agreement with the following statements.	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
Older adults are aware of available City programs and services.	21%	37%	26%	16%	0%

Comments

Some are aware but others are not. I am hopeful this will change with dedicated dollars for PARD outreach as well as tax exemption information. Increased community engagement via Community Health Workers would also help spread the word in a variety of languages.

Most older adults we speak with do not know about paratransit, non-profit programs, or city senior centers.

Those who are currently enrolled in city senior programs have an awareness of city programs.

My personal experience in working with older adults in this area is that they are often in the dark about available programs with the city and elsewhere.

Some clients are more versed than others. Many do not use technology and are still disconnected.

These programs are not well known in the senior community. City offices do not advertise and reach out to the Senior community as they should. Most Seniors are not on social media.

These departments do no engagement with the community to let older austinites or the austinites that could use these programs know that they're in existence.

So many of them still get their information via newsletters or written communication.

More marketing is needed on services in Austin.

More adults need to become aware of the activities, so they can voice what needs to change to improve them.

Any older adult who is not on social media or uses email is highly in the dark about any city services. The tech-divide for older adults is a huge deal and only getting worse.

It's virtually impossible to find and navigate this information.

Most older adults do not know about community resources or who to trust.

I think more could be done to raise awareness.

The City promotes programs and services for older adults equitably across the City.	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
	10%	30%	30%	25%	5%

Comments

We applaud the city for its efforts at multi-modal outreach, pre, during and post-pandemic to ensure translation, flyer distribution in addition to social media and a shared phone number to ensure testing and then vaccine access for older adults equitably across the city.

I do not feel qualified to address this.

Transportation and language access barriers make it difficult for equitable access.

Seniors who don't know someone that works in these departments or know someone who knows someone in these departments are not aware of the different programs available.

These City departments do no engagement on a regular basis to let citizens know that they're even in existence.					
There are service deserts still within the city.					
It seems as though various departments need to be reminded to look at services at programs and services through an aging lens.					
I think there is a good effort but lack of funds have impacted success.					
While that may be true for some adults, black and Spanish-speaking adults are left out.					
I think so, but I'm not 100% sure. How is this measured?					
We've seen wonderful events to provide resources and information from Tabitha Taylor and APH re: older adults. West Baxter and his team at CG do amazing work across the board for older adults.					
It is easy for older adults to access information about City programs and services in one central place.	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
	20%	65%	10%	5%	0%
Comments					
In my experience older individuals access information in more than one central location based on their existing participation, word of mouth and their neighborhood location. it seems a super local, multimodal outreach plan might have more success than one central number alone.					
I believe the austintexas.gov page on senior programs and services is a good spot that shares valuable information, but I do not believe that seniors easily find that page. They may also have difficulties with technology so other outlets are needed.					
Again, Seniors are not on social media and these programs are not accessible in one place. Most times you are pointed to an outside non-profit agency to complete repairs.					
City departments depend on social media to do any engagement of its citizens most older citizens don't know how to navigate social media.					
They get their information in lots of different ways.					
Difficult to navigate.					
There is such a digital divide amongst seniors causing a new challenge.					
While that may be true for some adults, black and Spanish-speaking adults are left out.					
City initiatives for older adults should have a section of its own on the City's website. I just did a search for "age-friendly" on the City's site, and the results weren't very helpful.					
Any older adult who is not on social media or uses email is highly in the dark about any city services. The tech-divide for older adults is a huge deal and only getting worse.					
I can't imagine that older adults are able to find the city programs and services pages at all. It is hard for me to navigate, and I know what I am looking for.					
Information is available everywhere. Older adults have trouble figuring out who to trust and where to go for safe, accurate and helpful information.					
The City provides information about programs and services in a variety of different languages.	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
	0%	15%	25%	40%	20%
Comments					
If the City does provide this information, it may not be accessible or promoted well.					
They have done this really well! Ensuring clients have things in different languages.					
I know they are provided in English and Spanish, I am not aware if they are provided in any other language.					

Nice job and thank you.					
This is true to some extent.					
I am very pleased to see other languages besides English and Spanish being made available to residents.					
Older adults can access information about City programs and services in a variety of formats such as online, radio, TV, newsletter, etc.	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
	0%	40%	35%	20%	5%
Comments					
Since I don't live here, I'm not sure.					
Personally, I rarely see or notice ads about programs in these other formats.					
Some Seniors may be able to access the aforementioned social media platforms, but most seniors are not social media literate, most still prefer pen and paper and the human element. No one takes in to account that most Seniors that need these services don't have the internet.					
City departments depend on social media older citizens tend not to know how to navigate social media					
A robust information system with lots of modalities is important.					
This isn't widely known or advertised. And then, it's not available in all languages.					
Any older adult who is not on social media or uses email is highly in the dark about any city services. The tech-divide for older adults is a huge deal and only getting worse.					
Where?					
Yes, but there is room for improvement to make it easier for aging adults to know about and access these resources.					
Older adults can access information about City programs and services in a variety of formats such as online, radio, TV, newsletter, etc.	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
	0%	40%	35%	20%	5%
Comments					
Since I don't live here, I'm not sure.					
Personally, I rarely see or notice ads about programs in these other formats.					
Some Seniors may be able to access the aforementioned social media platforms, but most seniors are not social media literate, most still prefer pen and paper and the human element. No one takes in to account that most Seniors that need these services don't have the internet.					
City departments depend on social media older citizens tend not to know how to navigate social media					
A robust information system with lots of modalities is important.					
This isn't widely known or advertised. And then, it's not available in all languages.					
Any older adult who is not on social media or uses email is highly in the dark about any city services. The tech-divide for older adults is a huge deal and only getting worse.					
Where?					
Yes, but there is room for improvement to make it easier for aging adults to know about and access these resources.					
The City communicates its programs and services to older adults who may be harder to reach such as older adults of color (e.g. Black, Hispanic, Asian, etc.) or older adults with low incomes.	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
	25%	20%	20%	30%	5%
Comments					
We do not get many calls from people speaking other languages other than Spanish and English, so I don't think they have this information.					

The Community Engagement staff clearly make every effort to reach the hard to reach. However, in a number of meetings when the discussion turns to reaching the harder to reach, one group keeps coming up. those individuals who live alone and have no family. EMS has noted the rise in the “solo senior” population also known as elder orphans who often fall through the cracks.

The Rec centers seem to be doing outreach and working to communicate with BIPOC communities.

None of my friends, church members know of such programs because they are not marketed to those demographics, nor are they explained one on one to help them understand these programs.

City of Austin departments don't take the extra step of sitting down with older adults and helping them with all the paperwork.

It doesn't matter what color a senior is, older seniors are not being reached because they are not using computers or smart phones. It is an equal deficit across gender, race, ethnicity, and income.

With the rise of email and social media, there are still many older adults who cannot access, not because they don't want to but because they cannot afford the internet or tech tools.

We all could do a better job of reaching our underserved community members and making sure they feel heard.

Yes, but there is room for improvement to make it easier for aging adults to know about and access these resources.

The City has sufficient resources dedicated to providing programs and services to older adults.	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
	25%	45%	25%	5%	0%

Comments

As mentioned, paratransit and other transportation is limited, as is caregiver respite and in-home services which is the services most requested.

More accessible and reliable transportation opportunities are needed.

With a growing senior population, I believe more resources are needed.

I know of someone who has been waiting more than 12 months for service.

Most older adults don't qualify for these programs because they have too much in savings.

Though there may be senior programs at several PARD facilities, they are pushed out during certain timeframes for youth services and transportation to the facilities need to be more robust.

Huge gaps in equity here: 1. Older adult programs in parks and recreation. Gaps in locations and distribution. 2. Lack of focus on older adults who are experiencing or at risk for homelessness. 3. Senior housing does not include a full range of services and programs to help older adults age in place including assistance with activities of daily living, recreation, transportation etc.

While the city does dedicate resources to providing programs and services to older adults, I believe more resources are needed to impact this rapidly growing segment of our population.

The City provides adequate access to safe and affordable transportation for older adults.	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
	37%	32%	26%	5%	0%

Comments

During our area planning process, we still heard from individuals that there were gaps in services transportation, especially for medical appointments and social engagements.

Bus stops are not in walkable distances from housing. Also, not all bus stops have shelters to sit and protect from sun and rain.

More transportation options are needed.					
I see this area being worked on for those especially low-income older adults.					
Most Seniors know of Capital Metro Special Transit but are not aware of any other transportation services.					
I know that Capital Metro provides transportation for older adults I am not aware of Transportation through the city of Austin.					
The City should assist the volunteer driving programs with funding to help serve more seniors.					
I have been to events where transportation was an issue and where accessibility issues were not well-thought out.					
Lots of issues with transportation. Common issues include assistance door-to-door, long waiting periods to be picked up, being dropped off in unsafe locations etc.					
Metro Access is underfunded. PARD provides poor service to senior centers. Nonprofits have to fill in gaps where the city has been unable to serve older adults.					
In some areas, yes. Unfortunately, it is unaffordable to live along the city's main corridors where one has the most access to transit.					
The City provides access to diverse and affordable housing options and home repair services for older adults with varying income levels.	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
	26%	47%	21%	6%	0%
Comments:					
Affordable Housing options appear to be decreasing, The City does provide a substantial amount of funding for home repairs and should continue to do so.					
Most supportive and affordable housing has long waiting lists (years).					
Many of our seniors have moved to Williamson County due to cost of living.					
Affordable housing is becoming more scarce in Austin and we definitely need more.					
This is still needed... many programs have lost funding due to shift to Homelessness thus losing funding for keeping those with homes housed. --Housing Prevention!					
The Seniors most in need are not aware of these programs, and they cannot be reached through social media.					
Older adults do not qualify for these programs they get very little money on limited income but in most cases, they may have a dollar over what the program says they can have in savings.					
Low-income housing is very hard on seniors.					
Thankfully, NPOs are stepping up to fill some of the gap where the City falls short, but people are still being forced to move away, rent out rooms, take in roommates or live with family.					
Too few are specifically for older adults.					
I do believe the funds are available through Meals on Wheels but I would doubt that there is a strong awareness of their availability.					
Some good work on home repairs, but affordable housing options remain limited.					

3. How useful is the City's website in helping older adults locate programs and services?	Response
Extremely useful	5%
Very useful	0%
Somewhat useful	42%
Not so useful	37%
Not at all useful	16%

Comments

The website only lists city programs and that is mainly senior centers, park and recreation activities, and some transportation services.

It is not translated in various languages and can be difficult to navigate.

The website is great! The downfall is not all older adults have access or know how to navigate it.

I cannot say enough that most Seniors don't use the internet.

The City of Austin website is difficult to navigate.

I tried to easily find services and it is not readily apparent that you need to "click here" for older adult services.

Ease of navigation is fair, but definitely not good. It isn't very intuitive.

I've looked for things that I knew were on the City's website and couldn't find them. At one point I spent 45 minutes going through what I thought were all the possible threads and options. Never found what I was searching for. Someone at the City had to send a link.

Any older adult who is not on social media or uses email is highly in the dark about any city services. The tech-divide for older adults is a huge deal and only getting worse.

The city's website is not user friendly in any form or fashion for those who are seeking services or recreation. Just the layout and formatting alone (fonts, font size) are not considerate of those who are aging.

Poor representation of non-profit services. Not enough information on navigating Medicare, Medicare Advantage and Medicaid.

If digital literacy is not a barrier-- COA's website is a useful resource.

4. On a scale of 1 to 10 (10 being all needs are being met and 1 being needs are not being met at all), please rate how well you think the City's programs and services meet the needs of older adults in the following domains of livability:

Domain	Average Rating (out of 10)
Outdoor Spaces & Buildings	5.4
Social Participation	4.9
Community Support & Health Services	4.5
Civic Participation & Employment	4.3
Respect & Social Inclusion	4.2
Communication & Information	3.6
Transportation	3.4
Housing	2.8

5. Check all that apply to you/your organization.	Percent of respondents who agreed
I am familiar with the City's Age-Friendly Action Plan.	80%
I am familiar with Austin's Age-Friendly Coordinator.	70%
I use the City's Age-Friendly Action Plan to guide my efforts.	40%
My organization's perspective was included in the creation of the City's Age-Friendly Action Plan.	50%
None of the above.	20%

6. Is there anything else you would like to share about the City's efforts on providing services to older adults?
Comments
Affordable Housing options appear to be decreasing, The City does provide a substantial amount of funding for home repairs and should continue to do so.
Most supportive and affordable housing has long waiting lists (years).
Many of our seniors have moved to Williamson County due to cost of living.
Affordable housing is becoming more scarce in Austin and we definitely need more.
This is still needed... many programs have lost funding due to shift to Homelessness thus losing funding for keeping those with homes housed. --Housing Prevention!
The Seniors most in need are not aware of these programs, and they cannot be reached through social media.
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Low-income housing is very hard on seniors.
Thankfully, NPOs are stepping up to fill some of the gap where the City falls short, but people are still being forced to move away, rent out rooms, take in roommates or live with family.
Too few are specifically for older adults.
I do believe the funds are available through Meals on Wheels but I would doubt that there is a strong awareness of their availability.
Some good work on home repairs, but affordable housing options remain limited.

Recommendations and Management Response

1

To ensure the City can effectively measure progress towards goals in the Age-Friendly Austin Action Plan and assess if the City's efforts are equitable across all groups of older adults, 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 according to the World Health Organization's best practices for measuring age-friendliness
- Clarify and communicate the expectations, roles, and responsibilities for each strategy
- Incorporate demographic data to assess if the implementation of goals and strategies is equitable across older adults

Management Response: Agree

Proposed Implementation Plan: The Age-Friendly Action Plan (AFAP) is governed by AARP a United States of America affiliate of the World Health Organization. The Age-Friendly Action Plan is rewritten every five years, the next iteration of the AFAP is due to AARP by July 15, 2026.

Austin Public Health (APH) will host a series of interdepartmental, stakeholder, and community engagement meetings to address and achieve each recommendation. APH will work with the City Manager and City departments to identify a Single Point of Contact (SPOC) to ensure alignment with each department's age-friendly performance measures and Strategic Direction 2028. Austin Public Health will work closely with the Commission on Aging to include demographic data for older adults from the upcoming quality of life study.

Proposed Implementation Date: July 15, 2026

2

To ensure that all City departments provide services with an age-friendly perspective that aligns with the Age-Friendly Austin Action Plan, 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 department's mission.

Management Response: Agree

Proposed Implementation Plan: Under the direction of the City Manager, Austin Public Health will facilitate a listen-and-learn session to ensure that City departments are familiar with the AFAP. APH will work with Age friendly partners, including AARP and possibly bring in outside consultants to help provide technical assistance and education to other city departments.

Proposed Implementation Date: June 30, 2024

3

To ensure older adults across Austin can have better awareness of and access to information about City programs and services, the Director of Austin Public Health should coordinate with the City Manager and other departments, including the Communications and Public Information Office, 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.

Management Response: Agree

Proposed Implementation Plan: Consistent with the Communication and Information goals included in Austin’s Age Friendly Action Plan, and for the purposes of clarity and consistency, CPIO and APH will partner to develop and provide City departments with guidance about best practices to communicate with older adults about programs and services.

Austin Public Health will coordinate with the City Manager and the Communications & Public Information Office to examine resources needed to develop an accessible and useable webpage to serve as a “one-stop” information center for use by older adults.

Proposed Implementation Date: September 30, 2023

4

To ensure the City can effectively make progress toward its Age-Friendly Austin Action Plan to serve older adults, the Director of Austin Public Health should assess the resources needed to implement and coordinate the Age-Friendly Program across City departments, evaluate those needs against current resources, and propose a plan to the City Manager to address any gaps.

Management Response: Agree

Proposed Implementation Plan: Austin Public Health will closely examine and assess the needs of the Age-Friendly program. A comprehensive report will be provided to the City Manager.

Proposed Implementation Date: October 15, 2023

Scope

The audit scope included the City's current efforts and practices to provide services to older adults.

Methodology

To complete this audit, we performed the following steps:

- Interviewed staff from Austin Public Health, Austin Public Library, the Communication and Public Information Office, the Equity Office, the Housing and Planning Department, and the Parks and Recreation Department
- Interviewed representatives from the Commission on Aging and other community stakeholders
- Reviewed plans and City policies related to Austin's older adult population
- Analyzed 2010 and 2020 American Community Survey data related to Austin's older adult population
- Surveyed community stakeholders that partner with the City to serve older adults in Austin
- Conducted a review of leading age-friendly cities around the country based on the AARP's Livability Index
- Reviewed demographic data collection and communication efforts for a judgmental sample of the City's programs geared towards or primarily used by older adults
- Evaluated internal controls related to the City's efforts and practices to provide services to older adults
- Evaluated the risk of fraud, waste, and abuse for the City's efforts and practices to provide services to older adults

Audit Standards

We conducted this performance audit in accordance with Generally Accepted Government Auditing Standards. Those standards require that we plan and perform the audit to obtain sufficient, appropriate evidence to provide a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives. We believe that the evidence obtained provides a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives.

The Office of the City Auditor was created by the Austin City Charter as an independent office reporting to City Council to help establish accountability and improve City services. We conduct performance audits to review aspects of a City service or program and provide recommendations for improvement.

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