

MARCH 2022

Age and Dementia Friendly Ware

Community Assessment and Action Plan
Executive Summary



Presented To
The Town of Ware



Executive Summary

The Age and Dementia Friendly Ware Community Assessment and Action Plan was developed with assistance from the Pioneer Valley Planning Commission through the Age Friendly Pioneer Valley Initiative funded by the Tufts Health Plan Foundation.

Residents of the Ware community and key stakeholders, or people who work in municipal or nonprofit organizations that serve older adults, were engaged in this Community Assessment in three ways: through an Age and Dementia Friendly Working Group, administration of a Ware Livable Community Survey (a shorter version of the AARP Livable Community Survey), and listening sessions held during already scheduled social events attended by many older residents of the community – Bingo night at Highland Village, and Pitch Night at the Ware Senior Center.

According to the survey results, most older adults would like to remain in the community as they get older, and most would like to remain in their own homes. However, if their health condition changes, many older residents would like the opportunity to downsize and move to a senior independent or assisted living community or into subsidized housing.



The Age and Dementia Friendly Ware Community Assessment and Action Plan provides analysis of the feedback gathered from older adults in the Ware Livable Community Survey and at public forums and provides recommendations for improvements to the social and built environments that can address the needs of older residents and create a more livable community for people of all ages.

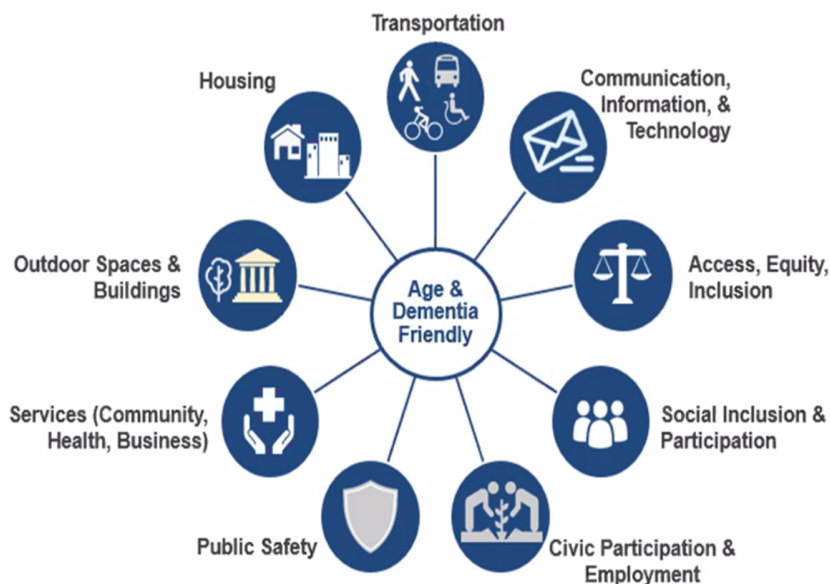
Why be Age and Dementia Friendly?

Populations worldwide are becoming older as people are living longer and having fewer children. Before the pandemic, it was estimated that by 2035 the number of people over the age of 65 would exceed the number of children under the age of 18. [add graphic]

The Town of Ware has a population of 9,811, of which 2,433 or 24.8% are 60 or over. The number of older adults who are veterans of military service is higher (26.3%) than the state (18.8%), and 33.8% of people over 65 live alone (compared to 30.2% in the state as a whole). More than 15% of residents over 65 are diagnosed with deafness or hearing impairment and 3.7% have self-reported vision difficulty. Over 20% of people over 65 have self-reported ambulatory difficulties while 3.3% are diagnosed with mobility impairments, and 11.1% of people over the age of 65 have been diagnosed with Alzheimer’s or Dementia (compared to 13.6% in the state).

The Domains of an Age and Dementia Friendly Community

The Ware Community Assessment and Action Plan is organized around nine Domains of an Age and Dementia Friendly Community. Actions benefitting people with dementia and their care partners are interspersed throughout each Domain, and a separate section on Planning for a Dementia Friendly Community highlights specific actions for building awareness, acceptance, and support for people with dementia and their care partners.



Planning for a Dementia Friendly Community

As people are living longer, it is expected that a growing percentage of people over 65 will be diagnosed with Alzheimer’s or other forms of dementia, and estimates show that one-third of people over the age of 85 have some form of dementia.



Key Actions

- Develop a committee of the Age and Dementia Friendly Ware Working Group to implement trainings and a public awareness campaign about dementia in Ware.
- Recruit volunteers to become Dementia Friends Champions who will provide trainings for community groups and neighbors.
- Encourage trainings on how to recognize signs of dementia and communicate with people with dementia for all municipal staff.
- Work with the Triad Program partners (Police, Fire, Emergency Services) to encourage residents to register on a list of people living with dementia or other health concerns.
- Identify and reach out to family care givers to connect them with support programs and opportunities for meeting with other caregivers of people with dementia.
- Meaningfully engage people with dementia in developing programs and services such as support groups or memory cafes at the Senior Center and other locations in the community.

Health and Caregiver Services

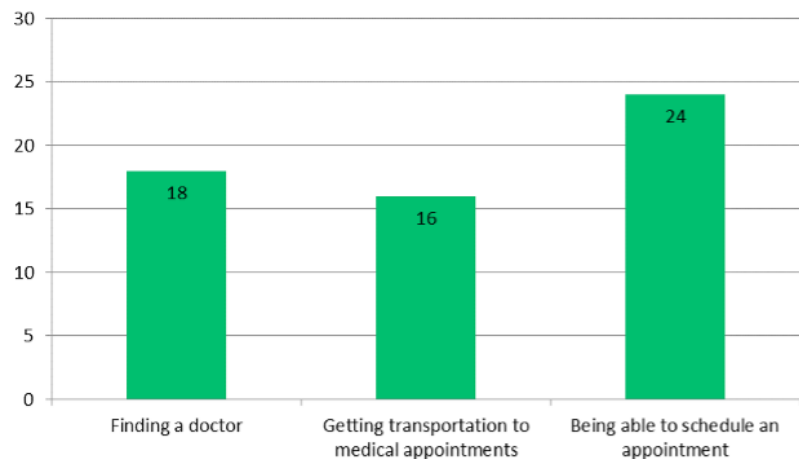
Community Concerns

Access to health care and assistance with basic tasks and home repair were some of the greatest concerns of older adults in Ware. Many survey respondents and participants in forums were concerned about the planned closure of Baystate Mary Lane both in terms of being able to find a doctor, schedule an appointment, or getting access to transportation to get to medical appointments.

As people age in place, personal home care may be needed through family, friends, or professional care providers.

Many survey respondents said that they needed caregiver services due to mobility impairments (18), psychological conditions or dementia (14), or chronic disease (14). It is important to ensure that people have access to professional caregiving services and that family caregivers have the support that they need to maintain their own health.

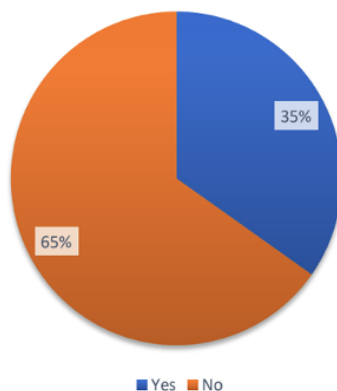
With the closing of Baystate Mary Lane, are you concerned about any of the following? (check all that apply)



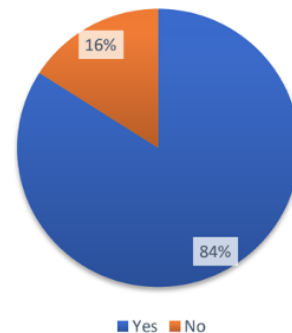
AGE AND DEMENTIA FRIENDLY WARE

WestMass Elder Care and Greater Springfield Senior Services offer, personal home care (for income eligible older adults) and support for family caregivers, options counseling, respite care, and money management services; and the Quaboag Valley Community Development Corporation (QVCD) offers pickup of groceries and prescriptions and running basic errands for income eligible older adults. However other tasks such as shoveling, yard work, and basic home maintenance is an area of need that has not been filled.

Do you need help with basic tasks or errands (e.g., changing a light bulb, shopping, shoveling snow)? (check all that apply)



Do you have a friend, neighbor or relative within 30 minutes you could ask for help if you needed assistance with a minor task or errand (e.g., changing a light bulb, shopping, shoveling snow)?



A volunteer-based Village model or Neighbors program, where people can offer help or ask for help, is one way that some communities in the region have addressed the need for help with basic tasks such as snow shoveling or grocery pickup. Working with schools to engage students in service activities may be another way that the Town could meet the needs of older adults in this area.

Food insecurity was another problem for many vulnerable populations during the COVID-19 pandemic but was especially prevalent among older adults who relied on senior center meals or transportation services to obtain food.



Top Priorities

- Catalogue existing community, social and health service programs in town and work with key service providers to disseminate information to residents via municipal channels, using a variety of media.
- Work with Baystate Wing to publicize Convenient Care walk-in clinic and to provide orientation on changes associated with closure of Baystate Mary Lane.
- Work with Quaboag Connector and PVTA and area hospitals to ensure all people who need rides to medical appointments can access transportation services.
- Research the feasibility of developing a Village or Neighbors model which coordinates volunteers to provide services that allow people to age in place. Services may include chore services, grocery and pharmacy delivery, safety monitoring programs, and transportation assistance.
- Work with elder care organizations, health care providers and the Alzheimer's Association to educate service personnel and first responders about concerns specific to older adults, including those with dementia or other cognitive or physical challenges.

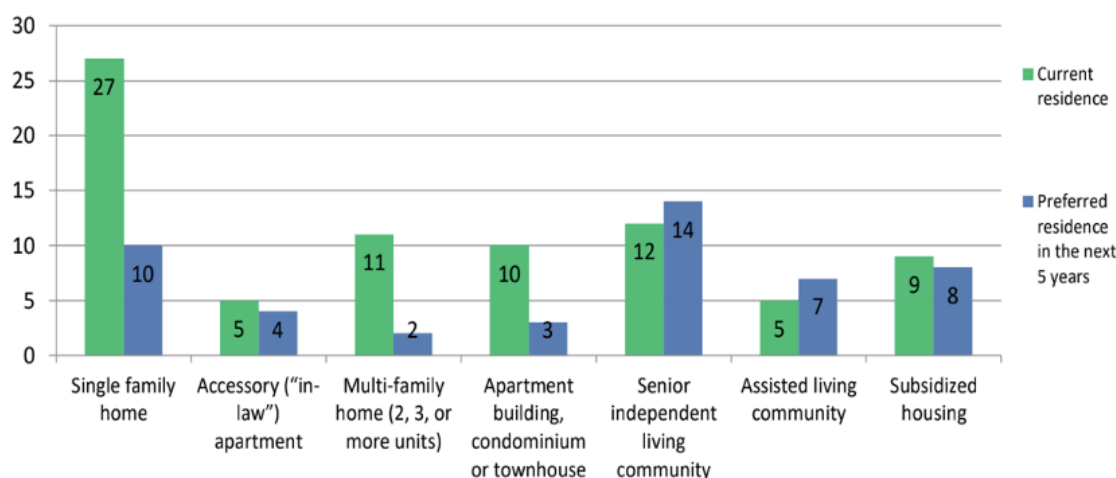
Housing

Community Concerns

A majority of survey respondents (89%) said it was either extremely important (64%) or very important (25%) to remain in their own homes as they age, either independently or with a caregiver. However, although a majority of respondents currently live in single-family homes (27), the most preferred residence in the next five years if one’s health conditions change was senior independent living community (14), followed by single family home (10), subsidized housing (8), and assisted living (7). This speaks to the need for Ware to offer a variety of housing options, as well as services for those who choose to remain in their own homes.

Ware has a shortage of affordable housing for people with lower incomes. Wait times for affordable apartments in Housing Authority properties are reportedly 18 months to two years.

Which of the following best describes your current place of residence? In the next 5 years if a change of health requires that you move, what type of housing would you prefer?



Top Priorities

- Assist homeowners in rehabilitating existing (older) housing to improve safety, accessibility, and basic upkeep and maintenance.
- Develop a Housing Need Assessment or Housing Production Plan that includes an inventory of the existing housing stock and engages older adults in determining the types of housing desired in order for them to be able to stay in community.
- Explore alternative living models such as shared housing, co-housing, and intergenerational housing to expand the housing options for older adults looking for a supported living environment.
- Develop planning and zoning tools to prioritize and incentivize housing development models that provide for a mix of housing types.

Transportation and Streets

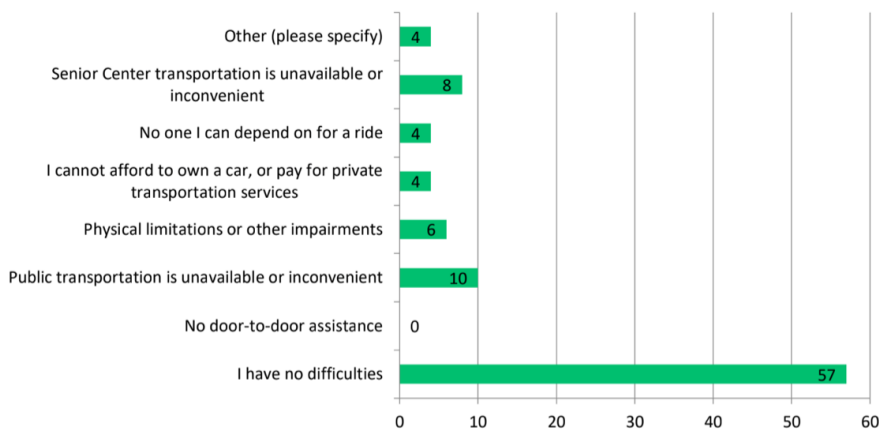
Community Concerns

The decision to stop driving oneself can be one of the most difficult transitions that comes with aging. Slower reaction times, difficulty seeing at night, and cognitive impairments are only a few of the challenges that people face as they age, and that make driving more difficult and potentially dangerous.

Services such as public transportation, senior center vans, and private transportation services are important to have in place when older adults in the community lose the ability to drive or the resources to maintain a personal automobile. Transportation services available in Ware include limited fixed route bus service and on-demand van rides through the Pioneer Valley Transit Authority (PVTA), and van transportation offered through the Ware Senior Center and the Quaboag Connector.

Challenges with PVTA buses and on demand van services according to survey respondents were that the services were not available or inconvenient. Many people don't know about the services available or bus routes and could benefit from an orientation on transportation services.

What kind of difficulties do you have in getting the transportation that you need? (check all that apply)



Infrastructure improvements for walking and biking as well as using transit services is discussed in Ware's Complete Streets Prioritization Plan. The Prioritization Plan includes a list of projects that will improve accessibility and safety (including re-timing or replacement of signals at pedestrian crossings), adding sidewalks to create a connected pedestrian network, installing ADA compliant ramps installations where necessary, and adding speed radar signs along key municipal roadways. Projects that will create the most positive impacts for older adults include sidewalks on West Street to connect the Senior Center to downtown. Forum participants also mentioned the need for benches or covered waiting areas for buses at Walmart.

When surveyed about the primary ways residents meet their transportation needs, 7 respondents reported they walk and only 2 selected biking or e-biking.

Top Priorities

Transportation Services

- Expand van service (Quaboag Connector) for older adults to provide medical transportation as needed to Baystate Wing hospital in preparation for the closure of Baystate Mary Lane.
- Add bus shelters at stops near senior housing and encourage retail establishments to install shelters near bus stops on their property

Transportation Infrastructure

- Improve sidewalk connectivity and maintenance in neighborhoods within ½ mile of services.
- Add dementia friendly design elements when completing infrastructure improvements including audible cues and appropriate timing on crosswalks, and separation from traffic on sidewalks (as feasible).

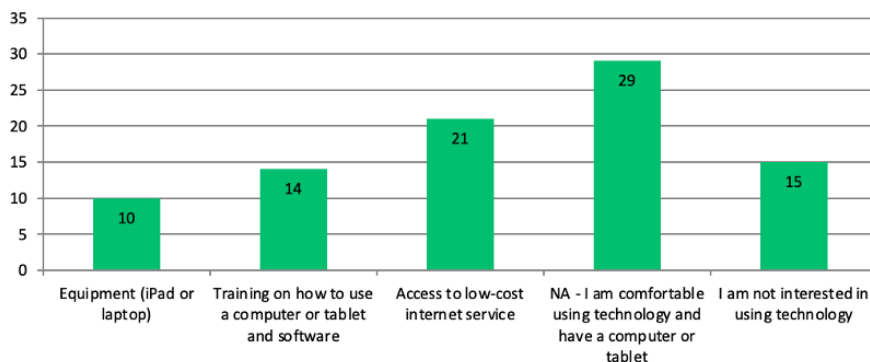
Communication, Information and Technology

Communication access to technology as a means for getting information is essential to the success of all of the domains of an Age and Dementia Friendly Community, as residents must know how to access information about programs, services, and places that are age and dementia friendly in order to use and appreciate these resources. The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the need for technology to communicate with one’s community, shop for groceries and other products, and participate in fitness programming and telehealth services when the Senior Center, businesses, and restaurants and cultural venues were closed.

Community Concerns

The Ware Livable Community Survey 2021 brought to light just how prominent the Digital Divide is in Ware, with 15 respondents saying they are not interested in using technology at all. In addition, communication challenges exist for people with visual or hearing impairments, and those whose first language is not English.

Do you need assistance in accessing any of the following in order to use technology to access basic information or to attend programs online?



Top Priorities

- Ensure that every household and business in Ware has access to high-speed internet.
- Assist older adults in acquiring equipment and training on how to use it and provide assistance with accessing low cost or free broadband service.
- Provide accommodations for vision and hearing impaired on Town website and in spaces used for public meetings (closed captioning, interpreter).

Buildings and Outdoor Spaces

The amount of physical activity that people engage in is related, in part, to the availability of safe and convenient places to walk and ride a bike. During the pandemic, parks and open spaces were vital places for people to meet with friends or to get exercise while buildings and gyms were closed. According to the Ware Livable Community survey, parks or outdoor space (42 respondents) were second to restaurants or cafés (48 respondents) for places where people liked to spend their free time prior to the pandemic and remained the two most popular places to visit since COVID-19. Parks with accessible walking trails, sidewalks, bike paths and bike lanes, accessible buildings and restrooms are all facilities that are important for inviting active transportation, recreation, and social interaction. Amenities such as benches, shaded resting spots, and lighting all support older adults, people with disabilities, and people of all ages.



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There are existing trails within Grenville Park and the Quabbin Reservoir Park, and the Ware River Valley Rail Trail connects Robbins Road to the Walmart/Lowes parking lot to the south providing a walking, biking or rolling route to popular stores including Walmart and Lowes.

Community Concerns

The inaccessibility of many trails due to a lack of maintenance, parking facilities, signage, and trail markers was noted in the 2016 Ware Master Plan and 2016 Open Space and Recreation Plan (OSRP). The OSRP recommended finding additional indoor spaces for recreational programming. Currently the Ware Senior Center and activity rooms at Hillside Village and Valley View provide spaces for indoor programming.

Only 8 respondents of the Livable Community Survey said they participated in gym or fitness classes prior to COVID-19, with only 2 attending classes in person since COVID-19 shutdowns began ending.

Top Priorities

- Work toward making public buildings, parks and sidewalks in Ware Dementia Friendly & ADA accessible.
- Ensure that the Ware River Trail is wheelchair accessible at all entries and road crossings; and add amenities to make the trail more comfortable for older adults including benches and signage pointing to nearby public restrooms (Senior Center, Walmart).
- Assess/solicit feedback from older residents on desired outdoor recreational opportunities to inform future expenditures on parks and recreation.
- Encourage creation of trails, parks and bikeways close to centers of population and/or where public transportation is available.
- Develop a map of safe walking and biking routes for people of all ages and abilities and make it available throughout town in print and in digital form on the Town website. Provide information on levels of difficulty and whether or not they are ADA compliant and/or accessible to people in wheelchairs.

Social Participation and Inclusion

Participation in social activities, either formal or informal, is important to one's mental health. Conversely, social isolation and loneliness can cause poor health outcomes. Research shows that loneliness and social isolation can increase the risk of premature death and has been associated with a 50% increased risk of dementia as well as increased risk of heart disease and stroke, depression, anxiety, and suicide.

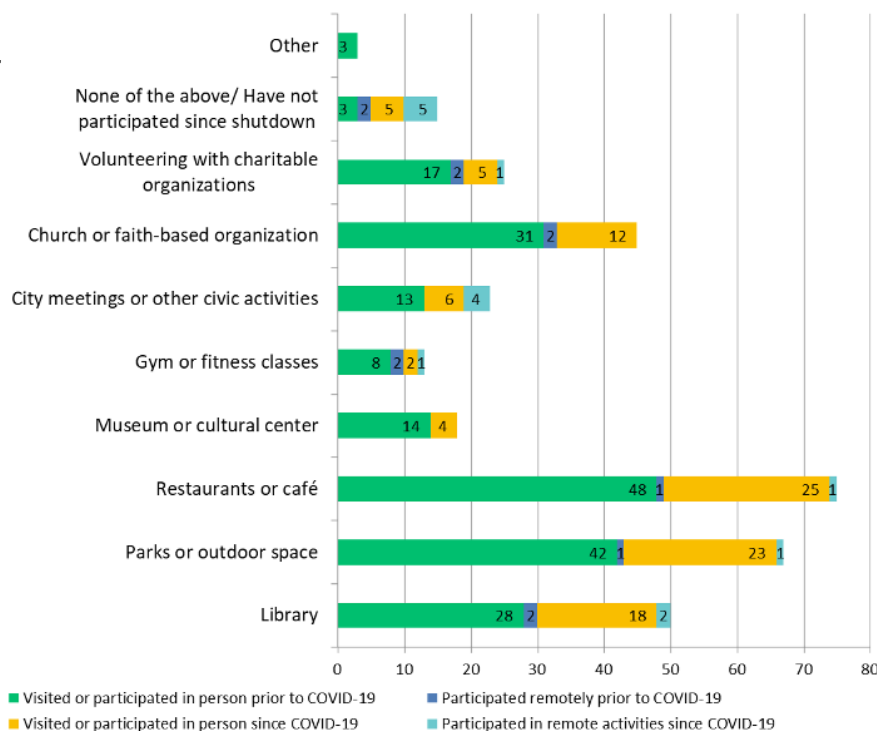


Community Concerns

The pandemic increased concern of social isolation among survey respondents as many of the places where people would normally socialize were closed or were forced to limit their capacity. The Ware Livable Community Survey illustrates the concern about social isolation with nine respondents having concerns prior to the pandemic and 16 respondents saying that they were concerned about social isolation after the state-mandated stay-at-home order. The chart below illustrates the change in the number of places where people spent their free time during the pandemic.

The survey also showed that a lot of older adults use the Ware Senior Center for the daily lunch program, social activities, exercise programs, and counseling about retirement. Most of those who said that they did not use the Senior Center said that they did not know what kind of programming was available.

Other than the Ware Senior Center (and assuming these places will be fully open in the coming year), where do you like to spend your free time?



People with dementia are at high risk of social isolation as they may not be able to drive or may become confused or agitated when they are out in public spaces. Providing activities such as memory cafes or support groups for people with dementia and their care partners could ensure a welcoming space for socializing. Also, trainings for staff of the library, volunteers at town-wide events, and the broader community can ensure that people with dementia are treated with respect and supported by the community. Planning and outreach of events or programming should include people with dementia as well as other sectors at risk of social isolation including veterans; people who are not fluent in English; people with vision, hearing or mobility impairments; and people of all racial and ethnic backgrounds.

Top Priorities

- Continue to collaborate with Ware Community Television and other senior centers to offer online and hybrid social and fitness programming that can be taped and accessed online or re-broadcast on Cable Access TV.
- Work with partners such as Cedarbrook Village to provide staffing for a Memory Café and other activities for people with dementia and their caregivers (adult day programs, creative arts/music, intergenerational connections, outings/group activities).
- Continue to work with Ware Public Schools to facilitate intergenerational conversations and engagement.

Employment and Civic Engagement

Most of the respondents (84%) to the Ware Livable Community Survey are retired, while 5% said that they do not anticipate ever fully retiring. No survey respondents said that they needed help finding employment, and only two respondents said that they needed help finding volunteer opportunities.

Community Concerns

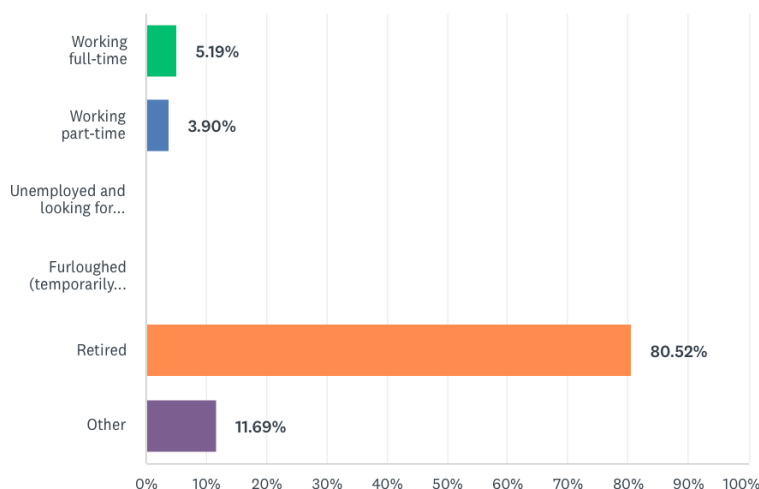
Financial security was one of the most important areas that survey respondents said that the Town should focus on to make Ware a more Age and Dementia Friendly Community, and many participants at the listening sessions thought that there should be lower property taxes for older adults in the community.

While few survey respondents said that they needed help finding employment or volunteer opportunities, it is important that those who do need these services know where to find them.

The Ware Senior Center works with the Retired Senior Volunteer Program (RSVP) to place people in volunteer positions where they get credit toward property tax abatements (if financially eligible). As property taxes were an issue of concern for participants in the forums, expanding and publicizing this program could offer relief to some homeowners.

What is your employment status? (check all that apply)

Answered: 77 Skipped: 1



84% of survey respondents are retired in Ware

Top Priorities

- Increase awareness among employers in town on the benefits of hiring older workers, including the use of flexible work schedules attractive to older or second-career workers, i.e. “flex time”, part-time, work at home, job sharing, etc.
- Connect older adults with volunteer programs (such as RSVP), and expand opportunities for property tax reduction in exchange for volunteer time.
- Provide flexible options for people with dementia to volunteer and provide training, recognition, guidance and compensation for personal costs.
- Expand programs on financial literacy to people on fixed incomes (social security).
- Create an “age friendly business” recognition program in the community.

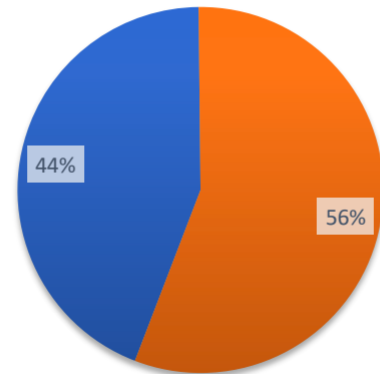
Public Safety

Police, Fire, and other emergency service providers are closely involved with the safety of older adults as they are often the ones that people call when they are not feeling safe or have had a fall. The Fire Department maintains a Persons at Risk finder, a list of individuals who are at risk of wandering due to dementia, autism, or other cognitive impairments. The Ware Council on Aging participates with the Ware Police and Fire Departments in the Triad Program which is a national organization initially started by the National Sheriffs' Association, the International Chiefs of Police, and the AARP.

Community Concerns

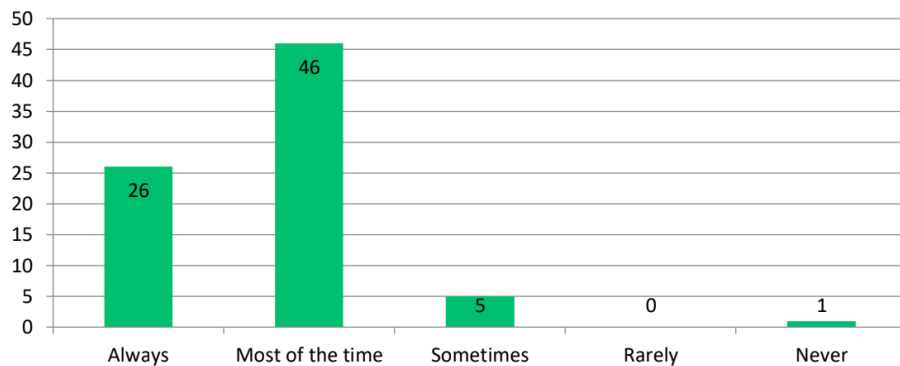
The Ware Livable Community Survey asked how safe people felt living in the community. For those who gave responses for times when they did not feel safe in the community, some of the reasons were poor lighting and police patrols on Main Street, concern about high drug and alcohol use of other residents, and a need for more patrols in Grenville Park. Nineteen percent of survey respondents said that they did not feel informed about what to do in the event of a weather or other emergency.

Do you or a family member have a "File of Life" in your home in case of emergency?



■ Yes ■ No

How often do you feel safe in the community where you live?



Top Priorities

- Post information on the TRIAD or SALT programs on both the Senior Center and Police Department websites to educate residents about the File of Life and Persons at Risk Finder.
- Provide regular trainings for all emergency personnel on recognizing the signs of dementia and how to communicate with people with dementia.
- Educate older adults about what to do in the case of emergency and about the Town's Critical Incident Management Plan (CIMP).

Access, Equity and Inclusion

Access, equity and inclusion are concepts that should be considered in all of the domains of an Age and Dementia Friendly Community to ensure that no one is left out of important information about resources and programming for older adults. In Ware, some groups may include non-English speakers, veterans, people living in poverty, and people with disabilities. Inclusion of older adults and representatives from other sectors should be considered in order to ensure that everyone's needs are met.

Community Concerns

The Access, Equity and Inclusion domain, although placed at the end of this Community Assessment report should be considered throughout all of the domains of an Age and Dementia Friendly Community. Improvements that allow people who may be living with a disability or with dementia can benefit the whole community.

Top Priorities

- Create Community learning projects, e.g. community gardens; multi-cultural festivals or other forums/events, to encourage dialogue and understanding.
- Encourage active and healthy aging educational programs, such as book study groups, for all community members to increase awareness and understanding.
- Develop an outreach program that includes people at an increased risk of social isolation including CALD, A&TSI, LGBTI, living alone and homeless to remain engaged in their community.

"Healthy Aging for All" factors to consider:

- Race/Ethnicity
- Age
- Behavioral Health
- Country of Origin
- Dementia
- Disability
- Economic Security
- Gender
- Geographic Area
- Language
- LGBTQIA
- Religion
- Residential Setting
- Substance Use Disorder
- Veterans

