



Older Adults: Where We Are and Where We're Going

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Older Adults in Greater Williamsburg: Where We Are and Where We're Going

Executive Summary

Objectives

This report is intended to catalyze community collaboration to support older adults in Greater Williamsburg in their well-being, independence, and overall quality of life. The over-arching objective is to help make ours an age-friendly community.

The report presents and analyzes data on the demographics, health status, and available health and human services for this large and growing segment of our population. The report presents key findings from the most recent publicly available, locality-level data on older adults and then uses the data to tell the story of where the community stands and where it's going. Where applicable, the report compares Greater Williamsburg's older adult population to the local population at large and/or state-level data on older adults.

The report identifies specific challenges and opportunities. In the report you will see the community landscape, health-related trends, and socioeconomic factors that impact the well-being of older adults.

Our premise is that “an age-friendly community allows people of all ages to participate in activities that keep the community healthy.” In an age-friendly community, “older persons can easily stay connected with others and remain independent. An age-friendly community also looks out for those who need support to age successfully.”¹

While the focus of this report is on older adults, the authors wish to emphasize that older adult well-being is critical to the overall well-being of residents of all ages.

¹ <https://vantageaging.org/blog/age-friendly-community/> Accessed November 12, 2021.

Structure

The report includes four sections:

Section 1: Demographic Profile: a description and analysis of population data. This section includes growth trends looking back over two decades and projecting forward for two decades. The increase of the older adult population relative to the entire population is highlighted.

Section 2: Health Profile: a multi-faceted illustration of health status. The section includes common risk factors, unhealthy behaviors, chronic disease prevalence, mental/behavioral health, and factors impacting access to care.

Section 3: Aging-in-Place Supports through a Lens of Social Determinants of Health (SDOH): a view of the availability of supports and resources that promote the ability of older adults to age in place. The section includes data and maps illustrating household income, housing costs, Medicare enrollment, food access, and disability rates, among other measures.

Section 4: Interviews with Key Informants: semi-structured interviews with selected community leaders working in various spheres of aging services. Respondents were asked about overall trends and their blue-sky vision for making Greater Williamsburg as age friendly as possible. In addition to Section 4, please see Appendices F and G for a listing of key informants and questions posed.

Scope

The geographic area of study for this report is Greater Williamsburg, includes three localities: James City County, York County, and the City of Williamsburg. As of 2019, Greater Williamsburg had a population of approximately 160,000.

Notes on the Data

The population data used in the report is from the 2019 census. At the time of writing (November 2021), locality-level census data is not available. Second, as mentioned in Section 1: Demographic Profile, the threshold age at which a person is considered an “older adult” is not standardized across data sets. For this report, the default threshold age is sixty. Where the data referenced has a different threshold age, the authors have noted it.

Where available, Greater Williamsburg data is compared to state-level data. In instances where the data is “estimated,” locally collected data is not available so the state-level prevalence rate is applied to Greater Williamsburg population numbers.

Selected Key Findings

This report reveals a community that is already age-friendly in many respects. There are strengths and positive attributes as well as significant challenges. The appeal of Greater Williamsburg for older adults is illustrated in many ways, including the rate of population growth, which is significantly higher than that of the state as a whole. Highlighted below are notable trends and findings. We hope you will use this report to find additional information and data based on specific areas of interest.

Demographic Findings

- Since 2000, the overall population of Greater Williamsburg has grown by 33% compared with 20% for Virginia overall.
- Greater Williamsburg is home to a larger proportion of older adults than is typical for Virginia. Moreover, the older adult population is the fastest-growing age segment of the community. It is projected to grow to 33% of the population by 2030 and to remain close to that proportion until at least 2040. James City County has the largest number and proportion of older adults in Greater Williamsburg.
- Nationally, by 2034, people aged sixty-five and over will outnumber people under the age of eighteen for the first time in our history. Greater Williamsburg has already passed that threshold. Our older adult population is 35% larger than the population under eighteen.
- Population growth and aging will continue to contribute to a growing demand for health and human services.

Health-Related Findings

- The prevalence of chronic illnesses is significantly higher among older adults than the population at large. An older adult is almost three times as likely to have diabetes and more than twice as likely to have high blood pressure or high cholesterol as a younger person.
- Nearly 70% of the older adult population is either overweight or obese.
- In Virginia, approximately 40% of older adults have at least one disability.
- Medicare data shows racial disparities for all three localities for preventable hospitalizations. Black older adults are more frequently hospitalized for preventable conditions than their White counterparts.
- The pandemic has disproportionately affected older adults. As of October 2021, 87% of COVID deaths in Virginia were people aged sixty or older.
- Population growth and aging will continue to contribute to a growing demand for health and human services.

Aging in Place Supports and SDOH Findings

- National survey data shows that 90% of older adults would like to age in place.
- To assess aging-in-place supports, the report uses an appropriate proxy: Social Determinants of Health (SDOH) variables.
- With ongoing implementation of healthcare reform, public and commercial insurers are incentivizing providers of healthcare services to address SDOH.
- Depending on the locality, between 13% and 17% of older adult households in Greater Williamsburg are below 200% of the Federal Poverty Level.
- A person of any age earning minimum wage would have to work 103 hours per week to afford 2-bedroom rental housing.
- The report details the number of older adult households cost-burdened by housing expenses, i.e., paying more than 30% of monthly income for housing.
- Between 16% and 27% of older adult households have limited food access.
- An older adult living alone is not an indication of successfully aging in place; rather it is a marker for numerous risk factors, including social isolation, physical health problems, and depression.
- In Greater Williamsburg, more than 20% of all older adults live alone, representing more than 10% of all households. The majority of these are female households.

Key Informant Findings

- The most frequently noted concern among key informants was social isolation and its impacts, followed closely by transportation and housing.
- Suggestions to address isolation include the need to expand both in-home care and opportunities for socialization.
- Informants identified not only a need for increased availability of preventive healthcare services but also a need for additional person-centered dementia care.
- Findings from the qualitative data from the interviews correlate closely with the quantitative data in the previous sections of the report.

For Community Consideration

We ground these suggestions in the assertion that in an age-friendly community, older persons can stay connected and engaged while remaining as independent as possible.

- Review community data and analysis with a view to developing priorities and action plans.
- Encourage community dialogue within and between organizations on how to make Greater Williamsburg a more age-friendly community.
- Engage older adults from all spheres and leverage their input; seek to strengthen the participation of under-represented groups because this will help to build equitable approaches.

- Develop action items even if these seem like small steps.
- Based on quantitative and qualitative data, action steps for Greater Williamsburg might include:
 - Increase health opportunities to support both physical and mental health and encourage making the healthy choice the easy choice.
 - Address social isolation by increasing in-home care and socialization opportunities.
 - Adapt homes and living spaces to allow aging in place as long as possible.
 - Improve mobility with additional transportation options and enhanced community walkability.
 - Support the use of technology to aid independence.

Conclusion

This report documents the significant proportion of the Greater Williamsburg community composed of older adults. These older adults deserve dignity, respect, and autonomy in the choices they make about aging. Moreover, older adults have a lifetime of skills, expertise, and experience to offer. An age-friendly community provides the supports older adults need in order to stay active and engaged, and to both benefit from, and contribute to, their families, social networks, and community.

The findings included here are designed to transform the data and numbers into actionable knowledge that will bring change. The Williamsburg Health Foundation will continue to work with community partners in the healthcare, human services, and local government sectors and continue to promote collaboration across sectors. The Foundation looks forward to engaging in the dialogue we hope this report will foster.

Most importantly, the hope is that this dialogue and collaborative action will ultimately lead to building an age-friendly community that supports the health and well-being of older adults — and all residents — of Greater Williamsburg.

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