

## Aging Well Whatcom Webinar: State of Older Adults in Whatcom County and 2022 Blueprint Updates July 14, 2022

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- Notes are compiled from live transcription (Zoom's closed caption function, started part way into the meeting) and the meeting chat, edited and condensed for clarity.
  - [Power Point slides](#) contain the primary content; notes include comments and discussion.
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### Welcome – Heather Flaherty, Chuckanut Health Foundation, and Lara Welker, Aging Well Whatcom

Heather and Lara welcomed the group, and participants introduced themselves via the chat.

The updated Blueprint can be viewed on the [Aging Well Whatcom website](#).

### Demographic Data – Amy Hockenberry, Whatcom County Health Department

*[Due to difficulty with audio during this presentation, Amy's comments are included in greater detail]*

- There is diversity among people over age 65 and the experience of aging varies based on race, ethnicity and culture, and regions of the county.
- The data I'll cover today will cover changes in the older adult population since 2017, when the original Blueprint was developed, key data in 2020, and then we'll look at population projections. Before I move into it, I just really want to acknowledge there's quite a bit of data here. I'll be going through it pretty fairly quickly and call out key findings that we have for each of these graphs.
- The data are in the Blueprint as Mary mentioned, so you can always review them more closely when you've got time.
- The change in population for those 65 and older: Between 2017 and 2020, the older adult population increased at a faster rate than the rest of the population.
- The 65 and older population in Whatcom County increased from 18 to 20%, growing at a rate 3 times greater than the county's total population. Expressed in another way, 60% of our county's population growth between 2017 and 2020 was in community members age 65 and older.
- To put this in the context, during that same time period, Washington State's population 65 and older increased from 16 to 17%.
- Looking at how things changed by geography, 6 out of the 7 subcounty areas that correspond to school district regions saw an increase in the portion of their population age 65 and older. The Blaine area continues to have the highest percent of residents age 65 and older, followed by Lynden. The Bellingham area saw a slight decrease in percentage, but not the number, of older adults.
- Again, it's important to bear in mind that while older adults make up the highest percent of population in Lynden and Blaine, the Ferndale and Bellingham areas have the greatest number of older adults since they have the largest population overall.
- Looking at race distribution in 2020 in Whatcom County's population age 65 and older, it was about 91% non-Hispanic white compared to about 70% for the county's total population. The next highest is our Asian population at 3.3% for 2020. We know that this is going to change and so we'll be looking at how it's going to potentially change a little later in our slides.
- For older adults who live alone: we look at older adults living alone as a proxy measure for social isolation. The most recent data available, which is for 2019, shows that the portion of Whatcom County's older population that live alone was approximately 11%. Looking at it over time, since 2012 it's been pretty stable, and we see relatively statistically the same for Washington State

- Looking at age 65 and older, living alone by geography, and across city jurisdictions as opposed to the school district boundaries. The city of Lynden was only the area with a statistically higher rate of householders age 65 and older living alone at 16% compared to Whatcom County, and Nooksack and Ferndale were the only 2 cities with a statistically lower rate than Whatcom County in 2020.
- Now we're looking at a very specific population among our older adults: those experiencing homelessness. These data come from our annual Point in Time count. This chart is showing us that we've seen a steady increase in older adults experiencing homelessness, both in total number as well as the percent of the total homeless population. So the number of elders experiencing homelessness that are identified in our annual Point in Time count has increased tenfold from 2012 to 2021. I just learned just the other day that the 2022 Point in Time count is set to be released at the end of next week, so we'll have more recent numbers next week, which is exciting.
- Population projections to 2040 show that the rate of growth in the older adult population will continue to increase. Among older adults, those 85 and older will be the fastest growing segment.
- While the population age 60 and older is projected to increase by 42% between 2010 and 2040, the population age 85 and older, is expected to increase over 200%. So our community's older adult population is growing and it will continue to grow both in numbers and the percent of total population.
- The narrative that often accompanies the demographic trends is one usually of concern, or even panic. It often focuses on the expected needs of our older adults implying that our older adults are more of a financial or societal drain. And while it's true that many older adults do utilize more health care or other health services, as they age, the older adult population also benefits our communities with financial resources, skills, expertise, time, and so many other great contributions. So it's equally important to consider both older adults' needs and the services and supports to meet those needs and the many assets that this population represents as well.
- The portion of the older adult population that is non-white as well as those with limited English proficiency is expected to increase in the coming decade. The projected rate of increase in elders who are a minority, and below the Federal Poverty Line is especially notable. While the population age 60 and older is projected to increase by 24% between 2020 and 2030, the portion of who are minority, and below the Federal poverty level is projected to increase by 57%. Lastly, I want to point out the percent increase of people age 65 and older, with dementia is also notable just that to be projected at 55% by 2030.
- The increase of our older adult community members, those 85 and older, those with dementia, those who are a minority, and those below the Federal poverty level will have significant implications for the services and supports our community will need to have in place.

#### *Questions and Comments Regarding the Demographic Data*

Amy, Lara, and Heather responded to questions from participants, including discussion of the fluid and changing nature of local demographics; potential uses of the presented data for policy and funding decisions; the value of sharing this information with governmental agencies and Chambers of Commerce; and the importance of including older adult voices in community planning processes.

#### **Older Adult Survey Findings – Chris Orr, Whatcom Council on Aging**

Chris presented findings from the survey of older adults in Whatcom County in late 2022. For detailed information regarding survey, please see [PPT slides](#) and the [Older Adult Survey Report](#).

#### *Questions and Comments Regarding the Survey*

Chris, Heather, and Lara responded to questions about the survey, including how it was distributed throughout the community; the broad nature of some of the categories (e.g. Wellness & Healthcare); use of the survey data in the development of organizational strategic plans; and a request to share the raw survey data with webinar participants.

### **Blueprint Updates – Sarah Lane, Health Ministries Network, and Mary Anderson, Whatcom Transportation Authority**

Sarah presented on the Blueprint section on the impacts of COVID on older adults. Mary and Sarah reviewed slides on the six Blueprint focus areas, highlighting high priority and new strategies. Please see [PPT slides](#) for more detail.

### **Closing – Heather Flaherty, Chuckanut Health Foundation**

Heather spoke about the purpose of the Blueprint as a tool to envision how we want our community to look, noting that it does not lay out specifics about who is going to do the work, how it will be funded, or a timeline. She invited participants to discuss what will it take to actually build out the strategies in this Blueprint and what actions they might take after attending this webinar.

Discussion and suggestions included creating a video or series of videos to educate community members about the Blueprint; acknowledging work already underway in each of the focus areas; and sharing resources for “Age Friendly” certifications (with examples shared for [cities](#) and [health systems](#)) and our local [Aging and Disability Resource Center](#) at Northwest Regional Council.

Heather shared a closing reflection, thanked the participants, and welcomed them to stay in touch about future opportunities for engagement.