

Age-Friendly Ocean County, New Jersey

MULTISECTOR PLAN FOR AGING

2026 - 2030





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agefriendlyoceancounty.org

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RUTGERS UNIVERSITY
**Family and Community
Health Sciences**
New Jersey Agricultural Experiment Station





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The Ocean County Board of Commissioners is excited to share the launch of Age-Friendly Ocean County, a new initiative dedicated to making sure our community is a welcoming, supportive, and vibrant place to live for people of all ages.

As part of the AARP Network of Age-Friendly States and Communities, Ocean County is committed to creating opportunities and resources that help residents stay healthy, connected, and independent as they grow older. With more than 200,000 adults aged 60 and older living in our county, and tens of thousands more reaching that milestone every year, this work has never been more important.

In partnership with the Family and Community Health Sciences (FCHS) Program at Rutgers Cooperative Extension of Ocean County, and with support from the New Jersey Department of Human Services, we are proud to begin this journey with an Age-Friendly Community Grant. Together, we will be asking the most important questions: *What do older adults, caregivers, veterans, and people with disabilities need to thrive in Ocean County?*

Over the next several months, we will be:

- Listening to community members through a countywide needs assessment
- Developing an Age-Friendly Ocean County Action and Evaluation Plan
- Building partnerships with local leaders, organizations, and residents
- Using AARP's Eight Domains of Livability- including housing, transportation, outdoor spaces, social inclusion, and more- as our roadmap to lasting change

This isn't just about planning for the future. It's about making sure that right now, every person- whether you're raising a family, living with a disability, caring for a loved one, or enjoying retirement- feels supported, respected, and connected here in Ocean County.

We look forward to partnering with you, our residents, in shaping a county where everyone can age with dignity, purpose, and joy.

Together, we can make Ocean County a model age-friendly community.

Sincerely,

The Ocean County Board of Commissioners

 SPECIAL ASSISTANCE/ACCOMMODATIONS available, please call (732) 929-2091. 

Executive Summary

Background

The Ocean County Multisector Plan for Aging (MPA) Advisory Committee, in collaboration with key county and community partners, developed this inaugural Ocean County Multisector Plan for Aging to strengthen the county's capacity to support older adults, adults with disabilities, caregivers, and residents across the lifespan.

Ocean County is home to more than 200,000 adults age 60 and older, representing nearly one-third (30%) of the county's population. Significantly older than both state and national averages, Ocean County has one of the highest concentrations of older adults in New Jersey and one of the largest aging populations in the Mid-Atlantic region. Over the next two decades, adults age 60 and older are projected to experience the region's highest population growth rate, underscoring the urgent need for coordinated, age-friendly planning, infrastructure, services, and systems development.

Ocean County is home to over 200,000 adults age 60 and older, representing nearly one-third (30%) of the county's population.



A team member from Meals on Wheels delivering food to a local resident.

The Ocean County MPA complements the New Jersey Age-Friendly Blueprint, a comprehensive statewide framework designed to prepare New Jersey for its rapidly growing older adult population, projected to reach 1.9 million residents by 2030. Released by the New Jersey Department of Human Services (NJ DHS) in May 2024 pursuant to Governor Phil Murphy's Executive Order No. 227, the Blueprint positions aging not as a challenge to be managed, but as an opportunity to build healthier, more inclusive, and more resilient communities for residents of all ages. The Blueprint includes 59 actionable recommendations to support aging in place and guide development of a coordinated statewide Multisector Plan for Aging.

Ocean County senior center participants celebrate Halloween together, illustrating the role these community hubs play in fostering social connection and belonging among older adults.

Development of this inaugural Ocean County MPA was supported by the NJDHS Division of Aging Services (DoAS) and led by the Ocean County Office of Senior Services in partnership with the Family and Community Health Sciences Program of Rutgers Cooperative Extension of Ocean County. Grounded in community engagement and informed by a countywide needs assessment, the plan establishes a collaborative framework for ongoing action planning, implementation, evaluation, and dissemination of evidence-informed and promising practices across six priority focus areas.

Recognizing that healthy aging is shaped by systems, environments, policies, and partnerships, the Ocean County MPA is intended to serve as a living framework that evolves alongside community needs and demographic change. The Age-Friendly Ocean County MPA Advisory Committee welcomes continued community engagement, cross-sector collaboration, and public input to ensure that Ocean County remains a safe, supportive, accessible, and inclusive place where all residents can age and thrive.

Learn More and Get Involved

Visit agefriendlyoceancounty.org

Together, we can shape the future of Ocean County.



Age-Friendly State Advisory Council Members

Development of the Ocean County Multisector Plan for Aging (MPA) was informed by earlier statewide age-friendly initiatives, including New Jersey's acceptance into the AARP Network of Age-Friendly States and Communities under the Murphy Administration, becoming the ninth of 14 U.S. states and territories to join the network at that time.

Pursuant to Governor Phil Murphy's Executive Order No. 227, the Age-Friendly State Advisory Council ("Advisory Council") was established within the New Jersey Department of Human Services (NJ DHS) to guide development of the state's age-friendly and multi-sector planning efforts. The Advisory Council was chaired by former NJ DHS Commissioner Sarah Adelman and included then-Lieutenant Governor Sheila Oliver in her capacity as Commissioner of the New Jersey Department of Community Affairs; former New Jersey Department of Health Commissioner Judith Persichilli; former New Jersey Department of Transportation Commissioner Diane Gutierrez-Scaccetti; and representatives from county and municipal government, local authorities, community-based aging and inclusion organizations, the business sector, and institutions of higher education.

Public Members of the Advisory Council

John Donnadio New Jersey Association of Counties	Elizabeth Schedl Hudson Pride
Nancyanne Fama Food Circus New Jersey	Janet Sharma Age-Friendly Englewood
Dr. Emily Greenfield Rutgers University, School of Social Work	Adeola Sonaike, Ph.D., MPH Baker Street Behavioral Health
Cheryl Kastrenakes Greater Mercer Transportation Management Association	Katie Squires, Ph.D. AARP New Jersey
Maria La Face, JD Ocean County Office on Aging	Rita Steindlberger Brain Injury Alliance of New Jersey
Gwen Orlowski, Mary Ciccone Disability Rights New Jersey	Mary Beth Wheeler Piscataway Senior Center/New Jersey Association of Parks and Recreation
Cheryl Ricci-Francione Alzheimer's Association Greater New Jersey	

The Advisory Council developed a blueprint of best practices for advancing age-friendly practices across the State, the New Jersey Age-Friendly Blueprint, which outlines 59 actionable recommendations to help residents age in place and establish a Multisector Plan for Aging.

Ocean County Departments

County Department	Department Director
Consumer Affairs	Ronald Heinzman, Director
County Clerk's Office	John Kelly, County Clerk
County College	Dr. Pamela Monaco, President
County Connection	Leyla Wade, Division Director
Cultural & Heritage Commission	Timothy Hart, Ocean County Historian
Engineering Department	Mark Jehnke, County Engineer
Rutgers Cooperative Extension Services	Dr. Douglas Zemeckis, Director
Fire Marshal	Dennis Allen, Fire Marshal
Health Department	Daniel Regenye, Public Health Officer
Human Services	Dr. Jamie Busch, Director
Library System	Susan Quinn, Director
Parks and Recreation	Mary Jane Bavais, Director
Planning Board	Anthony Agliata, Director
Prosecutor's Office	Bradley Billhimer, County Prosecutor
Public Affairs	Jillian Messina, Director
Senior Services	Maria La Face, Director
Sheriff's Department	Michael Mastronardy, Sheriff
Social Services	Meredith Sheehan, Director
Transportation Services (Ocean Ride)	Michelle Arnold, Director
Veterans Service Bureau	Vincent Camporeale, Director

Ocean County Senior Services Advisory Council Members

Mary E. Buckley Brick Township Affiliation: General Public	Regina Discenza Forked River (Lacey Township) Affiliation: General Public/Former Caregiver
Erin Delucia Lanoka Harbor (Lacey Township) Affiliation: Supportive Services Provider	Chana Lerner Lakewood Township Affiliation: General Public
Kathleen C. Edmond Manahawkin (Stafford Township) Affiliation: General Public/Volunteer/ Family Caregiver	Robert Rowe Toms River Township (county seat) Affiliation: General Public/Veteran/ Volunteer
Kimberlie A. Fiero (Chair) Jackson Township Affiliation: General Public	Michael A. Signorile Berkeley Township Affiliation: Elected Official
Gerry Gavin (Vice-Chair) New Egypt (Plumsted Township) Affiliation: General Public	Jonathan Lazarus Toms River Township (County Seat) Affiliation: General Public
Judy Noonan Manchester Township Affiliation: Elected Official	Dr. Kathleen Cullinen Whiting (Manchester Township) Affiliation: Age-Friendly Ocean County/ Former Caregiver

Community stakeholders gather for an Age-Friendly Ocean County planning session, reflecting the MPA Advisory Committee's commitment to inclusive, resident-informed decision-making.

In sum, the Ocean County Multisector Plan for Aging (MPA) was informed by statewide age-friendly groundwork established over the previous five years, as well as 15 months of iterative planning, stakeholder engagement, and community feedback. Development of the plan was guided by ongoing input from Ocean County department heads and members of the Senior Services Advisory Council, collectively referred to as the Ocean County MPA Advisory Committee.

Reporting to the five-member Ocean County Board of County Commissioners, the MPA Advisory Committee represents a broad cross-section of sectors and stakeholders, including older adults, adults with disabilities, and caregivers; County leadership representing housing, healthcare, transportation, senior services, veterans services, workforce development, and public information; and representatives from local businesses, community-based organizations, municipal and local government agencies, including key mayors and community leaders. The Advisory Committee also includes representation from youth-serving organizations, the interfaith community, cultural institutions, and educational partners.

The MPA Advisory Committee will continue to oversee implementation, evaluation, and dissemination of the plan through multidisciplinary action groups established to advance the recommendations and strategies outlined in this Ocean County MPA.





Introduction

The Ocean County MPA Advisory Committee was established through a multisector expansion of the Ocean County Senior Advisory Council, a citizen-led advisory body that meets quarterly to gather community feedback and advocate for the county's growing older adult population. The MPA Advisory Committee serves in a planning and advisory capacity in partnership with the Ocean County Office of Senior Services, the County's designated Area Agency on Aging.

Working collaboratively with the Office of Senior Services, the MPA Advisory Committee helps to:

1. gather input from older adults, adults with disabilities, and caregivers to identify gaps in services and supports;
2. advocate for initiatives that promote healthy aging, independence, and quality of life; and
3. support development of the Ocean County Area Plan, which guides countywide aging priorities, funding, and resource allocation.

As a lead applicant and one of the inaugural recipients of the New Jersey Department of Human Services (NJ DHS) Division of Aging Services (DoAS) Age-Friendly Communities Grants Program, the Ocean County Office of Senior Services launched the Age-Friendly Ocean County initiative to assess, plan, and advance local age-friendly strategies supporting the health, well-being, and independence of older adults. The initiative also sought to promote sustainable improvements in policies, systems, and environmental conditions that enable residents to age safely and successfully in their homes and communities.

In partnership with the Family and Community Health Sciences Program of Rutgers Cooperative Extension of Ocean County, the 15-month initiative fostered public-private and multisector collaboration among County leaders, community organizations, and residents. Older adults, adults with disabilities, and caregivers were engaged in an accessible, culturally responsive, and linguistically appropriate community needs assessment designed to identify local priorities, evidence-informed strategies, and promising practices to support aging in place and community livability.

The community needs assessment and development of the Ocean County MPA were organized around the six age-friendly domains identified in the New Jersey Age-Friendly Blueprint released by NJDHS in May 2024: 1) Housing; 2) Health; 3) Transportation; 4) Socialization; 5) Employment; and 6) Communication and Outreach. Although Ocean County is a member of the AARP Network of Age-Friendly States and Communities, none of its 33 municipalities has yet received individual designation within the network. Accordingly, this funding opportunity provided an important foundation for development of a countywide age-friendly framework and model for future local implementation.

The Ocean County MPA is intended to serve as a living document that evolves alongside community priorities, demographic trends, and emerging opportunities. This inaugural iteration of the plan is informed by findings from Town Hall Listening Sessions conducted between February and May 2026, as well as a broader community health assessment that included key informant interviews, a stakeholder survey, and a community survey engaging diverse residents across Ocean County. Recommendations and priorities identified by national, state, and local stakeholders collectively informed the MPA Advisory Committee's focus areas, strategies, and recommendations. The MPA Advisory Committee welcomes continued public engagement and cross-sector collaboration in the next phase of planning and implementation efforts. To learn more or get involved, visit agefriendlyoceancounty.org.



The Ocean County Board of County Commissioners, whose support and formal commitment launched the Age-Friendly Ocean County initiative.

Ocean County residents participate in a themed community event, demonstrating the social engagement opportunities that contribute to older adult well-being and quality of life.



Age-Friendly Ocean County: Local to Global Alignment

On May 3, 2021, New Jersey became the ninth of 14 U.S. states and territories accepted into the AARP Network of Age-Friendly States and Communities, laying the foundation for the subsequent release of the New Jersey Age-Friendly Blueprint in May 2024. Building upon these statewide efforts, the Ocean County Board of County Commissioners signed a Letter of Commitment and adopted a Resolution on July 6, 2023, formally expressing the County's commitment to becoming age-friendly. With this action, Ocean County became the third county in New Jersey to join the AARP Network of Age-Friendly States and Communities, a global initiative affiliated with the World Health Organization (WHO).

Participation in the AARP Network reflects a formal government-led commitment to improving livability for older adults through policy, systems, and environmental change. It also signifies a commitment to a multi-year process of planning, implementation, evaluation, and continuous quality improvement grounded in community engagement and cross-sector collaboration.

Ocean County older adults gather for a community outing, representing the social connection and civic participation that are central to age-friendly community planning.

By signing the Letter of Commitment, Ocean County committed to:

1. Conducting a community needs assessment;
2. Developing a Multisector Plan for Aging;
3. Implementing age-friendly strategies across sectors; and
4. Reporting progress to AARP at regular intervals.

As the U.S. affiliate of the WHO Global Network for Age-Friendly Cities and Communities, the AARP Network aligns participating communities with internationally recognized age-friendly frameworks and best practices. Accordingly, Ocean County incorporated the WHO's Eight Domains of Age-Friendly Communities throughout its community needs assessment and planning process (**Figure 1**).

The WHO's Eight Domains of Age-Friendly Communities include:

- Outdoor spaces and buildings
- Transportation
- Housing
- Social participation
- Respect and social inclusion
- Civic participation and employment
- Communication and information
- Community support and health services

As a result, Ocean County's community-based planning framework, strategies, and future direction are aligned with global age-friendly principles and initiatives, positioning the County as a model for Community-Based Participatory Research (CBPR) that actively engages older adults, adults with disabilities, and caregivers in the planning process. The resulting best practices, lessons learned, and collaborative approaches may inform and support age-friendly planning efforts at the local, state, national, and global levels.

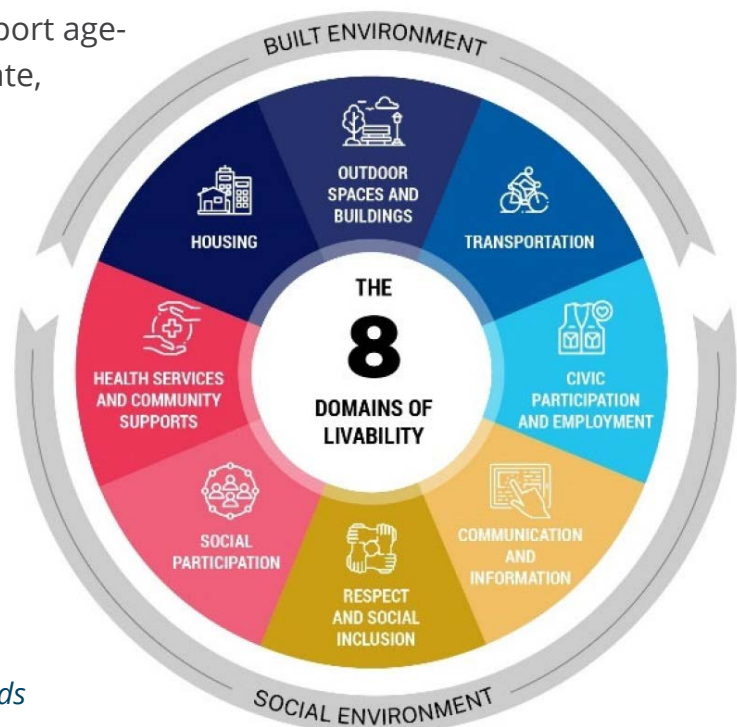


Figure 1. The World Health Organization's Eight Domains of Age-Friendly Communities, which guided Ocean County's community needs assessment and Multisector Plan for Aging.



Background/Context: Ocean County, New Jersey

Geography

Ocean County is the largest geographic county in New Jersey, encompassing approximately 916 square miles of land and water across 33 municipalities along the central New Jersey coastline (U.S. Census Bureau QuickFacts, 2025). The county includes densely populated suburban communities, rural Pine Barrens landscapes, coastal barrier island municipalities, environmentally protected areas within the Pinelands National Reserve, and one of the highest concentrations of retirement and age-restricted communities in the state (Ocean County Government, 2025; New Jersey Pinelands Commission, 2025). With a population exceeding 650,000 residents, Ocean County is both one of the most populous and geographically expansive counties in New Jersey (U.S. Census Bureau QuickFacts, 2025).

Ocean County's geographic scale has significant implications for public health, healthcare access, transportation, emergency preparedness, and equitable service delivery. Unlike residents of more densely urbanized counties in New Jersey, residents of less densely urbanized counties often travel substantial distances to access healthcare systems, specialty medical services, social services, public transportation, and other community resources. Geographic dispersion may disproportionately affect older adults, individuals with disabilities, caregivers, and veterans who experience mobility limitations, chronic disease, social isolation, or transportation barriers. In addition, coastal storm vulnerability, flooding risks, and seasonal tourism surges further complicate emergency response, evacuation planning, and continuity-of-care efforts across the county's large geographic footprint (Ocean County Government, 2025).

Older Adults and “Super Seniors”

Ocean County is among the oldest counties demographically in both New Jersey and the United States. Approximately 30% of county residents are age 60 years and older, substantially exceeding the national average of approximately 24% and surpassing many counties throughout New Jersey (Administration for Community Living [ACL], 2024;

Approximately 30% of county residents are age 60 years and older.

New Jersey Department of Human Services, Division of Aging Services, 2025). The county ranks among the highest in New Jersey for both the number and proportion of older adults (New Jersey State Data Center, 2025). This demographic profile

reflects Ocean County's longstanding role as a retirement destination and its exceptionally high concentration of age-restricted and active-adult communities, particularly within municipalities such as Manchester Township, Berkeley Township, Brick Township, Jackson Township, and Toms River Township (Ocean County Government, 2025) (**Figure 2**).

Ocean County additionally has one of the largest populations of adults age 85 years and older (“Super Seniors”) in New Jersey. Nationally, adults age 85+ represent one of the fastest-growing demographic groups and experience disproportionately high rates of chronic disease, dementia, frailty, falls, mobility limitations, disability, hospitalization, and long-term care needs (ACL, 2024). Compared with statewide and national averages, Ocean County's concentration of Super Seniors creates elevated demand for healthcare coordination, dementia-capable systems, chronic disease prevention, behavioral health services, caregiver support, age-friendly housing, transportation accessibility, and long-term services and supports (New Jersey Department of Human Services, Division of Aging Services, 2025).

A community Town Hall Listening Session held as part of Ocean County's countywide needs assessment, designed to engage older adults, caregivers, and community members across the county.

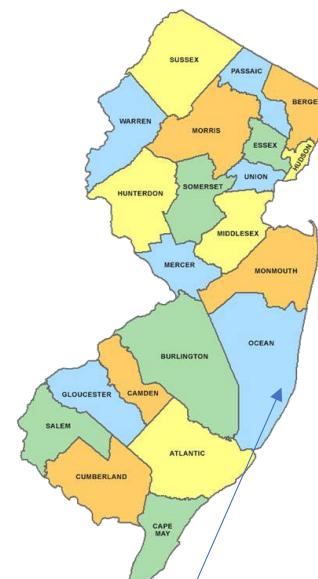


Figure 2. Map of Ocean County, New Jersey, showing its 33 municipalities and boundaries.

Ocean County also reflects broader national demographic trends related to increasing racial, ethnic, and linguistic diversity. While the county remains predominantly White non-Hispanic, Hispanic/Latino populations, multilingual households, and culturally diverse communities continue to grow steadily. Approximately 13% of residents speak a language other than English at home, underscoring the increasing need for culturally and linguistically responsive healthcare communication, emergency preparedness messaging, and equitable access to community-based services (U.S. Census Bureau QuickFacts, 2025).

The county also has a substantial population of adults living with disabilities and chronic health conditions. Disability prevalence increases significantly with age, particularly among adults age 85 years and older. As Ocean County's population continues to age, increasing numbers of residents are expected to experience mobility limitations, sensory impairments, cognitive decline, and chronic disease requiring coordinated systems of healthcare and social support (ACL, 2024). Ocean County's suburban and geographically dispersed development patterns may intensify barriers related to transportation, broadband connectivity, emergency evacuation, healthcare access, and social participation for individuals with disabilities, particularly those residing in rural or isolated communities (New Jersey Department of Human Services, Division of Aging Services, 2025).

Caregivers

Family caregivers represent another critically important population within Ocean County. Due to the county's large and aging population, thousands of unpaid family caregivers provide assistance with transportation, medication management, activities of daily living, chronic disease management, dementia care, financial oversight, and emotional support. Compared with national caregiving trends, Ocean County likely experiences a disproportionately high caregiving burden because of its concentration of older adults and adults age 85 years and older (ACL, 2024).

Compared with national caregiving trends, Ocean County likely experiences a disproportionately high caregiving burden

As the county's aging population continues to grow, demand for respite care, dementia support services, caregiver education, behavioral health resources, and integrated systems of support is expected to increase substantially (New Jersey Department of Human Services, Division of Aging Services, 2025).

Ocean County older adults participate in a themed senior center event, reflecting the spirit of engagement, joy, and community connection the Age-Friendly Ocean County initiative aims to sustain and expand.

Veterans

Ocean County additionally has one of the largest veteran populations in New Jersey, with nearly 30,000 veterans residing in the county (U.S. Census Bureau QuickFacts, 2025). Many veterans are older adults living with chronic disease, disability, behavioral health conditions, mobility limitations, or social isolation associated with aging and military service. Compared with many counties nationally, Ocean County's veteran population is older and more geographically dispersed, increasing the importance of coordinated healthcare access, transportation services, benefits navigation, emergency preparedness planning, and veteran-centered community supports (U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2025).

Implications for Age-Friendly and Public Health Planning

Collectively, Ocean County's status as the largest geographic county in New Jersey, combined with its high concentration of older adults, adults age 85 years and older, caregivers, individuals with disabilities, and veterans, creates a uniquely important context for age-friendly and public health planning. The county's demographic and geographic characteristics underscore the need for coordinated multisector strategies that integrate public health systems, healthcare organizations, transportation agencies, emergency management, housing, behavioral health services, veterans' services, disability services, parks and recreation, and community-based organizations.

These trends position Ocean County as both a microcosm of broader national aging trends and an important environment for innovation in healthy aging, dementia-capable systems, emergency preparedness, disability inclusion, climate resilience, and equitable community planning. As the United States population continues to age, Ocean County represents an increasingly valuable setting for developing, implementing, and evaluating age-friendly, community-based models that support aging in place, social connectedness, caregiver resilience, and quality of life across the lifespan.





Methods

Research Design

To inform development of the Ocean County Multisector Plan for Aging (MPA), a community needs assessment was conducted, engaging a purposive sample of older adults representing diverse populations across Ocean County, including caregivers, White non-Hispanic residents, Hispanic/Latino residents, Black or African American residents, Asian residents, LGBTQ+ individuals; and veterans.

A structured interview guide was developed to explore community strengths, unmet needs, barriers, and recommendations for improvement across six priority domains:

1. Housing
2. Transportation
3. Healthcare
4. Food Insecurity
5. Caregiving
6. Social Connection

The assessment was designed to support an inclusive, community-informed planning process and to ensure that the perspectives and lived experiences of older adults, caregivers, and underserved populations informed development of the Ocean County MPA.

Data Collection

BUILDING UPON EXISTING DATA

Existing data related to each of the six priority domains were curated, reviewed, summarized, and presented to the Ocean County MPA Advisory Committee. Key data sources included the most recent Ocean County Area Agency on Aging Area Plan, the 2025 Ocean County Health Department (OCHD) Community Health Assessment (CHA), the 2024 New Jersey Advocates for Aging Well Statewide Survey of Older Adults, and the AARP Livability Index.

These data sources provided important demographic, health, social, and environmental context to inform the planning process and guide development of recommendations and strategies within the Ocean County MPA. Summaries of existing data were reviewed by

the MPA Advisory Committee to support evidence-informed planning activities, identify emerging trends and service gaps, and contextualize findings across the six domains addressed in this report.

COMMUNITY FOCUS GROUPS

Based on the identified priority populations, the Ocean County MPA Advisory Committee developed a recruitment and outreach plan and identified key community partner agencies throughout Ocean County to support participant engagement. Four community focus groups were conducted between February and May 2026 through in-person Town Hall Listening Sessions facilitated by leadership from the Ocean County Office of Senior Services and the Family and Community Health Sciences Program of Rutgers Cooperative Extension of Ocean County.

The focus groups utilized a non-experimental, cross-sectional design and convenience sampling approach. Participant outreach and engagement were conducted in collaboration with community partners to help ensure broad representation and community participation. Facilitation and data collection services were provided by 35th Street Consulting, LLC, a certified Woman-Owned and Small Business Enterprise market research firm selected through a competitive county contractual bidding process.

Each session lasted approximately 90 minutes. Participation was voluntary and anonymous, and participants provided consent for audio recording prior to the start of each session. To acknowledge their time and contributions, participants received a \$25 gift card.

COMMUNITY HEALTH ASSESSMENT

During the New Jersey Department of Human Services (NJ DHS) Division of Aging Services (DoAS) award cycle for Age-Friendly Ocean County, the Ocean County Health Department completed a 2025 Community Health Assessment (CHA) in accordance with the methods and recommendations outlined in MAPP 2.0 (Mobilizing Action through Partnership and Planning), consistent with standards established by the Public Health Accreditation Board (PHAB). The assessment incorporated a comprehensive range of quantitative health indicators, community health measures, and population-based indices.



Participants at an Age-Friendly Ocean County Town Hall Listening Session, one of four community focus groups conducted to inform the Multisector Plan for Aging.

A presenter shares assessment findings during an engagement session.

Community engagement served as a central component of the assessment process. Qualitative and community-informed feedback was collected through four public presentations, 14 key informant interviews, a key stakeholder survey with 132 respondents, a community survey reaching 8,016 diverse residents, and five focus groups involving 50 Ocean County residents representing a broad range of perspectives and lived experiences. In addition, 46 individuals participated in a Community Forum to review and discuss the findings from the CHA process and help inform development of the Community Health Improvement Plan (CHIP).

Feedback gathered through these engagement activities provided important context for interpreting quantitative findings and understanding how social drivers of health affect residents throughout Ocean County. The qualitative data helped identify community priorities, barriers, and emerging needs, while respondents to the Key Stakeholder Survey ranked and prioritized the relative impact of various social drivers of health within the county.

The 2025 CHA and CHIP process was guided by countywide stakeholders represented through the Partnership for a Healthier Ocean County (PHOC). The Ocean County Office of Senior Services and the Family and Community Health Sciences Program of Rutgers Cooperative Extension of Ocean County—partnering organizations for Age-Friendly Ocean County—actively participated in PHOC throughout the CHA/CHIP process.

From the comprehensive data collected through the 2025 CHA, Age-Friendly Ocean County received aggregate data specific to Ocean County adults aged 65 years and older ($n = 2,791$). These findings were subsequently aligned with the six guiding domains of the Ocean County Multisector Plan for Aging, as established by the MPA Advisory Committee and informed by the New Jersey Age-Friendly Blueprint.

Process for Formulating Recommendations

Findings from the community focus groups and the Community Health Assessment (CHA) were presented to the Ocean County MPA Advisory Committee for review and discussion. Based on these findings, the Committee identified a series of recommendations to address unmet needs and priority issues across the six domains.

Recommendations were informed by community member feedback, evidence-informed and promising practices, sample programs and policies implemented in communities across the United States, and the professional expertise and lived experience represented within the MPA Advisory Committee. The recommendation development process emphasized feasibility, community relevance, multisector collaboration, and opportunities to advance equitable, age-friendly systems and environments throughout Ocean County.

Limitations

Several limitations should be considered when interpreting findings from the community focus groups and related planning activities. The focus groups utilized a convenience sampling approach and included participants who voluntarily attended congregate community settings and Town Hall Listening Sessions. As a result, findings may reflect the perspectives of individuals who are more socially connected, civically engaged, mobile, or already linked to community-based programs and services.

Accordingly, certain populations may have been underrepresented in the focus group process, including older adults experiencing significant social isolation, homebound individuals, residents with severe mobility or cognitive limitations, individuals without reliable transportation or internet access, and those experiencing food insecurity or housing instability. In particular, because many participants were recruited through congregate settings and existing community networks, the perspectives of food-insecure older adults may not have been fully captured despite food insecurity emerging as a significant data-driven priority among Ocean County older adults.

Additionally, while efforts were made to engage diverse populations across Ocean County, including caregivers, veterans, LGBTQ+ individuals, and racially and ethnically diverse residents, the findings may not be fully generalizable to the broader county population. The focus groups were qualitative and exploratory in nature and were intended to inform community-based planning rather than provide statistically representative findings.

Despite these limitations, the focus groups provided valuable community-informed insight into the lived experiences, priorities, and perceived service gaps affecting older adults, adults with disabilities, and caregivers throughout Ocean County. Findings were further contextualized and supplemented through integration with quantitative data sources, the 2025 Community Health Assessment (CHA), stakeholder feedback, and ongoing community engagement efforts. The Ocean County MPA is intended to remain a living framework, and future planning phases will continue to prioritize outreach to underserved, harder-to-reach, and historically underrepresented populations.



A speaker addresses community members at an engagement event held as part of the Age-Friendly Ocean County planning process.



Needs Assessment

Community input was gathered through a series of focus groups representing diverse geographic areas and population subgroups across Ocean County, including caregivers; White non-Hispanic residents; Hispanic/Latino residents; Black or African American residents; Asian residents; LGBTQ+ individuals; and veterans. Input was further informed by local aging service providers and community-based organizations serving older adults, adults with disabilities, and caregivers throughout the county.

Six county-relevant domains were explored during the focus groups:

1. Housing
2. Transportation
3. Healthcare
4. Food Insecurity
5. Caregiving
6. Social Connection

These domains were selected because they require and support multisector collaboration, align closely with state, national, and global (World Health Organization) age-friendly frameworks, and are strongly associated with measurable quality-of-life outcomes among older adults, caregivers, and communities.

Within the context of this Multisector Plan for Aging (MPA), quality-of-life outcomes refer to meaningful improvements in residents' daily lives, health, independence, safety, social connectedness, and overall well-being resulting from programs, policies, systems change, and community-based interventions. In aging, public health, and multisector planning, quality-of-life outcomes help assess whether initiatives are effectively supporting residents to live healthier, safer, more connected, more independent, and more meaningful lives within their communities.

Examples of quality-of-life outcomes associated with each domain include:

Housing

- Increased ability to age in place
- Reduced falls/injuries
- Improved housing safety/accessibility

Transportation

- Increased access to healthcare and groceries
- Reduced missed appointments
- Improved independence and mobility

Healthcare

- Better chronic disease management
- Increased preventive care use
- Reduced hospitalizations

Food Insecurity

- Improved nutrition
- Reduced hunger
- Better health outcomes

Caregiving

- Reduced caregiver stress/burnout
- Increased caregiver confidence/support

Social Connection

- Reduced loneliness/social isolation
- Increased community engagement
- Improved mental well-being

In multisector aging planning, quality-of-life outcomes are especially important because the goal extends beyond service delivery alone. Rather, the objective is to create communities in which older adults, adults with disabilities, caregivers, and families can thrive across the lifespan through coordinated systems, supportive environments, and strong community partnerships. As reflected throughout this MPA process, fostering healthy aging and livable communities truly “takes a village.”

Data Sources

Baseline data, including secondary sources on the six priority domains, were aggregated and reviewed prior to conducting the community focus groups to provide context for community discussions and inform the needs assessment process. Four community focus groups were conducted between February and May 2026. Nearly all focus group participants were adults aged 60 or older or caregivers of individuals aged 60 or older.

In addition to focus group findings, data from the 2025 Community Health Assessment (CHA) were incorporated to better understand the needs, priorities, and lived experiences of older adults, adults with disabilities, and caregivers throughout Ocean County. These quantitative and qualitative data sources provided a comprehensive, community-informed foundation for the development of the Ocean County Multisector Plan for Aging.

A facilitator guides participants through a community livability self-assessment exercise at an Age-Friendly Ocean County Town Hall Listening Session.



Needs Assessment Findings

Summary of Key Focus Group Findings

The focus group conversations explored the strengths, challenges, barriers, and supports that help or hinder participants' ability to live well and age successfully in Ocean County. These discussions were framed within AARP's Eight Domains of Livability: Housing, Outdoor Spaces and Buildings, Transportation, Civic Participation and Employment, Communication and Information, Respect and Social Inclusion, Social Participation, and Community and Health Services. The conversations also aligned with the six age-friendly domains identified in the New Jersey Age-Friendly Blueprint: Housing, Health, Transportation, Socialization, Employment, and Communication and Outreach.

Attendees engage with needs assessment findings at an Age-Friendly Ocean County community session.

Participants were also asked to identify the priorities they believed would have the greatest impact on their own well-being and on the well-being of friends, loved ones, and caregivers. Analysis of the discussions across all focus groups yielded the following themes for consideration in prioritization planning:

New Jersey Age-Friend Blueprint Domains

Domain	Description
Transportation	The desire to participate in community life is greater than the means to get there.
Caregiving and Healthcare	Caring for a loved one brings pride and purpose, but it also increases worry and makes older adults more aware of their own physical and emotional limits.
Social Connection	Opportunities to engage in social activities motivates seniors to participate, which improves their quality of life.
Multisector Collaboration: Communication and Information, Respect and Inclusion, and Civic Engagement	Although seniors greatly value the institutions that hosted the focus groups, they frequently reported feeling disrespected or overlooked by other providers and officials, and described limited opportunities to engage directly with decision-makers.
Housing	Resources providing housing maintenance, household chores, housing financial assistance, and home safety improvements are disjointed and prohibit seniors from aging in place comfortably.
Health and Finances	Underlying every obstacle are worries about declining health and financial constraints.



Transportation

The desire to participate in community life is greater than the means to get there.

Participants across all focus groups expressed a strong desire to engage in community life through activities such as games, special events, shopping, outdoor recreation, and visiting friends, family, and community destinations. However, transportation was consistently identified as a major barrier to fully participating in social life as they would like, regardless of whether individuals drove themselves, relied on family members, or used alternative transportation.

Each transportation modality presented age-related barriers, including cost, scheduling complexities, limited service hours and destinations, technology requirements, and feelings of lost autonomy and dignity associated with dependence on others for transportation. While a range of transportation options exists throughout Ocean County, participants described significant challenges associated with regular use of these services.

- Ocean Ride services are available, but participants noted that limited operating hours and the need for substantial advance scheduling reduce flexibility and spontaneity.
- Uber and Lyft services were viewed as restrictive due to both cost and the technology skills required to access and manage rides.
- Public transportation was infrequently used because of limited routes, schedules, and accessibility to desired destinations.

Although many focus group participants continue to drive, numerous older adults who attended the focus groups relied on transportation provided by the host facilities to participate.

IN YOUR WORDS: TRANSPORTATION

“People have to plan their [health]care around transportation, not the other way around.”

“How do we get the bus schedule for Route 9? I don’t know where the stops are or what the schedule is? Are there handouts in the grocery store?”

“I tried to sign up for a transportation program through [Agency Name Omitted], and the first thing they ask is, ‘What is your household income?’ I currently live with my brother and his wife, and it is none of their business what they make, and they’re not responsible for my transportation.”

“I tried to sign up for a transportation program through [Agency Name Omitted], and the first thing they ask is, ‘What is your household income?’ I currently live with my brother and his wife, and it is none of their business what they make, and they’re not responsible for my transportation.”

“[I had] cataract surgery. They wouldn’t let me take an Uber home or Ocean Ride home...it needed to be someone to sit and wait. It might’ve been a money-making thing because they did offer to hire someone.”

“If it’s anything other than what we do here, there’s waiting lists. So we’re cut off from being able to participate in things.”

“[When I go] grocery shopping, I bring nieces or nephews because can’t afford to transfer to the motorized shopping cart at ShopRite and leave the chair at the door, and hope no one takes it.”

“There aren’t as many Ubers here either, because they all want to be on LBI [Long Beach Island] where they can charge more.”

Ocean Ride Transportation Services provides public transit options for older adults and residents across Ocean County.



Caregiving and Healthcare

Caring for a loved one brings pride and purpose, but it also increases worry and makes older adults more aware of their own physical and emotional limits.

The majority of focus group participants had served, or were currently serving, in caregiving roles for adult family members, most often spouses. While caregiving was frequently described as a source of pride, meaning, and purpose, participants also shared that providing care while aging heightened feelings of stress, worry, and awareness of their own declining physical and emotional capacity.

Participants identified numerous barriers that complicated their ability to care for loved ones while also maintaining their own health and well-being:

- Difficulty accessing medical information due to technology-related barriers, including challenges with patient portals such as MyChart, password management, and HIPAA-related limitations
- Physical strain and mobility concerns associated with caregiving responsibilities, including difficulty lifting or assisting loved ones safely
- Concerns that “insufficient rehabilitation” following hospital stays often results in individuals returning home requiring levels of care and support that family caregivers do not feel adequately prepared or physically capable of providing, raising safety concerns for both caregivers and care recipients
- Financial barriers and lack of insurance coverage for items not deemed “medically necessary,” but which would substantially support caregiving efforts, including hospital beds, ramps, grab bars, and hygiene supplies

- Frustration with “one-size-fits-all” approaches to home health care that may not align with the unique needs, schedules, or financial realities of individual families
- Significant interest in more flexible, affordable, and personalized home health and caregiving support services
- A strong desire among current and former caregivers to share their lived experiences, knowledge, and practical advice with others navigating similar caregiving roles

IN YOUR WORDS: CAREGIVING AND HEALTHCARE

“Despite the difficulties, I’d do it all over again if I could have [my mother] back.”

“[If I had a magic wand], quality home health care that can come in. My husband was my caregiver, and I’m now having to transition into being his caregiver, and I don’t know how that’s going to work.”

“It’s hard to find information. We’re preoccupied with the tasks of daily life. Our doctor recommended some resources, but that’s because we had the right doctor.”

“Could we have a situation where we could share our caregiving experiences with others because we’ve learned a lot along the way? At the beginning, I didn’t even know the questions to ask.”

“I have a son who’s 35 years old with autism, bringing someone by who knows about programming for adults with special needs.”

“My husband is not particularly mobile, but he still thinks he can do things, so I have to watch him.”

A group of family caregivers and older adults, demonstrating peer support and connection.



Social Connection

Opportunities to engage in social activities motivate seniors to participate, which improves their quality of life.

Focus group participants consistently expressed overwhelmingly positive experiences with the senior centers where the focus groups were conducted, as well as with programs and services. Participants described these settings as important sources of social connection, trust, respect, and reliable information. Beyond access to activities and services, senior centers were viewed as spaces that foster belonging, purpose, and meaningful engagement in community life.

Participants emphasized that the sense of connection and support offered by these programs often motivates older adults to overcome barriers to participation, such as transportation challenges and other personal limitations, to remain socially engaged.

At the same time, participants acknowledged that access to quality programming is not consistent across Ocean County. Many expressed feeling fortunate to be connected to their particular senior center or program, noting that “not all programming is created equal.” Participants shared concerns that some senior centers in other communities are closing or reducing services, forcing older adults to travel greater distances to access programs and resources in other service hubs. However, resources and staffing were perceived as not keeping pace with increasing demand.

For many participants connected to senior centers, staff members were identified as their most trusted source of information, guidance, and connection to community resources and supports. Participants consistently noted that the senior centers they attend are

welcoming environments where staff members have earned their trust and respect through responsiveness, compassion, and meaningful engagement.

Participants also identified numerous opportunities to engage older adults more creatively and meaningfully in community life, thereby enhancing emotional well-being and quality of life. Interests included attending performances, arts and cultural activities, outdoor and recreational events, and opportunities for intergenerational engagement. Participants suggested that senior centers and other aging-focused organizations could play a larger role in facilitating these experiences and expanding opportunities for social participation and community connection.

IN YOUR WORDS: SOCIAL CONNECTION

"There's the problem, it's great for here, but the other towns don't have one. [Township Name Omitted] doesn't have one like this. That's why I come down here."

"[If I had a magic wand] more grant money so Jeannie can continue to do these socialization programs because getting out here is so beneficial to my well-being."

"The Solas program, they've gone out of their way for us. They reach out, they take us on trips."

"[I get] a lot of information from the senior center, word of mouth, lunch and learns."

"I live in a 55+ community, and a lot of them have their noses stuck up in the air about places like this. I have more friends here; people are down to earth here."

"Jean here is phenomenal. If she doesn't have the answer, she'll find out for us."

"Even the guy who takes care of the building, if I need an electrician or any kind of handyman, he'll tell me two or three of the best people."

"[If I had a magic wand] facilities that people are interested in – dancing, socializing, things of that nature."

"Arts and crafts."

"I do bus trips on Thursdays through the Bayville Rec Center."

"Intergenerational events [would motivate me to participate]."

"I would like one place to go to on the website that tells me I can go see a play in Little Egg Harbor if I wish, I can go play bingo if I wish, etc."

Older adults engage in social activities, reflecting focus group findings that community programming is a primary driver of well-being, belonging, and quality of life for Ocean County residents.



Multisector Collaboration: Communication and Information, Respect and Inclusion, and Civic Engagement

Although seniors greatly value the institutions that hosted the focus groups, they frequently reported feeling disrespected or overlooked by other providers and officials, and described limited opportunities to engage directly with decision-makers.

Focus group participants expressed strong appreciation for the institutions and organizations where the focus groups were conducted and consistently described feeling welcomed, respected, and valued within those settings. However, participants also overwhelmingly expressed frustration with broader systems of care and support, citing experiences of disrespect, lack of follow-through, and difficulty accessing information, assistance, and services from other providers and officials.

Many participants shared personal experiences related to navigating services and seeking assistance. Although the stories reflected a wide range of situations, several common themes emerged:

- 1. Misunderstanding of older adults' strengths and needs**

Participants frequently felt that providers underestimated both the capabilities and the actual needs of older adults seeking assistance or information.

- 2. Disconnect between proposed solutions and real-world needs**

Participants noted that when solutions were offered, they often failed to address the practical realities older adults face, leaving significant gaps between the recommended support and the actual need.

- 3. Reactive rather than proactive systems coordination**

Participants described fragmented coordination among service providers, resulting in delays, inefficiencies, and escalation of otherwise manageable challenges. While many policies and procedures may be intended to protect providers and consumers alike, participants felt these systems can unintentionally diminish dignity and create unnecessary burdens for older adults and caregivers.

Most participants expressed interest in greater opportunities to engage directly with decision-makers responsible for services and quality-of-life issues within their communities. Participants emphasized a desire not only to access reliable information but also to share recommendations and lived experiences that could help improve existing systems, services, and community processes for older adults.

Focus group participants expressed interest in engaging with the following decision makers and stakeholders:

- First responders
- Mental health providers
- Housing agencies and representatives
- Department of Transportation officials
- Medicare representatives
- Senior services providers and program leaders
- Mayors and other local elected officials
- The Governor's Office and other statewide representatives

IN YOUR WORDS: MULTISECTOR COLLABORATION

"By and large, seniors are quiet, so people get the idea that they can just run over us. We've worked all our lives, we get what we get from social security, some get pensions, not a lot, and it's hard, and we pretty much get ignored most of the time."

"One cannot find greater indifference, incompetence; they do not care. I'm specifically talking about housing. The help is nonexistent."

"[If I had a magic wand] consistency, more than a one-day deal."

"We used to have an ombudsman [at the County] for seniors. Is it possible to reinstate that position?"

"I have difficulty now that I can't stand properly, just changing a lightbulb. It's an issue. Everything's an issue. With the last storm where we lost power, I was in an electric reclining chair. I decided to sleep in the chair. I woke up at 7 am needing to go to the bathroom and I had to call the police ... they called the volunteer EMS because the police won't help me out of the chair, but the smoke alarms were going off because the power was out, so [EMS] wouldn't come in, and they had to call the volunteer fire department, who came and took out all of my smoke alarms, so now I don't have any smoke alarms. All I needed was one guy to lend me his arm."

Multisector stakeholders participate in an Age-Friendly Ocean County planning session, representing the cross-sector collaboration central to the MPA Advisory Committee's approach.



Housing

Resources providing housing maintenance, household chores, housing financial assistance, and home safety improvements are disjointed and prohibit seniors from aging in place comfortably.

Ocean County is home to many senior living communities. Although these communities are designed to support the housing needs of older adults, the amenities, requirements, services, and supports available vary significantly from one community to another. Differences in features such as homeowners' association requirements, maintenance responsibilities, transportation access, and the availability of on-site care coordination or supportive services can create confusion for residents, family members, and service providers seeking to support aging in place.

As a result, concerns related not only to housing availability and affordability, but also to the ability to remain in one's home and community while aging safely, emerged as significant themes across focus groups.

Focus group participants consistently identified home repairs, maintenance, and household upkeep as major concerns for older homeowners. Participants frequently cited the high cost and inconsistent quality of home maintenance and repair services, along with growing difficulty managing routine household tasks such as changing lightbulbs, landscaping, snow removal, and household cleaning.

While some assistance programs and services are available to support older adults with home maintenance and aging-in-place needs in Ocean County, participants described the system as confusing, fragmented, and difficult to navigate. Many participants were uncertain about what resources existed, who qualified, or how to access available assistance. Participants also noted that differences in neighborhood regulations, homeowners' association rules, and local housing resources further complicate access to support, as these conditions vary substantially across communities.

Additionally, focus group respondents reported that many needed home support services have lengthy wait lists, limiting timely access to assistance and increasing concerns about safety, independence, and the long-term ability to remain in their homes.

IN YOUR WORDS: HOUSING

"[Between] HOAs, maintenance fees, taxes, we can't keep up with the house. People coming into the houses don't know their trades. I want to get a rail for [my wife], and it's \$750, and they're beating up on the older people."

"I couldn't find a place to get my mower fixed for a reasonable amount, and then I got a letter from the city saying they were going to fine me, and it's hard for me because I'm not used to having to ask somebody to do it for me."

"In the last storm, they were willing to shovel everyone out for \$75. People didn't have that [money]. Able-bodied, [people] with no walkers/canes [in our senior community], helped shovel everyone [neighbors] out."

"[If I had a magic wand] Income-based assistance for housing, maintenance issues that seniors used to be able to do on their own, and can no longer rather than hiring out the full price! It's a small job, you ignore it and it gets bigger."

A suburban Ocean County residential community. The county's predominance of single-family homes and age-restricted communities reflects both its identity as a retirement destination and the importance of home modification and maintenance resources for aging in place.



Health and Finances

Underlying every obstacle are worries about declining health and financial constraints.

Qualifying for needed services was described by many focus group participants as confusing, burdensome, and discouraging. As a result, older adults expressed particular appreciation for programs and supports that do not impose strict income or eligibility requirements, including the wide range of services, activities, meals, and information available through local senior centers.

While healthcare itself was not the primary focus of most focus group conversations, declining physical capacity emerged as a consistent underlying concern influencing many other aspects of daily life. Participants described physical decline as intensifying concerns about transportation, housing stability, caregiving responsibilities, social connection, and financial security.

Focus group participants frequently referenced declining mobility, strength, endurance, and physical independence as reasons they could no longer engage in activities they once performed routinely, travel where and when they wished, or manage everyday tasks without assistance. Increasing reliance on others for support with daily activities contributed to feelings of loss, vulnerability, frustration, and fear regarding the future.

Participants also expressed that the emotional impact of physical decline often compounds the challenges of coordinating the many systems and services needed to maintain a high quality of life as they age. Difficulties navigating fragmented resources, eligibility requirements, and service systems further contributed to stress and uncertainty.

In this context, participants expressed deep appreciation for the role senior centers play in supporting health and well-being through access to meals, social engagement, activities, trusted information, and supportive staff relationships. These programs were viewed not only as service providers, but also as important sources of stability, belonging, and protection against isolation.

At the same time, it is important to note that the focus groups primarily included older adults who already regularly attend senior centers and are connected to available services. As a result, concerns related to physical decline, isolation, and unmet needs may be even more pronounced among older adults in the broader community who are not connected to senior centers or who face barriers to participation and engagement.

IN YOUR WORDS: HEALTH AND FINANCES

"People can't get help when their budget is \$2/\$3 over, but then you can't afford the things. I took care of my mom for 16 years, and I couldn't get her on Medicaid because she was \$100/month over."

"[We go to the] church for food/clothes."

"We started coming [to the senior center] for the food pantry the last few months of last year and then coming for the breakfasts."

"You have to live, you have to figure out what you're going to pay."

"[If I had a magic wand] health issues would be solved for good, and I wouldn't have to worry about any health issues."

"Have the magic wand take off a lot of years when we were healthy and these things were not a problem."

"My magic wand, having my husband always healthy."

"Stay healthy, keep your independence. The care isn't out there, unless you can afford it."

"Not get old. You're relying on the other people, and the other people don't want to take care of you."

"We'd all be 30 again, but know everything we know now."

The Ocean County Senior Services mobile outreach unit brings resources directly to residents, supporting access to nutrition, caregiver assistance, and Medicare information across the county's expansive geography.

Recommendation Selection Process

Based on findings from the community focus groups, Community Health Assessment (CHA), stakeholder engagement activities, and ongoing committee discussions, the Ocean County MPA Advisory Committee identified and developed recommendations for inclusion in the Ocean County Multisector Plan for Aging (MPA) across the six priority domains. Recommendations aligned with the 59 actionable recommendations outlined in the New Jersey Age-Friendly Blueprint—reflecting statewide priorities affecting older adults, adults with disabilities, and caregivers—received additional consideration and discussion through an Ocean County-specific multisector planning lens.

Potential recommendations and strategies were further evaluated based on implementation opportunities, available resources, and the potential for multisector collaboration and partnership development. Prioritization criteria used in the final recommendation selection process included local feasibility, potential impact on quality-of-life outcomes, resource and partnership requirements, sustainability, type of intervention, and the potential for scalability and replication across communities.

Recommendations emphasizing systems-level interventions, educational initiatives, communication and social marketing strategies, community engagement approaches, and programmatic or service-delivery improvements received greater consideration than recommendations requiring longer-term, large-scale policy, infrastructure, or environmental reforms that may emerge more gradually over time.

Priority recommendations that emerged through this process were those whose related strategies demonstrated the greatest potential to improve quality-of-life outcomes while remaining accessible, equitable, and inclusive for diverse populations, including individuals with disabilities, rural residents, caregivers, LGBTQ+ older adults, veterans, and individuals living with dementia. Additional consideration was given to community readiness, measurable outcomes and indicators, partnership opportunities, cross-sector applicability, and the capacity of interventions to support multiple focus areas simultaneously.

Overall, the MPA Advisory Committee prioritized evidence-informed, partnership-driven strategies that are visible, achievable, scalable, and sustainable in order to build community momentum, strengthen public trust, and position Ocean County for long-term success in advancing healthy aging, livable communities, and multisector collaboration.



Ocean County Multisector Plan for Aging

Ocean County Domain	PERTINENT STATE RECOMMENDATIONS
HOUSING	Promote aging in place through home modifications; incorporate universal design, accessibility, climate resiliency, and emergency preparedness; incentivize age-friendly design.
TRANSPORTATION	Assess access to grocery stores, medical care, parks, and senior centers; conduct street/walkability assessments; promote travel training and defensive driving.
HEALTHCARE	Build partnerships around social drivers of health; support aging in place; expand older adult fitness; increase behavioral health/addiction supports; improve digital health access; promote culturally responsive care.
FOOD INSECURITY	Address social drivers of health; improve transportation to essential services; increase awareness of resources; use community profiles and data to guide initiatives.
CAREGIVING	Support aging in place; expand behavioral health supports; reach homebound older adults; provide technology support; improve culturally responsive outreach.
SOCIAL CONNECTION	Increase accessible in-person activities; raise awareness of existing social programs; foster intergenerational relationships; engage older adults in the arts; reach homebound older adults; support LGBTQ+ older adults.

Cross-cutting strategies for all six domains: multi-format and multisector communication, language access, 508/accessibility compliance, fraud prevention education, digital inclusion, and community profiles/data mapping.

Ocean County Domain	IMPLEMENTATION OPPORTUNITIES
HOUSING	Create home modification referral pathways; develop aging-in-place resource guides; offer home safety/falls prevention workshops; promote universal design checklists; and integrate housing accessibility into emergency preparedness planning.
TRANSPORTATION	Map transportation gaps; conduct walk audits; survey older adult transit habits; offer public transit orientation; promote AARP Smart Driver or similar programs; identify mobility barriers in rural/suburban areas.
HEALTHCARE	Create healthcare-community referral networks; partner on falls prevention and wellness programs; offer telehealth/patient portal training; host education on older adult mental health and recovery; promote awareness of dementia screening.
FOOD INSECURITY	Map food access gaps; develop meal and pantry resource guides; strengthen referrals to SNAP, Meals on Wheels, and food pantries; coordinate grocery delivery/transportation supports; connect nutrition with healthcare and caregiving.
CAREGIVING	Create caregiver resource navigation tools; offer caregiver support groups; develop dementia caregiver education; integrate caregiver screening into programs; raise awareness of respite resources; support caregivers with telehealth/digital training.
SOCIAL CONNECTION	Create countywide social connection calendar; develop friendly visitor/caller programs; expand arts and aging programs; launch intergenerational initiatives with schools/colleges; ensure accessible and inclusive events; strengthen outreach to isolated/homebound residents.

Ocean County Domain	POTENTIAL PARTNERS
HOUSING	Ocean County AAA/Office of Senior Services; municipal housing offices; Habitat for Humanity; hospitals; home health agencies; occupational therapists; emergency management; disability organizations.
TRANSPORTATION	Ocean Ride; NJ Transit; municipal governments; senior centers; libraries; planning boards; disability advocates; AARP; public health; parks and recreation.
HEALTHCARE	Hospitals; FQHCs; Ocean County Health Department; behavioral health providers; MCOs; PACE providers; recreation centers; libraries; Rutgers/academic partners; Alzheimer's Association.
FOOD INSECURITY	Food banks; Meals on Wheels; AAA; faith-based organizations; senior centers; hospitals; MCOs; community health workers; libraries; municipal social services.
CAREGIVING	AAA; Alzheimer's Association; caregiver coalitions; hospitals; home care agencies; behavioral health providers; faith communities; libraries; respite providers; disability organizations.
SOCIAL CONNECTION	Senior centers; libraries; schools; colleges; arts organizations; faith communities; LGBTQ+ organizations; volunteer groups; long-term care facilities; municipal recreation departments.





Conclusion

The Ocean County Multisector Plan for Aging (MPA) represents a collaborative, community-informed framework designed to support healthy aging, independence, inclusion, and quality of life for older adults, adults with disabilities, caregivers, and families throughout Ocean County. Grounded in quantitative and qualitative data, stakeholder engagement, and alignment with the New Jersey Age-Friendly Blueprint, the Plan recognizes both the opportunities and challenges associated with an aging population in one of New Jersey's largest, most geographically diverse, and rapidly aging counties.

Organized around the six priority domains of Housing, Transportation, Healthcare, Food Insecurity, Caregiving, and Social Connection, the MPA emphasizes practical, achievable, and partnership-driven strategies that can be implemented across sectors and communities. Priority recommendations were selected based on local feasibility, potential impact, equity, sustainability, and opportunities for multisector collaboration, with particular attention given to interventions that can improve quality-of-life outcomes while remaining accessible and inclusive for diverse populations.

The MPA recognizes that creating an age-friendly county is an ongoing and evolving process requiring long-term coordination among government agencies, healthcare systems, community-based organizations, businesses, educational institutions, faith communities, municipalities, and residents themselves. While some recommendations may require gradual policy, infrastructure, or systems-level change over time, many immediate opportunities already exist to strengthen communication, accessibility, community engagement, service coordination, and supports that enable residents to age safely, independently, and successfully within their homes and communities.

Volunteers pack food donations at an Ocean County food distribution site.

Through continued collaboration, implementation, evaluation, and community engagement, Ocean County is well-positioned to advance a comprehensive, multisector approach to aging that promotes dignity, resilience, health, equity, and social connectedness across the lifespan. The Ocean County Multisector Plan for Aging provides a strong foundation for future action, innovation, and partnership, helping ensure that residents of all ages can thrive in inclusive, supportive, responsive, and age-friendly communities for generations to come.

Next Steps

The next phase of the Ocean County Multisector Plan for Aging (MPA) will focus on translating recommendations into actionable, community-driven implementation strategies that support aging in place and improve quality-of-life outcomes for older adults, adults with disabilities, caregivers, and families throughout Ocean County.

Following the adoption of the MPA recommendations, implementation efforts will emphasize identifying practical strategies, sustainable actions, and partnership opportunities across sectors. A countywide call to action—centered around a “Step Up for Our Seniors” campaign—will encourage broad multisector engagement and participation among older adults, caregivers, County departments, healthcare and community-based organizations, municipalities, academic and research institutions, philanthropic partners, businesses, and residents.

Collectively, these next steps aim to transition the Ocean County MPA from a planning framework into a sustainable, action-oriented initiative that advances healthy aging, livable communities, multisector collaboration, and long-term systems change across Ocean County.

KEY NEXT STEPS WILL INCLUDE:

- Launching multidisciplinary work groups aligned with the MPA focus areas;
- Developing implementation and evaluation plans with measurable process and outcome indicators;
- Identifying lead and partnering organizations responsible for advancing recommendations and strategies;
- Strengthening community-clinical, public-private, and academic partnerships; and
- Expanding communication, social marketing, media engagement, and public reporting efforts to support transparency, accountability, and sustained community involvement.

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Appendix: Focus Group Discussion Guide

Moderator Instructions

The purpose of these focus groups is to encourage interactive discussion and capture shared community experiences. The moderator's role is to guide conversation using open-ended, neutral questions while allowing participants to respond naturally and engage with one another.

Each topic area includes optional discussion probes. Participants may raise some topics organically; depending on time and engagement, moderators may use additional probes to deepen discussion. Questions may be skipped or asked out of sequence to maintain conversational flow. Moderators are encouraged to explore emerging issues as appropriate, provided discussion remains focused on the six primary domains: housing, transportation, healthcare, food insecurity, caregiving, and social connection, as well as the broader needs of older adults, adults with disabilities, and caregivers in Ocean County.

Research Objectives

- Identify which domains are most important to participants;
- Explore community strengths and trusted supports;
- Clarify caregiving responsibilities and needs;
- Identify barriers affecting daily living, participation, and access to services;
- Understand motivators for community engagement and action;
- Explore major concerns, stressors, and unmet needs; and
- Assess trusted communication pathways and information sources.

Opening Script

Thank you for participating in today's focus group and for sharing your experiences and recommendations to help improve aging in Ocean County. My name is [Facilitator Name], and I will facilitate today's discussion. The session will last approximately 60–90 minutes.

This focus group is sponsored by the Ocean County Office of Senior Services as part of a community needs assessment designed to support development of local age-friendly initiatives that promote the health, well-being, and independence of older adults. The project also seeks to advance sustainable improvements in policies, systems, and environmental conditions throughout Ocean County. Our firm has been contracted to conduct this research on behalf of the County.

Today's session will be audio recorded to help ensure accurate note-taking. Participation is voluntary, comments will remain confidential, and names will not appear in any reports.

Our discussion is intended to be conversational. Please speak openly and candidly. I may occasionally call on participants to ensure everyone has an opportunity to contribute. To help us stay on schedule and ensure all voices are heard, I may guide the conversation or transition us to the next topic as needed.

Ground Rules

1. One person speaks at a time so responses can be accurately captured.
2. Please respect differing opinions and perspectives.
3. The facilitator's role is to help keep discussion productive and on schedule.

Before we begin, does anyone have any questions?

Introductions

Please share your name and how long you have lived in Ocean County.

"Forced Choices" Exercise

Participants receive three Post-it notes and are asked to place them on the three domains they consider most important. Assistance is available for participants with limited mobility.

Domains

- Housing
- Health Services and Community Supports
- Social Participation
- Respect and Social Inclusion
- Communication and Information
- Transportation

Discussion Questions

- Would anyone like to explain why they selected those domains?
- After hearing others, would anyone change their selections?
- It appears that [x], [y], and [z] are the most important priorities. Please raise your hand if you agree. If not, why?

Living Environment

- What type of living environment best describes your current situation?
 - » 55+ community
 - » Private home outside a 55+ community
 - » Living with family members
 - » Assisted living or nursing facility
 - » Other

Caregiving

- Are you currently a caregiver for another person?
 - » If yes, are they older, younger, or living with a disability?

- Do you have someone who provides support for you?
 - » Examples may include scheduling appointments, transportation, meal delivery, shopping, or housekeeping.

Resources and Supports

- When you need help, where do you go for assistance or advice?
- Who or what has been most helpful to you, and why?
- Were there services or supports you needed within the past year but could not obtain?
- What barriers prevented access?

Motivators and Daily Life

- What aspects of your daily routine do you enjoy most?
- What activities or opportunities do you wish you could participate in more regularly?
- What types of community activities or programs would motivate you to become more involved?

Worries and Barriers

- What concerns or stressors affect you most frequently?
- Have you ever sought help for these concerns?
 - » If yes, what was your experience?
 - » If no, what prevented you from seeking help?

Transportation

- How did you travel to today's session?
- What transportation resources do you use regularly?

Internet and Communication

- How comfortable are you using the internet to access information or services?
 - » Very comfortable
 - » Comfortable with assistance
 - » Not comfortable
- What resources do you access online or through apps?
 - » Examples: healthcare appointments, news, services, or events
- Besides the internet, what sources do you rely on for information and support?
 - » Examples: senior centers, patient navigators, family members, printed mailings, or text alerts



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