



# Age Friendly Survey Results

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## Executive Summary

October, 2021

*Donated by Nancy Frank & Associates*

# Petaluma Age-Friendly Survey

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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August, 2021

**Background:** In 2020, Petaluma joined the Age Friendly Communities movement originated by the World Health Organization and managed by AARP in the U.S. Membership requires developing a Strategic Plan for Aging. The Petaluma Senior Advisory Committee led the development of this survey to launch that process.

Despite focused outreach to communities of color (within the constraints of Covid 19), respondents are disproportionately White, with the LatinX population significantly underrepresented. A second round of surveying targeting communities of color, and the Latinx community specifically, was attempted but not successful in bringing in new LatinX participants. The effort was successful in bringing in 14 new Asian/Pacific Islander participants and 2 new Black participants. These additional surveys have been analyzed but not edited into this original report as their low numbers did not impact findings significantly.

**What Respondents Want and Need:** With 903 Round 1 responses received, findings from this survey are not surprising and do affirm common themes heard elsewhere. While satisfaction and desire to remain in Petaluma throughout aging is high, outstanding wants and needs are also high.

### **Large, Long-Term Municipal Efforts:**

- Housing, housing, housing: Affordable, senior, accessible, continuous including assisted living, CCRC
- Climate change management and mitigation: Emphasis on fires and smoke
- Safety: Sidewalks, sidewalks: In good repair, and lighting and safe walking surfaces in parks, on streets
- Transportation: More frequent, expanded routes for existing public transit, smaller (possibly) electric system transporting seniors around town for free
- Walkability/Bikability: Better sidewalks, streets, more/better walking/biking trails, crosswalks; longer lights at big intersections; incentives for stores selling necessities to stay in/come to downtown

### **Potentially Smaller/Faster Improvements:**

- Disaster preparation: Household-level planning for disasters and evacuation – Outreach, education, planning, provision of supplies
- Transportation: Taxi vouchers – especially to travel to medical appointments in Santa Rosa and Marin
- Support to Meet Basic Needs:
  - Make sure more people take advantage of discounts (e.g.; PG&E rate plans)
  - Look into subsidizing elders to get Medicare Supplement Plans (needs research)
  - Outreach to develop more senior discount opportunities
  - Expand affordable access to healthy food, prepared food, delivered food
- Outdoor Amenities/Quality of Life: Park improvement, increased social/recreational activities
- Information & Referral: A single, comprehensive internet site/face page with phone and live support that aggregates information from multiple online sources (e.g.: 211, City, food delivery, etc.) for up-to-date information including services, transportation, food, social/recreational activities, entertainment

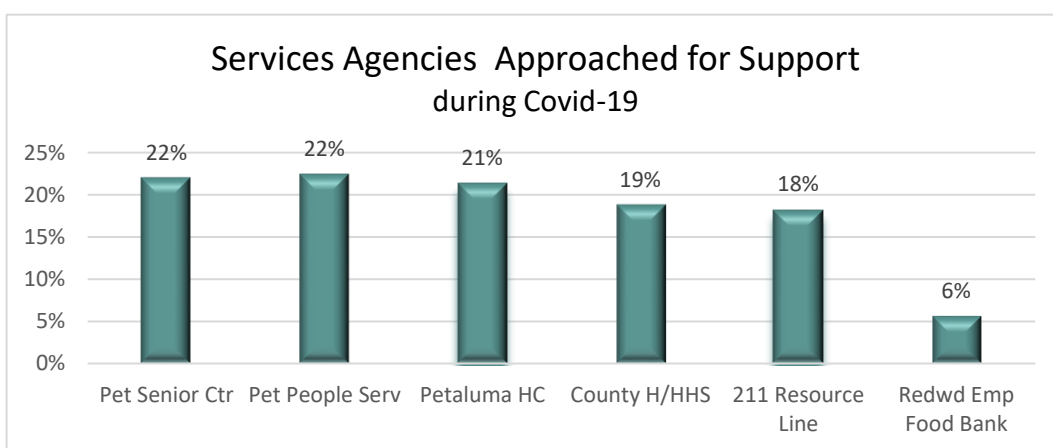
- Technology: More free/low cost training for computer skills including new technologies for social connections that have arisen over Covid 19 (e.g.: Zoom)
- Safety: Fall prevention education/programming, home modification
- Planning for healthy aging: Can include fall prevention training, disaster preparation (at household level), food and discount access, planning for housing and transportation needs as they change.

### How Petaluma Rates as a Place to Age

- 69% rate Petaluma as an Excellent or Good place to age and 79% report that it is Important or Very Important for them to remain in Petaluma as they age;
- Most common reasons for satisfaction in Petaluma include: the caring, friendly people and community; availability of senior supports and services; wide range of activities for seniors and for all ages; and walkability of the community (depending on where you live);
- Nearly half of negative comments reference the cost of living, cost of housing, or housing in general as main reasons for the ratings. The next most common reasons include transportation, sidewalks, bias against elders, and lack of services/supports for elders;
- There was no significant correlation between satisfaction with living in Petaluma and race, income, length of time in Petaluma, or side of town lived on.

### Impact of COVID 19

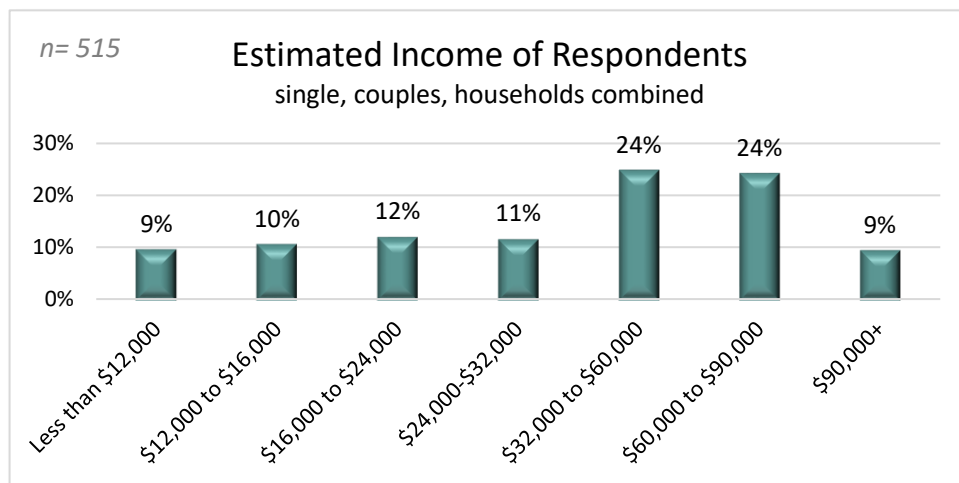
- Far more people found the pandemic to be very challenging socially/emotionally (37%) than logistically (17%);
- 71% turned to TV/Newspaper/Radio news and 51% turned to the Internet for information about the pandemic, followed by friends/family (24%) and City of Petaluma (town halls, emails, website - 20%);
- Less than a quarter of respondents reported having approached any single community agency for support. This is likely affected by the bias in who answered the survey.



### About Respondents and Their Lives

Full descriptive data is provided in the body of this report. Key findings include:

- **Location:** 55% of respondents live on the West Side of town, 41% on the East Side, and 3% outside of town or with no regular place to live;
- **Longevity:** 63% of respondents have lived in Petaluma for 15 years or more;
- **Race/Ethnicity:** Whites are overrepresented in the survey with 89% of responses and Latinos are most notably underrepresented. 15 surveys were completed in Spanish.
- **Income:** With a very low response rate to this question (57%), we can at least affirm that the survey includes “voices” from across the income spectrum.



- More than half of those who responded appear to be living below the Self-Sufficiency Level as defined by the Elder Index,<sup>1</sup> with 42% of singles AND couples in this survey reporting incomes of less than \$32,000. Self-Sufficiency levels can rise to as high as \$50,000 for a couple paying a mortgage. With rising costs of food, housing and medical expenses, those just above the stated Self-Sufficiency Level may also be struggling;
- Looking more deeply at a sample of single respondents who provided income information and characteristics of household, 48% live below 200% of the Federal Poverty Level and another 19% live in the “donut hole” which is defined as earning too much to qualify for public supports but too little for self-sufficiency. This “donut hole” group is often overlooked in resource planning.

#### Health and Health Insurance:

- 84% of respondents report that their health status is Very Good or Good compared to others their age. With outreach difficulties, there is likely underrepresentation in the survey from those most isolated due to poor health;
- 72% of respondents report that they are on Medicare;
- With 58% reporting having insurance that they receive from an employer (theirs or partner) or that they purchase directly, it appears that many have a Medicare Supplement plan – but many do not. Those without a supplemental plan are more likely to be heavily burdened by medical expenses;
- 29% report that they, their partner, or both of them have a disabling condition that prevents them from participating in work, household or other activities. We do not know how this compares to other communities but seems notable.

<sup>1</sup> <https://elderindex.org/>

**Housing:**

- 54% report that they worry about being able to afford their housing as they age;
- Cost of living, housing and the cost of housing in Petaluma are top reasons respondents gave Petaluma a lower rating as a place to age, or as a reason they would move out of Petaluma to age;
- 8% of those who own or rent rely on income from renting out a room, ADU, granny flat or cottage;
- Of those who own or rent, about half reported that bathroom changes such as grab bars, hand rails, a higher toilet or non-slip tiles (53%) and installing an emergency response system (48%) would help them stay in their current home as they age. 36% thought easier access into their home would help them stay and 18% reported that a bedroom or bathroom on the first floor would help them stay.

**Work:**

- 48% of respondents are not working and not looking for work, with full retirement increasing slightly (51%) during Covid 19;
- Those working full or part-time decreased from 35% to 25% during Covid 19 with nearly the same number (9%) looking for work or hoping to return to work from furlough;
- 78% of those currently working or looking for work reported that they are Very Likely/Extremely Likely to work for as long as possible – although the number of missing answers on this is high.

**Daily Living:**

- We know that isolation has a serious impact on health and mental health. While the survey population is highly interactive, 11% report connecting socially face-to-face or electronically just once a week or less before Covid. This rose to 28% during Covid 19 with 7% reporting interactions less than once a month during Covid 19.

**Technology:**

- Just 3% report no internet access. Even with focused outreach with paper surveys, it was difficult to connect to those without internet access during Covid 19 so these results are likely skewed;
- Again, with a biased response due to the limited outreach during Covid, 87% of respondents report that they are Very Comfortable/Somewhat Comfortable on the Internet;
- Despite this high level of comfort on the Internet, 41% reported that they would be Very Likely or Somewhat Likely to take Internet training if it were free or low cost.

**Information:**

- 2/3 of respondents prefer to get City information via email from the City with the local newspaper, direct mail, and the City website the next most desired methods;
- With more than one answer allowed, more than half of respondents reported that they would turn to the Petaluma Senior Center, the Internet, family/friends, and/or Petaluma People services for information about Older Adult Services. One-third or more also identified their health care provider, the County, or the Council on Aging as top places to turn;
- In open-ended questions, many suggested that a single source of information for aging would be helpful. Many wanted that on the Internet.

**Other**

- 34% of respondents reported that they do not feel prepared for a community-wide emergency;

- 64% would welcome guidance to plan for positive aging.

## **Access to Resources in Petaluma**

### **Outdoor Amenities:**

- Two-thirds or more of respondents report that Petaluma offers well-maintained and safe parks within walking distance of their homes before Covid. Most also report that public parks have enough benches, drinking fountains and shade;
- 42% report they do not have access to well-maintained public restrooms that are accessible to all.

### **Streets & Transportation:**

- Reports about audio/visual pedestrian crossings, affordable and reliable public transportation, and safe public transportation stops were far more positive than negative;
- This then shifts with 2/3 reporting that sidewalks are not well-maintained and 1/3 reporting that streets and intersections are not well-lit and safe for walkers, bikers, drivers.

### **Access to Health-Related Resources:**

- Before Covid 19, more than half of respondents agreed that they had access to health and wellness programs and classes, fitness activities for older adults, and easy-to-find information on where to find local health and supportive services;
- The majority of those who had an opinion (excludes “don’t know”) reported that they did not have access to home care services, well-trained and certified home health providers, affordable home health providers or culturally sensitive home health providers.

### **Access to Aging-Related Activities & Supports:**

- The majority reported access to continuing education, social clubs, activities for older adults. Fewer affirmed senior discounts, accurate and clear information about what is available to seniors, classes and services to assist with technology, and affordable multi-age activities.
- Just 30% were aware of diverse cultural activities and just 5% were aware of activities specifically for LGBTQ elders.

### **Volunteer Activities and Supports:**

- 62% report that Petaluma has a range of easy-to-find volunteer activities but 52% reported that there was no transportation to these activities.
- The majority of respondents were aware of volunteer training opportunities and opportunities on community councils and committees.

### **Jobs and Related Supports:**

- Very few respondents reported access to a range of flexible job opportunities for older adults, job training, or jobs adapted for older adults and people with disabilities.

### **Access to Community Information:**

- Over half of respondents reported free access to computers and the Internet in public places in Petaluma.
- This drops when looking at a single, easy-to-use source or internet source for community information. Clearly displayed, printed information with large type is viewed as accessible by just 10%.