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Community Services for People Aging in Place

Tom McKinney, CEO
Interfaith Community Services, Tucson AZ

Abstract:

Interfaith Community Services (ICS) mission is to help people in need achieve healthy, stable and independent lives. ICS knows that independence is important to seniors and disabled adults who want to age in the comfort of home. Also, much of our work with seniors also helps alleviate isolation. Because our population is aging, we envision, seniors and disabled individuals will have transportation, meals and other caregiving services available to them in order to remain independent in their homes.

The aging population wants to live independently to achieve a higher quality of life and control their circumstances as they age. We are able to provide some semblance of control while seniors “stay at home”

Issue/Topic: Services for People Aging in Place

You may share the often-heard wish—"I want to stay in my own home! "Feeling one is "at home" is a major aspect of aging in place. Providing older adults, a place to call their own that supports the development of the psychological attachments necessary to convert the place to home is key for successful aging in place." (Aging in Place)

There are many concerns about seniors aging in place. The concerns are shared by seniors themselves, their children, and friends. The challenges vary depending on people's financial situation, living accommodations, and mobility. Unfortunately, there is not a one size fits all solution. The good news is that with the right choices and help seniors might just be able to stay in their home.

The challenge that social service agencies like ICS or Pima Council on Aging help address are varied and their greatest resource are volunteers. Volunteers are essential for keeping costs down for many seniors who are living on a fixed income. Also, volunteers are key to helping our senior population not feel as if they are isolated, it provides someone to talk to and someone to share challenges with.

While there is a great need for transportation, medical equipment, food and medical supplies, there is no greater need than human interactions. During this COVID crisis this has become even more evident.

Loneliness and social isolation in older adults are serious public health risks affecting a significant number of people in the United States and putting them at risk for dementia and other serious medical conditions. People generally are social by nature, and high-quality social relationships can help them live longer, healthier lives.

A new report from the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine (NASEM) points out that more than one-third of adults aged 45 and older feel lonely, and nearly one-fourth of adults aged 65 and older are considered to be socially isolated. Older adults are at increased risk for loneliness and social isolation because they are more likely to face factors such as living alone, the loss of family or friends, chronic illness, and hearing loss.

Although it's hard to measure social isolation and loneliness precisely, there is strong evidence that many adults aged 50 and older are socially isolated or lonely in ways that put their health at risk.

Recent studies found that⁽¹⁾:

- Social isolation significantly increased a person's risk of premature death from all causes, a risk that may rival those of smoking, obesity, and physical inactivity.
- Social isolation was associated with about a 50% percent increased risk of dementia.
- Poor social relationships (characterized by social isolation or loneliness) was associated with a 29% increased risk of heart disease and a 32% increased risk of stroke.
- Loneliness was associated with higher rates of depression, anxiety, and suicide.

- Loneliness among heart failure patients was associated with a nearly 4 times increased risk of death, 68% increased risk of hospitalization, and 57% increased risk of emergency department visits.

Current research suggests that immigrant, and lesbian, gay, bisexual populations experience loneliness more often than other groups. Latino immigrants, for example, “have fewer social ties and lower levels of social integration than US-born Latinos.” First-generation immigrants experience stressors that can increase their social isolation, such as language barriers, differences in community, family dynamics, and new relationships that lack depth or history, the report states. Similarly, gay, lesbian, and bisexual populations tend to have more loneliness than their heterosexual peers because of stigma, discrimination, and barriers to care.

Nearly one-third of all seniors live by themselves, according to the U.S. Census Bureau. That’s close to 13.8 million seniors aging alone. Senior isolation is both common and dangerous — and while living alone doesn’t inevitably lead to senior loneliness, the two often go hand-in-hand. Some of the implication of loneliness lead to:

- Health complications
- Unhealthy habits
- Increases the risk of Alzheimer’s
- Higher instances of elder abuse
- Assume the worst
- Family and neighborhood dynamics have changed
- Married couples can be lonely
- The feeling of being left behind

Background:

Aging in place means the ability to make choices. Establishing an aging in place lifestyle is about choices. One of those choices is what community you live in. Choosing the right community is very important and has a real impact on quality of life as one ages. Planning for and choosing the right community will allow diverse support opportunities.

The ability to get from one place to another, services that can be provided (both in and out of the home... including medical care), the ability to socialize with other people and available community resources are a few of the things that need to be considered. These communities can include your townhome area, faith communities or agencies of your choice.

Conclusions:

Seniors may say they do not wish to leave their current community but the goal of aging in place is to maintain control over your life and the quality of it, and this may be a choice you need to make. Older adults have choices, but must consider a few things when deciding to stay in your current community or when choosing a new one.

Aging in place will require support services or communities that provide these types and other services that will fill future needs for assistance. In most cases, there are people who can help

keep up with all the things that you might not be able to do (or, do safely). And, in some cases, one may be able to acquire some of these services for little-to-no cost, depending on financial situation. In most every city there are agencies, civic groups, churches or others that provide needs-based services.

Access to organizations that utilize volunteers that provide essential support services is important. Not only do they provide support services, they also provide important social contact to help keep recipients healthy and connected. Providing natural, neighborly services through trained volunteers at no charge to the recipients. Services might include transportation, friendly visits and phone calls, family caregiver relief, yard work, meal delivery and other errands, as well as other creative options. There are also opportunities for seniors themselves to serve as volunteers.

Sustainability within programs is crucial, as is creating additional services such as social and educational events, produce delivery, informal support groups for grief and/or dementia, end of life workshops, delivery of incontinence and pet care supplies and information, and more. Many of these can be provided through a variety of agencies.

Planning ahead to Age in Place is essential. think about the kinds of help you want in the future. Every situation is different and every situation will change. Your health, financial situation, access to food and transportation needs all need to be accessed. Support that can help you age at home can be provide for almost anything at a cost. Agencies who provide wrap-around services (more than one service) can help you as things in your life change.

Support services that are not always of the forefront of people's minds include money management, health issues and financial advice. Make sure to have someone you trust that maybe can discuss any of these issues on your behalf.

Benefits of staying at home:

- Improved quality of life
- Improved physical health.
- Insulated from potential bacterial and viral risks found in senior living facilities
- Cost-Savings of Living at Home.

Aging in place communities offer the resources that a person needs to keep enjoying their lives, while staying healthy and happy:

- Places of learning – Places where you can continue to expand your mind, learn and grow as an individual.
- Faith-based institutions – Where you can be with people of similar faith, and continue to learn and grow.
- Socialization – Clubs, centers or other organizations that provide for social activities, friendships or volunteer opportunities.
- Transportation – At the point you are no longer driving (or don't want to), are there sufficient transportation options, such as ride-shares, buses, trains or other mass transit.
- Health – Are there sufficient medical facilities or in-home medical care companies, including doctors, hospitals, outpatient or emergency care?

- Assisted Living – When you do get to the point where you require moving to some sort of assisted living, are there sufficient options in your community?
- Shopping – Stores where you can buy groceries, clothing or other items you need. Having one that delivers to your home is a plus.
- Home services – Maintenance, lawn care, house cleaning, personal care or cooking are some services that you may need in the future.

References:

Aging in Place - <https://ageinplace.com/aging-in-place-basics/community/>

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Claire Samuels, Facts About Senior Isolation and the Effects of Loneliness That Will Stun You, June 23, 2020

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National Institute on Aging - <https://www.nia.nih.gov/health/aging-place-growing-older-home#place>

