

## Introduction

Every three years Western Illinois Area Agency on Aging (WIAAA) prepares a Full Area Plan for the Illinois Department on Aging (IDoA). In preparation for the FY 2025 - 2027 Area Plan, WIAAA conducted a comprehensive needs assessment throughout its ten-county Planning and Service Area (PSA), designated PSA 03 by IDoA. The collection and analysis of this data was based on a foundation of sociological research, utilizing both qualitative and quantitative methods. There were two sources from which data was collected: the Needs Assessment Survey and Community Input Meetings.

The survey and meetings primarily focused on questions about aging concerns, service familiarity, and caregiver concerns. WIAAA received 1,213 usable survey responses and heard from 61 community members during the eight input meetings.

## Key Findings

After considering all the data, the comprehensive needs assessment resulted in four key findings:

1. Lack of awareness of available services
2. Concerns about health, specifically falls and social isolation
3. Need for transportation services
4. Caregiving concerns

### Awareness of Services

The top concern was access to, and awareness of, services. This included know what services are available and finding resources. In the meetings, the phrase, “the people who need the most help don’t know how to get it” was often repeated. The lack of awareness of available services was evident in the survey data. Of the twelve services that were asked about, only three had been used by more than 30% of respondents.

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### Health

Health was another top concern. The survey asked respondents how often they worried about their health, and 63% of respondents said they worried about their health sometimes, often, or always in the last six months. Additionally, 32% of respondents indicated that they had a chronic illness. Among survey respondents who were 60+, just under 50% of respondents said in the last six months they worried about having a serious fall sometimes, often, or always.

Social isolation can negatively impact one’s overall health. Many survey respondents indicated feeling lonely. In fact, 559 respondents indicated feeling depressed sometimes, often, or always in the last six months, and 416 respondents indicated feeling isolated at the same frequency. Only 14% (81) of those who indicated feelings of depression were familiar with programs that reduce social isolation. Of those who indicated feeling isolated, only 15% (65) were familiar with programs to reduce social isolation.

## Transportation

Transportation was the most discussed service throughout the Community Input Meetings and was a top concern identified from the survey data. There were 157 respondents who disagreed with the statement, “I can get where I need to go without any issues.” Of those 88 respondents indicated that they do not have access to public transportation. Additionally, 93 of those 157 respondents indicated that they have limited mobility.

In the meetings, a few people identified depending on others to transport them to their doctors’ appointments. One woman said she felt guilty because her children take time off work to take her to appointments. Another woman shared that she was completely dependent on her caregivers to help get her places, in fact she was more than 30 minutes late to the input meeting because she had to wait until her caregiver’s shift began. A woman at that same meeting expressed fear of needing to be so dependent upon someone else. She said she was afraid of being unable to drive or get up and down the stairs at her house. Fear was a very common theme that was picked up on in seven of the eight meetings. Often fear was coupled with an idea of losing independence. Having a secure mode of transportation allows individuals to feel independent, but that is lacking in all ten counties.

## Caregivers

Prior to conducting this research WIAAA was aware that one major barrier to reaching caregivers is the lack of individuals identifying themselves as a caregiver. Only 259 survey respondents identified themselves as caregivers in the Needs Assessment Survey. More than 60% of caregivers identified feeling tired/ drained and stressed sometimes, often, or always in relation to their caregiving. Around 50% identified feeling concerned about finances and irritable sometimes, often, or always. More than 40% of caregivers identified feeling alone in their caregiving and unable to keep up with chores sometimes, often, or always.

## What’s Next

The data collected in the Needs Assessment Survey and Community Input Meetings has provided WIAAA with immeasurable insights into the needs of older adults and caregivers in PSA 03. These findings have assisted in the completion of the Full Area Plan for FY 2025 - 2027, and this data will continue to inform WIAAA’s work for years to come.

Many of the concerns identified in the findings can be addressed with existing services and programs in PSA 03. The barrier is that many people do not know that these services and programs are available to them. To bridge this gap, WIAAA will prioritize increasing awareness for all programs and services offered in PSA 03. The key to providing services will be educating the community on the availability of these services.

WIAAA’s top priority has always been to provide high quality services to older adults, adults with disabilities, and caregivers. This cannot be done if those who need the services most, do not know WIAAA and their funded providers are here providing these services.

The full Comprehensive Needs Assessment Findings Report can be found on [wiaaa.org](http://wiaaa.org).