

AGING READINESS

Profile of the issue:

Society as a whole is undergoing immense transformation. Globally, we are experiencing an enormous rise in the age of the world's populations. The percentage of individuals living beyond 60 years is increasing at levels never before seen in human history. No challenge "is as certain as global aging, and none is as likely to have as large and enduring an effect - on the size and shape of government budgets, on the future growth in living standards, and on the stability of the global economy and even the world order."¹

In the United States the "baby boom" generation, the largest ever born (78 million Americans), is also in the process of transforming American society as it moves into its senior years. This, of course, is reflected at the local level as well.

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, Washington's population will increase 30% by the year 2020, reaching 7.5 million. The aging of this population will be the most important demographic phenomenon the next few decades.

In 2006, 13.4% (90,138) of the total population (671,800) in Snohomish County were persons age 60 and older; 4.5% (30,202) were persons age 75 and older. The most recent projections available indicate that, by the year 2020, 22.1% (190,258) of the Snohomish County population will be age 60 and older; 5.4% (46,380) will be persons age 75 and older.

Between 1990 and 2005, the total population grew by 40.8%, the 60 and older age group grew by 45.9% and the 75 and older age group grew by 69.0%. Within the next 15 years (2005 – 2020), the projected growth for the total population is 31.5%, while the growth expected for the 60 and older and 75 and older age groups are 118.6% and 56.5% respectively.

These changes in the population present opportunities as well as challenges in meeting the needs of county residents. Preparation is needed in all areas. It will take time to advocate for and develop the kind of community services, programs, housing options and environment needed to respond to these changes.

In order to accomplish this, there is a need for a comprehensive approach to planning. We need to bring "aging awareness" to government leaders, business leaders, civic leaders, and the larger community. By looking at "Aging Readiness" in a holistic manner, we can develop an elder friendly community.

¹ Richard Jackson, director, Global Aging Initiative, Center for Strategic & International Studies
Snohomish County Area Agency on Aging
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This vision of community:

1. Encourages people of all ages to prepare for retirement and old age.
2. Develops “age sensitive” service infrastructures that support people as they age.
3. Establishes and adapts existing services to recognize and accommodate the needs of older adults and adults with disabilities.
4. Builds and adapts physical infrastructures that support people as they age.
5. Promotes creative ways for the county’s aging population to utilize their talents, skills, and experiences in both paid and un-paid roles.
6. Promotes flexibility in the workplace to accommodate and support the vital role played by family caregivers.
7. Promotes flexibility in the workplace to accommodate and support the vital role played by an increasingly aging pool of workers.

Change that enhances older adults’ quality of life will improve conditions for everyone because elder-friendly communities are good places for people of all ages to live. Elder-friendly communities become communities of choice for everyone.

Problem/Need Statement: The County’s population is rapidly aging. Government, business, civic, education and community leaders need to proactively plan for the changes this will make in how they provide services, build infrastructure, and integrate aging citizens into all aspects of our community.

Goal: Encourage the development of an “Elder Friendly” community.

Objective: Promote awareness of changing demographics and the dramatic increase in the aging population.

Measurable Activity: Conduct outreach and education by methods which may include but are not limited to:

1. Plan and organize an Aging Readiness Conference
2. Conduct educational and training events
3. Create a Speakers’ Bureau
4. Promote inclusion of aging curriculum into public schools at all levels
5. Organize outreach to business and civic entities

December 2008

Measurable Activity: Support local service providers, businesses, and agencies in their efforts to become more “Aging Ready” by methods which may include but are not limited to:

1. Providing checklists of issues to consider

2. Sharing “Best Practices”

Ongoing, but at least 50 businesses/service providers will be provided with materials by December 2009.

Objective: Advocate for a fair share of resources and services targeted to seniors.

Measurable Activity: Create an advocacy campaign regarding senior issues through efforts such as but not limited to:

- a. Develop a Legislative Agenda with Council on Aging and disseminate to legislators and community groups
- b. Organize Legislative receptions
- c. Hold candidate forums and direct senior-specific questions to candidates
- d. Develop and promote training for community members to be “senior advocates”
- e. Meet with elected officials
- f. Join existing coalitions with common issues

Ongoing

Measurable Activity: As highlighted in discussions during the Aging Summit, the AAA should promote a focus on issues such as the need for increased low-income housing options, increased transportation options, awareness and action on elder abuse issues, and inclusion of senior issues in emergency shelter and transitional housing planning. Activities may include, but not be limited to, attending housing and transportation advisory board meetings, joining appropriate coalitions, and including these issues in any legislative advocacy efforts.

Ongoing