



ACTION PLAN

2025-2029

Dedication:

This Age-Friendly Howard County Action Plan is dedicated to the Howard County community who continue to strive each day to learn, teach, give, and enable this county to prosper, and to the community partners who work to make each day the best day possible. This plan was developed to continue age-friendly efforts that move Howard County forward toward a more cohesive, livable community for people of all ages and abilities.

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About this Document:

The Age-Friendly Howard County Action Plan is a living document. Portions of this plan may be updated to reflect available resources and the needs and wants of community members. To learn more about this initiative visit www.howardcountymd.gov/agefriendly

This report uses “older adult” to refer to a person age 50 years and older. It also uses the phrase “people with disabilities” to refer to adults in the Disability community ages 18 and older.

To request a hard copy of this report, translation, interpretation, accommodation or other auxiliary aids or services, contact Maryland Access Point of Howard County at 410-313-1234 (voice/relay).

Questions and Comments

If you have a question about this plan, a comment, or a correction for Age-Friendly Howard County staff, please contact us.

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Executive Summary

AARP recognizes Howard County for the accomplishments of Age-Friendly Howard County's first cycle of planning and implementation between 2019 and 2024. As a member of the Network of Age-Friendly States and Communities, Howard County has successfully met the challenge of reflecting on services, resources and opportunities, and pursuing continuous growth and improvement. On January 16, 2025, Howard County Executive Calvin Ball announced the start of the County's second age-friendly cycle, a continuation of the County's Age-Friendly Howard County initiative. The second cycle will lay the groundwork for the age-friendly efforts from 2025 through 2029.

This Age-Friendly Howard County Action Plan outlines specific goals and strategies to improve livability across Howard County. The Action Plan is structured by three Pillars: Health & Wellbeing, Living & Mobility, and Community & Inclusion. The goals within each Pillar are considered integral to promote inclusion and engagement, support independence, improve accessibility and safety, and enhance health and wellbeing for people of all ages and abilities.

In Howard County's second Age-Friendly cycle, we emphasize the role of collaboration in advancing an age-friendly community. Collaboration leads to better connections, coordinated efforts and sharing of resources and expertise. Age-Friendly Howard County aligns strongly with Longevity Ready Maryland and incorporates a longevity lens, so residents feel stronger, safer and better included as the County grows and develops. Together, we are a driving force to make it possible for people of all ages and abilities to thrive in Howard County.

Letter from County Executive Calvin Ball

The 2025-2029 Age-Friendly Howard County Action Plan continues our commitment to making Howard County a truly inclusive and accessible place for our residents to thrive in their older years. Since we first launched our Age-Friendly Initiative in 2019, we have created spaces and opportunities for our older residents to lead healthy and fulfilling lives. We have opened state-of-the-art 50+ Centers with world-class amenities and programs to keep our older residents healthy and engaged. We have created outdoor spaces such as our Age-Friendly Connection tables to encourage socialization and decrease isolation.

Guided by the Age-Friendly Howard County theme of Collaboration, we have received input from more than 100 community members who shared their vision for an Age-Friendly Howard County during seven community listening sessions. Their vital input showed us where our challenges lie- transportation, housing, healthcare gaps, and public safety.

These community voices want action, and the Age-Friendly Howard County Action Plan delivers, focusing on Key Pillars of Livability: Health & Wellbeing, Living & Mobility, and Community & Inclusion. These pillars serve as a guided roadmap to target opportunities for improvement, engage in effective collaboration, and act on community priorities.

We have accomplished so much since the implementation of our Age-Friendly Initiative, but we still have plenty of work ahead. This action plan outlines the specific ways in which we will continue to make Howard County a truly inclusive and age-friendly model community for the nation.

Everyone has a role in making Howard County age-friendly and we are encouraged to see people of all ages working together to achieve these goals. Thank you for your support.

Sincerely,

Calvin Ball

Howard County Executive

Letter from the Department of Community Resources and Services and the Office on Aging and Independence

People in Maryland are living longer than ever before. In 2000, residents aged 60 and older represented 15% of the state's population; by 2020, that percentage grew to 23% and is projected to reach 26% of the population by 2030. As longevity increases, so does the importance of creating communities that support independence, connection, and wellbeing across the lifespan. The research shows older adults and individuals living with disabilities desire to remain in their homes and connected to their communities. County Executive Calvin Ball's vision to create a community that is a great place to live, work, play and age for all recognizes that thoughtful planning today shapes opportunity for generations to come. Designing a community that is inclusive, accessible, and responsive to changing needs benefits residents of every age and ability.

In December 2019, we launched the Age-Friendly Howard County Initiative to create a more livable community where residents of all ages feel safe, welcomed, and engaged. Since then, the County has made meaningful progress implementing the inaugural Age-Friendly Howard County Action Plan and advancing the World Health Organization and AARP framework across the eight domains of livability. Building on this strong foundation, the 2025–2029 Age-Friendly Howard County Action Plan reflects a deeper commitment to collaboration, measurable outcomes, and inclusive strategies.

As we introduce the next Age-Friendly goals, our efforts aligned with the four epic goals of Longevity Ready Maryland (LRM): building a longevity ecosystem, promoting economic opportunity, preparing residents to afford longevity, and optimizing health, wellness, and mobility. The collective input of over 100 work group participants identified challenges, opportunities, and recommendations that ultimately became the Age-Friendly Howard County Action Plan 2025-2029.

We extend our sincere gratitude to the community members, County partners, stakeholder committee members, the Howard County Commission on Aging, business owners, and service providers who helped focus this work. Community feedback was clear: health, transportation, housing, dementia-friendly efforts, and longevity are top priorities. While Howard County has many age-friendly strengths, this Action Plan acknowledges the need for new approaches, innovative partnerships, and continued accountability to ensure equity, inclusion, and access for all.

We look forward to continuing the strong collaboration that is the foundation of Age-Friendly Howard County. Together, through the implementation of the Action Plan 2025-2029, we reaffirm our shared commitment to ensuring Howard County is not just a great place to grow up but is also an exceptional place to grow older.

Sincerely,

Jackie Scott

Jacqueline R. Scott, J.D., M.L.
Director, Department of Community
Resources and Services

Ofelia Ross Ott

Ofelia Ross Ott
Administrator, Office on Aging and
Independence

What is Age-Friendly Howard County

MISSION: To create an age-friendly County that fosters safety, respect, and connection for residents and visitors of every age and ability.

VISION: Howard County will be a vibrant, inclusive and livable community where people of all ages and abilities can thrive.

GOALS:

Age-Friendly Howard County will:

- Spread awareness of age-friendly concepts, including physical design of public and private spaces, accessible and affordable services and resources, policies, and community engagement.
- Engage diverse community stakeholders to identify opportunities for improving livability and wellbeing.
- Improve safety, affordability, enjoyment, and access to places in Howard County where residents and visitors live, work, and play.
- Recognize businesses and organizations dedicated to implementing innovative age- and dementia-friendly practices.
- Adapt to the needs of the aging population in Howard County.

Plan of Action

Community Engagement

Howard County embarked on its second Age-Friendly cycle on January 16, 2025, a continuation of the County's Age-Friendly Howard County initiative. During the kick-off event, Age-Friendly Howard County welcomed County Executive Calvin Ball, Carmel Roques, Secretary of the Maryland Department of Aging, Jen Holz, AARP Maryland Associate State Director for Community Outreach, and David Conway, AARP Maryland State President to speak. After the engaging presentation, over 100 attendees were invited to network and provide feedback on ways Howard County could improve across eight domains of livability. These domains were determined by efforts and lessons learned during the first age-friendly cycle, and included, Resilience and Health, Dementia-Friendly Community, Longevity, Workforce Development, Inclusion, Transportation, Housing, and Age-Friendly Businesses. The feedback from community members and stakeholders was used to frame Community Listening Sessions.

The Howard County Office on Aging and Independence hosted seven Community Listening Sessions between February and April 2025. Nearly 100 community members participated and shared their perspectives on how to make Howard County safer, healthier and more livable. Listening Session feedback revealed cross-cutting themes, community strengths and challenges, and the most urgent or important issues according to community members. The most urgent issues were consistently Housing, Transportation, Inclusion, Longevity, and Resiliency. Listening Session feedback coupled with the community's identified priorities were used to guide the development of the Key Pillars of Livability and overarching goals. The summary of the Listening Session feedback can be found in the [Appendix](#).

Understanding the community's priorities helped guide Age-Friendly Howard County staff to identify key stakeholders who are actively working within prioritized domains. Stakeholder engagement supported the refinement of goals and identify action items to help attain the age-friendly mission. Stakeholder feedback was used to draft and refine the Age-Friendly Howard County Action Plan which was then sent to community members for their review and feedback. Community feedback was used to further refine the Action Plan.

Continued community engagement is a high priority for Age-Friendly Howard County. Community members will continue to be welcomed to take part in the implementation phase of the age-friendly cycle, making suggestions, sharing their expertise, skills, and interests to support an Age-Friendly community for people of all ages and abilities.

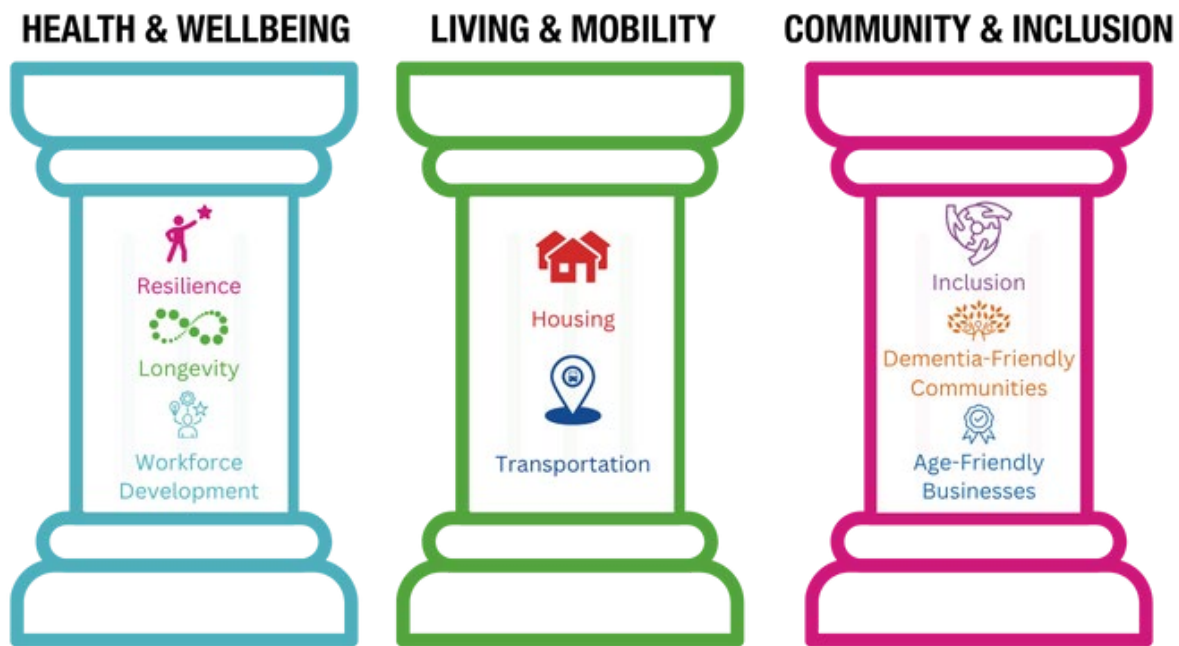
Stakeholder Work Group

Community stakeholders across multiple sectors are actively collaborating to advance Howard County's age-friendly goals. Through their leadership and coordinated efforts, they leverage their collective expertise to promote a more livable community. Below is a list of Stakeholder Work Group members whose efforts are strengthening the longevity ecosystem making the County stronger, safer and more inclusive.

AARP Maryland	Howard County Health Department
Association of Community Services	Howard County La Alianza Latina Commission
Bridgeway Community Church	Howard County Local Health Improvement Coalition
Bridges to Housing Stability	Howard County Office on Aging & Independence
Coalition of Geriatric Services	Howard County Office of Emergency Management
Columbia Association	Howard County Office of Transportation
Community Action Council	Howard County Office of Workforce Development
Compass Real Estate	Howard Community College
Enterprise Residential	Ignited Strategies
Heritage Housing Partners	Johns Hopkins Howard County Medical Center
Howard County Asian American & Pacific Islander Commission	Kindred Strategies
Howard County Association of Realtors	Maryland Age-Friendly Network
Howard County Commission on Aging	Maryland Department on Aging
Howard County Commission on Disabilities	Maryland Inclusive Housing
Howard County Department of Community Resources & Services	MDOT MVA Maryland Highway Safety Office
Howard County Department of Community Sustainability	MDOT State Highway Administration
Howard County Department of Housing & Community Development	Neighbor Ride
Howard County Department of Licensing & Permits	Regional Transportation Agency of Central Maryland
Howard County Department of Planning & Zoning	Splaine Consulting
Howard County Department of Recreation & Parks	The Columbia Association
	The Village in Howard
	Yingling-Ridgely VFW & Auxiliary Post 7472

Key Pillars of Livability

There are three Key Pillars of Livability that structure and guide age-friendly efforts in Howard County. These Pillars were established based on community input and priorities. Efforts within each pillar are pursued by collaborative partners and community members dedicated to the Age-Friendly Howard County mission and vision.



Health and Wellbeing will focus on the ability for people to live long, productive lives which includes efforts to increase healthier lifestyles, improve access to healthcare, increase participation in community-based services, and decrease negative effects of social isolation. This Pillar emphasizes meaningful engagement, quality of life, personal growth, and social wellness.

Living and Mobility will address the physical environment, County infrastructure and needs of the community to help people access affordable, appropriate, and accessible housing and transportation options which support aging in the right place. This Pillar aims to uplift systems, including Maryland Access Point of Howard County, that support independence and mobility for residents and visitors of all ages and abilities.

Community and Inclusion will focus on making Howard County a more inclusive place for people of all ages or abilities. This Pillar promotes community-driven age- and dementia-friendly efforts and caregiver wellness, so resources and services are accessible and welcoming to all.

Goals and Action Items

Health and Wellbeing

PURPOSE: To promote healthy aging, resilience and opportunities for personal growth so residents of all ages can thrive physically, mentally, and socially.

PILLAR GOALS

1. Connect older adults, people with disabilities, and adults with limited income to affordable, timely, and local healthcare by improving care navigation, awareness, and support systems, prioritizing people currently disconnected from care.

ACTION ITEMS

- a. By 2029, pilot a Primary Care Access Program in Howard County's 50+ Centers through partnerships with health care providers, serving at least 300 older adults annually, and collaborating with Community Health Workers to improve access and awareness of services.
 - b. By 2027, refine the hospital discharge suite in partnership with Johns Hopkins Howard County Medical Center to streamline referrals from clinical providers to Maryland Access Point (MAP), the Office on Aging and Independence's programs and resources, and other community-based resources to reduce hospital readmission rates, improve equitable access to healthcare that address physical, behavioral, emotional, and cognitive health, and better connect discharged patients to community-based services.
 - c. By 2028, host "Bring a Friend" open house events across Howard County to increase awareness of community-based resources and services.
 - d. By 2029, pilot a micro-transit shuttle in partnership with the Howard County Office of Transportation and the Regional Transportation Agency of Central Maryland to serve rural and under-resourced areas within Howard County to connect older adults, adults with disabilities, and adults with limited income to medical and community resource hubs.
 - e. By 2027, strategically provide outreach to older adults without support networks (i.e., Solo Agers), including social programs, advance care planning programs, and volunteer check-ins.
2. Leverage trusted community networks to deliver health education, resilience-building capacity programming, and peer support.

ACTION ITEMS

- a. By 2027, partner with faith-based and community-based organizations to establish resilience circles (e.g., support and education groups) that promote health, resilience, chronic condition management, and peer connection.
- b. By 2027, partner with and elevate the efforts of the Howard County Community Ambassador Program to improve community navigation of resources offered by the County.

3. Expand opportunities for healthy living, including access to nutritious food, physical activity, and digital and social connection.

ACTION ITEMS

- a. By 2028, strengthen and expand the Office on Aging and Independence’s congregate meals program at each 50+ Center through strategic partnerships, by increasing variety of culture-rich menus, increasing participation, and reducing food waste.
 - b. In 2026, engage adults in building advocacy skills that include understanding and assessing legislation, public speaking and testifying, and Op-Ed writing.
 - c. By 2028, strengthen and expand the Office on Aging and Independence’s digital inclusion program, by asset mapping Digital Equity tools, identifying a new location to host a “Learning Lab”, increasing the frequency of classes in alternative languages, and advocating for accessible and affordable home internet services.
 - d. In 2026, engage post-cardiac rehabilitation patients from Johns Hopkins Howard County Medical Center in exercise and healthy living by connecting patients to 50+ Centers and Go50+ programming.
 - e. Expand intergenerational programs through partnerships with the Howard County Local Children’s Board, Youth Engagement Leadership Workgroup, the Boys and Girls Club of Howard County, and other community-based youth organizations.
4. Increase resilience for emergencies and public health events, to help people feel supported before, during and after crises.

ACTION ITEMS

- a. In 2026, leverage local partnerships, including the Howard County Office of Emergency Management, to promote and distribute an “Emergency Preparedness Month” campaign highlighting age-friendly safety and resilience tips to older adults, people with disabilities, and people with limited income.
- b. By 2028, pilot an Age-Inclusive Workforce Initiative to help adults adapt to changing economic and public health conditions, to include digital literacy workshops, financial preparedness, and leadership training.
- c. By 2028, review, update and expand the Howard County Food Connection Map in partnership with the Local Health Improvement Coalition to ensure resources are mapped for people of all ages and include additional locations of food pantries and community composting.

Living and Mobility

PURPOSE: To advocate for safe, accessible housing and transportation options that support independence, connection, and full participation in the community.

PILLAR GOALS

1. Support “aging in the right place” by providing education, resources, and services that help residents remain safe and comfortable.

ACTION ITEMS

- a. In 2026, design and distribute a Welcome Package to at least 75% of new homebuyers age 50+ that promotes the Office on Aging and Independence programs, 50+ Centers, and key community resources, including transit access.
 - b. By 2028, design and distribute a Home Modification Resources Package in partnership with the Howard County Department of Housing and Community Development to at least 1,000 homeowners, to include key county resources like the Community Living Program, Reinvest/Renovate/Restore Loans, and Senior tax credit and Aging-in-Place tax credit.
 - c. By 2029, offer financial wellness workshops in partnership with faith-based and community-based organizations on topics including emergency budgeting, fraud prevention and scams.
 - d. By 2027, incorporate advance planning for longevity into current programs (e.g., nutrition programs, peer support groups, caregiver support programs) to expand community outreach and longevity preparedness in alignment with Longevity Ready Maryland.
 - e. By 2028, update user-friendly map showing 50+ Centers, senior housing, and create additional features that incorporate key resources, including fixed routes and within paratransit zones.
2. Advocate for affordable and accessible housing options, including Accessory Dwelling Units, and prioritize community advocacy-building skills.

ACTION ITEMS

- a. In 2026, empower adult renters to learn about their rights, supportive resources and programs, and connect with each other and community-based organizations and programs in partnership with the Howard County Office of Consumer Protections and the Horizon Foundation.
- b. In 2026, engage adults in building advocacy skills that include understanding and assessing legislation, public speaking and testifying, and Op-Ed writing.
- c. By 2027, engage volunteers of all ages in County- and State-level legislation to advance policies that promote universal design, accessible housing tax incentives, and age-friendly zoning reforms including those in support of Accessory Dwelling Units.
- d. In 2026, promote the expanded Senior Tax Credit and Aging in Place Tax Credit that went into effect for tax year 2025.
- e. By 2029, pilot an age-friendly housing and transit dashboard in partnership with the Howard County Department of Housing and Community Development and the Office of Transportation

to track new accessible and affordable housing units across the County, transit accessibility metrics, and identify barriers to affordable housing development through a review of processes.

- f. By 2029, promote Bridges to Housing Stability's HoCo Home Share pilot program to improve pilot outcomes including financial stability, social connection and practical support; and advocate for the expansion of home sharing options across Howard County.
3. Improve transportation access and safety by advocating for multimodal, dementia-friendly, and pedestrian-safe transportation systems built with mobility in mind.

ACTION ITEMS

- a. By 2029, identify, promote, or establish a transportation service that connects at least 5 major 55+ Communities to 50+ Centers, serving at least 500 adults age 50+ annually, then refine the service to address "last mile" access and flexible scheduling.
- b. By 2028, develop and promote an Age-Friendly Transit Toolkit in partnership with key collaborators to give guidance on using transit services, safety tips, how to ride the bus, and other relevant information to make public transit more accessible.
- c. By 2027, provide educational opportunities to at least 200 adults age 50+ to build confidence in using car-free travel alternatives and to expand access to drive safety programs such as CarFit.
- d. By 2027, mobilize volunteers to conduct countywide audits of sidewalks and bus stops near 55+ Communities, 50+ Centers and resource hubs, assessing accessibility, comfort and safety across seasons. Then share findings and recommendations with partners to guide improvements.
- e. By 2028, expand dementia-awareness training (e.g., Dementia Live) to RTA staff, drivers, and transportation planners to ensure transit services are inclusive and supportive.

Community and Inclusion

PURPOSE: To empower all residents to feel a sense of belonging, engage in civic participation, and seek accessible information.

PILLAR GOALS

1. Advocate for strong regional communication, shared resources, and collective impact to support a Longevity Ready Maryland.

ACTION ITEMS

- a. By 2029, establish and sustain a Maryland Age-Friendly Network of formally designated communities and prospective communities, with quarterly collaboration and shared initiatives launched annually, and welcome new communities and jurisdictions to the network regularly to build close working relationships across Maryland.
 - b. By 2028, expand the Howard County Food Connection Map to include well-rounded asset mapping for resources and supports, in collaboration with the Howard County Local Health Improvement Coalition.
 - c. By 2029, expand and promote the Ageism Awareness Program by sharing a toolkit of materials with neighboring counties and the Maryland Department of Aging, providing trainings to at least 500 community members, and hosting at least 8 Community Conversations in public places like libraries and community centers to reduce age bias.
2. Advance age- and dementia-friendly practices and expand standards to businesses and community organizations.

ACTION ITEMS

- a. By 2029, certify at least 100 local businesses and community-facing organizations in Howard County that meet age- and dementia-friendly criteria, through the launch and adoption of a formal Age-Friendly Business Certification Program.
- b. By 2027, achieve formal Dementia-Friendly Community certification by documenting existing initiatives, identifying priority gaps, and coordinating a county-wide Howard County Dementia Plan in alignment with the Dementia Friendly American (DFA) model.
- c. By 2028, expand dementia-awareness training (e.g., Dementia Live) to RTA staff, drivers, and transportation planners to ensure transit services are inclusive and supportive.
- d. By 2029, promote new and improved public spaces that are age-inclusive and accessible to people of all abilities, and keep a list of these spaces and key information so the public can regularly access the information.

3. Build an inclusive, age-friendly volunteer network that welcomes people of all ages but prioritizes meaningful opportunities for adults age 50+ in partnership with nonprofits, local organizations, businesses, and schools.

ACTION ITEMS

- a. In 2026, post and promote quarterly age-friendly volunteer opportunities on hoco volunteer.gov.
 - b. By 2028, pilot a neighbor-helping-neighbor volunteer program that assists adults age 50+ and adults with disabilities with decluttering, organizing, and yard work to ensure safety and wellness.
 - c. By 2027, assess the Community Ambassador Program for impact and outcomes related to community knowledge and confidence and use lessons learned to strengthen and expand the program, including promoting opportunities to become a Community Ambassador.
 - d. By 2027, mobilize volunteers to conduct countywide audits of sidewalks and bus stops near 55+ Communities, 50+ Centers, parks and resource hubs, assessing accessibility, comfort and safety across seasons. Then share findings and recommendations with partners to guide improvements.
4. Foster a more compassionate and supportive environment for caregivers that helps to improve their health, welfare and financial stability.

ACTION ITEMS

- a. In 2026, expand awareness of and access to 24/7 caregiver resources and support, including Howard County Caregiver Portal by Trualta, to support caregivers in caring for others and themselves.
- b. In 2026, develop and promote a Caregiver Campaign to identify people who may be providing care to a loved one, neighbor, or friend, but may be disconnected from support; prioritize multicultural partnerships and provide education and resources welcoming all.
- c. By 2029, refine and expand the Caregiver Support Program to support personal resilience, expand dissemination of resources and information, and promote caregiver wellbeing for all types of caregivers (i.e., spousal, sandwich generation, grandchildren caring for grandparents, grandparents caring for grandchildren, etc.).
- d. By 2029, offer targeted financial wellness and workforce development workshops for family caregivers and direct care workers to support long-term financial stability and meet the growing needs of the Home and Community-Based Services sector, in collaboration with Howard County Community College.
- e. By 2029, collaborate with Howard County Community College, Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health, the University of Maryland Baltimore County Erikson School, and other local universities to advance the focus on longevity and healthy aging.

Conclusion

The Age-Friendly Howard County Action Plan represents the community's shared commitment to a safer, healthier, and more livable county for people of all ages and abilities. Guided by the voices of residents and visitors, the expertise of community stakeholders, and the lessons learned from the first age-friendly cycle, this Plan charts a clear path forward across the three Key Pillars of Livability: Health & Wellbeing, Living & Mobility, and Community & Inclusion.

The second age-friendly cycle emphasizes the power of collaboration. As stakeholders, community members, and County agencies work together, we strengthen the collective capacity to respond to changing needs, support independence, expand access to resources, and foster a more connected, resilient, and longevity ready Howard County. This Plan outlines over 45 action items with clear timelines, performance indicators, and implementation partners. Across the three Key Pillars of Livability, the Plan establishes targets such as expanding access to health services, distributing resource packages, and piloting innovative programs. The goals and action items outlined in this Plan are ambitious by design; they reflect that meaningful progress happens when communities commit to shared action.

Age-Friendly Howard County is an ongoing initiative that evolves as our population, environment, and opportunities change. As we move into the implementation phase, this Plan provides a clear roadmap for achieving meaningful improvements in health access, mobility, affordability, connection, and inclusion – ensuring that Howard County is prepared not just for today's aging population, but for generations that follow.

Appendix

Community Listening Session Summary

Between February and April 2025, the Howard County Office on Aging and Independence conducted seven Age-Friendly Community Listening Sessions. The purpose of the listening sessions was to collect actionable input on how to strengthen safety, health and livability for residents of all ages and abilities. Each session was 60 to 90 minutes and was facilitated by the Livable Communities Program Manager, supported by a notetaker from the Office on Aging and Independence. All sessions were voice-recorded to ensure accurate qualitative analysis.

Nearly 100 Howard County residents and visitors participated in the seven listening sessions. Most participants were age 50 years or older, and 24 percent identified as male. Half of all attendees reported living in Columbia (50%), followed by Ellicott City (15%) and Laurel (11%). Representation was captured from communities across the county, providing geographically diverse input.

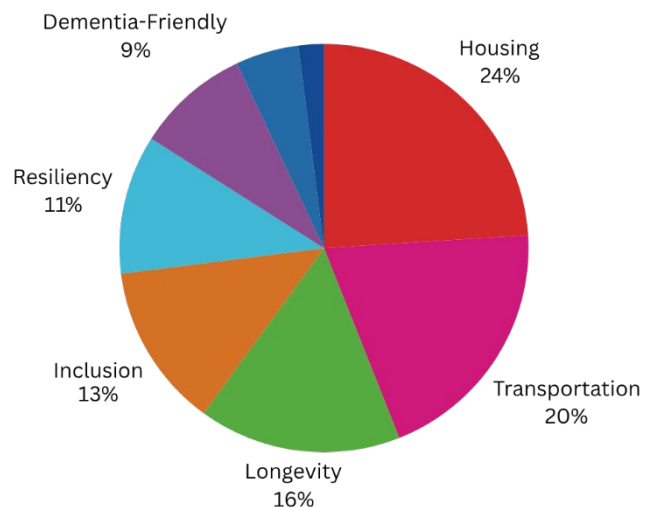
Participants reviewed eight domains of livability, including Resilience and Health, Dementia-Friendly Community, Longevity, Workforce Development, Inclusion, Transportation, Housing, and Age-Friendly Businesses. Each domain was defined and illustrated on poster boards (Figure 1). Attendees were asked to identify the three domains they viewed as the most urgent or important. These priorities shaped discussions during each session.

Across all seven sessions, four domains consistently emerged as top priorities (Figure 2): Housing (24%), Transportation (20%), Longevity (16%) and Inclusion (13%). These data trends provided a clear foundation to further qualitative analysis. The Livable Communities Program Manager conducted a thematic review of notes and recording to identify cross-cutting themes, community strengths, and community challenges that reflect the community’s collective vision and concerns.

Figure 1. Example of Domain poster boards with sticky notes.



Figure 2. Top Priorities of Attendees.



Four cross-cutting themes emerged that reflected consistent priorities and concerns:

- Participants expressed a strong desire to age in place, but reported uncertainty about how to access the resources, supports, and housing options needed to do so.
- Participants voiced frustration with rapid overdevelopment, noting that community input is often limited in planning decisions.
- Participants emphasized the need for more inclusive, welcoming public spaces that accommodate people of all ages and abilities.
- Participants made clear that they want tangible action and measurable progress, not just input collection, demonstrating a readiness for the County to move from listening to implementation.

Participants identified several notable community strengths that support livability and wellbeing in Howard County:

- The Office on Aging and Independence's 50+ Centers were praised as welcoming, activity-rich space that fosters social connection and engagement.
- Libraries were described as inclusive, informative, and highly trusted institutions that provide critical access to community resources and programs.
- The quality of the County's parks and trail systems, noting that they are clean, accessible, easy to navigate, and enjoyable for people of all ages.
- Strong network of communication resources, including the Ball Bulletin, e-newsletters, and neighborhood or community bulletin boards which served as primary and reliable channels for receiving information.

Participants also identified several significant challenges that affect their ability to live safely and comfortably in Howard County:

- Housing stress emerged as a major concern, driven by rising home prices, taxes, and utility costs, a lack of right-sizing options for people of all ages, the absence of rent control, and the high cost of home maintenance compounded with the difficulty finding trusted contractors.
- Transportation challenges were noted, including missing or incomplete sidewalks, limited benches along pathways or at bus shelters, and increasingly aggressive driving that compromises pedestrian safety.
- Healthcare gaps, including extensive wait times for appointments and triage, limited availability of local providers, and transportation barriers to access timely care.
- Public safety concerns surfaced with participants citing increased crime around the mall area, insufficient lighting that complicates night driving, and broader concerns about pedestrian comfort and safety in public spaces.

The insights gathered through the seven listening sessions directly shape the structure and priorities of the 2025-2029 Age-Friendly Howard County Action Plan. The community's feedback informed the development of the three Pillars of Livability: 1) Health & Wellbeing, 2) Living & Mobility, and 3) Community & Inclusion. Each pillar includes targeted, measurable goals and actionable strategies designed to address the needs,

strengths, and challenges the community identified. These Pillars will guide implementation efforts over the next four years, ensuring that the Action Plan moves beyond listening to deliver measurable, community-driven progress.

Definitions

Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs)	A second, smaller, and subordinate residential unit located on the same lot as a single-family home, which includes its own independent living facilities for cooking, eating, sleeping, and care. ADUs are regulated by strict zoning oversight, size limitations, and specific design criteria.
Adults with Disabilities	According to the Americans with Disabilities Act, refers to someone who has a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities.
Advance Care Planning	A process of making decisions about future medical care, especially in situations where the person is no longer able to speak for themselves. It involves reflecting on values and preferences, discussing them with trusted others and healthcare providers, and documenting wishes in an advance directive.
Advance Directive	A written statement of a person's wishes regarding medical treatment, including a living will, made to ensure those wishes are carried out should the person be unable to communicate them to a doctor.
Care Navigation	The process of helping people, especially those with complex medical needs, get through the healthcare system by coordinating their care, providing support, and reducing barriers.
Care Navigator	A person who acts as a guide to help patients understand their medical conditions, access the right services at the right time, and connect with necessary social and community resources.
Co-Housing	A form of intentional living where residents own private homes or rooms and share common spaces, such as laundry facilities, dining rooms and kitchens. Co-housing fosters a collaborative relationship with a focus on active social interaction and interdependence.
Direct Care Worker	A paid professional who provides hands-on personal and health-related assistance to people, helping them with activities of daily living such as bathing, dressing, and medication management.
Family Caregiver	An unpaid individual, typically a family member, partner, or friend, who provides regular assistance to another person. Their duties can range from helping with daily tasks like cooking or personal care to managing medications, finances, and medical appointments or care.

Last Mile	Refers to the final leg of a delivery process, often the end-customer's location. Within the context of Living & Mobility, service to the "last mile" means to be picked up or dropped off at the resident's home address or closest navigable point.
Livable Community	A place that is safe and secure, with affordable housing and diverse transportation options, and supportive community features and services that allow residents of all ages and abilities to thrive.
Longevity	The ability to live a long life which can be considered both the maximum potential life span of a species and a goal for individuals to extend their lifespan and health span.
Longevity Ready Maryland	A comprehensive, 10-year plan by the state of Maryland to support its growing older adult population by coordinating services across government agencies, communities, and the private sector. Learn more at https://lrm.maryland.gov/
Missing Middle	A range of housing types that fall between single-family homes and large apartment buildings, including duplexes, triplexes and townhomes.
Resilience	The ability to withstand, recover or adapt from stressors like illness, loss, life changes, or environmental changes.
Solo Aging	An increasing trend when an older adult lives and ages without a partner or adult children to rely on, facing challenges related to healthcare, finances, and daily life "alone." Solo aging requires proactive planning to build a support system to maintain independence and security.