Cape May County Age Friendly Needs Assessment



NEW JERSEY HUMAN SERVICES
NEW JERSEY AGE FRIENDLY

RUTGERS UNIVERSITY
Cooperative Extension of Cape May County
New Jersey Agricultural Experiment Station

Progress Report
July 30, 2026

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Executive Summary

The 2026 Cape May County Age-Friendly Needs Assessment is designed to strengthen Cape May County's capacity to support all older adults, adults with disabilities, caregivers, and residents, ensuring they can live a high-quality life with dignity throughout the entire span of their lives. Cape May County has one of the smallest overall populations in New Jersey, with roughly 93,000 people in all, but has the oldest median age in New Jersey at 52 years old. Cape May County is home to roughly 29,500 adults ages 65+, representing more than 30% of the total population of Cape May County. In the coming decades, the population over 65 is expected to continue to grow. To ensure Cape May County can remain a place for people to thrive across all of their years, coordinated, age-friendly planning, infrastructure, services, and systems development is essential. This Needs Assessment complements the New Jersey Age-Friendly Blueprint, a comprehensive statewide framework designed to prepare New Jersey for its growing older adult population, as an opportunity to build healthier, resilient, inclusive communities for people of all ages.

A summary of the methods, principles, and findings from this effort is presented on page 3.

RESEARCH FRAMEWORK

AARP 8 Domains of Livability

METHODOLOGY FOCUS

Community-Based Participatory Research

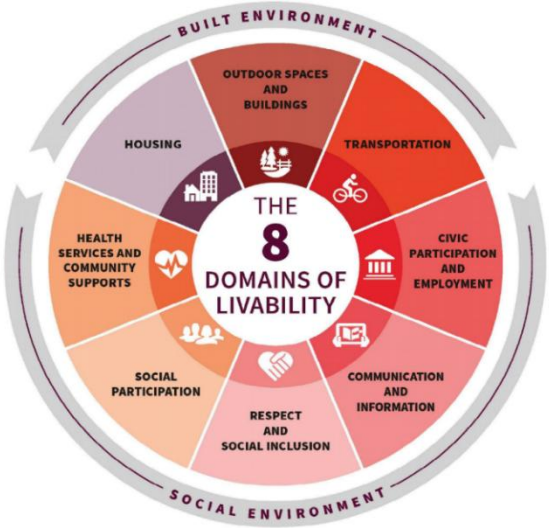
DATA COLLECTION AND STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

10 Key Informant Interviews

One-on-one conversations with regional leaders representing senior services, health care, first responders, and faith leaders

4 Focus Groups

Engaged 30 diverse participants (volunteers, providers, and older adults) at senior centers and virtually via Zoom



The AARP 8 Domains of Age-Friendly Communities are inspired by the Eight Domains of Age-Friendly Communities established by the World Health Organization, which is acknowledged by 60 countries globally. These principles guided the needs assessment process, analysis, and recommendations for the Cape May County Age-Friendly initiative.

Synthesis of 8 Domains

1. Affordable Accessible Housing

Unstable year-round rentals, limited assisted living options with long wait lists, distance from doctors and family, and affordability for care workers are concerns.

2. Transportation

Transportation is a barrier to medical care and social participation. Many Cape May older adults drive themselves to avoid social isolation.

3. Communication & Information

Many seniors are left out of information, activities, or coupons that require technology. Many seniors use local newspapers and public flyers for information.

4. Social Participation

Older adults value face-to-face interaction and recognize a need to invite and welcome newcomers.

5. Outdoor Spaces & Buildings

Parking is limited or far away from recreational facilities and other amenities, especially in the summer.

6. Health Services & Community Supports

Availability of care, transportation costs and insurance concerns are barriers to timely and consistent care.

7. Civic Participation & Employment

Workforce shortages in needed senior support areas impact the availability and quality of needed supports for older Cape May residents.

8. Respect & Social Inclusion

Seniors who choose Cape May for retirement struggle to be included in activities shared by word of mouth. The lack of technological skills to access online resources creates barriers for older adults.

Background on Age-Friendly Cape May County

In 2021, New Jersey became one of the 14 U.S. states accepted into the AARP Network of Age-Friendly States and Communities. Participating in the AARP Network demonstrates a commitment to government-led policy, systems, and practices that improve livability for older adults in their communities. Cape May County was well positioned to become an Age-Friendly Community due to its large senior population, existing programs, and its capacity to encourage municipalities throughout the county to seek this designation after the county itself achieves it. In early 2026, Cape May County became the 1,030th Age-Friendly designee.

This work grew from a longstanding and productive partnership between Rutgers Cooperative Extension (RCE), the County of Cape May, and the County Division of Aging and Disability Services. The partnership between RCE and the Cape May County Department of Aging and Disability Services dates back to the 1990s with the creation of the Grandparents Raising Grandchildren program. This enduring collaboration reflects a shared commitment to leveraging partnerships throughout Cape May County to address the needs of an aging population. The Cape May Age-Friendly initiative is designed to promote inclusion, engagement, and community participation through collaboration with local organizations while continuing to develop and strengthen the Cape May County Age-Friendly Coalition.

Cape May County has successfully implemented programs and services that support older adults in several priority areas identified in the New Jersey Age-Friendly Blueprint, including transportation, social participation, civic engagement, and employment. Rutgers Cooperative Extension (RCE) coordinates Age-Friendly Cape May County, promoting inclusivity and participation by collaborating with local partners while actively building the Cape May County Age-Friendly Coalition. RCE's Department of Family and Community Health Sciences also maintains a strong presence within county government. Located within a county office, the department benefits from established relationships with county agencies, departments, and university systems, enabling broad collaboration and resource sharing.

This Needs Assessment Progress Report represents an important first step toward making Cape May County truly Age-Friendly. The effort seeks to bring together community organizations, stakeholders, and residents to create a coordinated network that will guide the development of a data-driven action plan focused on improving the health, well-being, and quality of life of older adults.

With support from the New Jersey Department of Human Services (NJDHS), Division of Aging Services, 35th Street Consulting, a New Jersey-certified Women Business Enterprise (WBE) and Small Business Enterprise (SBE), was engaged to provide technical assistance in developing a strategic framework to strengthen the county's capacity to support older adults. This work is informed by data collected from community partners and residents throughout Cape May County.

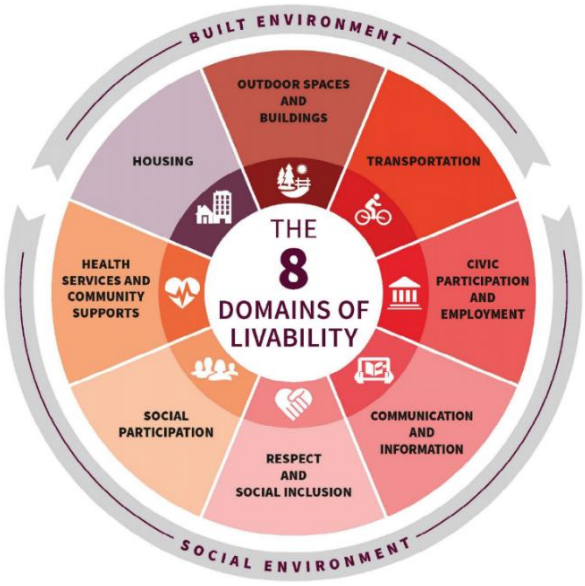
The 35th Street Consulting team is employing Community-Based Participatory Research (CBPR) methods to gather information for both this Progress Report and the comprehensive Needs Assessment. This approach actively engages community members and local partners in identifying community strengths, challenges, and priorities. The resulting data will inform future planning efforts, support the establishment of an Age-Friendly Cape May County, and further strengthen the Cape May County Age-Friendly Coalition.

Needs Assessment Progress Report Introduction

This Needs Assessment Progress Report complements the New Jersey Age-Friendly Blueprint, a statewide framework designed to prepare New Jersey for its rapidly growing older adult population. Created by NJDHS in May 2024, the Blueprint includes 59 actionable recommendations to support aging in place and to guide development of a coordinated, statewide Multisector Plan for Aging.

This Needs Assessment Progress Report was grounded in community engagement, gathering input from interviews, focus groups, and demographic analysis to highlight strengths and gaps in housing, transportation, outdoor spaces, social participation, communication, civic involvement, and health and social services. Findings from this assessment are designed to craft a data-driven framework based on local needs, strengths, and opportunities for broader engagement in evidence-based and promising practices in the priority areas.

This Needs Assessment is organized around the 8 Age-Friendly domains identified by AARP. The 8 Age-Friendly domains of livability as defined by AARP are reflected in the accompanying graphic and include:



- Outdoor spaces and buildings
- Housing
- Respect and social inclusion
- Communication and information
- Social participation
- Transportation
- Civic participation and employment
- Health services and community supports

The Needs Assessment Progress Report is designed to leverage the data collected across the 8 Age-Friendly domains listed above to create a Multisector Plan for Aging specific to Cape May County. The Multisector Plan for Aging will be shared across all Cape May County municipalities and the Cape May County Departments. The Cape May County Age Friendly Program welcomes continued community engagement, collaboration, and input to ensure that the systems, environments, and policies for Cape May County reflect the changing needs, strengths, and opportunities to ensure Cape May County is a safe, supportive, accessible, inclusive place for all residents to thrive as they age.

Methodology

Building Upon Existing Data

This Needs Assessment is designed to build upon existing strengths, including ensuring that existing plans, data sources, and research impacting the 8 Age-Friendly Domains are reviewed, referenced, and incorporated. These data sources provide important demographic, social, environmental, and economic context for Cape May County today.

Existing data related to each of the 8 Age-Friendly domains were reviewed, analyzed, and presented in the following pages. Key data sources reviewed include the US Census Bureau American Community Survey. Additional data were curated from the 2025 Cape May County Community Health Needs Assessment.

Primary Qualitative Research

A key component of this Needs Assessment is balancing an upstream, quantitative analysis of needs and external forces with a local perspective on opportunities and barriers across research, planning, and implementation. To this end, Community-Based Participatory Research (CBPR) methods were used to engage stakeholders and gather diverse perspectives to both define and address challenges with the people who experience them. CBPR is a partnership-based approach that involves stakeholders and organizational representatives throughout the research process and honors all participants' expertise and input to co-develop solutions grounded in local needs and strengths. This was accomplished using the following research methods:



Key Informant Interviews

Following the review of existing data, Key Informant Interviews were conducted with 10 individuals in leadership positions representing a variety of perspectives, selected by the Cape May County Age Friendly Program team. These one-on-one conversations are valuable in capturing high-level perspectives, gathering input on priority needs from a macro level, and collecting recommendations for problem-solving.

Focus Groups

Focus groups offer a valuable opportunity to uncover the "why" behind quantitative data. By engaging in in-depth discussions with small groups, facilitators can gather candid feedback from participants about their experiences, attitudes, awareness, and ideas related to living in Cape May County, New Jersey, and serving older adults across the County in various roles. These discussions help to highlight personal experiences and perceptions that quantitative data alone may not fully capture, offering a richer understanding of the quality of life for older adults and identifying areas for improvement in services and support. From May to June 2026, 35th Street Consulting conducted four (4) focus groups with 30 older adults and senior-serving professionals.

Key Findings

Professionals across Cape May consistently described Cape May County's aging challenges as rooted in housing instability, limited in-home and healthcare support, transportation barriers, communication gaps, and social isolation—issues intensified by workforce shortages, eligibility constraints, and the county's seasonal/resort economy. Older adults pointed to four interconnected themes: transportation affects healthcare access and social participation, communication determines whether residents can find support, housing influences independence, and community support helps older adults remain safe and engaged. Those findings are summarized below as Direct Needs, Policy Issues, and Strategic Themes:

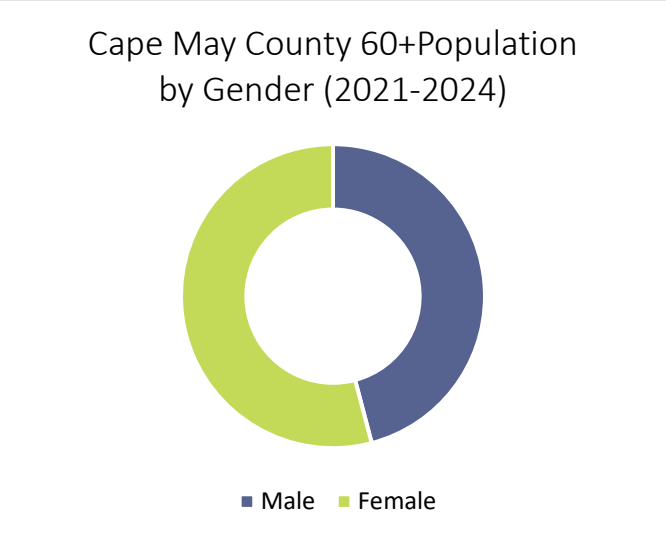
Direct Needs	Policy Issues	Strategic Themes
Healthcare access and navigation are difficult Limited primary and specialty care access, navigation Entering Medicare with unmanaged health conditions .	**Affordable and accessible housing is the dominant concern** Rising rents, , long senior-housing waitlists, lack of affordable year-round housing. Workforce shortages are tied to housing and wages	**Partnerships are a major strength,such as:** Food pantries, churches, senior centers, advisory councils, state agencies, healthcare providers, community resource events, HOAs, volunteer networks, and cross-county peers.
Welcoming language and leveraging local newspapers would improve communication and information Increase non-digital channels of information like local papers Caregivers/adult children also need information	**Eligibility rules and resource limits create frustration** People who fall just above income thresholds, limited-capacity programs that cannot meet demand.	**Social isolation and participation are recurring concerns** Loneliness, loss of spouses/family proximity, and the need for more welcoming social opportunities.
In-home supports demand exceeds supply Older adults want to remain at home but need support to do so safely.	**Transportation is a barrier for medical care and social participation** Transportation gaps lead to missed care, isolation, and difficulty accessing senior centers, food, and services.	**Safety, mental health, dementia, and emergency preparedness are emerging issues** Unsafe homes, dementia/mental health concerns, scams, falls, well-being checks, and emergency registries like Register Ready.

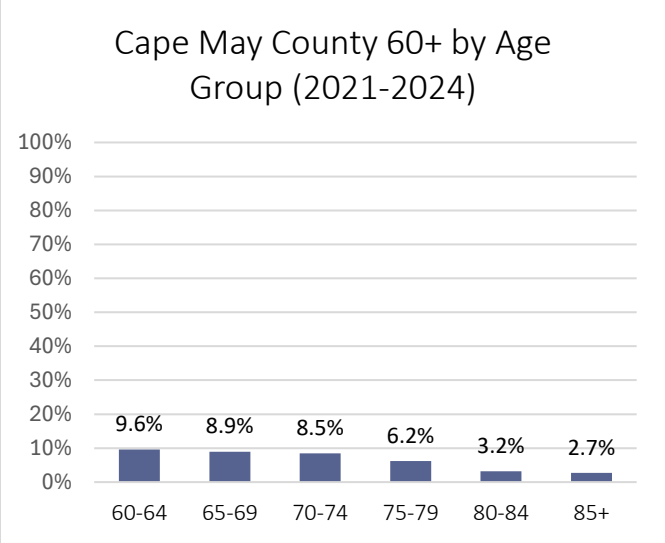
The following graphic details some of the consistent sentiments and specific statements from the Key Informant Interviews.



Demographics and Context of Cape May County

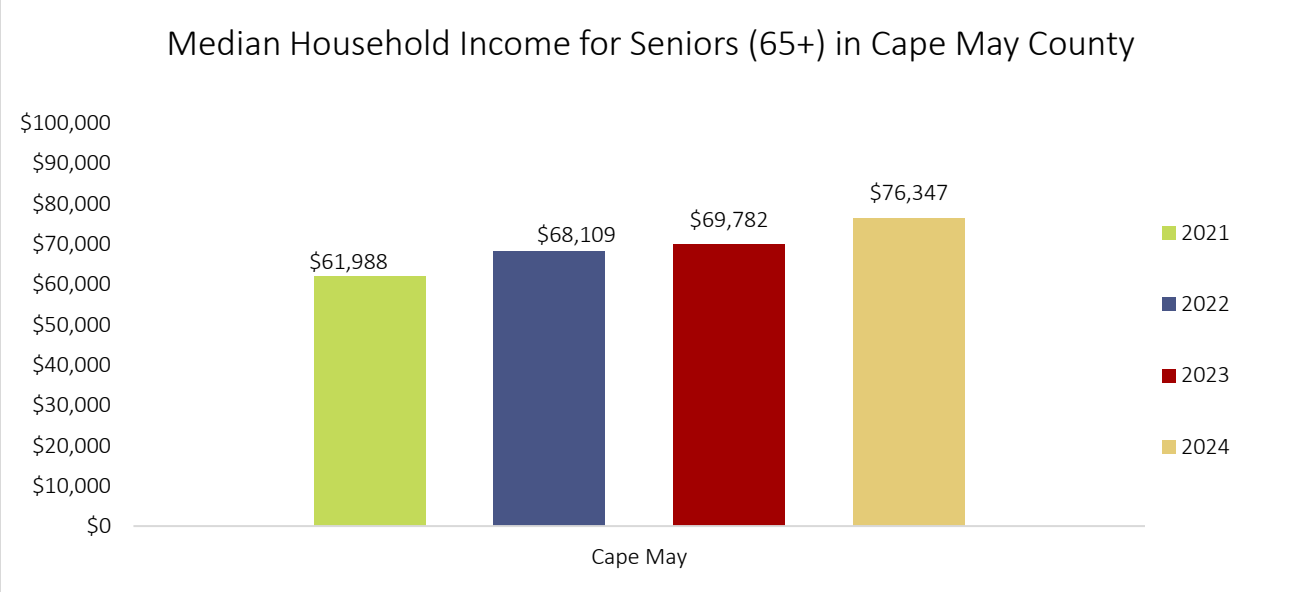
The population of Cape May County is primarily composed of younger seniors, particularly those aged 60 to 69, who make up the largest share at 18.5% of the county's total population. In contrast, there are fewer people in the older age brackets. Additionally, among the population aged 60 and older, there is a slightly higher proportion of females compared to males in Cape May County.





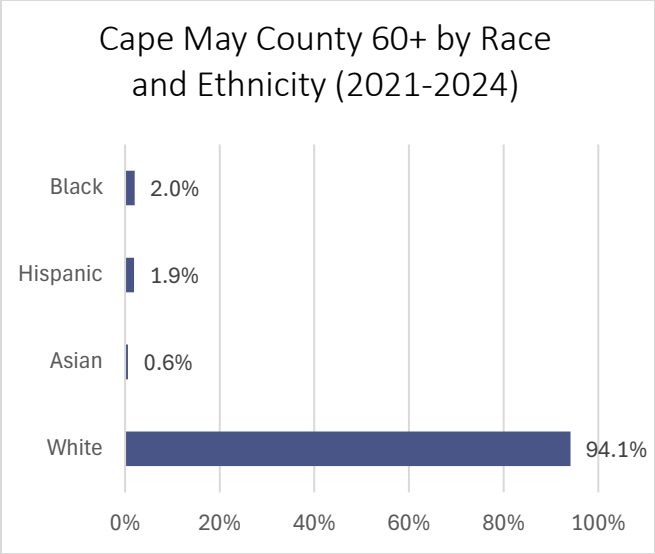
Source: US Census Bureau, American Community Survey

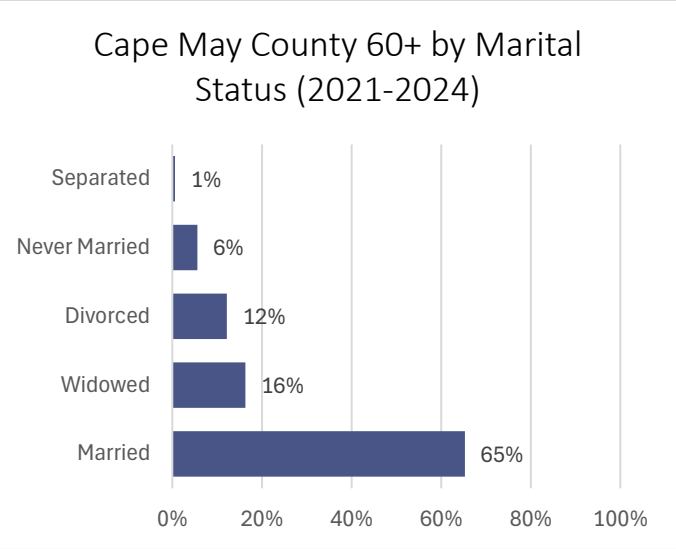
Financially, the median household income for Cape May County seniors aged 65+ grew steadily from $61,988 in 2021 to $76,347 in 2024.



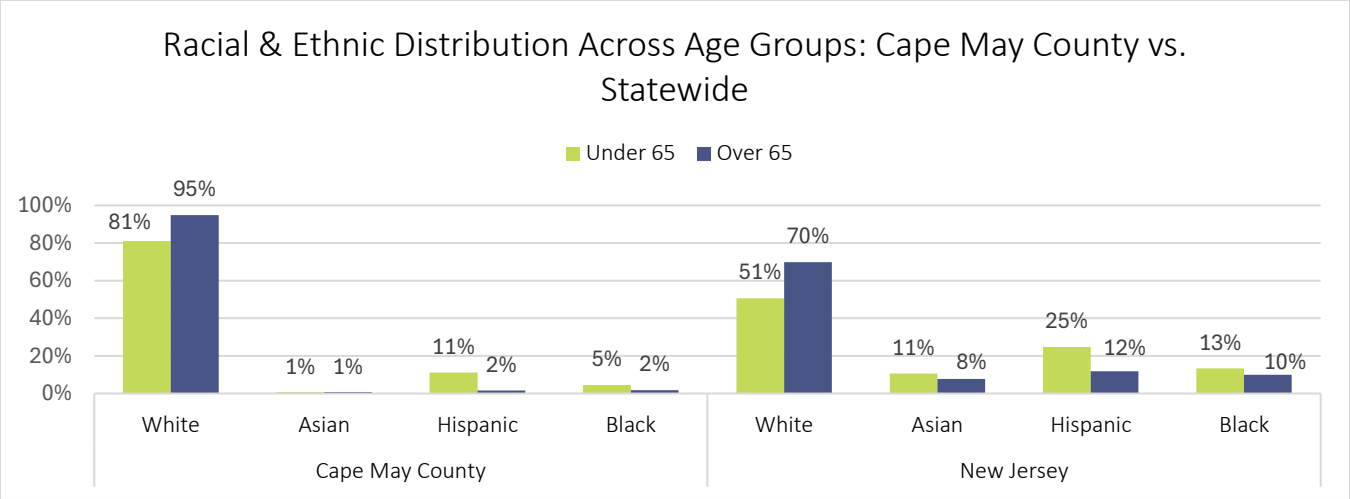
Source: US Census Bureau, American Community Survey

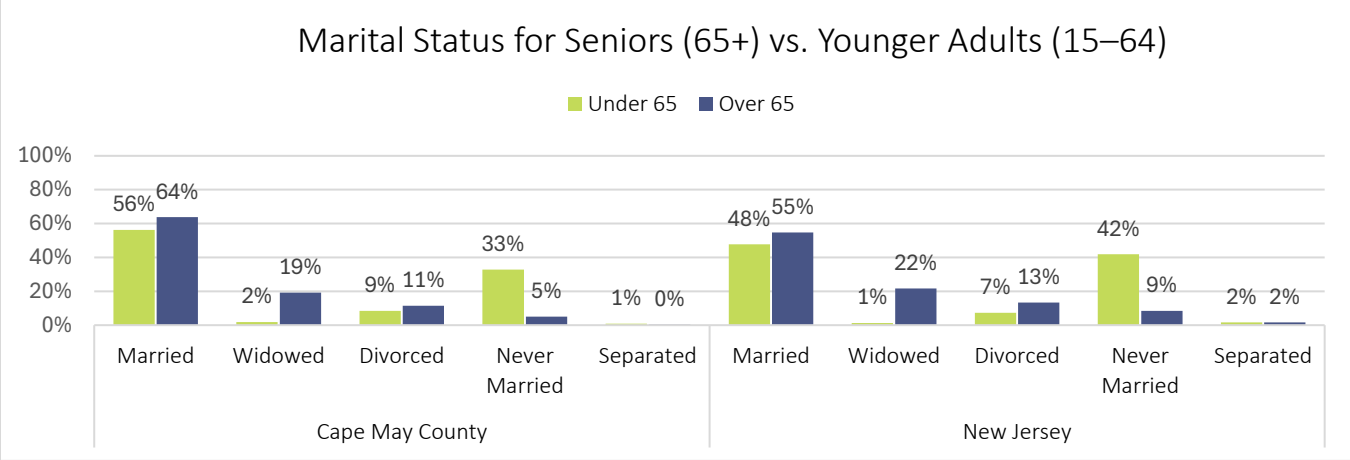
Most Cape May County seniors aged 60+ identify as white (94.1%), and nearly two-thirds are married (65%).





Source: US Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2021-2024





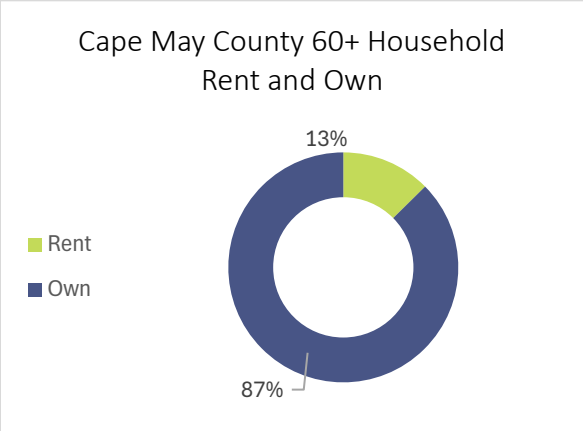
Source: US Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2021-2024

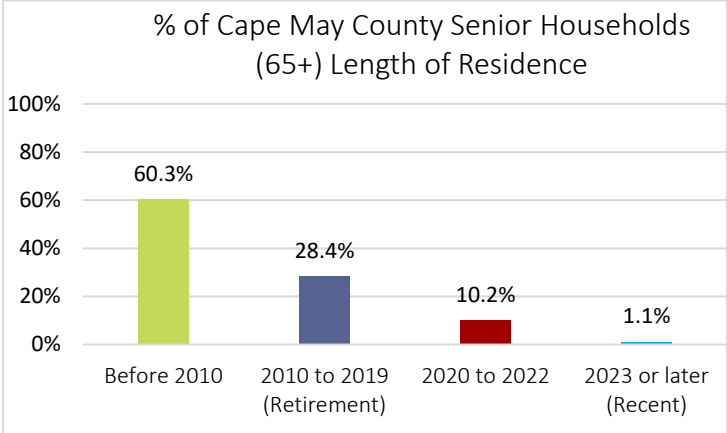
8 Age-Friendly Domains

Housing

Appropriate, affordable, stable housing is complicated to find and maintain for both older adults and younger supportive services workers in Cape May County.

Most older adults in Cape May County own their homes (75%), but over half still carry a mortgage.





Source: US Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2021-2024

Older adult residents in Cape May County are diverse in terms of their tenure as Cape May County residents, their income base, and whether they rent or own their current homes. Concerns that are common among all older adult residents and among professionals serving older adults are long waitlists and financial barriers to accessing in-home support and assisted living opportunities. As a tourist-driven economy, many year-round residents of Cape May County live in more rural areas of the county where resources, including transportation resources, are often far away.

More than half (60.3%) of Cape May County adults over age 65 have lived year-round in Cape May County for more than 15 years, and many choose to remain in their homes. Focus group participants who represented this group discussed the need to continue driving to access necessities of everyday life, difficulty accessing in-home care, challenges with the availability and affordability of assisted living options, and concern about social isolation as their health declines or their spouses and families are far away. Focus group respondents expressed appreciation for providers and first responders who conduct wellness checks for them, and also expressed concerns for friends, neighbors, and others who lack the capacity or resources to leave home easily. Many older adults in this category have long-standing relationships and activities that they participate in, such as book clubs, faith-based activities, and strong neighborly relationships.

> *"Over 60% of housing inventory is 2nd homeowners; minimal were up for year-round rental (maybe 3%)."*

About 35% of older adults in Cape May County retired from another location. Focus group participants representing this segment of the population tended to be more financially comfortable and less likely to live in more remote rural parts of Cape May County. However, despite these advantages, focus group respondents in this group were more likely to struggle with finding home care and handyman services, social activities, services, and supportive relationships, despite living in more resource-dense environments and having some financial resources. The explanations for this touched on two other domains – transportation and communication, and information. Regarding transportation, because many long-term residents have been accustomed to driving themselves, some of the established routes for senior-serving transportation have adjusted circulation because of low ridership, impacting access for new residents. There is also a sentiment that information and schedules for local activities such as clubs or social activities are communicated via word of mouth, which newcomers are less likely to hear.

"There was a guy sitting across the table, and at the end, he came over and he tapped me on the shoulder, and he said, 'I've got a neighbor who does handyman stuff…and I had him for years. He finally told me, 'Stop telling people, because I've got a full 40-hour-a-week job."

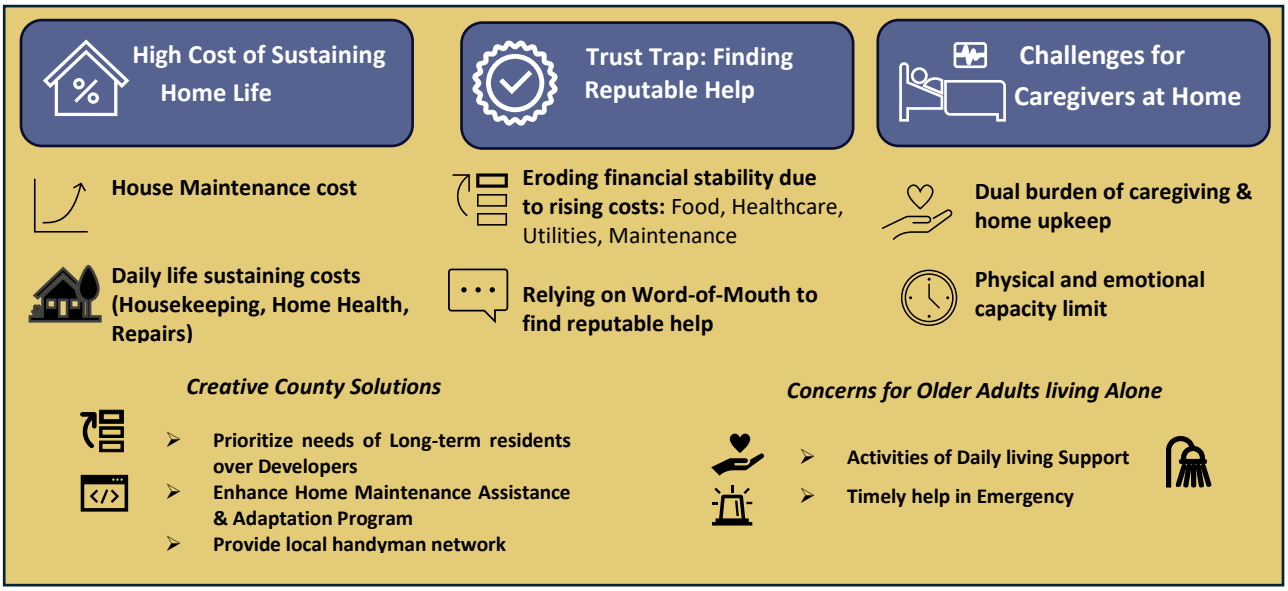
Among interviewees and focus group participants who are professionals in roles that provide care or support to older adult residents of Cape May County, housing was described as a primary concern. Professionals described the unique rental market environment that is driven by the summer tourism economy, including lucrative short-term rentals over the summer months, as a component of an unpredictable and expensive year-round rental stock. The unpredictability of the year-round rental stock negatively impacts housing stability for older adult renters as well as for younger professionals. Housing unpredictability can make it difficult for service providers to recruit and retain professionals who do not already own a home in Cape May County or are unfamiliar with the seasonal economic and population changes in Cape May County. Professionals also noted that recent increases in the costs of food, property taxes, utilities, home maintenance, and healthcare are threatening the financial stability of many of the older adults they serve as well as themselves as year-round workers living in Cape May County. As a result, the financial "in-between" group of seniors who need additional support is met with social services and health care providers who also have similar needs due in part to local housing challenges, straining the available resources for everyone.

"It's tough to recruit younger people to work in Cape May County because of the housing market which is a problem for the workforce."

"We've had 2 separate households that have relatively low income, but it's still too high to get into seniors housing. The owner is selling their rentals, and there is nowhere for them to go in the county."

Older adults are primarily concerned about long waiting lists for assisted living facilities and social isolation from living in more rural areas. Meanwhile, younger senior services providers face challenges in finding affordable, year-round housing in Cape May too. The seasonal resort economy in Cape May impacts the availability of affordable and accessible rentals, contributing to housing instability for both retired renters and younger workers. This housing instability can also impact the availability of health and supportive services for seniors by pricing out workers.

Summary of Findings:



In Your Words: Housing

"Lots of people retire here and lost spouses and children, and then becomes only one person left here as their needs are getting greater and greater."

"I see a lot of need for house cleaning, people to volunteer to keep these properties clean inside. I'm delivering meals to properties where my feet are sticking to floors."

"A lot of what I hear from my mom's friends and social workers is like a handyman don't have access to a handyman and need little things fixed throughout the house."

"I'm a terrible housekeeper. I took good care of my husband, but when you take care of your husband in such an intense way that I had you can't do the housework and take care of the husband."

"[If I had a magic wand] create affordable housing units, accessible many of them, lots of them … over the county. When I say affordable, it means affordable to anyone coming in from very low income to moderate and higher income, and accessible has modifications already built in with more community, effective community with all the services right where they live in little villages."

"Over 60% of housing inventory are 2nd homeowners; minimal were up for year-round rental (maybe 3%). Many owners didn't get rent during the eviction moratorium, so when it was lifted they switched to get their money back [leading to evictions]. Property values are still really, really high. I would be scared to death to rent something here right now because it's so unstable and our rentals are so much higher than fair market rent, so you can't use Section 8."

"Because if you try that Angie's List, oh my god, you're going to be contacted by all these contractors, and know that they didn't just pay to get on Angie's List. In a small community, that's exactly…When the fella comes up, if he unfortunately puts a magnetic sign on his truck, and he's a painter, and he shows up at one house in the neighborhood, people just have a compulsion to walk by a picture, to have it for later, and then they use that for references. And then, even though the advertising and the social media, there's this trust between people. People you know is mostly what drives a lot of this."

"[If I had a magic wand] Low-income housing, someone who could get a small apartment for $1000-1200/month. In my mind there's plenty of land to do that but there's political will opposed to that. It would have to be on a public transportation route, and you could put it away from the 'big homes' so it's not in people's faces but it's still in a nice area."

Regarding assisted living: "They don't give you a referral. It's like they're trying to hold onto you, even if they can't accommodate you for whatever reason."

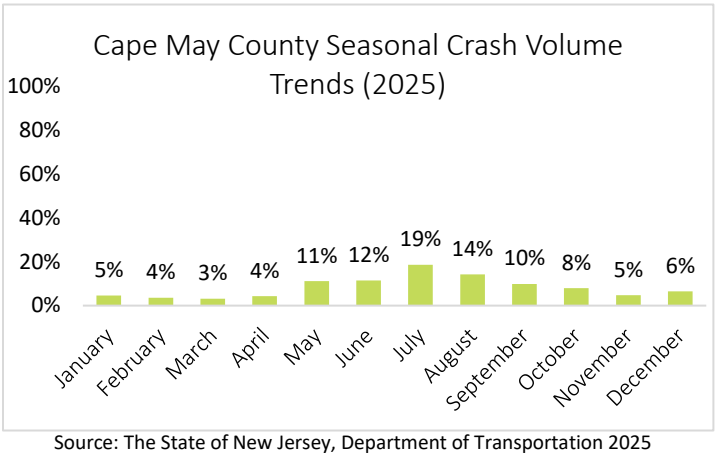
"It's tough to recruit younger people to work in Cape May County because of the housing market, which is a problem for the workforce."
"If you look at all the resorts here, they need cleaning people, waitstaff, etc. There are not a lot of places to put these workers up for the summer. They don't allow boarding houses anywhere down here."

"[One of the biggest barriers is] the shift to AirBnBs for properties that used to host year-round renters."

Transportation

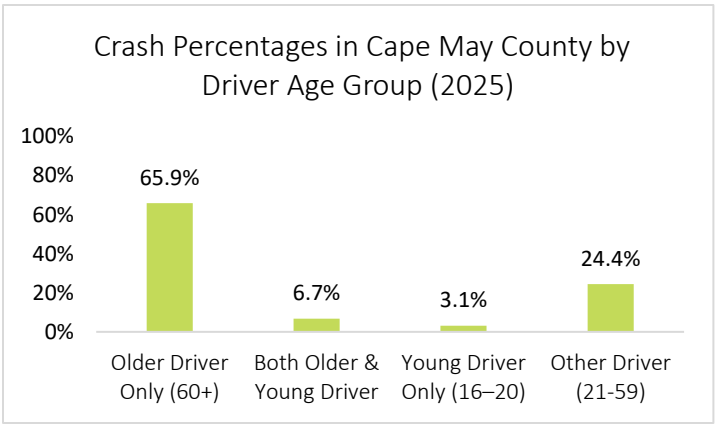
Limited transportation resources lead seniors to continue driving, which reduces the utilization and availability of other transportation options and increases isolation for non-drivers.

Losing the ability to decide when and where to travel undermines older adults' physical health, social participation, and emotional well-being. Limited, unreliable, or inaccessible transportation options force many to curtail medical visits, errands, and social activities, increasing isolation and dependence on others for everyday needs. As people age, driving can become challenging due to poor night vision, limited parking options, high gas prices, and road maintenance issues.



Source: The State of New Jersey, Department of Transportation 2025

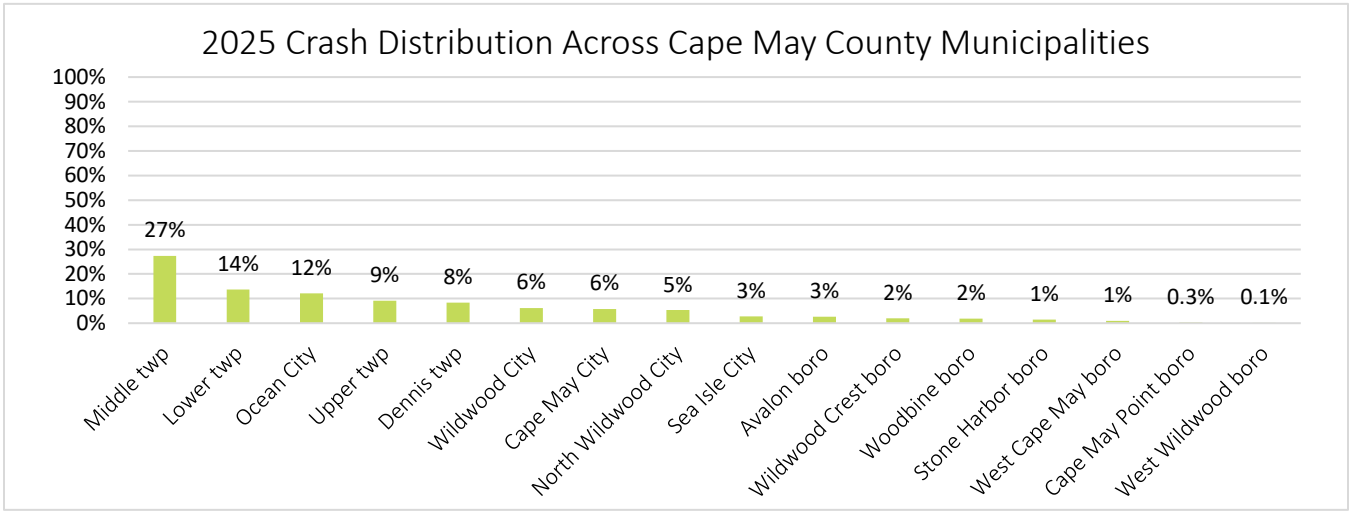
[1]All of the older adults who participated in the focus groups shared that they still drive, even as some admitted that they know they should not but see few viable alternatives. Participants also noted that on-street parking is a barrier due to digitized parking meters, and "handicap parking" that is located an unreasonable distance from building entrances, including at the doctor's office. Additionally, the "parking problem" becomes something altogether different in the summer months, when Cape May County's population of tourists increases car and pedestrian traffic. Data from the New Jersey Department of Transportation (NJDOT) show an increase in traffic accidents during the summer months when the population swells with visiting tourists. NJDOT data also show that many Cape May car crashes involve older drivers (ages 60+), showing an increased risk of injury for older drivers and others.



Source: The State of New Jersey, Department of Transportation 2025

> *"One of my patients had to cancel today because they got in an accident on the way here. It is horrific. People leave their brains at the bridge, and they cross over it, and the brains stay somewhere else, and then drive."*

[1] *Note*: Older driver -Crashes with an older driver and no young driver, both older & young driver -multi-vehicle crashes involving both age groups, Young Driver-Crashes with a young driver and no older driver, Other Driver-Crashes involving drivers aged 21–59



Source: The State of New Jersey, Department of Transportation 2025

Focus group participants living in assisted living communities indicated that transportation services from assisted living have been reduced due to lack of use by residents who live there. They believe that the limited hours and locations of provided transportation caused some assisted living residents to continue driving themselves, reducing demand for coordinated transportation. This had the secondary effect of both increasing safety risks for older drivers and others and also increasing the social isolation of assisted living residents who are unable or unwilling to drive anymore.

"The jitneys and things don't come anymore because people didn't take advantage of them."

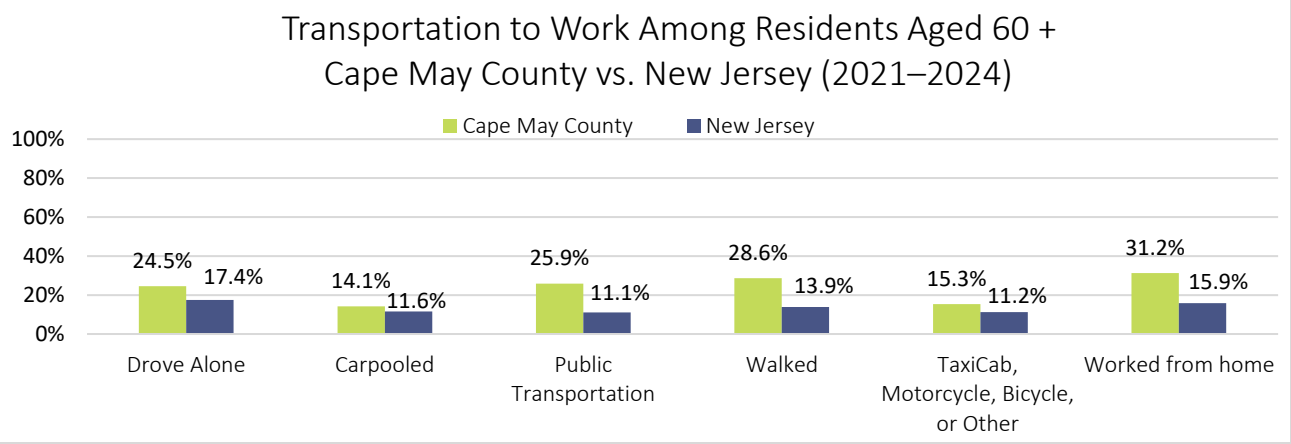
"Now, everybody thinks that you get free transportation to doctors, but it's $30 to go to a doctor's appointment. Now, once you have to go to Summers Point, there's the additional charge, it's by the mile. And one of the ladies told me just recently about. She had to go to her cardiologist at Egg Harbor Township. It was $50 each direction."

Many older adults participating in focus groups described needing specialist health care services that are only available outside of Cape May County, often very long distances away. In these scenarios, most seniors described needing to pay $50 or more for transportation to necessary medical care, even when the transportation is coordinated by their health care provider, assisted living center, or through a subsidized service, because of the distance. This limits access to necessary health care. For older adults who choose to drive these long distances themselves, there was widespread discomfort in driving at night, which also limited access to both health care that is far from home as well as any other social activities that might run into evening hours.

"Cape May County is beautiful but it's also fairly rural and transportation is a barrier for people seeking services and there's a more limited number of medical services. Unless you are in an income bracket or have a layer of wealth that you can drive out of the County or go anywhere you want."

Older adults who participated in both focus groups all reported driving and having a somewhat active social life, but they also expressed concern for the physical, social, emotional, and financial well-being of other older people who could not drive. Providers participating in interviews and focus groups confirmed

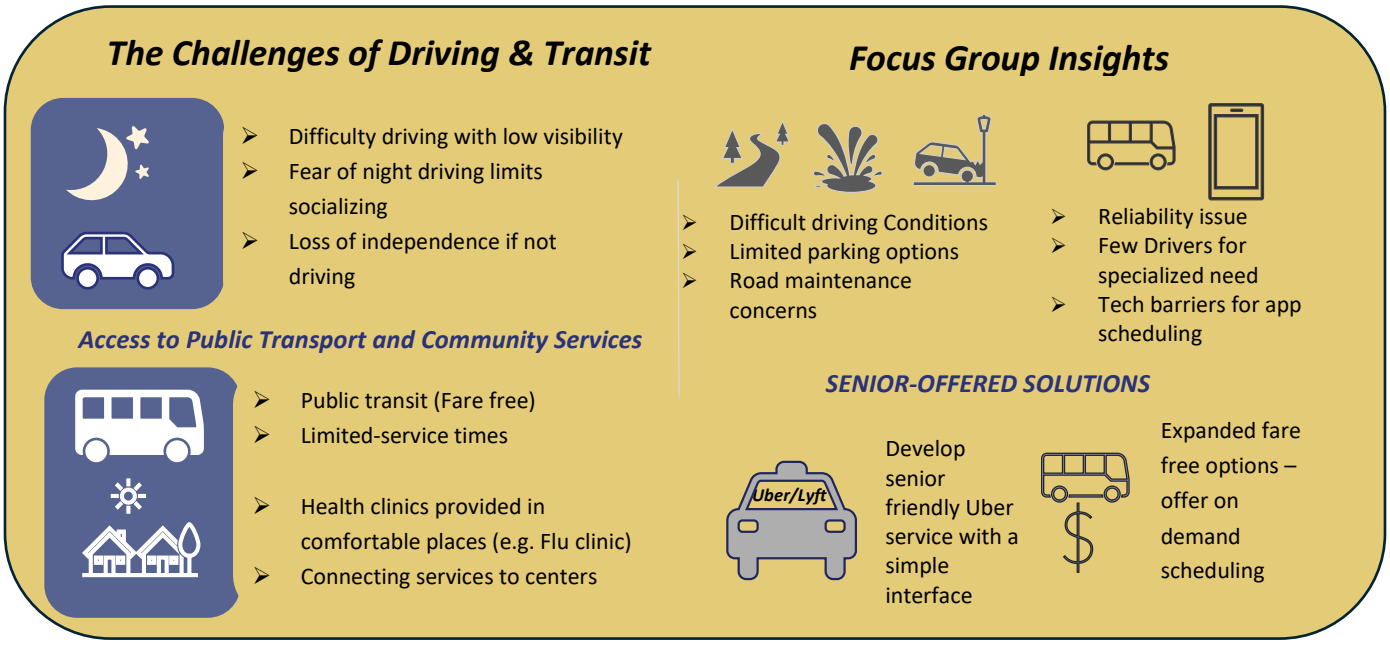
and shared this concern. Professionals who participated in focus groups and interviews discussed the need to take care out to the community to combat the transportation barriers that increase isolation. They suggested conducting collaborative outreach with staff from other agencies to provide for a variety of needs at once, rather than relying on residents to come to them, as one way to reduce the transportation burden.



Source: US Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2021-2024

Summary of Findings:

Some of the older adults in the focus groups who still drive offered some solutions to ameliorate some of the limitations of public or shared transit options, as well as parking concerns.



There are a variety of alternative transportation options available to Cape May County residents, and to seniors in particular. Some of the factors limiting sustainable utilization and accessibility include:

- Limited hours of operation
- Seasonal changes in parking, traffic, resources
- Rural nature creates expensive travel
- Restrictions on destination types
- Challenges for people with mobility concerns
- Technology requirements are confusing

In Your Words: Transportation

"We have Fare Free but it's not the easiest to maneuver and not everyone qualifies."

"We go to their senior center for flu clinic and med management. We have been going into the community where they are comfortable for health services and health education."

"[We need' Uber service for seniors, an app that says get me here and someone gets them where they want to go. I'm impressed with how tech savvy older adults are becoming. Someone would have to set it up for them but they can use it once it's there."

"And as the years have gone by, more and more of us have dropped out of the night driving thing. We've got one driver now, and if more than four people want to go there, I'm not sure what we're supposed to do."

"A lot of us are driving that shouldn't be driving that car, because we have no other options."

"But, it's just, it's getting harder, you know, to be able to get everybody where we need to go. So it's the sort of, like, the senior citizens who, at that station, they're, like, segregated kids all. Naturally, people like to do things, maybe on the weekends and all that stuff."

"Transportation is an issue but people have learned to deal with it. We have patients who have to take 2 different buses to get to us, and what should be a 20-minute car ride, is 2-3 hours. They just plan, it's their whole day. There's a lot of shared, one car between the family or the extended family. Grandma and the baby are also coming to the appointment and then they're going to the grocery store afterwards. The whole family is out because it's the one car."

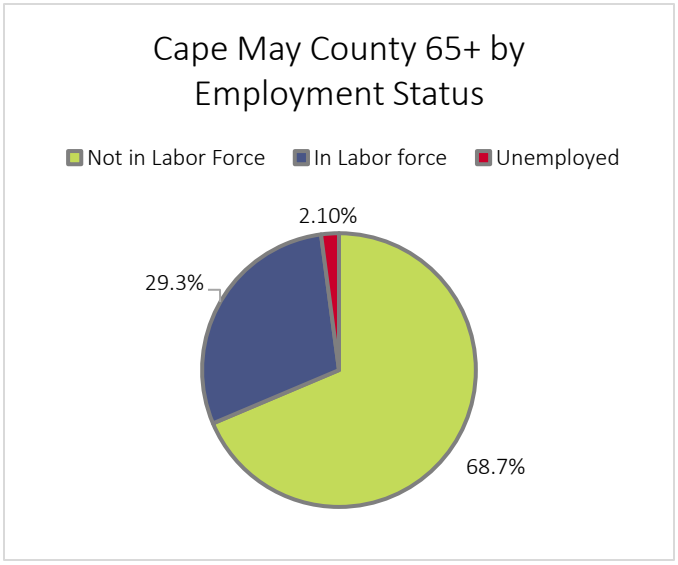
"There's Fare Free but it's so limited and it's not medical so if people have medical/mobility limitations, it's not accessible."

"And, you know, she shouldn't be driving. [but] she still drives. We only let her drive, really, around town in the off-season. Now we try to take her to where she needs to go and all that kind of stuff."

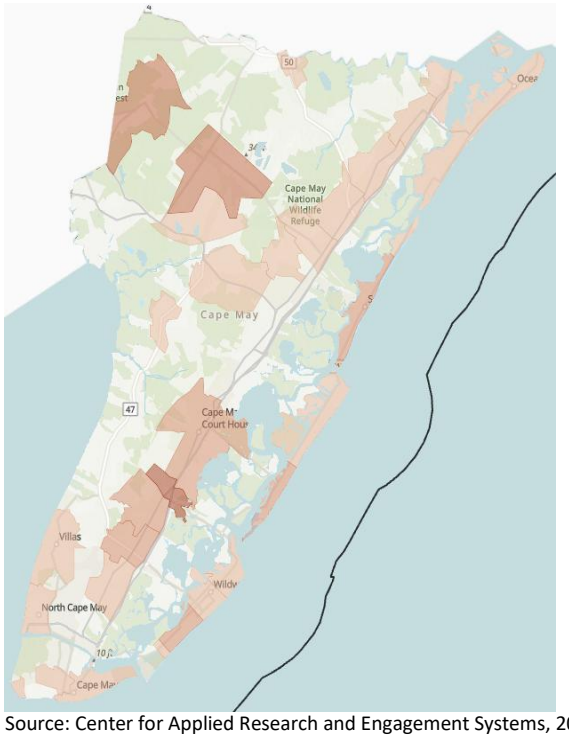
Civic Participation and Employment

Most Cape May County residents are engaged in working for their community through employment, volunteering, or neighborliness, regardless of their age.

Many people with means choose to retire in Cape May County and have the financial means to remain comfortable. However, pockets of poverty among older adults do exist in Cape May. Nearly 1/3 of Cape May seniors continue to work beyond a comfortable retirement age to afford housing and other essential expenses. Many vital resources in Cape May—such as food programs, housing assistance, communication services for homebound individuals, and other essential services—heavily rely on the volunteer efforts and expertise of local seniors. Both situations are fragile and would greatly benefit from improved infrastructure support to enhance their sustainability.



Cape May County is home to an increasing number of "comfortably" retired people. They do not work for pay, and do not desire to work for pay. However, many people's identities are tied to their "work," and they are interested in meaningful avenues by which they can continue to contribute. This was true across the focus group participants.



Source: Center for Applied Research and Engagement Systems, 2020-2024

Many older adults and professionals in the focus groups talked about financial strain, volunteer roles, and the difficulty of finding and retaining workers in senior services and home health care. Participants consistently noted struggles experienced by people "in the middle," meaning people who do not qualify for income-based supports but do not have enough to be able to afford the high costs of fee-for-service supports. Additionally, focus group participants felt that investments made for local seniors favored activities geared towards active seniors and tourists, such as pickleball courts, over higher-need, less mobile older adults. They observed several barriers to people's basic needs being met and are equally committed to helping individuals to the extent that they can.

Cape May County Culture is Special

Many of the professionals who participated in focus groups and Key Informant interviews described providing extraordinary levels of care for older distant relatives and neighbors who live in Cape May County who do not have children or other family members available to assist with coordinating and planning care and daily living supports as they age. The stories shared by older adults participating in focus groups confirmed that they also supported their neighbors in similar ways and also received support from neighbors and others who "check up on them" regularly. Cape May County has a relatively small year-round population, and as a rural, tourist - driven economy, has less access to many types of resources than other more densely populated parts of New Jersey. The Cape May culture of neighborliness is special and fragile. While the culture of volunteer, neighborly support is wonderful, it does run the risk of creating an unsustainable emotional, physical, and financial strain on younger adults who carry most of the responsibility, particularly as the cost of living increases and investment in formal social supports for all ages decreases, driving up needs for already vulnerable people.

In Your Words: Civic Participation and Employment

" I have my neighbor that I was taking care of her husband for the most part, and now he's passed away, so now I'm taking care of her as she's getting older. She's 88 now. I got someone to come in, they have the financial means, but it took a lot. We had to do a reverse mortgage and all this kind of stuff, and work through all of that, but she… because she didn't want to go into an assisted living, all this kind of stuff, but she really wasn't safe to live by herself, so…you know, I'm down there at least two, three times a week, and she's only a couple houses down from me, but just checking on her."

"Most communities now, they fulfill… they feel that they've done their obligation for seniors if they build more pickleball courts. And so there's a… there's a big gap now between the active seniors and the folks that literally can't get a ride to go to the doctor. This whole thing in the middle is missing."

"I retired early and came down to the shore and was looking for an opportunity that let me use my head. I was volunteering at an animal shelter and organizations here and there but I really like the fact that I have to think on the job."

"They need more effort the other 9 months of the year for the 90,000 people who live here year-round."

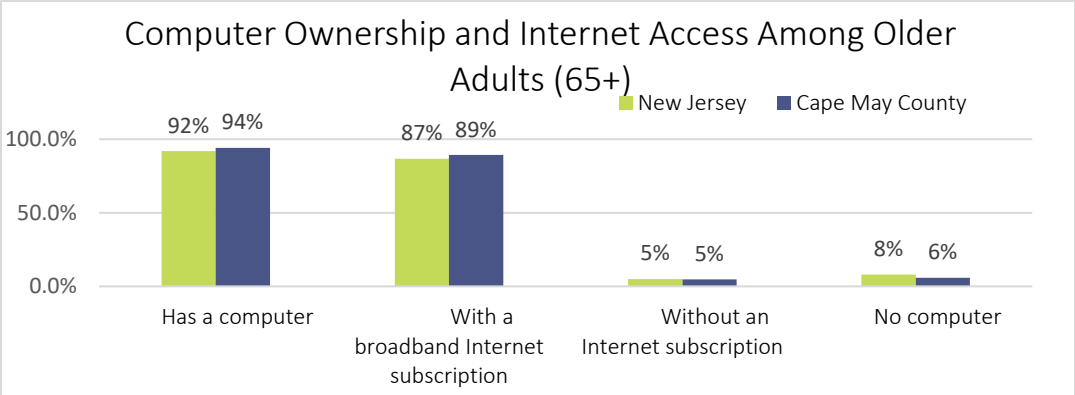
"When you start talking to people about that, it hurts, honestly, people who have lived their lives, and thought they would retire ok, and they're not ok. That has to become a focal point for legislation, for politicians. That's a social problem."

"It's tough to recruit younger people to work in Cape May County because of the housing market which is a problem for the workforce."

Communication and Information

Older Adults in Cape May County are interested in local activities and connections and use the two local newspapers and word of mouth as their main sources of information.

Older adults in Cape May County are interested in local activities and resources, and continue to read, trust, and use the local papers.



Source: US Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2021-2024

Technology Barriers

Seniors have varying levels of comfort and skill when it comes to using technology. In Cape May County, this comfort is associated with age, as older seniors tend to feel less comfortable with technology compared to younger seniors. Income also plays a role; higher-income seniors, many of whom held white-collar jobs before retiring, generally report greater comfort in using technological resources. Regardless of these factors, all of the older adults who participated in the focus groups read the local papers and relied upon them for important information about resources, activities, and local current events.

> *"But again, the whole trend now of nobody reading the newspapers, this is a self-fulfilling prophecy. They don't deliver them anymore, so you have to go get one, right? That's a big thing, a lack of computers."*

> *"None of us know a lot [about technology]. Like, I'm still going around and around with the [supermarket], trying to get on their thing so I can use their digital coupons. … I mean, that's discriminating against older people, right? They do that a lot, a lot now, because everything they want, everything on apps and everything…"*

In general, older adults and professional/volunteers agreed that improvements in communication about resources, planning, navigating care, and activities should be made. Many needed resources, such as scheduling medical appointments, applying for services, or accessing coupons for the supermarket, require internet access and comfort with computers or smartphones, skills and resources many older adults do not have. The proliferation of online tools to access care, resources, and coupons makes life simpler for some but is a barrier to access for many older people. They describe this as a "tax" applied only to those who struggle with technology. The technology barrier not only limits access to needed resources, but it also compromises the dignity of the older person, fueling discrimination and discouragement. Overall, respondents would prefer to get information from the local papers.

Centralized Source of Information for All Ages

> *"The fact is, there is not a centralized place to get information that you need specifically for the elderly, or, in my case, old. I have found that most of the employees in the county, even the few state employees I have met, are either, about to retire, or they're kids. Kids, you know, 20 years, and they don't understand the problems that someone older than 40 or 50 or 60 might, have to endure on a daily basis."*

Older adults and the professionals who serve them also agreed that there needs to be more information available about planning for aging that is based on facts and explains clearly the advantages and disadvantages of support options as needs increase. Older adults and younger professionals all describe struggles with learning how to navigate aging supports, from Medicare and Social Security enrollment to accessing health care to making housing decisions and the emotional and financial components that accompany those changes. Many respondents indicated they regretted having to learn about support for their loved ones during a crisis because a plan was not in place. Many indicated that they would have benefitted from a more centralized source of information about resources.

Age Friendly Communication Practices

> *"If there would be a way to make sure whoever answers his phones knows that you are of a certain age, and you want help because of that."*

> *"Even if you advertise heavily, if people don't understand the vocabulary [of the program/service] they're not going to look into it. The presentation of these groups confused people even more."*

Others admitted that some sources do exist but feel confused or "not invited" by the names of the resources or the announcement of the activity or information session. Many older adults indicated that they often need more time to respond to questions over the phone, and can feel dismissed, misunderstood, and discredited when their inquiries do not meet the pace of speech expected when they call places to ask questions. Most respondents, particularly adults ages 60-75, did not consider themselves "seniors," and were hesitant to participate in activities or information sessions labeled with that word.

> *"That was…me with my grandmother…If I was more informed on, like, how to guide as you age and you need help, because I really wasn't, and she ended up being in her home, way later than she should have, and it got to the point of no return. She went to assisted living. But I think… and her experience was horrible, because she was so old that she didn't want to make friends; she didn't know where she was half the time. I think painting a better picture of what assisted living and those homes are, not, like, a nursing home. If she went in, like, 10 years or 5 years prior, she would have been, socially, able to make friends and do all these things. I felt like she probably wouldn't have declined as fast."*

The professionals themselves also indicated that they and their peers would benefit greatly from clear information about education regarding aging for themselves, their clients, and their loved ones, but would also hesitate to participate in sessions described as being for seniors. Increasing opportunities for educating people of all ages about planning options would go a long way to increasing the quality of life for older adults in Cape May County and their families and neighbors.

In Your Words: Communication and Information

"I think, for me, I think it was lack of knowledge of what is available for those people who don't qualify for Medicaid and also aren't millionaires, you know, like, an in-between, because that's where we were. I really knew nothing; I didn't think I would have to know all these things, but I was put in that situation that I was the one to have to make these decisions, and even she was not informed of what you're supposed to do in those years like planning. I think there's not a lot of planning."

"A lot of people are working under the assumption that people's tech skill level is growing but the people above us, the 75+, the skill level just is not there."

"They're [social services] understaffed. They can't take the 100s of calls that come in but they tell them they can go online but people don't have that skillset. As much as you might want to help them [do it online] the systems don't allow you. They require certain documents, prove identity, so they would have to give up certain information that we're not [as volunteers] supposed to have. If my wife wanted to get access to my MIL's social security or banking, it's very difficult. So, when people don't even have family it's impossible. And then you have to worry about people being scammed."

"[We need] ease of communication, giving them direct lines of communication to help them with their needs. Right now, if you call the Department of Aging, they're going to ask you 4 questions before they get you where you need to go, and then you have to hope they have someone. [We need] to simplify how a person can get the help they need."

"If there were a dedicated elderly concierge, just for the elderly."

"You call any, any of these bureaucratic agencies. And… If you get them the first… on the first go, It's a miracle."

"That's discriminating against older people. Right. They do that a lot, a lot now, because everything they want, everything on apps and everything…You know, I'm fortunate I can get my way through it, but my mother can't do that. I have to help her with it."

"Many people don't even know that that's available to them. Nothing is ever…put in the newspapers. You know, we would… You have booklets from…Department of Aging, they pass them out, like, once a year at the AARP meetings, but that still doesn't reach most of the people."

"One thing that we have in common is probably Social Security, and that might be a safe place for a logical place where most people would look for information. I know that's a federal government thing, but there's county offices."

"[When we call for services] could we have menu options for people over a certain age, like 'press 3 for Spanish' but instead it's 'press 3 if you're over 65?'"

"We don't publicize enough in the papers because it's costly, but that's where the elderly are looking for things. [The papers] they're not getting delivered and you have to go to the local Wawa or 7/11 to pick it up."

Respect and Social Inclusion

Cape May has a year-round community of older adults that includes both those who have retired to the area and long-time residents who have called Cape May home for decades.

Becoming an Age-Friendly County reflects a shared belief that everyone deserves to age with dignity. Centering dignity in providing care requires making an effort to understand the particular barriers and stigmas that prevent people from engaging in needed resources, and to prioritize proactive, welcoming messages. Older adults desire autonomy, engagement, activity, and purpose. They do not want to *have* to rely on others to meet basic needs, and many are actively grieving this shift. It is important for everyone, particularly service providers, to remember that even when older adults are asking for help, they are not *helpless.*

Many social activities in Cape May County are advertised by word of mouth, which can make finding community engagement activities and the courage to both make and welcome new friends challenging. Residents who have lived in Cape May for decades shared their experiences of participating in various activities and groups for many years, including book clubs, neighborhood game nights, and informal social clubs. They acknowledged that while they themselves are socially active, they are aware of others in the community who are isolated.

> *"Okay. I think that's part of my issue, is I'm still kind of struggling to find that. And so this is 2 years after retirement. So, I was happy to come today to some, you know, meeting with them."*

Seniors who have moved recently to Cape May County to retire described difficulty learning about social opportunities and struggled to make friends and grow social support networks. Providers serving older adults also agreed that older adults who have moved to Cape May to retire often struggle to build local networks of friends, even when they are active, seeking engagements, and are not financially constricted.

> *"And they have classes here for probably about distance and back, but I've never had any friends that wanted to go. I have to have friends that like to do the things that I would like to do, so I've never been to [Cape May MAC events], and they have nice lecture series and movie series and things like that."*

Some of the barriers that older adults and providers described were hesitation based on not knowing anyone who is participating, being unsure if one is welcome, and the emotional, physical, and sometimes financial effort of trying something new. Having a friend to accompany them or an individual invitation to participate made a big impact in ensuring people felt welcome and went a long way towards reducing isolation and improving one's quality of life. Among older adults who are caregivers for spouses, children, or others, having support and welcoming encouragement to access the care, socialization, and support they need is particularly important. Additional barriers include limited transportation options, the costs of programs, and concerns about health and finances.

> *"Once you get into it, it just flows, but if you retire and then don't do any of this stuff, it's really hard to get engaged in the first step."*

In Your Words: Respect and Social Inclusion

But I think… the frustration is that I do have a lot of friends that don't engage at all.

"Many of my friends are overburdened by being the only ones caring for older family members, and its hard and costly: taking them to appointments, having a home health aide and putting them in a nursing home, and running them around, it's a lot."

"It's taking a lot to get her to get back into the things, and it's a lot of pushing from me. We'll call this one. Call that one. Let's go. You always tell, you know, and then I start fussing at her, you know. You always tell me. No, you don't want to go out to dinner."

"[There's a] lack of information on wills and things. 60% of seniors in a room for a meeting with a surrogate judge, had no wills, no documents."

"I'm concerned about my own emotional health. My husband being in the nursing room, I go to see him, he doesn't open his eyes, he doesn't know who I am, and I go out in the car and cry."

"[Spouse] and I were just talking about this, and saying, she's been retired years now, but how disorienting the first year of retirement was. But the overriding joy was not having to run out of the house in the morning. That's true. Listen to NPR and drink coffee. Feed the cats. If you want to sleep in, you can sleep at, you know."

"Oh, [I hoped retirement would be] there would be fun things to do every day, and I would meet a lot of people, and make new friends, just have a great time, and look forward to my next event. I wouldn't have to worry about my dog, because I'll have a friend taking care of my dog. Just an abundance of possibilities. For new social interactions and using my mind, and All that good stuff."

"I had somebody complain to me once that there wasn't a welcoming group here. Oh! They would come through the door and not know what to do, nobody would look at them, nobody would talk to them, they didn't show them where to go, and I really think for shy people, we need something like that. Yeah, that's a really nice idea, I like that."

"[We have a] CMS grant for 'social prescribing.' Doctors/clinicians are prescribing to do things on a social level. It's a prescription that says, 'you're going to go to the gym 3 days a week or you're going to get involved in this group.' I think as you age, having that ability to have that connection, we know that people who have connection are healthier overall, even physically."

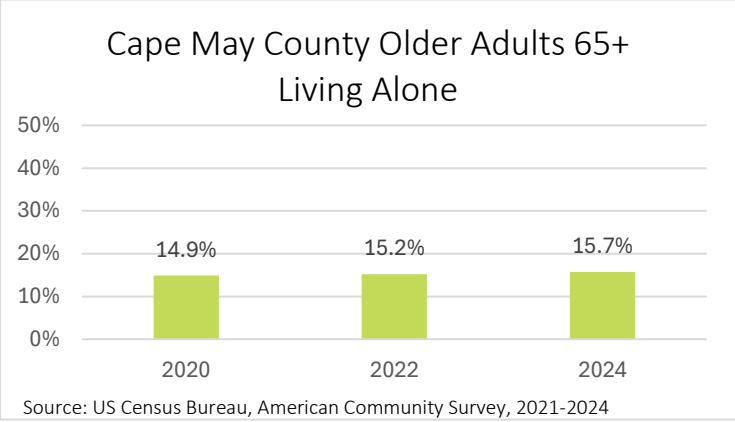
"[My magic wand] robust social network, maybe it's a crochet circle here but more comprehensive and not just these niche kinds of things. No matter where you are in the County, there's always something that has that social connection built in – no cost, implies transportation systems."

"Social participation, I feel like is important, whether it's volunteering, you know there's a lot of lonely people. Cape May County, most counties, have wonderful programs but getting someone to stick their neck out and go [is a challenge]."

Social Participation

The summer season, crowded with tourists, drives many seniors to avoid going out, and the desolate feeling of the other seasons reinforces social isolation for many older adults.

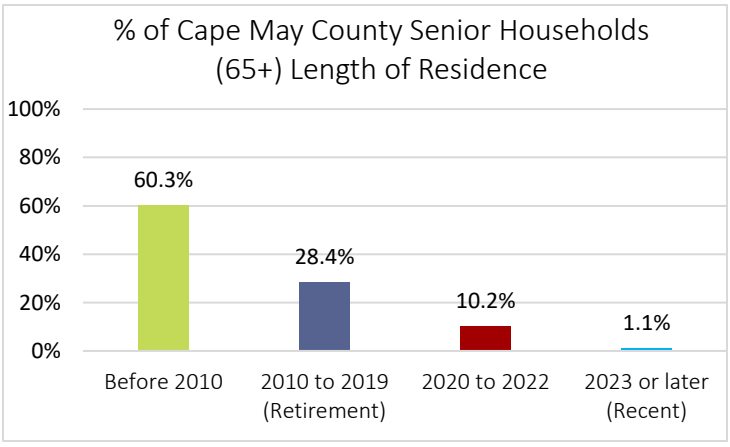
More than 15% of people over ag 65 in Cape May County live alone, which is a larger proportion than the statewide average. Combined with the rural nature of Cape May County, this puts older adults in Cape May at greater risk of social isolation, which can lead to more rapid social, physical, and mental decline.



Source: US Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2021-2024

Older adults and professionals or volunteers working with seniors emphasized the importance of social participation for everyone, particularly for older adults. Many older adults expressed a strong desire to live full social lives for as long as their health and finances permit. They want to stay engaged with others in meaningful ways and seek a sense of community that provides belonging and opportunities to contribute.

One of the focus groups consisted of volunteers, all of whom were seniors themselves. They shared various reasons for wanting to contribute to their communities, such as using skills or resources gained in earlier stages of their lives to help meet the needs of other older adults.



Source: US Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2021-2024

Cape May County is home to two distinct groups of seniors: those who have moved to the area for retirement, often with comfortable financial resources, and long-time residents who often have fewer financial resources but greater familiarity with resources and established social support networks. Both groups expressed a desire for social engagement and highlighted the importance of relationships for their mental and physical well-being, and enjoy volunteering their time and skills primarily in service to other older adults. A limitation of these focus groups is that the participants were already engaged in structured activities within the community. A common concern raised across the focus groups was for those who are homebound.



In Your Words: Social Participation

"I think of my neighbor, they're just sitting in the house, in the recliner, watching Game Show Channel all day freaking long. And that's not enough stimulation."

"Social participation is a barrier for a lot of seniors, embarrassed to participate because they can't do the exercise or issues with technology or transportation. They want to do stuff but don't have a way to get there or don't know anyone there and are embarrassed or its too new for them."

"It can be very cliquey here, too. Even [family members] who is 85…her friend group narrows down. It's hard to break into different groups. It was hard to break in for me too here. You don't get invited unless you know someone who is in it."

"Loneliness is beyond words for these people."

"In the summertime, families come more often because it's nicer and want to stay in their house and go to the beach, but you still have a higher need all year round."

"I wish there were volunteers to sit with them and play games for the ones who don't want to go to the senior centers."

"I see my mom going through depression and regression when she didn't got out for a while and it is taking a lot to get her to get back in to things and get out of the house, even to go out to dinner."

"Find out what they enjoy and what their needs are and get them to what they want to do. Not everyone likes bingo, some like book club. Find out what people want. Customize."

"[The highlight of my day] Yeah, it's getting out of the house, going somewhere, talking to somebody, different…"

"[We need] kindness to one another. You don't know if one person will come in because they passed away over the weekend. But also, it gives you pleasure within your heart that you have kindness for others."

"The inclination to isolate, and how it creeps over people, like a shadow. You don't know it's coming until you find 'I haven't been anywhere this week'…I think as we get older, our knees fall apart, then you can't, you know, get down. A lot of it is mobility issues. It's easier to stay home than to get dressed or to get people to come and get you to help you."

"Lots of people retire here and lost spouses and children, and then becomes only one person left here as their needs are getting greater and greater."

Outdoor Spaces and Buildings

Access to Cape May County's rich natural resources is designed primarily for tourists and the tourist season rather than for year-round access for local older adults.

There is interest in enjoying the natural beauty of Cape May County, but doing so independently often felt overwhelming to older adults. Most of the conversation regarding outdoor spaces and buildings in Cape May revolved around seasonal changes in access to places and transportation. Because the economy of Cape May County depends on its summer tourist season, transportation options, public resources, and hours of operation of key places to visit, are all expanded during the summer months to ease access to the many visitors to the area.

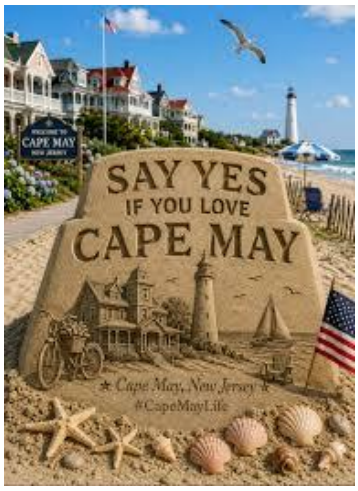


Some older adults welcomed some of the summer changes, such as expanded hours in restaurants and stores, and some public transportation options. Some older adults who participated in focus groups expressed a desire for expanded service hours for transportation and other amenities to continue until after September 11, instead of ended after Labor Day weekend. This was particularly true among older adults who are veterans or family members of veterans, who wanted to participate in September 11 remembrance activities but struggled to reach them.

"I'd like to have more outdoor stuff to do."

Some older adults felt overwhelmed by the population increase during the summer months and were intimidated to venture out due to parking challenges and larger crowds, which felt uncomfortable, inconvenient, and sometimes unsafe.

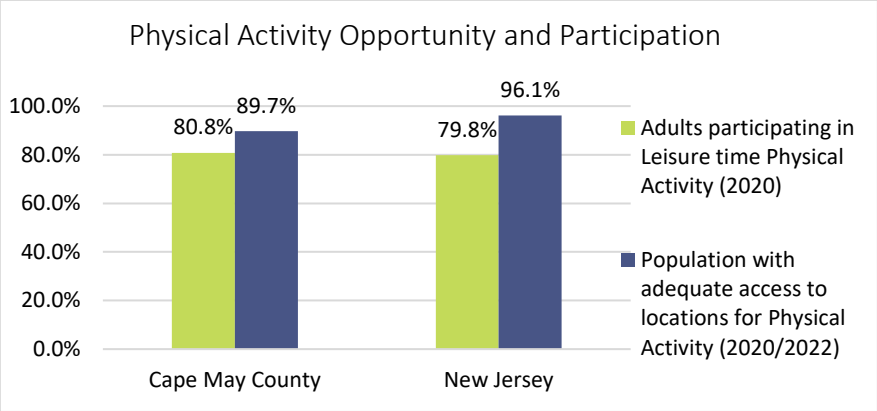
Parking consistently arose as a summertime concern. The distance between handicapped parking and key destinations, including medical offices, was a concern. Parking meters are closely monitored during the summer months, and most require smartphone apps to access, which many seniors report as a challenge. Many older adults who live in beachfront towns report that people often park their cars on the street in a manner that blocks access to their driveways and homes during the summer, making it difficult or impossible for older adult homeowners to leave their own driveways.



Some older adults also discussed the desolate feeling during the off-peak season, when hours of operation for many resources are reduced and streets and

sidewalks feel empty. Solutions worth exploring during both peak and off-peak seasons include actively organizing, promoting, and coordinating outdoor activities for seniors. These can include beach visits, nature walks, trips to iconic local establishments, and other activities during both summer months and the rest of the year.

Regarding buildings, older adults and younger professionals serving older adults all discussed the need for more assisted living resources and senior centers. Many of the concerns revolved around long wait lists, high costs, and understaffed conditions. Many of the discussions among both older adults and the professionals who serve them indicated that there were assisted living facilities and senior centers that have closed or reduced hours for a variety of reasons, leaving the buildings vacant and the services unavailable.



Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

In Your Words: Outdoor Spaces and Buildings

"The spaces between the driveways and stuff are very short… However, if you have an SUV, the back end of your car is going to be over somebody's driveway."

"Does it get crazy in the summer, parking? Does it get worse? Yeah. Don't go anywhere, just stay home."

"There's no good time of year, and there's pluses and minuses to the summertime for older adults."

"You don't have parking meters anymore. You have to do something with your time. I don't know how to do that. And I don't have an E-Z Pass account, which you need to have to make these things work."

"9-11 feels, like, important, and not that far beyond Labor Day, even though Labor Day doesn't… it's not always the same day, and it usually is before 9-11, but…that's just a handful of days, isn't it?"

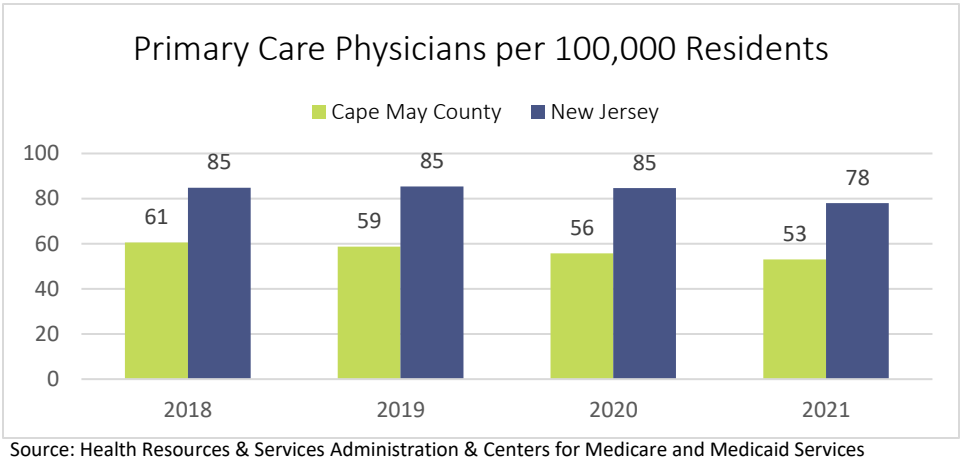
"The building … was an assisted living place. My aunt was there. It was a lovely place. Relatively new, nicely put together, well-staffed, well, she complained about the food, but she couldn't please everybody. Then they… all of a sudden, Monday, they were closing up. But our point of the building is sitting there, empty. That's frustrating."

"He's there for dementia, probably forever. That's all in our money. It's not everybody who can come up with $10,000 a month. So, if I didn't live in the house, they get the house. Well, they have taken all, just about all of his savings and his investments. And the care that he gets is certainly not worth $10,000 a receipt."

"They have different sections where you qualify, where you don't qualify, and that's fine. And they have, you know, where your income, you know, is a… is a problem. But people that may have a, you know, a decent income don't… still, they'll fit in that category. And it's… it's hard for them."

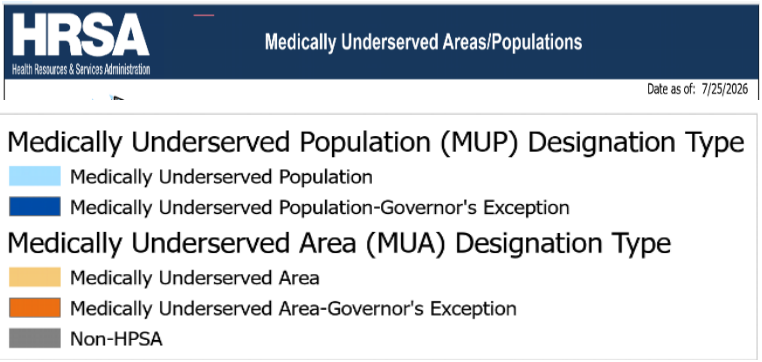
Health Services and Community Support

Many year-round residents depend on local family members, neighbors, and friends to provide a wide range of health and community support.

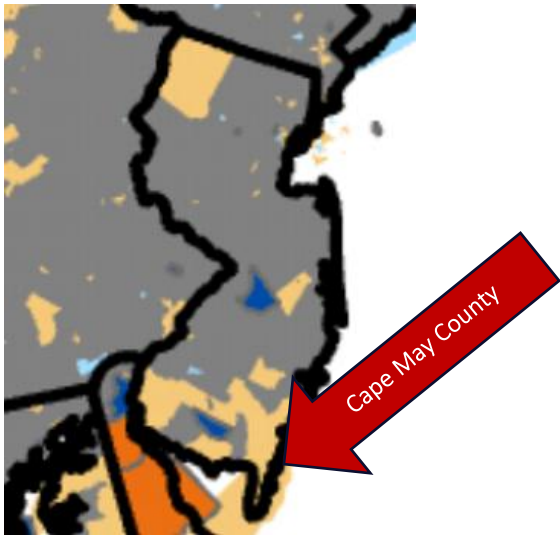


Source: Health Resources & Services Administration & Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services

Cape May County does have high-quality health care, social services, and public health services for residents. However, due to a variety of reasons, Cape May County has fewer providers per population than other parts of the state and nation. This, combined with the rural nature of Cape May, presents barriers to accessing care beyond transportation and technical access challenges discussed in earlier sections of this report.



Cape May County community culture is unique. Many year-round residents depend on local family members, neighbors, and friends, many of whom are younger adults in public services fields, to provide a wide range of health and community support. There are few resources designed to support the large number of younger adults who quietly provide these supports.



Focus group participants often said that if they had a magic wand, they would return themselves and others to "better health." As many older adults retire in Cape May County, living in Cape May full time for the first time as "seniors," they talked about the difficulty of transitioning medical care from lifelong providers to local ones. As this is an increasingly common experience among the older adult population, it may be a real opportunity to coordinate resources towards helping people navigate this transition.

This growing population may also be a beacon for recruitment and retention of a healthcare and social services workforce and volunteer force. Currently,

many health care and community support services across Cape May County are struggling to recruit and retain workers, due to housing instability and other factors. However, there are several models of care underway through volunteer groups, community-based agencies, and local first responders that have found ways to ensure older residents are safe, connected to care, and have what they need. There are some collaborations, fueled largely by local volunteers, that have made notable strides in connecting the resources that are available together to leverage existing resources towards common goals through collaboration.

Some of the barriers to ensuring greater access to care for Cape May older adults is ensuring that there are resources and staffing within social support agencies to meet the demand.



"[We have a program] Well-being check. They call into dispatch every day, and when they don't call in, we get a call that says, 'Ms. [name redacted] hasn't called today.' Usually she just forgot, but maybe she passed, or maybe she's in the hospital, or maybe she went on vacation and didn't tell anyone."

"Tabernacle hosts an event every February called Community Resource Day. This year we had 96 organizations. The surprising takeaway for the first iteration (4 years ago), even if no one from the community walked through the doors except the reps from the organizations, it was still a success because they got to talk to one another. They were all in silos."

"I wish that there was more care for clients that would come in the home, that there could be funding for. There's a lot of clients that can't afford to get help in the home. Meals on Wheels is one thing but a lot of clients need other help in the home. Personal care: we do have housekeeping but there's a waiting list. Personal care, especially for husbands and wives, they're just getting more sicker because of the effort of caring for their spouse but they can't afford extra help."

In Your Words: Health Services and Community Supports

"I volunteer at the food pantry, and that's scary, just how many people are reliant on the food pantry. There's 6 to 8 right by where I live, and they're busy. They're very busy. They're reliant on other people to help them, but how many volunteers are available? We need people to understand how massive the problem is that we're facing as a generation."

"[There are] programs through [health network] that recruit people to foster children [whose guardians have severe mental health concerns]. Is there a way to mirror that program for seniors, where you can get the County to provide some of the protections so you can then actually sit down and help, whether it's the homebound person or the person who doesn't have any family in the County?"

"I don't go to doctors; I just go to one appointment every month. But all these people, they wait months for a doctor's appointment. It pains me to hear these people waiting months to go see a doctor."

"I just had a [medical] test recently, and the guy I was talking to, the tech, came down from Philly. And he was talking about the fact that they have him under contract as a traveling person since for a year, but he had to leave here twice to go back to Philly, and he travels every day because he can't afford housing here, especially as the summer came on."

"The planning is really important. I'm taking care of my neighbor because her husband passed and needed help because wasn't safe to live alone and I'm down there 2-3 times per week to check on her and help the aide who lives there but it would have been nice if she had planned for this stuff. She had no plan for her and her husband and have no kids or family, so I feel like an adopted child of theirs. So, me and another neighbor have been trying to juggle her medical care and will and power of attorney and driving limitations and trying to take her where she needs to go. They didn't plan for what happens at this age so it was a lot of work for us to figure out."

"The mental health population has risen to a level that's uncomfortable, and we have to figure out how to manage it."

"They can apply for Medicaid waiver program and even if they qualify, they can't get aides to come south of Ocean City."

"People have passed away and we're [as first responders] dealing with the clean-up. Adult children are leaving their parents, mom dies, we call and it's 'Ok, we'll be there in 3 days,' but in the meantime we have to start making calls."

"[There's] 'Register Ready' [a database that tells us if people] live alone, are on oxygen, etc. If there's a hurricane, we log into that system, and we know who we need to go to first."

"[We] help patients who are aging into Medicare to apply and coach them through the whole process, do an exit visit only when we know they have a scheduled visit. Our patients don't always understand how to be good consumers of healthcare. Because we provide healthcare to the uninsured, when people are healthy [in their younger years] they usually don't seek us out."

"As a nation we do ourselves a disservice by not having access to care when they're younger and when they're Medicare eligible, they have 20 years of unmanaged diabetes, or unmanaged hypertension."

Cape May County Multisector Plan for Aging

A total of 45 seniors and senior service providers from Cape May County participated in our assessment through interviews and focus groups. They discussed the eight Age-Friendly Domains according to their personal significance and pinpointed the specific components within each domain that were most important to them. Below is the resulting list along with the corresponding actions.

Domain	Implementation Opportunity
1. Housing	Affordable housing for all will improve resources and opportunities to age in place
2. Transportation	Safety, access and affordability through creative planning
3. Civic Participation and Employment	Ensuring support for transporation, information, housing, and other needs will reinforce the strong neighborly volunteer culture in Cape May
4. Communication and Information	Provide regionalized activities with schedules in the local newspapers Create centralized, Age-Friendly, information source welcoming to all ages
5. Social Participation	Center welcoming, consistent messaging and home visits to engage isolated people
6. Respect and Social Inclusion	Provide best practices models for providers, vendors, and others to ensure older adults feel welcome, included, and treated with dignity
7. Outdoor Spaces and Buildings	Organize and advertise outings enjoying outdoor spaces year round
8. Health Services & Community Supports	Leverage collaboration to address gaps in care and support and retain workers and volunteers

The next phase of the Cape May County Multisector Plan for Aging will focus on turning recommendations into measurable strategies, using data from this report to support aging in place and improving the quality of life for all residents in Cape May County. After these recommendations are adopted, implementation efforts will prioritize identifying practical strategies, sustainable actions, and partnership opportunities across various sectors. This approach aims to treat all residents with dignity and enhance their quality of life.

Key aspects of this phase include encouraging wide-ranging engagement and participation among older adults, caregivers, county departments, and community-based agencies. The goal of these next steps is to transform the plan into a sustainable, action-oriented initiative that promotes healthy aging, livable communities, multisector collaboration, and lasting systems change throughout Cape May County.

Conclusion

The document represents a data-driven, community-based framework designed to enable all Cape May County residents to age in place with a high quality of life. Informed by robust data, strengthened partnerships, and aligned with the New Jersey Age-Friendly Blueprint, this document recognizes both the opportunities and challenges associated with supporting an aging population in Cape May County.

Organized around the 8 Age-Friendly Domains, this document emphasizes strategies and first steps based on collaborative efforts to ensure that the infrastructure that supports Cape May County considers the strengths, needs, and dignity of all older adults. Through continued collaboration, implementation, evaluation, and community engagement, Cape May County is well positioned to implement gradual policy, infrastructure, and systems-level change over time.

Creating a truly Age-Friendly County is an ongoing and evolving process requiring long-term coordination between government agencies, healthcare systems, community-based organizations, businesses, educational institutions, faith communities, municipalities, and residents themselves. Many immediate opportunities already exist to strengthen communication, accessibility, community engagement, service coordination, and support. These efforts enable residents to age safely, independently, and successfully within their homes and communities with dignity. Together, we can start by committing to ensuring all programs, activities, and support promote dignity, resilience, health, equity, and social connectedness across all stages of life.

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