

Creating Community for a Lifetime Roadmap

Overview—Awareness of Services

The Awareness of Services issue area focuses on the community’s capacity to reach out effectively to older adults and their families and caregivers so they know how to access support services when they need them. This ranges from a community-wide single-point-of-entry information and referral system to individual service provider’s understanding of aging issues and ability to assess, problem-solve with, and refer clients effectively.

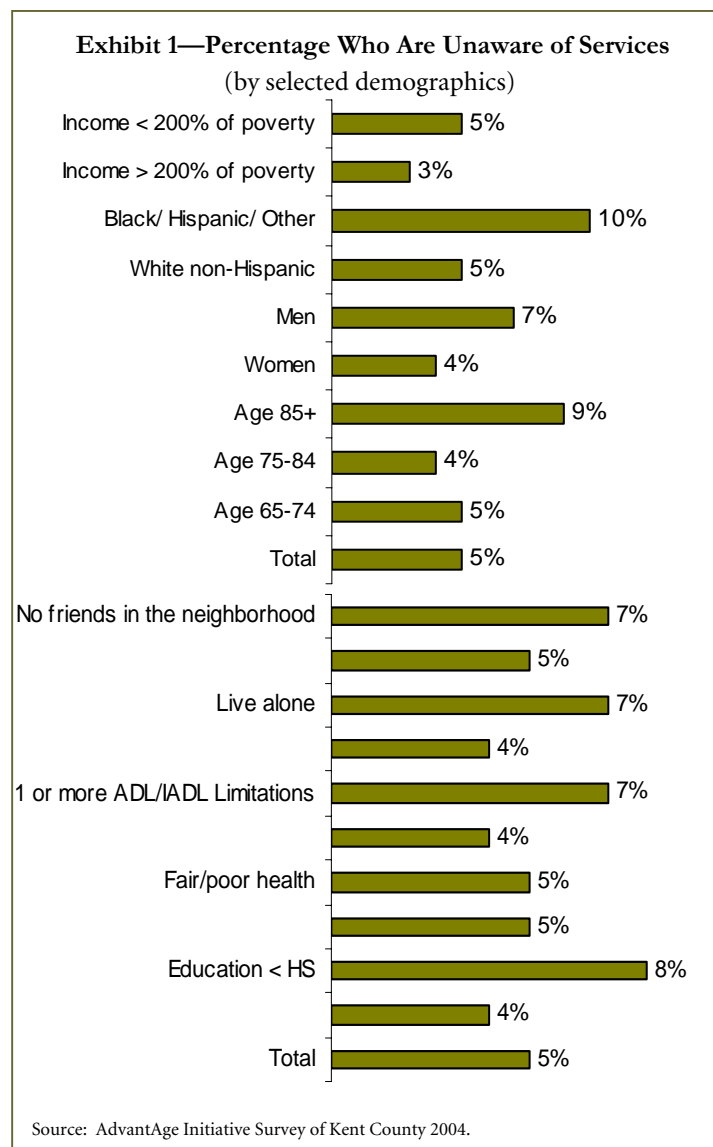
Desired Outcome

Older adults are linked to supportive services in the community to accommodate their changing needs.

Background

Although the overwhelming majority of older Kent County residents want to remain in their homes as long as they can, more than 14,000 of them need assistance from others to carry out everyday activities. And while thousands of older adults in Kent County are served by community-based programs, two out of three Kent County elders who need assistance with everyday activities are not receiving the help they need. One in four older adults—including a disproportionate number of the most vulnerable groups—simply do not know whom to call for information about supportive services.

According to most estimates, Kent County’s aging population will double in the next 30 years. Linking older adults with a daily nutritious meal, home repair service or other supportive services as their needs change can mean the difference between their ability to age in place and the costly and often disruptive option of moving to a long term care facility.



Awareness of Services Is Generally High...

One in four Kent County elders need assistance with daily activities. One in five say their health is fair or poor. In general, older adults in Kent County seem to be very aware of the multiple services available to help them meet their needs: hospice (90%), senior centers (87%), meals on wheels (86%), visiting nurses (85%), food pantry (81%), food stamps (81%), special transportation (80%), home health aides (79%), lifelong learning (75%), congregate meals (74%) and homemaker services (74%). The services they are least familiar with include respite (59%), home repair (56%) and senior volunteer services (55%).

...But Lower Among Specific Populations

Many of the elders who are least aware of services in Kent County are those who tend to be hardest to reach: low income and less educated elders, those who live alone, racial and ethnic minorities, and those with activity limitations—as well as older men and people 85 years or more in age.

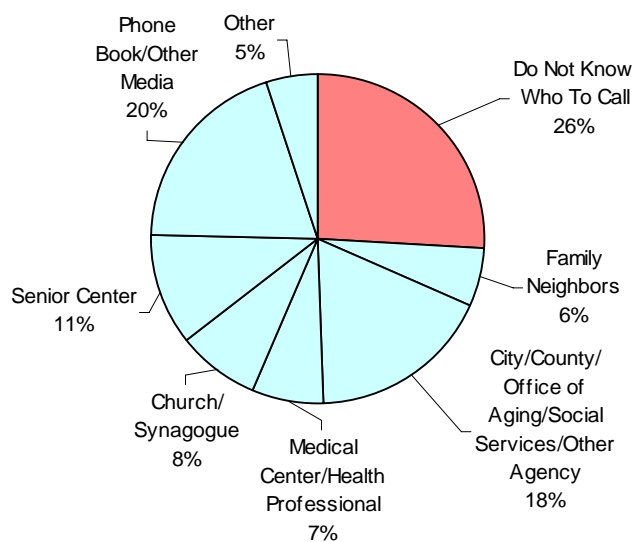
Knowing Whom to Call for Information about Services

Most older adults in Kent County know where to get information about supportive services. However, a full 26% of Kent County elders cannot name a trusted source of such information in their community, compared to 20%¹ nationally. One third of all low income elders in Kent County don't know whom to call.

Older adults in Kent County are most likely to look in the phone book (20%) or turn to public or non-profit social service agencies (18%) for information about supportive services. Nationally, 16% of older adults see medical centers or medical professionals as a good source of information about services; in Kent County, that figure is only 7%.

Older adults – and people of all ages – need more than simply a list of organizations who may be able to help. They often need help understanding which service is the best match for them and how they go about deciding which kind of service to seek. Truly effective information and referral systems must build in assessment of needs, initial screening for eligibility, problem-solving and consultation to help link their clients to appropriate services.

Exhibit 2—Not Knowing Whom to Call
(percentage of people age 65+ who do not know whom to call for information about supportive services)



Source: AdvantAge Initiative Survey of Kent County 2004.

¹Feldman, Penny H., Mia R. Oberlink, Elizabeth Simantov, and Michael G. Gursen (April 2004). *A tale of two older Americas: Community opportunities and challenges*. Report on the 2003 national survey of adults aged 65 and older. New York: Center for Home Care Policy & Research, Visiting Nurse Service of New York, page 8. Retrieved March 2, 2005 from www.vnsny.org/advantage/survey.html#survey.