

Rural Board of Older Adult Advisors community research agenda

from the July and September 2024 meetings

TOP PRIORITIES

#1. Aging in place well

- Problem: There are challenges to staying in our homes as we age, which is what many people prefer
- Research areas and questions:
 - How can we make home environments safer to support aging in place?
 - What policies would support people to age in place?
 - What is the impact of property taxes on aging in place, especially for rural older adults?

#2 (tie). Social isolation and loneliness

- Problem: Older adults and rural adults are especially susceptible to isolation and alienation, though it's a widespread problem affecting people of all ages
- Research areas and questions:
 - What is the relationship between isolation, psychological distress, and physical health?
 - How do we measure the impact of social connections on happiness, individual health, and community well-being?
 - How can we facilitate bringing people together?
 - What is the relationship between type of housing and isolation? (ex: are apartments more isolating)
 - How can technology help reduce social isolation and loneliness?
 - How can we encourage community members to take care of each other?
 - What are the health benefits and risks of pets as we age?

#2 (tie). Family and friend caregivers

- Problem: There is a need to improve communication with and support for family / friend caregivers, and for family members to "share the care" fairly
- Research areas and questions:
 - How can we make sure caregivers receive education on tasks and problems that may occur?
 - How can we improve information sharing with caregivers who aren't present when the person they help is receiving emergency care?
 - What policies would enable family and friends to provide care?
 - How can families be encouraged to work together / share the care?
 - How can caregivers easily access technology to support the person they're helping?
 - How can technology enhance the ability of family and friends to provide care?

#2 (tie). Health promotion, behaviors, and prevention

- Problem: Many people lack the information and support to prevent age-related health issues, or to understand what is normal aging and what is a problem that could be treated or prevented
- Research areas and questions:
 - What are effective ways to encourage older adults to engage in prevention?
 - How can people better manage chronic conditions?
 - How can people prevent loss or decline in vision, hearing, and mobility, to stay independent?
 - What social issues keep older adults from activities that promote health?
 - How do we encourage people to learn about aging throughout their lives?

#3. Healthcare quality, provider communication, and person-centered care

- Problem: Poor communication and/or assumptions by the healthcare team lead to low-quality care that doesn't reflect older adult needs and priorities
- Research areas and questions:
 - How can healthcare staff be trained to focus on what matters to the patient and quickly identify pressing issues?
 - How can patients describe their health issues so providers understand what's important?
 - Do people from rural communities communicate differently with healthcare providers? (ex: complain less about pain)
 - What are clearer ways to share test results, making clear what's normal and what's a problem? (ex: emojis, visualizations)
 - How can we improve the information provided at discharge, so people know what to watch out for?
 - How can healthcare providers be trained to care for older people and be aware of their own age-related biases?
 - How can technology be used in ways that don't complicate or decrease the quality of healthcare communications?

#4 (tie). Access to information

- Problem: There are barriers for older adults and rural residents to receiving accurate information
- Research areas and questions:
 - How can we make health information more engaging? (ex: share personal stories)
 - How can we help more people understand Medicare regulations?
 - How do older adults in rural areas get up-to-date health information?
 - How does the proliferation of media influence healthcare for older people?
 - How can we share information when there are fewer newspapers and local media?

#4 (tie). Nutrition

- Problem: People may not know how to choose, prepare, and eat foods that promote health
- Research areas and questions:
 - How can we support healthy aging through nutrition?
 - How do we prevent and deal with obesity?

- What common practices might make food less healthy? (ex: preservatives, undercooked food, microwave cooking)

OTHER AREAS OF INTEREST

Housing

- Problem: There is a shortage of housing, especially affordable housing in rural communities
- Research areas and questions:
 - How does the stigma around affordable housing impact small town/rural housing policies?
 - What policies would support an increase in affordable housing?

Access to care

- Problem: There are significant barriers to accessing mental health and dental care in rural communities, as well as shortages of long-term care facilities and in-home care providers
- Research areas and questions:
 - How does Medicare policy impact access to mental health and dental care?
 - What are the barriers to people getting dental care? Survey people of all ages
 - Why are people screened for mental health but not connected to care, even when there are providers?
 - How can we increase access to in-home care in rural communities?
 - What policies could encourage more people to provide home care?
 - How can people without transportation be supported to access care?

Financial health

- Problem: Financial insecurity leads to health disparities
- Research areas and questions:
 - Could promoting benefits (like SSI) support the health of lower-income people?
 - How can financial insecurity be prevented throughout life?
 - What policies support the health of lower-income people?

Health research

- Problem: Older adults are under-represented in health research
- Research areas and questions:
 - What is the best way to get older adults to participate in research?