

# Promoting Health Equity Among Older Adults

## Healthy Aging

**Equitable healthy aging** means that everyone has a fair and just opportunity to optimize health and wellbeing at all life stages and abilities across the life course. **Equitable healthy aging** is achieved when every person has the opportunity to attain his or her full health potential to age well and no one is disadvantaged from achieving this potential because of social position or other socially determined circumstance.

**Healthy Aging** is defined by the process of promoting health, preventing injury, and managing chronic conditions, optimizing physical, mental health (cognitive and emotional), and facilitating social engagement, and social well-being and function as people age.

## The Importance of Equity Among Older Adults

The older adult population in the US is growing quickly— according to the [2021 Tennessee State Plan on Aging](#), between 2021 and 2031, the number of older Tennesseans age 60+ is projected to grow from 1.66 million to 1.93 million. Through new partnerships and collaboration with older adults, aging services providers, local health departments can coordinate their efforts and expand their capacity to reach all older adults in all communities, including members of racially/ethnically diverse communities. The coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic exacerbated health inequities for older adults. Many older adults experienced limited access to necessary resources and services including critical preventative measures. However, many organizations found ways to partner and collaborate to provide opportunities to support and serve underserved older adults. By combining resources, outreach strategies, and services, organizations and agencies began to develop new approaches to providing support to older adults in underserved areas.

## Community Health Assessments

This toolkit is provided to Tennessee health departments to suggest foundational strategies for the inclusion of healthy aging efforts in the County Health Assessments to:

- Improve the coordination of public health interventions that promote the health and wellbeing of older adults.
- Educate professionals to identify and address disparities that may be exacerbated with age.
- Coordinate multisectoral efforts to promote the health and wellbeing of older adults across governmental and nongovernmental health and related agencies
- Disseminate and implement evidence-based best practices and programs with respect to promoting the health and well-being of older adults.
- Share data to identify and map gaps in service and underserved aging communities.

\*These ideas are based on the Age-Friendly Public Health System (AFPHS) framework developed by Trust for America's Health (TFAH). Additional details in a working paper entitled "[Healthy Aging and Health Department Accreditation Think Tank Report with Recommendations](#)" (January 2021).

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## At a Glance: Health Inequities for Older Adults

### Alzheimer's disease and related dementias:

- 6<sup>th</sup> leading cause of death in Tennessee
- 120,000 Tennesseans diagnosed
- 357,000 caregivers
- *Higher rates:* Older African Americans 2 times and Hispanics are 1.5 more likely than non-whites
- 2/3 of women diagnosed with Alzheimer's
- 55 % of Black Americans *do not* feel confident they have access to providers who understand their ethnic or racial background and experiences.

### Hypertension:

- Accounts for 1 in every 4 deaths.
- African American adults are more likely than white adults to develop.
- Heart Disease is the leading cause of death for women
- High blood pressure is more common in Black adults (54%) than in white adults (46%), Asian adults (39%), or Hispanics adults (36%).
- A heightened response is required due to the disparities in high blood pressure control in African American men.

### Caregivers:

- 25% of caregivers are considered the "*sandwich generation*", caring for a child under the age of 18 and an aging parent.
- 66% of caregivers have multiple chronic conditions.
- Black caregivers provide more than 40 hours of care per week compared to their white counterparts.
- 89.1% of African American caregivers and 85.2% of Hispanic caregivers have health coverage.

### Dementia caregivers:

- 55% are women
- 13% are Black
- 51% are 55+ years old
- 54% are employed outside the home
- 42% care for parent/parent-in-law
- 51% are 55+ years old
- 14% of dementia caregivers in TN have a cardiovascular disease and 45% have hypertension

### Elder Abuse:

- 50 and older adults are more susceptible to fraud and financial exploitation.
- African American are at an increased risk of financial and psychological abuse than their Caucasian counterparts.
- Women are more likely to experience elder abuse than their male counterparts.
- Abuse occurs more frequently in older adults with dementia and those that are dependent on others for basic care.

### Suicide:

- Older men are four times as likely to take their own lives as older women.
- Older Caucasians are more likely to die by suicide than are members of minority communities.
- Suicide deaths are more likely in rural vs urban areas.

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## At a Glance: Health Inequities for Older Adults

### Diabetes:

- 7<sup>th</sup> leading cause of death in the United States.
- Rates of diagnosed diabetes: American Indian (14.7%), Hispanics (12.5%) and blacks (11.7%).
- Compared to adults aged 18 to 44 years, incidence rates of diagnosed diabetes were higher among adults aged 45 to 64 years and those aged 65 years and older.
- Adults aged 50 years or older with diabetes die 4.6 years earlier and develop disability 6 to 7 years earlier.

### Grandparents (Raising grandchildren):

- In TN, 76,680 grandparents are raising grandchildren.
- 48% are age 60 and older
- 17% live below the poverty line
- 56% are in the workforce
- Latino solo grandparents have a high prevalence of chronic health conditions, including arthritis (51%), depression (40%), and diabetes (34%).
- *Lack of access to services and supports* tends to have more to do with a grandfamily's ability to navigate complicated systems and bureaucracies than the needs of the family.

### Obesity:

- Non-Hispanic Black older adults compared with Hispanic, non-Hispanic white, other race, and Asian older adults.
- Those with less than a high school education compared to with college graduates.
- Older adults with an annual household income of \$25,000 or less compared with those with higher incomes.

### Falls:

- 1 out of 5 falls causes a [serious injury](#); hip fractures and [traumatic brain injuries](#).
- 65 and older adults, falls are the leading cause of fatal and nonfatal injuries, particularly in women.
- Falls are more prevalent among older adults with less than a high school education and an annual household income of less than \$25,000.

## Communicating with Older Adults

[The National Assessment of Adult Literacy \(NAAL\)](#)[external icon](#) indicates the following about older adults' health literacy skills:

- 71% of adults older than age 60 had difficulty in using print materials
- 80% had difficulty using documents such as forms or charts
- 68% had difficulty with interpreting numbers and doing calculations

Preferred terms for Older Adults:

- Older adults
- Persons aged [numeric age group] (e.g., persons aged 55-64 years)
- Elders when referring to older adults in a cultural context

## Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Resources

- [Inclusive Communication Principles Using a Health Equity Lens](#)
- [Health Equity Guiding Principles Fact Sheet: An introduction to inclusive communication](#)

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## Resources for Community Action

### Suicide

- Suicide Prevention Resource Center-Older Adult Resources: <https://www.sprc.org/populations/older-adults>
- CDC Suicide Prevention Resources: <https://www.cdc.gov/suicide/index.html>
- Veterans Crisis Line: <https://www.veteranscrisisline.net/>

**Strategies:** Increase provider awareness of mental health problems. Make systematic screening tools available to staff in medical and non-medical settings, and train staff to screen for suicide risk. Address social isolation and lack of access to social support for at-risk older adults.

### Alzheimer's disease and related dementias:

- Tennessee Department of Health's Office of Patient Care Advocacy Alzheimer's Disease and Brain Health [webpage](#)
- TN Dementia Friendly Toolkit [webpage](#)
- CDC's The Healthy Brain Initiative's (HBI) [State and Local Public Health Partnerships to Address Dementia, The 2018-2023 Road Map](#)
- CDC Rack Cards:

Healthy Aging. Healthy Brain. ([English](#) / [Spanish](#))

Healthy Diet. Healthy Brain ([English](#) / [Spanish](#))

Healthy Blood Pressure. Healthy Brain ([English](#) / [Spanish](#))

Healthy Body. Healthy Brain ([English](#) / [Spanish](#))

Healthy Blood Sugar. Healthy Brain ([English](#) / [Spanish](#))

**Strategies:** *Brain health across the life span* integrated into all health promotion programming; educate the public about brain health and cognitive aging; promote risk reduction; educate health care providers; and encourage early detection, diagnosis, and advanced care planning.

### Dementia Caregivers

- REACH OUT: Moving Programs into Practice: evidence-based guide for communities designed to promote the health of caregivers providing care for those with cognitive decline. <https://www.cdc.gov/aging/caregiving/activities.htm>
- CDC Promoting Caregiving Across the Full Community: f actionable strategies for communities to support caregivers in their caregiving role and offers a caregiving infrastructure assessment for communities to consider. <https://www.cdc.gov/aging/caregiving/promoting-caregiving/pdfs/promoting-caregiving-across-the-full-community-202012-508.pdf>

**Strategies:** Provide information and tools to help caregivers anticipate, avert, and respond to challenges that typically arise during the course of dementia, and to enhance their health and well-being.

### Resources on Healthy Aging

- [Tennessee County Profiles](#)

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## Resources for Community Action

### Diabetes

- [Take Charge of Your Diabetes](#)
- CDC-led [National Diabetes Prevention Program](#)
- [Project Diabetes](#)

**Strategies:** Collaborate with community partnerships to provide primary prevention by emphasizing healthy lifestyle changes among high-risk older adults.

### Hypertension

- [Mind Your Risks](#)
- CDC: [Prevention Heart Disease](#)
- [Million Hearts Campaign: Focusing on Health Equity](#)

**Strategies:** Promote cardiovascular health and lifestyle changes, especially those that address social determinants of health; and interventions to increase awareness, treatment, and control.

### Grandparents raising grandchildren

- [Tennessee Grandfamilies Fact Sheet](#) (and Resource Guide)
- [Generations United](#)
- [AARP Guide for Grandparents Raising Grandchildren](#)
- [TDMHSAS Older Adult Program](#)
- [Chronic Disease Self-Management](#)

**Strategies:** Partner with community organizations and faith-based communities to conduct health promotion initiatives and to share services and supports.

### Obesity

- [CDC Evidence-Based Self-Management Education and Physical Activity Programs for Remote Delivery](#)
- [Walk with Ease](#)
- [Fit & Strong!](#)

**Strategies:** Healthcare provider education to promote screening for obesity and integrate prevention into clinical care. Engaging faith-based communities to promote dietary change and physical activity in their health awareness and promotion councils.

### Elder Abuse

- World Elder Abuse Awareness Day: <https://ncea.acl.gov/WEAAD.aspx>
- Recognizing the Signs of Elder Abuse: Infographics and quick reference guides for spotting the signs of elder abuse.: <https://www.nia.nih.gov/health/infographics/spotting-signs-elder-abuse>

**Strategies:** Promote prevention of abuse, neglect, and exploitation. Educate staff and the community on the signs of elder abuse and how they differ from the normal aging process. Report suspected abuse to Adult Protective Services and law enforcement.

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## Older Adult Health Data

The health assessment process presents opportunities to advance healthy aging by including older adult health data in the state/community health assessment and related processes. Please reference the 2022 [Tennessee County Profiles](#).

## Identifying Healthy Aging Experts and Aging Sector Partners

[AARP-Tennessee](#)

[Tennessee Commission on Aging and Disability](#)

[Statewide volunteer program](#)

[Statewide fall prevention and exercise programs](#)

[Tennessee Area Agencies on Aging and Disability](#)

Directors for senior centers and local Meals on Wheels Program

[Tennessee Department of Health and Substance Abuse Services](#)

Tennessee Offices on Aging ( [Aging Well Middle](#)

[Tennessee Department of Human Services, Adult Protective Services](#)

[Tennessee, Fifty Forward, Knox County Office on Aging \)](#)

[Honoring Choices Tennessee/Advance](#)

[Directives TN](#)

[Alzheimer's Tennessee](#)

[Alzheimer's Association](#)

[Brain Links](#)

[Tennessee Council on Developmental Disabilities](#)

Tennessee Department of Health- CHANT, TBI, Chronic Disease, Minority Health programs

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## Resources on Healthy Aging

- [Tennessee County Profiles Trust for America's Health \(TFAH\) Age-Friendly Public Health](#)
- [Trust for America's Health Creates Momentum Towards an Age-Friendly Public Health System](#)
- [Florida Department of Health: Age-Friendly Public Health Systems Initiative](#)
- [Tennessee Department of Health, Office of Patient Care Advocacy](#)
- [2020 Update to the Tennessee State Health Plan](#)
- [2019 Update to the Tennessee State Health Plan](#)
- [2021 Tennessee State Plan on Aging](#)
- [Association of State and Territory Health Officials \(ASTHO\) HBI Road Map Module](#)
- [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Alzheimer's Disease and Healthy Aging Program and Healthy Aging Data Portal](#)
- [Healthy Brain Initiative Roadmap](#)
- [Alzheimer's Association Public Health Resources](#)