

Executive Summary 2020 Senior Needs Survey

Introduction

Beginning in the spring of 2019, the Juneau Commission on Aging conducted a survey of Juneau residents aged 55 and older. This survey was the fourth in a series of similar surveys conducted at approximately ten-year intervals beginning in 1989. Although the members of the JCOA are local volunteers, CBJ allocates a budget for the creation, analysis, and distribution of the survey. The 2020 Senior Needs Survey budget was \$23,809. As in prior years, the general intent of this survey is to provide data to the Juneau community and assist the City and Borough of Juneau in making informed decisions when planning for senior services and infrastructure changes in the coming years. This Senior Needs Survey was the first to collect responses electronically. There were 1,845 survey responses, 256 of which were manually entered from hard copy surveys. Note that this survey was conducted from June through November in 2019, before the COVID-19 pandemic.

One benefit of conducting these surveys is it prompts participants to revisit assumptions, review organizational structures, and learn more about the valuable services that already exist. Since the surveys have been conducted at approximately ten-year intervals, the results of this and prior surveys now provide points of comparison for future surveys as you will see in the details of this document. Thus, we hope this survey can provide present and future policy makers with valuable insights not only into existing services and gaps in services but also of demographic trends over long periods of time. Providing real-time data to inform policies that improve the lives of seniors residing within CBJ is the purpose of our efforts.

Background and Methodology

This report generally analyzes responses question-by-question. The discussion examines the trends of responses over the four surveys (1989, 1998, 2010 and 2020) and takes a more in-depth look at the snapshot of attitudes, situations, and suggestions of the senior population based on responses to the 2020 survey open-ended questions.

In addition to meeting the basic intent of informing the planning process, this survey and the associated analysis provides other, perhaps less well-known or understood benefits.

Conducting a survey with this much detail elicits a wealth of diverse ideas and opinions.

The City and Borough of Juneau (CBJ) and its assembly, which commissions this survey every 10 years, are motivated to keep seniors in Juneau and in their homes when desired and feasible. Seniors contribute enormously to CBJ's economy. They also provide an immeasurable number of hours of volunteer support and creative problem-solving experience to non-profit organizations.

Demographics

The most notable difference in results from prior surveys is the number of respondents living in "Downtown Juneau" compared to the number living in the Valley. The Valley has seen a dramatic increase in its senior population while Downtown Juneau has seen a sharp decline in its senior population over the past 10 years.

Compared to results in 2010, there is a shift in the last decade toward more home ownership and less rental. Seventy-six percent of respondents now live in houses compared to 65 percent in 2010. While the majority of respondents, 84 percent overall, own their home, seniors ages 75 and older show a transition away from home

ownership to rentals. This further supports the idea that younger seniors are aging in place in the homes they purchased in the Valley when they first moved to Juneau.

Eighty percent of respondents have lived in Juneau 20 years or more. Almost one quarter, 24 percent, have lived in Juneau 31 to 40 years, and 22 percent have lived here 41 to 50 years. There are few that move to Juneau as seniors. The majority of seniors in Juneau have aged in place having grown up here or moved here for work.

In 2020, just under half of all respondents, 46 percent, indicated that they have executed an advanced directive. Sixty-three percent of respondents provided estimated household income, with 44 percent of these seniors indicating income over \$100,000 and 11 percent indicating income under \$50,000.

Findings

Four themes came up consistently in the analysis of this survey of current CBJ seniors (ages 55 and older), all relating to how Juneau's senior population feels about their ability to continue to live in Juneau – to age in place.

1. Housing and in-home care
2. Specialty medical care
3. Cost-of-living
4. Support Services

It is important to note that topics that don't come up frequently can still be important to address. For example, about 7 percent of respondents reported they cannot afford dental care. While that means the majority of seniors are not in need, having 7 percent of seniors not able to afford dental care is not ideal. Lack of dental care will likely create requirements for more expensive procedures in the future, increasing the burden on government programs and nonprofits.

Housing and In Home Care

Housing was the most mentioned topic in this survey and is a pivotal issue when making the decision to stay or leave Juneau. Availability of affordable assisted living housing, affordable independent senior housing, and services to help residents continue to live in their own homes were identified as the top senior priorities that need work in Juneau.

The increase in fees at the Pioneer Home was unanimously condemned. Respondents indicated they could not or would not be able to afford the fee increases and will have to find alternative housing and care elsewhere, more than likely outside of Alaska. Having affordable housing that can accommodate the needs of seniors is absolutely essential for them to continue living in Juneau. It is important to note that the survey questions did not specifically ask about the fee increases at the Alaska Pioneer Homes meaning those seniors who shared their opinion likely felt strongly about the increased fees and are not necessarily representative of the survey population.

The greatest percent, 29 percent, anticipated a need for a more accessible/lower maintenance home, a need that could be met by adaptations to one's current home as opposed to living elsewhere. Although Juneau's senior

population was not knowledgeable of many nationally growing alternative housing programs (Integrated Resident Communities, The Village to Village Network, etc.), the "Tiny Home" concept showed the most familiarity with 13 percent saying it would be a good fit in Juneau.

Affordable senior independent housing was the top answer for Question 45 "What do you think

Juneau residents aged 55 or older need that is not now adequately and/or readily available in Juneau?”

Specialty Medical Care

The need for medical services outside of Juneau is spread among many medical conditions, but the greatest stated need among this age group was for cataract surgery. (Note: since the survey data gathering was closed, in December of 2019, a monthly visiting ophthalmologic surgeon now rotates to Juneau who provides this service.) Dental care and dentures, hearing aids and eyeglasses were mentioned more than the other services, such as wheelchairs, likely because Medicare and many insurance plans do not cover these services.

Respondents were asked if they have ever gone without medication because it was unaffordable. Only two out of 1,665 answering this question said that was the case. Very few seniors have been denied medical or other senior services. Written comments indicated a problem finding providers who accept Medicare or Medicaid patients. Over 60 percent of the 63 explanations about being denied health care services were about providers not accepting Medicare or Medicaid.

A few of the medical needs that respondents felt they couldn't get or couldn't get at a quality level include long term pain management, respite care, rheumatologist, urologist, dermatologist, internist, periodontal care, ophthalmologist, and allergist. A shortage of physicians trained to deal with and treat senior citizen's medical and mental health problems was identified. In-home elder care, including managing, scheduling, and administering medications, was also identified as a need.

Cost-of-Living

Forty-eight responses identified the cost of living in Juneau as an issue in the additional comments question. The costs of health care, local taxes and housing were the most mentioned expenses, with the lack of affordable housing being the most mentioned concern.

The cost of travelling to and from Juneau is important to seniors, especially to those with family out of state or who need to go out of state for specialized medical care. The Alaska Marine Highway System is used by a large percentage of respondents (77 percent) and is highly valued by Juneau's senior community.

The reduction of the senior sales tax exemption from all purchases to just "essential" items was strongly condemned. There were 66 responses that addressed this topic, nearly all of which voiced support for keeping or expanding the senior sales tax exemption to all purchases. Some respondents expressed a feeling of betrayal when the sales tax exemption was reduced to "essential" purchases. While most responses indicated support for a full reinstatement of the exemption, some provided more specific suggestions such as adding phone/internet bills to the list of exempt purchases by seniors. Responses also indicated that one of the problems with this change is it impacted all seniors, including those who have already done their financial planning and counted on the full exemption. Several respondents pleaded for the city to leave the senior property tax exemption at the current level or raise the deducted amount. It is important to note that the topic of sales tax exemptions was not mentioned in the survey questions. This means those who mentioned this topic are likely those who felt strongly about it and do not necessarily represent or summarize the views of Juneau's senior population.

Support services

“Which of the Following Services in Juneau Do You Use?” was a new question in the 2020 survey. Forty-six percent of the respondents said they don’t use any of the services listed. AARP is used by 25 percent of all respondents; CBJ pools are used by 24 percent; and CBJ Parks and Recreation programs are used by 19 percent.

Results show that more than half of all respondents use five Juneau agencies: State of Alaska Division of Motor Vehicles, CBJ, Alaska Marine Highway, State of Alaska Fish and Game, and the U.S. Social Security Administration. The America the Beautiful Senior Pass and UAS are the next most selected.

The percentage of respondents that use one of the Senior Centers located within CBJ dropped significantly from 14 percent in 2010 to 5 percent in 2020. The Valley has seen a dramatic increase in its senior population while Downtown Juneau has seen a sharp decline in its senior population. The closure of the Valley Senior Center and decreased population around the Juneau Senior Center (located downtown) likely had some influence on the decrease in usage of senior centers. Douglas has its own senior center and the Douglas Island population has stayed relatively flat since 2010.

Thirty-four percent of all respondents were interested in attending a community meal in 2020. In 2010, only 25 percent were interested in using a communal meal service. Comments indicated that seniors were interested in not only a meal service, but also in the opportunity to get out and socialize with other seniors. Furthermore, seniors 75 and older were much more interested in this option than younger seniors, 42 percent compared to 29 percent. Sixty-one percent of the respondents said they would be willing to pay between \$5-10.

About 34 percent of the respondents use the city bus system. Overall, for the seniors who ride the bus, not enough protection from the weather at bus stops, no place to sit and no service beyond Auke Bay rose to the top as unmet needs. However, looking only at seniors 75 and over, the greatest need was for bus stops to be closer to their homes.

In 2020, respondents were asked how often they do volunteer work. Only 37 percent report never doing volunteer work, compared to 51 percent in 2010 and over 60 percent in prior surveys. There appears to be a trend of increasing rates of volunteerism over the decades. Only small differences are seen in rates of volunteer work across age cohorts.

Seniors from ages 55 to 74 ranked nature/outdoor opportunities as the most important aspect of the decision to live in Juneau. By far, all age groups chose walking as their preferred activity. Winter safety (slipping and physical snow barriers) was identified as an issue.

Question 45 of the survey asked ““What do you think Juneau residents aged 55 or older need that is not now adequately and/or readily available in Juneau?”

Reading and understanding the responses provides an insight into the diversity of needs of Juneau’s senior community. Some of the stated needs are easier to address than others. Hundreds of write-in comments were submitted, with a sampling provided here and additional comments provided in Appendix 1.

- gym-activity access, weight trainers, pickleball
- financial planning and assistance
- more medical care housing options than Wildflower Court or Pioneer Home
- Senior retirement complex with separate 1 or 2-bedroom apartments with dining facilities, exercise, hobby, and community areas

- More dementia care facilities
- Companion surrogates
- Volunteer or lower rate pay handymen/women to help with house maintenance
- inexpensive assistance with big household chores, like moving things and big cleaning jobs
- In home safety installation program to help install necessary grab bars and ramps as mobility declines;

to stay safe at home

- social activities, dances, events for Seniors that are also active/independent
- snow cleared off sidewalks
- I hope the city stops adding taxes and fees to the seniors. They help the homeless but not the seniors on fixed incomes.
- Stop escalating home valuations that drive up property taxes
- Condos one level, affordable single level housing
- Tax exemptions to include food for in-home pets (dog & cat only)
- Financial grants and advice to help with accessibility issues like ramps and stairs
- Therapy pool
- Internet services and education, problem solving