



HIGH COUNTRY
AREA AGENCY

on

AGING

Area Plan on Aging
July 1, 2024 – June 30, 2028

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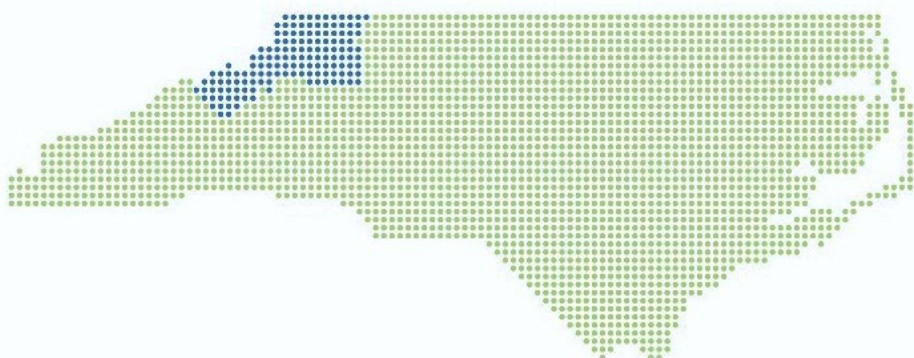
Executive Summary

High Country Area Agency on Aging is excited to introduce the 2024-2028 High Country Area Plan on Aging. This plan identifies our agency's strategic objectives for the upcoming four years, with a primary focus on bridging service gaps and fulfilling identified needs across the High Country of North Carolina. There is heightened significance to identify and mitigate gaps in service given the unprecedented pace of growth in the older adult population at the regional, state, and national levels.

High Country Area Agency on Aging serves Alleghany, Ashe, Avery, Mitchell, Watauga, Wilkes, and Yancey Counties in North Carolina, and is currently one of sixteen Area Agencies on Aging across the state. The Older Americans Act of 1973 facilitated the creation of High Country Area Agency on Aging along with hundreds of other Area Agencies on Aging across the United States. These agencies are tasked with providing supportive services to older adults to help them remain in their homes and within their communities, thereby deferring the need for long-term care.

The 2024-2028 High Country Area Plan on Aging extends the principles set forth by the Older Americans Act and aligns with the 2023-2027 North Carolina State Plan on Aging. Additionally, the plan advances High Country Area Agency on Aging's core mission to improve the lives of older adults, family caregivers, and people with disabilities by providing support, education, advocacy, and choices throughout their continuum of care. This mission is closely interwoven with the agency's broader vision of a community where all older adults, caregivers, and people with disabilities enjoy independence with dignity and respect as a result of community collaboration among all stakeholders involved in their health and wellbeing.

Realizing this mission and vision hinges upon effectively partnering with community stakeholders and consistently championing new and increased funding sources. These aspirations have been crafted to meet the anticipated needs of our regional population, including an older adult population that continues to grow. The objectives and strategies outlined within this plan highlight High Country Area Agency on Aging's commitment to administering and delivering effective, efficient, and equitable services and information to older adults, family caregivers, and people with disabilities throughout the North Carolina High Country.



Developing the Plan

High Country Area Agency on Aging crafted this Area Plan on Aging to steer the organization's initiatives from July 1, 2024 through June 30, 2028, in compliance with the federal Older Americans Act. The agency harnessed insights from both internal and external contributors to shape the Area Plan, which will serve as an annual measure of the agency's advancement towards certain goals and objectives. Some of these goals are tied to specific programs, such as the Long-Term Care Ombudsman Program, the Family Caregiver Support Program, and Health Promotion & Disease Prevention programming, while others are set at the agency level.

The objectives within this Area Plan were devised by High Country Area Agency on Aging to support the goals set forth within the 2023-2027 North Carolina State Plan on Aging. This alignment not only bolsters efficiency and effectiveness by fostering consistency across government tiers but also enables each region to benchmark strategies and interventions to discern the effectiveness of various services and supports. This plan, and other aging plans across the state, are guided by these six goals:

- **Goal 1:** *Protect the rights of Older North Carolinians by preventing abuse, neglect, and exploitation using a multi-disciplinary approach.*
- **Goal 2:** *Support programs and partnerships that improve the health and well-being of Older North Carolinians.*
- **Goal 3:** *Adopt an equity-centered housing lens approach to enable older adults to age in their place of choice with the appropriate services, support, and housing opportunities.*
- **Goal 4:** *Advance equity, accessibility, and inclusion through informal and formal caregiving support.*
- **Goal 5:** *Incorporate innovative practices and create reliable systems and infrastructures that prepare us for the future of NC, all while recognizing the need for communication equity to help foster involvement from all stakeholders.*
- **Goal 6:** *Advance equity by supporting and encouraging older adults of all backgrounds and their support systems to access information that helps them make informed choices about support services at home or in the community.*

Although these goals remain constant across regions, each region grapples with unique needs, hurdles, and resources. To pinpoint the distinct regional characteristics of the High Country, the team solicited feedback to ascertain the region's most prevalent needs. This feedback was gathered from a diverse group of respondents, including older adults, caregivers, Senior Tar Heel Legislators, community service providers, faith-based organizations, local businesses, and many others.

High Country Area Agency on Aging gathered firsthand feedback from regional stakeholders through digital and print community needs assessment survey responses and meetings with service providers and regional partners around the region. 600+ survey respondents were asked to identify the top three needs facing older adults, caregivers, and people with disabilities in their community. As seen in the table below, of the twenty possible needs from which respondents could choose, the most selected need from across the region was ‘Housing Affordability and Availability’. For additional county-level response data, please see *Appendix C*. For a copy of the regional needs assessment survey instrument, please see *Appendix D*.

Top 10 Identified Needs - Regional	% of Respondents
<i>Housing Affordability and Availability</i>	31.05%
<i>Food Access and Affordability</i>	25.00%
<i>Home Repair & Modifications</i>	23.37%
<i>In-Home Assistance (laundry, shopping, etc.)</i>	23.20%
<i>Caregiver Resources and Support</i>	23.04%
<i>Medication Affordability</i>	20.10%
<i>Social Isolation and Loneliness</i>	18.63%
<i>Medical Care</i>	17.65%
<i>Long-Term Care Availability and Access</i>	14.71%
<i>Transportation</i>	12.58%

Using diverse data collection methods enabled the team to amass crucial feedback on existing programs, recognize the specific needs in each county, and consider potential solutions to address those needs. Once specific needs were identified, High Country Area Agency on Aging converted this feedback into tangible objectives within this Area Plan to facilitate measurable progress towards each objective.

Quality Management

High Country Area Agency on Aging established this plan to address identified gaps in service experienced by older adults, caregivers, and people with disabilities throughout our region. High Country Area Agency on Aging staff will review and update this plan annually to measure progress, in conjunction with annual oversight from the North Carolina Division of Aging. High Country Area Agency on Aging and our contracted service providers are subject to annual programmatic and financial monitoring to ensure quality in service delivery. This oversight includes regional or subrecipient regulation at the state level and on-site program evaluations and financial reviews at the local level.

GOAL 1:



Use policy, advocacy, education, and a multi-disciplinary approach to protect the rights of Older North Carolinians from abuse, neglect, and exploitation.

As older adults navigate the complexities of aging, they are often vulnerable to abuse, neglect, and exploitation. High Country Area Agency on Aging employs a multi-disciplinary approach and remains committed to preventing these injustices. By integrating the expertise of social workers, healthcare professionals, legal experts, and volunteers, our organization strives to create a robust shield of protection for older adults. This collective effort allows us to address issues from multiple angles, ensuring comprehensive safeguarding of the rights of older North Carolinians. Our objective is not just to serve, but to uphold the dignity, respect, and security that every older adult deserves.

Objective: *Maximize outreach and training to prevent the abuse, neglect, and exploitation of older adults.*

- ◆ **Strategy:** Collaborate with local and statewide professional agencies to educate older adults and the public about fraud, scams, and other related exploitation.
 - Participate in community events and health fairs across the region to promote elder abuse prevention education at least two times per year.
 - Present to the Senior Tar Heel Legislature, senior centers, and High Country Council of Governments Board of Directors at least annually.
 - Utilize social media and electronic outreach continually to increase public awareness.
- ◆ **Strategy:** Partner with aging and human service professionals to increase recognition of elder abuse.
 - Provide Aging Sensitivity Training at least two times a year to help people understand how the senses may be impacted by the aging process.
 - Partner with Appalachian State University to host Aging Well Conference annually in the High Country region to provide continuing education for older adults, caregivers, and professionals.
- ◆ **Strategy:** Promote World Elder Abuse activities and increase awareness about the prevalence, recognition, and prevention of elder abuse throughout the region.
 - Implement an Elder Abuse Awareness walk annually in the region.
 - Implement an Elder Abuse Prevention Month outreach campaign annually.

Objective: *Using a multi-disciplinary approach, address elder abuse identification and prevention.*

- ◆ **Strategy:** Continue regular engagement with multi-disciplinary teams across the region.
 - Work with counties to continually expand, develop, and support elder abuse task force and MDT efforts.

Objective: *Empower long term care residents, resident representatives, and persons under guardianship to better exercise their rights through training and outreach.*

- ◆ **Strategy:** Facilitate resident rights and elder abuse prevention training for facility staff, long-term care residents, and the public.
 - Provide resident rights training to stakeholders such as facility staff, long-term care residents, or the public at least quarterly.
 - With permission from the council, attend one resident or family council every quarter to provide training and consultation.
- ◆ **Strategy:** Maintain active presence in local long term care facilities.
 - Each long-term care home in the region will receive a visit from ombudsman and/or Community Advisory Committee volunteers at least quarterly.

Objective: *Engage in policy education and advocacy events to stay informed of current information and policies that impact older adults and caregivers.*

- ◆ **Strategy:** Continue to provide strong support to the local chapter of the Senior Tar Heel Legislature (STHL) to ensure that members have resources necessary for effective advocacy in their communities, and statewide.
 - Provide STHL and Regional Advisory Committee continually with timely and relevant information, training, and education regarding pertinent aging issues, empowering them to stay abreast of developments and enabling them to advocate more effectively.
- ◆ **Strategy:** Continue engagement with professional groups engaged in policy advocacy and education.
 - Continue engagement with USAging and continue disseminating information regarding USAging updates and policy events.
 - Continue engagement with the Friends of Residents policy committee.
 - Continue to serve on the legislative and advocacy committee for the NC Ombudsman Association.
 - Continue engagement with North Carolina Association of Area Agencies on Aging (NC4A).

Objective: *Provide education regarding financial exploitation & fraud/scam prevention.*

- ◆ *Strategy:* Partner with the NC Department of Insurance's Senior Medicare Patrol (SMP) program to provide education and materials related to fraud recognition, fraud reporting, and healthcare billing review.
 - Provide training and SMP materials to all county based service providers, staff, regional advisory committee members, MDT groups, clients, and volunteers annually.
 - Provide SMP materials and training to older adults and caregivers, including active clients in the FCSP, Lifespan Respite and Health Promotion programs annually.
- ◆ *Strategy:* Provide fraud prevention materials from the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau to older adults, caregivers, human service professionals, and the public continually through electronic media, public events, and direct distribution.

Objective: *Promote access to legal resources important for advance planning and exploitation prevention.*

- ◆ *Strategy:* Promote access to legal assistance and education events such as wills and advance directive clinics.
 - Implement legal preparedness sessions for Appalachian State University's Aging Well Conference and other educational events, including those for caregivers.
- ◆ *Strategy:* Continue partnership with and referrals to Legal Aid of North Carolina's Senior Law Project.
 - Provide educational materials through outreach events and electronic media.
 - Increase staff engagement with Legal Aid of North Carolina outreach events.

Goal 1 - Expected Outcomes

- ◆ Staff, stakeholders, and the public will become more aware of elder abuse prevalence, recognition, and prevention.
- ◆ Staff, stakeholders, and the public will become more aware of financial exploitation prevalence, recognition, and prevention.
- ◆ Staff, stakeholders, and the public will become more aware of legal resources important for exploitation prevention.

GOAL 2:



Support programs and partnerships that improve the health and well-being of older North Carolinians.

As the population in our region ages, the need for specialized programs and partnerships aimed at enhancing the quality of life for older adults becomes increasingly crucial. These initiatives not only provide essential healthcare services, but also foster social connections, promote mental health, and encourage active and fulfilling lifestyles. By supporting these programs and partnerships, we are investing in a future where every person, regardless of age or disability, has access to the resources and care they need to thrive. This commitment reflects our respect for these populations and our desire to ensure their dignity and well-being.



Objective: *Continue to support and expand robust fall prevention efforts in the region.*

- ◆ **Strategy:** Continue support of partnerships necessary for offering fall prevention programming throughout the region.
 - Continue support, training, and mentorship for program leaders and host sites throughout the region.
- ◆ **Strategy:** Continue leading and growing the impact of the multi-disciplinary High Country Fall Prevention Coalition.
 - Continue to grow membership for strong multi-disciplinary attendance from all counties in our region.
 - Form a leadership committee within the Coalition to grow leadership outside of internal staff.
 - Provide training and educational opportunities to coalition members for fall prevention and related health topics.

Objective: *Review possible new funding sources to support the growth of health promotion programs available to older adults and caregivers in our region.*

Objective: *Support the implementation of Chronic Disease Self-Management Programs (CDSMP) in our region.*

- ◆ *Strategy:* Organize annual or biannual training opportunities for CDSMP leaders.
- ◆ *Strategy:* Provide technical support for leaders and host sites as they implement classes at their sites.
- ◆ *Strategy:* Support the establishment of at least three host sites that offer at least one CDSMP class annually for older adults.



Objective: *Engage in efforts to reduce social isolation of older adults in our region.*

- ◆ *Strategy:* Attend and engage with the Social Bridging NC Work Group.
 - Share the work of the Social Bridging NC Project with contracted service providers
 - Facilitate discussion and collaboration amongst contracted service providers to address social isolation.

Objective: *Promote access to health promotion information.*

- ◆ *Strategy:* Engage in health fairs, community events and working groups throughout the entire region.
 - Provide high quality health promotion resources including information from the National Institute on Aging and National Institute of Health.
 - Continue representation of the older adult population during engagement in MDT's focused on community health.
 - Provide resources continually through digital media such as bi-weekly bulletin, social media, and online resource guide.

Objective: *Provide education and support for caregiver health and stress reduction.*

- ◆ *Strategy:* Continually promote respite opportunities for caregivers throughout the region to promote health, wellbeing, and stress reduction.
- ◆ *Strategy:* Continue partnership and referrals to programs supporting caregivers including, but not limited to Project CARE, Yancey Dementia Caregivers and Friends, Caregiver Haven in Avery County, High Country Caregivers, Family Caregiver Support Program and NC Lifespan Respite program.
- ◆ *Strategy:* Implement at least one Powerful Tools for Caregivers program annually in our region.

Goal 2 - Expected Outcomes

- ◆ Staff, stakeholders, and the public will have increased awareness of health issues and health promotion strategies relevant to older adults and caregivers.
- ◆ Older adults in our region will have a reduced risk of falling.
- ◆ Older adults and caregivers will have increased opportunities to participate in fall prevention and health promotion programming.



GOAL 3:



Adopt an equity-centered housing lens approach to enable older adults to age in their place of choice with the appropriate services, support, and housing opportunities.

Adopting an equity-centered housing lens is pivotal in addressing the diverse needs of older adults and enabling them to age in their place of choice. This approach recognizes that housing is not just about buildings, but also about the services, supports, and opportunities that allow individuals to live with dignity and independence. It acknowledges the disparities in housing access and quality that exist among older adults due to factors such as income, race, and health status. By focusing on equity, we can ensure that all older adults, regardless of their circumstances, can age comfortably and securely in their preferred environment. This not only enhances their quality of life but also contributes to healthier, more inclusive communities.

Objective: *Provide education and referrals for older adults and caregivers seeking repair, home modifications, emergency housing and in-home assistance.*

- ◆ *Strategy:* Review published resource guide annually to ensure accuracy of listed regional housing and in-home assistance resources.

Objective: *Promote expansion of home and community-based services that support home modifications for older adults and caregivers.*

- ◆ *Strategy:* Provide education to HCCBG planning committees in the region to increase awareness that Housing and Home Improvement is an allowable block grant service to attempt to increase the number of providers offering this service.
- ◆ *Strategy:* Work with NC Division of Aging on the Choosing Home Initiative.
 - Utilize funds for critical home safety repairs and financial assistance to maintain the desired living situation.
- ◆ *Strategy:* Increase staff training, awareness, and involvement in housing and homelessness issues affecting older adults in the High Country region.
 - Collaborate and engage with regional housing related working groups and/or agencies.
 - Seek collaboration with community action groups WAMY and BROCC for Housing and Home Improvement service provision for older adults to facilitate a stronger referral pathway for older adults seeking support.

Objective: Promote educational opportunities for legal and financial planning for topics including preserving homeownership, long term care payment options, etc.

Objective: Promote home safety education for older adults and caregivers to reduce fall risk in the home.

- ◆ *Strategy:* Partner with AARP to provide ‘Homefit’ education opportunities in our region.
- ◆ *Strategy:* Continue to engage with High Country Fall Prevention Coalition to explore strategies for increased home safety for older adults in our region.

Goal 3 - Expected Outcomes

- ◆ Staff, older adults, and stakeholders will be more knowledgeable about home repair and modification resources in our region.
- ◆ Home repair and modifications resources will be more readily available in the region.
- ◆ Older adults will have a reduced fall risk in our region.



GOAL 4:



Advance equity, accessibility, and inclusion through informal and formal caregiving support.

High Country Area Agency on Aging is committed to empowering caregivers and older adults by enhancing the accessibility and quality of services. We recognize that caregivers play a crucial role in the well-being of older adults and strive to support them in navigating the continuum of care effectively. By engaging external stakeholders and fostering collaboration with regional providers, we aim to expand the range of services available to caregivers and older adults. Our goal is to equip caregivers with the knowledge and resources they need to make informed decisions and provide optimal care to their loved ones. Through strategic resource allocation and ongoing networking efforts, we seek to increase our organizational capacity to meet the evolving needs of caregivers and older adults. By working together with our community partners, we can ensure that caregivers receive the support they need to provide the best possible care, leading to improved health outcomes for their loved ones and themselves.

Objective: *Deliver comprehensive support for family caregivers across the entire spectrum of care.*

- ◆ **Strategy:** Continue to provide caregiver-centered case management that includes a holistic assessment, home visits and annual reassessments for caregivers enrolled in the program.
 - Initiate and encourage continued communication with caregiver clients as the progression of care changes.
 - Utilize funding to ensure low-income caregivers have access to supportive services.

Objective: *Support the expansion and development of the NC Lifespan Respite Program.*

- ◆ **Strategy:** Support efforts to increase access and utilization of respite vouchers by Spanish speaking caregivers.
 - Ensure that all program materials are available in Spanish.
 - Support and engagement with El Centro Hispano as a new partner with the program.
- ◆ **Strategy:** Increase utilization of vouchers in underserved geographies.
 - Review historical voucher utilization data across the state to identify geographies with low program usage.
 - Continue outreach efforts through in-person events and direct outreach to human service agencies.

Objective: *Ensure family caregivers have access to comprehensive information and are aware of options while caring for their loved ones.*

- ◆ *Strategy:* Provide caregivers with up to date and relevant information regarding services in their region.
 - Disseminate information through health fairs, community events, electronic distribution, and newsletters.

Objective: *Partner with community organizations to provide educational and supportive services for family caregivers.*

- ◆ *Strategy:* Work to ensure that caregivers have access to support groups throughout the region.
 - Continue maintaining and supporting existing support groups in the region.
 - Partner with senior centers, libraries, churches or other community organizations to implement support groups in areas where one does not exist.
- ◆ *Strategy:* Explore and support the establishment of a group respite option once a month for family caregivers in Yancey County.
- ◆ *Strategy:* Facilitate at least two events per year geared towards community support and education for family caregivers.

Objective: *Assist grandparents raising grandchildren and other older adults acting as kinship caregivers.*

- ◆ *Strategy:* Provide relevant information and resources for grandparents raising grandchildren and older adults as parents.
- ◆ *Strategy:* Utilize funding to provide relevant direct services to grandparents raising grandchildren and older adults as parents based on the unique needs of the family.
- ◆ *Strategy:* Partner with organizations to reach additional grandparents raising grandchildren that qualify for services.
- ◆ *Strategy:* Host and implement one event annually for grandparents raising grandchildren and/or older relatives as parents to expand education and resource utilization.

Goal 4 - Expected Outcomes

- ◆ Caregivers will have increased utilization and awareness of community resources for respite, education, and support.
- ◆ Caregivers who engage in programs will experience better health and well-being, and less negative impacts associated with caregiving.

GOAL 5:



Incorporate innovative practices learned through COVID-19 and create reliable systems and infrastructures that will have the capacity to serve the growing aging population, all while recognizing the need for communication equity to foster involvement from all stakeholders.

In the rapidly evolving landscape of aging services, it is imperative to incorporate innovative practices and establish reliable systems that prepare us for the future. These measures are not only crucial for economic growth and sustainability, but also for addressing emerging challenges in areas such as healthcare and education. The success of these initiatives hinges on the active involvement of all stakeholders, which is only possible through communication equity. Communication equity ensures that every individual, regardless of their background or circumstances, has an equal opportunity to participate in discussions, voice their concerns, and contribute their ideas. This inclusive approach fosters a sense of ownership and shared responsibility throughout the community, thereby enhancing the effectiveness of the implemented strategies and ensuring that future decisions are shaped by the collective wisdom of its diverse population.

Objective: *Increase efforts to identify and access new funding sources for existing or expanded service delivery for older adults.*

- ◆ *Strategy:* Continue engagement in North Carolina's development of a community care hub.
- ◆ *Strategy:* Engage with NC Division of Aging efforts related to funding sustainability.
- ◆ *Strategy:* Identify applicable funding sources to support or expand service delivery including private foundation grant opportunities.

Objective: *Provide emergency preparedness resources and education for older adults, individuals with disabilities and caregivers throughout our region.*

- ◆ *Strategy:* Provide emergency preparedness resources such as File of Life materials.
- ◆ *Strategy:* Provide and support completion of an emergency preparedness plan with all Family Caregiver Support Clients.

Objective: *Increase collaboration with local Emergency Management agencies throughout the region.*

- ◆ *Strategy:* Encourage Emergency Management professionals to attend and help lead multi-disciplinary teams in which staff regularly participate.
- ◆ *Strategy:* Collaborate to provide training and educational opportunities to benefit older adults and caregivers.
- ◆ *Strategy:* Consider partnerships for resource provision such as smoke detectors, 'File of Life' and emergency plans.
 - Explore how fall prevention education and referrals can be shared with EMS providers and local fire departments and other providers.

Objective: *Expand efforts to increase digital equity and access amongst older adults and caregivers.*

- ◆ *Strategy:* Collaborate with NC Division of Aging and local service providers to implement the digital navigator program.
- ◆ *Strategy:* If received, collaborate with High Country Council of Government's Planning and Economic Development department on their Digital Champion Grant to ensure that older adults and caregivers are served by this initiative.
- ◆ *Strategy:* Provide digital equity resources continually to help reduce social isolation in our region.

Objective: *Increase staff awareness regarding implications of an emergency.*

- ◆ *Strategy:* Review agency emergency procedures and review with staff annually.
- ◆ *Strategy:* Continue engagement in emergency preparedness conferences, webinars, and other educational opportunities for aging professionals.

Goal 5 - Expected Outcomes

- ◆ Increased community competence, including for older adults and caregivers, regarding emergency preparedness as related to older adults and caregivers.
- ◆ Improved internal resources and preparedness to serve older adults in an emergency.
- ◆ Strengthened relationship network for emergency preparedness and resources for older adults and caregivers in our region.

GOAL 6:



Advance equity by supporting and encouraging older adults of all backgrounds and their support systems to access information that helps them make informed choices about support services at home or in the community.

As our society becomes increasingly diverse, it is crucial to ensure that older adults of all backgrounds have equal access to information that can help them make informed decisions about their care. This includes understanding the various options available for support at home or within the community. By providing this information, we empower older adults and their support systems to choose services that best meet their unique needs and circumstances. This not only enhances their quality of life but also fosters a sense of dignity and independence. Furthermore, it contributes to a more inclusive and equitable society where every individual, regardless of age or background, is afforded the opportunity to thrive.

Objective: *Continue to expand equity-centered communications to older adults, people with disabilities, and families of all backgrounds.*

- ◆ *Strategy:* Review online resource guide, print materials, and website annually for accessibility and inclusive language.
 - Ensure website meets ADA compliance and best practices for inclusion.
 - Provide resource materials in both print and electronic versions.
 - Provide resource materials in both English and Spanish.

Objective: *Provide information about long-term care options and planning throughout our rural region.*

- ◆ *Strategy:* Review and update long-term care information in our resource guide at least annually.
- ◆ *Strategy:* Provide dual language print materials and targeted outreach to Spanish speaking communities in our region.
- ◆ *Strategy:* Provide community presentations at least annually, including at Appalachian State University's Aging Well Conference.

Objective: Increase the knowledge and skills of staff, other provider organizations, stakeholders and the public about diversity, equity, and inclusion.

- ◆ *Strategy:* Maintain SAGECare platinum accreditation for High Country Area Agency on Aging staff.
 - Encourage contracted service providers to pursue SAGECare accreditation.
- ◆ *Strategy:* Provide education and resources to promote inclusivity amongst our stakeholders and providers in our region.
 - Ensure that our resource guide contains DEI resources and is reviewed annually.
- ◆ *Strategy:* Provide expanded support to contracted local service providers to initiate more outreach efforts for underserved populations.
 - Continually collect and share available data that will inform service delivery and utilization.

Goal 6 - Expected Outcomes

- ◆ Staff, stakeholders, and the public will have expanded access to resources and training regarding inclusivity to older adults and caregivers.
- ◆ Older adults and caregivers will have an increased sense of inclusivity and welcomeness when accessing support services throughout our region.

Conclusion

Anticipating an increase in the older adult population over the next four years and beyond, High Country Area Agency on Aging is committed to broadening funding avenues, enhancing existing services, and introducing new services and supports based on insights from residents and professionals. The agency is devoted to addressing the diverse needs of our region's expanding aging demographic. To accomplish the goals specified in this plan, collective efforts with regional and local agencies, as well as our volunteers who contribute to our various committees and groups, are essential. Local service providers consistently confront barriers to funding, and sustaining the provision of programs and services to the growing number of older adults in our region poses a challenge based on available economic resources. Our most successful outcomes occur when we bolster collaboration, allocate available resources strategically, and emphasize accountability for ourselves and our provider agencies.



Appendix A: Regional Demographics

High Country Region | Projected Population Change by Age Group

Projected change from 2022-2042 by %

<i>County</i>	<i>0-17</i>	<i>18-44</i>	<i>45-59</i>	<i>60+</i>	<i>65+</i>	<i>85+</i>	<i>Overall</i>
Alleghany	+22%	-10%	+14%	-4%	-5%	+23%	+1%
Ashe	+13%	+9%	+13%	+22%	+26%	+67%	+15%
Avery	<-1%	-10%	-4%	+14%	+19%	+38%	0%
Mitchell	-1%	-5%	+12%	-16%	-13%	+9%	-5%
Watauga	+19%	+25%	+34%	+14%	+18%	+119%	+23%
Wilkes	+14%	+1%	+11%	+20%	+27%	+45%	+11%
Yancey	+18%	+11%	+19%	+0%	+3%	+29%	+10%
State	+17%	+19%	+22%	+39%	+48%	+114%	+24%

High Country Region | Age 65 and Older | Population by Race

2022 Population by %

<i>County</i>	<i>American Indian</i>	<i>Asian</i>	<i>Black or African American</i>	<i>Hispanic or Latino</i>	<i>White</i>	<i>Other</i>	<i>2 or more races</i>
Alleghany	<1%	0%	2%	3%	96%	0%	2%
Ashe	<1%	0%	1%	1%	97%	0%	1%
Avery	0%	0%	1%	1%	98%	<1%	1%
Mitchell	<1%	<1%	1%	1%	97%	1%	1%
Watauga	1%	<1%	1%	1%	97%	<1%	1%
Wilkes	<1%	<1%	4%	1%	94%	<1%	1%
Yancey	<1%	<1%	1%	1%	98%	<1%	1%
State	1%	2%	17%	3%	78%	1%	2%

High Country Region | Age 65 and Older | Population by Social Characteristics

2022 Population by %

<i>County</i>	<i>Difficulty with English</i>	<i>Has a disability</i>	<i>High School Graduate</i>	<i>In labor force</i>	<i>Less than High School</i>	<i>Lives alone</i>	<i>Veterans</i>
Alleghany	1%	28%	34%	14%	15%	25%	16%
Ashe	1%	37%	31%	14%	15%	26%	16%
Avery	1%	37%	29%	12%	14%	22%	14%
Mitchell	1%	39%	35%	17%	19%	36%	18%
Watauga	1%	28%	21%	22%	9%	27%	18%
Wilkes	<1%	38%	38%	15%	19%	28%	15%
Yancey	1%	34%	38%	17%	17%	27%	15%
State	3%	34%	30%	17%	13%	27%	16%

Appendix C: Overview of Needs Assessment Responses by County

Alleghany County 2024 Needs Assessment Results Top 10 Most Selected Needs	
Selected Response	Response %
<i>Caregiver Resources and Support</i>	35.48%
<i>Medical Care</i>	32.26%
<i>Housing Affordability and Availability</i>	27.42%
<i>In-Home Assistance (laundry, shopping, etc.)</i>	25.81%
<i>Food Access and Affordability</i>	22.58%
<i>Home Repair & Modifications</i>	22.58%
<i>Personal Care Support (bathing, dressing, etc.)</i>	17.74%
<i>Social Isolation and Loneliness</i>	16.13%
<i>Long-Term Care Availability and Access</i>	14.52%
<i>Transportation</i>	12.90%

Ashe County 2024 Needs Assessment Results Top 10 Most Selected Needs	
Selected Response	Response %
<i>Housing Affordability and Availability</i>	29.50%
<i>Food Access and Affordability</i>	26.62%
<i>Caregiver Resources and Support</i>	25.90%
<i>In-Home Assistance (laundry, shopping, etc.)</i>	24.46%
<i>Home Repair & Modifications</i>	21.58%
<i>Medication Affordability</i>	18.71%
<i>Social Isolation and Loneliness</i>	17.99%
<i>Medical Care</i>	15.11%
<i>Transportation</i>	13.67%
<i>Health & Wellness Programs</i>	12.95%

Avery County 2024 Needs Assessment Results Top 10 Most Selected Needs	
Selected Response	Response %
<i>Home Repair & Modifications</i>	30.43%
<i>Housing Affordability and Availability</i>	30.43%
<i>Food Access and Affordability</i>	28.26%
<i>Social Isolation and Loneliness</i>	19.57%
<i>Medical Care</i>	15.22%
<i>Caregiver Resources and Support</i>	13.04%
<i>Dental Care</i>	13.04%
<i>Legal Support (wills, advance directives, etc.)</i>	13.04%
<i>Long-Term Care Availability and Access</i>	13.04%
<i>In-Home Assistance (laundry, shopping, etc.)</i>	10.87%

Mitchell County 2024 Needs Assessment Results Top 10 Most Selected Needs	
Selected Response	Response %
<i>Home Repair & Modifications</i>	37.63%
<i>Caregiver Resources and Support</i>	32.26%
<i>In-Home Assistance (laundry, shopping, etc.)</i>	31.18%
<i>Food Access and Affordability</i>	23.66%
<i>Housing Affordability and Availability</i>	19.35%
<i>Social Isolation and Loneliness</i>	18.28%
<i>Medication Affordability</i>	17.20%
<i>Dementia Support and Education</i>	13.98%
<i>Mental Health, Depression, and Anxiety</i>	13.98%
<i>Health & Wellness Programs</i>	10.75%

Watauga County 2024 Needs Assessment Results Top 10 Most Selected Needs	
Selected Response	Response %
<i>Housing Affordability and Availability</i>	50.00%
<i>Social Isolation and Loneliness</i>	22.78%
<i>Caregiver Resources and Support</i>	21.52%
<i>Long-Term Care Availability and Access</i>	19.62%
<i>In-Home Assistance (laundry, shopping, etc.)</i>	18.35%
<i>Home Repair & Modifications</i>	17.09%
<i>Medical Care</i>	15.82%
<i>Medication Affordability</i>	15.19%
<i>Food Access and Affordability</i>	13.92%
<i>Health & Wellness Programs</i>	13.29%

Wilkes County 2024 Needs Assessment Results Top 10 Most Selected Needs	
Selected Response	Response %
<i>Food Access and Affordability</i>	38.52%
<i>Medication Affordability</i>	33.61%
<i>In-Home Assistance (laundry, shopping, etc.)</i>	28.69%
<i>Medical Care</i>	23.77%
<i>Housing Affordability and Availability</i>	21.31%
<i>Home Repair & Modifications</i>	18.85%
<i>Caregiver Resources and Support</i>	16.39%
<i>Social Isolation and Loneliness</i>	13.93%
<i>Transportation</i>	13.93%
<i>Long-Term Care Availability and Access</i>	13.11%

Yancey County | 2024 Needs Assessment Results | Top 10 Most Selected Needs

Selected Response	Response %
<i>Housing Affordability and Availability</i>	50.00%
<i>Caregiver Resources and Support</i>	32.14%
<i>Dental Care</i>	28.57%
<i>Home Repair & Modifications</i>	28.57%
<i>In-Home Assistance (laundry, shopping, etc.)</i>	25.00%
<i>Food Access and Affordability</i>	21.43%
<i>Dementia Support and Education</i>	17.86%
<i>Long-Term Care Availability and Access</i>	17.86%
<i>Medication Affordability</i>	14.29%
<i>Long-Term Care Education & Planning</i>	10.71%

2024 Regional Needs Assessment Survey



Survey Purpose and Information:

High Country Area Agency on Aging is seeking community input regarding the local needs of older adults, caregivers, and individuals with disabilities. Please complete the following survey to the best of your ability, as your answers will guide the development of our next four-year plan. We appreciate your help!
For more info, contact Tim Price at (828) 265-5434 ext.140 or tprice@hccog.org.

Please return all hard copies of completed surveys by March 18, 2024 to:
High Country Area Agency on Aging, 468 New Market Blvd. Boone, NC 28607

1. Which response describes you? (Select all that apply)

- | | |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Older adult (age 60+) | <input type="checkbox"/> Caregiver of a person with a disability |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Caregiver of a person 60 or older | <input type="checkbox"/> Professional who works with older adults |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Caregiver of a person 17 or younger | <input type="checkbox"/> Other _____ |

2. In which county do you live or work? (Select all that apply)

- | | | | |
|------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|----------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Alleghany | <input type="checkbox"/> Avery | <input type="checkbox"/> Watauga | <input type="checkbox"/> Yancey |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Ashe | <input type="checkbox"/> Mitchell | <input type="checkbox"/> Wilkes | <input type="checkbox"/> Other _____ |

3. How would you rate your community as a place to live for older adults? (Select one)

- | | | | | |
|------------------------------------|-------------------------------|-------------------------------|-------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Very Poor | <input type="checkbox"/> Poor | <input type="checkbox"/> Fair | <input type="checkbox"/> Good | <input type="checkbox"/> Very Good |
|------------------------------------|-------------------------------|-------------------------------|-------------------------------|------------------------------------|

4. Why did you select this rating? (Please write your response below)

5. What are the THREE (3) most significant needs currently facing older adults (60+) in your community? (Please select no more than three options)

- | | |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Caregiver Resources and Support | <input type="checkbox"/> Medical Care |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Dementia Support and Education | <input type="checkbox"/> Medication Affordability |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Dental Care | <input type="checkbox"/> Mental Health, Depression, and Anxiety |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Food Access and Affordability | <input type="checkbox"/> Personal Care Support (bathing, dressing, etc.) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Health & Wellness Programs | <input type="checkbox"/> Personal Safety and Security |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Home Repair & Modifications | <input type="checkbox"/> Social Isolation and Loneliness |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Housing Affordability and Availability | <input type="checkbox"/> Transportation |
| <input type="checkbox"/> In-Home Assistance (laundry, shopping, etc.) | <input type="checkbox"/> Vision Care |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Legal Support (wills, advance directives, etc.) | <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Long-Term Care Availability and Access | <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Long-Term Care Education & Planning | <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____ |

► **Health Services & Fall Prevention**

6. Please indicate the current level of need in your community for older adults, caregivers, and people with disabilities regarding each of the following services:

	No Need				Big Need
	1	2	3	4	5
Chronic Conditions Management Education	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Dental Care	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Fall Prevention Classes and Education	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Food Access	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Home Repair and Modification	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Housing Affordability and Availability	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Medical Care	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Medication Affordability	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Mental Health Services	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Nutrition Education	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Vision Care	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Volunteer and Employment Opportunities	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

7. Please provide any information that may help us promote healthy aging: (Please write your response below)

► **Caregiver Support**

8. Please indicate the current level of need in your community regarding each of the following caregiver services:

	No Need				Big Need
	1	2	3	4	5
Caregiver Support, Education, and Planning	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Dementia Caregiver Support	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Parkinson's Caregiver Support	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Respite Care and Companion Care	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Support for Caregivers of Adults with Disabilities	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Support for Older Adults Raising Youth	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

9. Please provide any information that may help us provide better support and services for caregivers: (Please write your response below)

► Long-Term Planning

10. Please indicate the current level of need in your community for older adults, caregivers, and people with disabilities regarding each of the following services:

	No Need				Big Need
	1	2	3	4	5
Advance Directives and Wills Assistance	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Advocacy for Long-Term Care Residents	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Aging-at-Home Resources and Education	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
End-of-Life Options and Support	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Financial Planning Classes and Education	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Healthcare & Insurance Education	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Long-Term Care Financial Education	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Long-Term Care Options Counseling	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Powers of Attorney & Guardianship Assistance	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

11. Please provide any information that may help us promote aging-in-place and long-term planning: (Please write your response below)

► Abuse & Scam Prevention

12. Please indicate the current level of need in your community for older adults, caregivers, and people with disabilities regarding each of the following services:

	No Need				Big Need
	1	2	3	4	5
Emotional Abuse Prevention	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Financial Exploitation Prevention	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Neglect and Abandonment Prevention	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Physical Abuse Prevention	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Scam Prevention and Education	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Self-Neglect Prevention	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

13. Please provide any information that may help us promote abuse and scam prevention: (Please write your response below)

14. Where do you get information about community services available for older adults?

(Select all that apply)

- | | |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> AARP | <input type="checkbox"/> Library |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Area Agency on Aging (AAA) | <input type="checkbox"/> Newspaper or Newsletters |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Caregiver or Case Manager | <input type="checkbox"/> Parks and Recreation |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Church or Religious Organization | <input type="checkbox"/> Senior Center |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Doctor or Medical Provider | <input type="checkbox"/> Town Offices |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Family or Friends | <input type="checkbox"/> TV or Radio |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Internet or Social Media | <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____ |

15. What currently prevents older adults in your community from accessing the services they need? *(Select all that apply)*

- | | |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Difficulty finding available services | <input type="checkbox"/> Limited income |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Difficulty with technology | <input type="checkbox"/> Limited personal mobility |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Limited access to transportation | <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____ |

16. What is your age? *(Select one)*

- | | | |
|-----------------------------------|--------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Under 60 | <input type="checkbox"/> 70-74 | <input type="checkbox"/> 85-89 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 60-64 | <input type="checkbox"/> 75-79 | <input type="checkbox"/> 90+ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 65-69 | <input type="checkbox"/> 80-84 | |

17. Do you consider yourself a member of the LGBTQ+ community? *(Select one)*

- | | | |
|------------------------------|-----------------------------|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> No | <input type="checkbox"/> Prefer not to answer |
|------------------------------|-----------------------------|---|

18. What response best describes you? *(Select all that apply)*

- | | | |
|---|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Asian/Pacific Islander | <input type="checkbox"/> Hispanic/Latino | <input type="checkbox"/> White/Caucasian |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Black/African American | <input type="checkbox"/> Native American/Indian American | <input type="checkbox"/> Other _____ |

19. What is your gender? *(Please write your response here:)* _____

20. Thank you for completing our survey! If you have any additional comments that may help during our planning process, please let us know below: