



Aging in the Pikes Peak Region

A report from Innovations in Aging Collaborative – April 2015
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Executive Summary

Purpose of the Report

The goal of this report is to build upon the ideas and concerns identified in an initial report published by Innovations in Aging Collaborative in 2011, *Aging in El Paso County*. As was recognized in the original report, the population growth of individuals 65 and older is surging, a phenomenon that government officials, public health officials, and community members all need to recognize in order to strategically prepare. This predicted surge illustrates the probability of enormous future demands on Social Security, Medicare, and local public and private services that serve the needs of the over-65 population.

Although this imminent population shift may be daunting, such a change also illuminates significant opportunities for our region. A major component of the current report involves identifying best practices from other communities that have established themselves as a great place in which to age. The practices highlighted in this report can act as a stepping stone for the Pikes Peak region in order to become more age-friendly. Moving forward, it is important to review these practices, identify those that can be implemented in the Pikes Peak region, and find ways in which to duplicate such services in order to meet the needs of our local seniors and improve resources that already exist.

Pikes Peak Seniors Today

As compared to the national average, the Pikes Peak region is expected to experience an even greater increase in the 65+ population. While the projected national increase is 21% from 2010 to 2020, the population of individuals 65 and older in El Paso County alone is expected to grow by 39%, almost double national average. This dramatic discrepancy can be accredited to several features of the Pikes Peak region, including the prominent military population coupled with the desire to age in place, and the reputation of the region for having ample opportunities for recreation. Because of this trajectory, those of us in the Pikes Peak region have an even greater responsibility to prepare for the opportunities and challenges that an aging population can present.

An Age-Friendly City

The Age-Friendly City concept is a global project endorsed by the American Association of Retired Persons (AARP) and the World Health Organization (WHO) that encourages metropolitan cities to engender and prioritize initiatives that focus on making the area a safe and enjoyable place in which to age. To help cities begin the process of becoming age-friendly, the AARP has created guidelines that focus on eight important domains: outdoor spaces and buildings, transportation, social participation, respect and social inclusion, civic participation and employment, communication and information, and community support and health services. Within each of these categories, the AARP provides several suggestions about how to make services suitable for seniors. For example, they suggest that cities find ways to encourage builders to design multigenerational housing so individuals can stay in their houses for as long as possible.

Although Colorado Springs has already begun the process of becoming age-friendly, there is still room for improvement in several of the domains identified by the AARP. Specifically, senior residents of Colorado Springs have identified transportation as a key issue, with 20% indicating they have mobility needs. Additionally, according to the Community Assessment Survey for Older Adults (CASOA), published by the Colorado Department of Public Health & Environment, Colorado Springs scored a 38 out of 100 on affordability of housing and a 44 out of 100 for variety of housing options indicating that housing is another area for improvement. Thus, by adhering to the Age-Friendly City guidelines, the Pikes Peak region can continue to become a great place in which to age.

Lessons Learned from Other Communities

While completing this report, representatives from Innovations In Aging Collaborative (IIAC) had the opportunity to visit cities across the U.S. that have developed innovative programs to become age-friendly. Initiatives ranged from expansive projects that met the needs of entire cities, such as iTNOrlando - a door-through-door transportation service similar to Uber that picks seniors up in their current location and drops them off at their desired location, while ensuring that the senior makes it inside safely - to smaller, elective programs like Arts and Aging, which exposes seniors and caregivers to the fine arts. By reviewing the successful programs of other cities, IIAC hopes to stimulate interest in replicating such programs locally in order to improve the wellbeing of seniors in our area.

Opportunities and Challenges

Many of the national challenges facing seniors today are reflected in the Pikes Peak region. Specifically, senior centered careers remain some of the lowest paying jobs forcing young professionals to follow alternative career paths. Additionally, as information and services become increasingly automated, many seniors struggle to stay up-to-date and connected to potentially helpful services. Finally, many seniors did not make adequate financial arrangements for their retirement and did not consider the needs they may have in the years to come. As a result, many individuals do not have enough money saved to thrive in retirement and have little information about the services available to them.

Fortunately for the Pikes Peak region, there is plenty of infrastructure in place that will allow these challenges to become opportunities. For example, the University of Colorado Colorado Springs offers degree programs focused on aging and houses a nationally known Gerontology Center, allowing young professionals to pursue occupations related to aging. Colorado Springs has also been successful in illuminating the link between business and aging, boasting companies like AbleLink Technologies - a business that creates easy to use technology to assist individuals experiencing cognitive decline - and Caring Transitions - an organization that helps seniors and their family members prepare for life transitions including relocation and downsizing assets.

Conclusions: A New Vision of Aging

Today, seniors are less likely to view retirement and old age as a time for reflection. Instead, they are more likely to view this period as a third stage of life in which there is opportunity for positive social purpose. Because of this vision, organizations, businesses, and the community at large needs to offer opportunities for seniors to fulfill their evolving and varied goals. As a starting point, it will be important to follow the lead of other age-friendly cities and replicate their successful programs in the Pikes Peak region. Furthermore, we must begin to recognize that, whether a Millennial or a Baby Boomer, we all share similar needs and desires. From accessible transportation, to affordable housing, a number of these initiatives will benefit all community member in the Pikes Peak region.

To view the full report, please visit our website:

www.innovationsinaging.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=8&Itemid=108