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Editor, Janis Merrell
GoodLife@LifePathMA.org
(413) 773-5555 x2255

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What Older Adults and Caregivers in Our Region Are Saying: LifePath's 2025 Needs Assessment



Lynne Feldman

By Lynne Feldman, MBA, Associate Executive Director

Every four years, LifePath, the Area Agency on Aging for Franklin County and the North Quabbin areas, conducts a region-wide survey to understand the needs of older adults and caregivers.

We received 545 surveys in total—453 from older adults and 93 from caregivers. People from all over the region responded, and the results match the population distribution of older adults in the towns we serve. Most respondents were women (75%) and the majority were between 65 and 75 years old.

What Older Adults Told Us

When older adults were asked to pick the aging-related needs that were most important to them, the top answers were:

- In-home support to maintain independence (54%)
- Access to health care (49%)
- Affordable health care (49%)
- Staying active and promoting wellness (48%)
- Housing accessibility and maintenance (43%)

Older adults also voiced the need for help with technology, more physical and social activities, and support for things like service animals and dementia care. One woman in Sunderland said, "Need additional assistance beyond basic technology." Another from Greenfield shared, "Would like more activities geared to seniors, especially physical, social, and cultural." Confirming earlier assessments, many people may not know about the services already available to them, pointing to a need for improving outreach and communication.

When looking at the difference in needs by age, older adults under 70 reported maintaining their health and access to health care as top priorities, including Affordable Health Care (58%), Staying Active (53%), and Access to Health Care (51%). However, respondents over 90 prioritized In-Home Support for Maintaining Independence above all else at 71%, followed by Access to Health Care (36%) and Nutrition Support (36%). This shows how older adults' needs shift at different points.

Aging in Place

Challenges related to aging in place are on the top of the mind for the area's older adults. In-home support took the top spot in our survey of unmet needs. Another key to aging well in place is housing accessibility and maintenance, which came in fourth on the list with people looking for help with home repairs, safety modifications, and/or finding more suitable housing.

Health Care and Wellness

Nearly half of respondents were concerned about access to healthcare (for example, finding a doctor, accessing health services, attending falls prevention classes, exploring alternative medicine options, and receiving medical home visits); affordable healthcare (for example, accessing affordable health services, insurance, and managing prescription costs); and staying active and promoting wellness via classes on healthy aging, information on physical wellness, fitness programs and exercise classes for older adults, and wellness support for caregivers.

Income Makes a Big Difference

People with lower incomes were more likely to report serious challenges. For example, more than half (53%) of low-income older adults said they needed better transportation—compared to below 40% of higher-income respondents. In focus groups, people shared stories of having to rely on neighbors or missing important appointments. "If we're not within a few miles of a bus stop, we can't use the ADA van—and our road is too far out," one resident from Shutesbury explained. They also pointed out that some transportation services, like PT1 through MassHealth, are limited to medical trips. "It doesn't let you go to things that help keep you healthy, like local exercise groups."

In addition to transportation challenges, low-income respondents were also more likely to need help with managing expenses, getting legal advice, getting food, and finding safe and affordable housing.

Nutrition Needs and Challenges

About 29% of older adults reported needing better nutrition support—especially those with limited incomes or transportation barriers. Participants shared that the cost of groceries, limited choices at food banks, and cutbacks in food assistance programs are making it harder to eat well. One older adult shared about food assistance programs, "People run out of their allocation by the second or third week of the month." Others said that getting to the store, and even getting groceries inside the house, can be a challenge. Low-income residents were especially affected—43% of those earning under \$20,000 a year said they needed help with nutrition, compared to just 29% of the total population.

Services like Meals on Wheels were seen as helpful. One participant said, "We don't have any problems

In-home support took the top spot in our survey of unmet needs.

up here because it is part of the services we get from LifePath." But some respondents emphasized the need for expanded support and better outreach.

What Caregivers Need

Caregivers reported different needs—both for their loved ones and for themselves. They said the top issues for those they care for are:

- Memory or thinking problems (53%)
- Living with a physical disability (49%)
- Often feeling lonely or isolated (40%)
- Living with Alzheimer's or Dementia (39%)
- Having mental or emotional health issues (38%)

Caregivers reported their own unmet needs as:

- In-Home Care Services (58%)
- Respite Care (56%)
- Financial Assistance (45%)
- Care Coordination (44%)
- Information and Resources (42%)

Caring for someone with memory problems like dementia made things even harder. These caregivers said they needed more training, emotional support, and help managing stress. "A person to come in and visit for an hour once or twice a week would make such a big difference," one caregiver said.

What Happens Next?

All of these responses are helping LifePath create the next Area Plan for Older Adults, which will guide how we provide services from 2026 to 2029. Because state and federal funding is expected to decrease, the Plan will focus on the most important unmet needs and will not include program expansion. The Plan will be available for community input later in the spring before being finalized in July.

We are grateful to everyone who filled out the survey or participated in a focus group. Your voice matters. Your input is helping to build a better, safer, and more supportive community for older adults and caregivers in our region.