



AGING WELL
WHATCOM

A Community Vision for Aging Well

Aging Well Whatcom Blueprint

The Aging Well Whatcom initiative was launched by the Chuckanut Health Foundation in December 2017 to help make Whatcom County a more age-friendly community. We have an increasing aging population with diverse skills, capabilities, and physical and social needs; Aging Well Whatcom is helping our community develop a coordinated approach to utilizing those abilities and meeting those needs.

In 2019, Aging Well Whatcom published a community Blueprint representing a vision for Whatcom County becoming a place with the culture, physical infrastructure, social supports and services for all of us to live and age well. A second edition, refreshed and updated with extensive community input, was released in 2022.

Covering six focus areas (Cultural Shift, Information & Navigation, Housing, Intergenerational Community, Transportation, and Wellness & Healthcare), the Blueprint includes desired outcomes, challenges, assets, and strategies for collectively moving toward our vision. The Blueprint is not about specific programs and services for the elderly, but rather about designing and fostering a community that meets the diverse needs of people of all ages.

Aging Well Whatcom draws on work done by the World Health Organization, the Livable Communities movement, and other communities across the country. A broad range of sectors and organizations are represented on the Aging Well Steering Committee.

Our goal is that the Blueprint will be used throughout Whatcom County to guide policy and funding decisions, program and service development, grassroots activism, and business opportunities.

The Blueprint wouldn't be possible without input from our community, and we want to hear from you! Contact us at AgingWell@chuckanuthealthfoundation.org

Key Building Blocks For Aging Well

- 1 **Shift the culture** around how we view aging and older adults.
- 2 Expand **information and navigation** services for aging populations about services available to them.
- 3 Expand **housing** options for older adults and people with advanced healthcare needs.
- 4 Support **intergenerational** partnerships and programming that connect older adults and young people.
- 5 Expand **transportation** options to older adults throughout Whatcom County via public, commercial, and community-based options.
- 6 Enhance older adults' **wellness** through access to healthy food, physical activity, well-trained and supported caregivers, and comprehensive and appropriate healthcare.

Who are Whatcom County's Older Adults?

- Older adults age 65+ are now 20% of Whatcom County's population, or about 45,272 of our 228,000 community members (2020).
- The portion of the older adult population that is non-white (Black, Indigenous and People of Color, or BIPOC), as well as those with limited English proficiency, is expected to increase in the coming decade.
- The percent of older adults living in Whatcom County's smaller cities and rural areas is growing more quickly than in Bellingham.
- The percent of people age 85+ is projected to increase at a faster rate than the overall 65+ age group.
- Older adults are not a homogeneous group. It is increasingly clear that in Whatcom County, older adults' experiences of aging can vary greatly, based on race, ethnicity and culture, regions of the county and neighborhoods within our cities, age, family structure, socioeconomics, health status, and lifestyle.
- Older adults say that interaction, connection and relationships are the most important factors affecting their quality of life, based on surveys conducted in 2018 and 2021. Increasing social connection is an overarching theme in the Blueprint, and strategies that contribute to this are embedded throughout.
- Older adults bring knowledge, skills, talents, time and, as a group, significant economic power to our communities. It's critical that we acknowledge these assets, in addition to the physical and social needs they may have.