



COUNTY OF SANTA CRUZ

701 OCEAN STREET, SANTA CRUZ, CA 95060-4073

(831) 454-2000 WWW.SANTACRUZCOUNTY.US

CARLOS J. PALACIOS, COUNTY EXECUTIVE OFFICER

NEWS RELEASE



Date: October 15, 2025

Contact: Jason Hoppin

Jason.Hoppin@santacruzcountyca.gov

COUNTY MASTER PLAN FOR AGING – A BLUEPRINT FOR AGING WELL

Community Needs Assessment Survey Results Shared in Final Report

The County of Santa Cruz is releasing results of its Community Needs Assessment Survey in a long-anticipated [final report](#). This effort, which is part of the County's Age Well Santa Cruz County (Age Well) initiative, complements our AARP Age Friendly Network efforts and is a key foundational step in the collaborative development of our local Master Plan for Aging (MPA).

With more than 72,000 residents over the age of 59 in Santa Cruz County, older adults represent 26 percent of the total population — a figure expected to grow to nearly 30 percent by 2030. The MPA, developed in partnership with the Seniors Council and leadership from each city within the county, serves as a blueprint to promote healthy aging for all county residents. Efforts aim to ensure equitable access to services and quality of life in all areas of daily living, regardless of age, disability, socioeconomic status, and geographical location.

The report features views, concerns and challenges faced by the over 3,200 county residents ages 40 and older who responded to the survey, illuminating strengths and gaps in the resources and services supporting residents to thrive as they age. To determine this, a diverse pool of respondents was asked about a wide range of needs, common tasks, how they navigate daily life and access various services. The survey explored availability, access, costs and cost burdens of resources and services, culminating in questions centered on affordability and access to quality of life.

Results highlight that many respondents do enjoy good health, access to transportation, hold positive views about their community, and have access to local resources and neighborhood connections for needed support. However, they also show a growing pattern of disparities among the most vulnerable county residents. Caregivers, those who are unstably housed, people with disabilities, low-income residents and mono-lingual Spanish speakers report experiencing higher rates of poorer physical and mental health; have less access to healthcare, transportation and affordable housing; and cost of living makes it increasingly difficult to remain in Santa Cruz County.

KEY COMMUNITY NEEDS ASSESSMENT TAKEAWAYS

- **Health Care Access Disparities:** Older adults report challenges finding specialists or doctors who accept Medicare, with one in four respondents leaving the county to access routine health care.
- **Caregiving Pressures are High:** Burden and stress are high among caregivers, especially those caring simultaneously for kids and aging loved ones, with 73% of respondents over 60 providing regular care to others with physical disabilities, memory care issues, or serious illnesses.
- **Isolation and Loneliness are Common:** Many seniors reported significantly higher levels of loneliness, with one in five seniors feeling lonely or isolated at least some of the time.
- **Help with Disaster Preparedness Needed:** 45% of respondents over age 60 feeling ill-prepared for an emergency.
- **Vulnerable groups at Greater Risk of Abuse and Neglect:** While overall respondent rates of abuse and neglect are at a 3% low, research shows vulnerable groups remain at greater risk and that most instances of abuse or neglect often go unreported.
- **Educating Seniors around Financial Scams:** 7 percent of seniors reported having been victim of a financial scam, with rates increasing across vulnerable population demographics.
- **Housing & Affordability:** Two-fifths of respondents are uncertain about remaining stably housed in the county as they age, with concerns highest among younger, lower income, and disabled respondents, and 24% noting a need to rely on free groceries in the past year.
- **Public Transportation Challenges:** Those who rely on public transportation report inconvenience and difficulties navigating public transit, especially those over age 75, with lower incomes or disabilities.

The report's conclusions point to planning and policymaking considerations that align with our local and statewide MPA goals.

"Looking at the data culminating from the survey results, we are not surprised to see that respondents struggling the most financially are also those facing the greatest barriers to healthy aging," County Executive Officer Carlos J. Palacios said. "Given the growing state and federal challenges the County and local nonprofits are facing, it is especially imperative that we are flexible, creative and innovative in our approach as we collaboratively develop effective strategies and partnerships to promote healthy aging."

Click here for the full Community Needs Assessment report, or visit Age Well initiative and download the report:

<https://www.santacruzhumanservices.org/AdultLongTermCare/AgeWellSantaCruzCounty>