

# Version 2022 Lessons Learned

## Healthy Aging - What Have We Learned from Accredited Health Departments?



*Advancing  
public health  
performance*

### What is healthy aging?

Healthy aging is the process of maintaining and promoting physical, mental (cognitive and emotional), spiritual, and social (including meaningful social engagement) well-being and function as people age.<sup>1</sup>

### Why focus on health aging now?

As projected life expectancy in the United States continues to increase due to advances in medicine, older adults are a rapidly growing population. For example, by 2060, nearly one quarter of the population of the United States will be aged 65 or older.<sup>2</sup>

Public health intervention is an integral tool for promoting healthy aging, with Healthy People 2030 identifying improving health and well-being for older adults as an overarching objective.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup><https://phaboard.org/wp-content/uploads/2.0Healthy-Aging.pdf>

<sup>2</sup><https://www.census.gov/library/publications/2020/demo/p25-1145.html>

<sup>3</sup><https://health.gov/healthypeople/objectives-and-data/browse-objectives/older-adults>

<sup>4</sup> Public Health Accreditation Board. Health Department Accreditation Data Portal. 2021. [www.phabdata.org](http://www.phabdata.org).

### What We Have Learned

PHAB has several methods to understand the health outcomes tracked by health departments and their communities. Analyzing a sample of Community Health Assessments (CHAs) and Community Health Improvement Plans (CHIPs) of 46 health departments, we found that 80 objectives out of approximately 5,500 (1.5%) were specific to older populations.

The most common objectives found within the CHA/CHIPs included: access to care (including vaccination and screenings); fall prevention; prevention of elder abuse/neglect; and social engagement. Less common objectives included: Mental/behavioral health; Alzheimer's; community engagement; and access to nutritious food.

As part of the documentation submission process for reaccreditation, health departments are required to report on population health outcomes they track in their communities. As part of this process, health departments indicate the topics they are tracking from a set list. Of the first 71 health departments to complete this requirement, 14% indicated they are tracking Alzheimer's mortality, the topic most closely aligned with aging.<sup>4</sup> Health departments may disaggregate the data from other topics they track to examine the impact on older adults, although PHAB requires health departments to provide detailed information on only a sample of the outcomes they track. Of those, there are several examples of objectives that specifically related to older adults, including:

- Decrease hospitalization rate due to falls per 10,000 - aged 65+ years by 2%
- Reduce rates of elder abuse, neglect and exploitation to 6 cases per 1,000 individuals aged 60 or older

### Stories of Success

The Annual Report process is another opportunity for PHAB to collect stories and observe the way health departments are engaging with healthy aging.

One health department's partnership with the Office on Aging resulted in a social connection program, Buddy Connect, that paired adults aged 55 and older with "buddies," who provided friendship in the form of phone calls, in-house visits, and social functions. Through these interactions, Buddy Connect promoted mental and social well-being among older adults. In addition to the social connectedness work, the health department works with the Office on Aging to promote the Drug Repository Program, a program that assists local seniors with medications at a low cost.

Another health department addressed the issue of oral health in older adults by creating an initiative focused on advocacy, public awareness and education. The health department partnered with several local organizations, including local dental hygiene students, to provide oral health tips and brief articles on menus that are distributed to older adults at a local meal program. Oral health workshops have also been held in the county to inform and educate about oral health needs of older adults.

### What next?

PHAB is currently developing Version 2022 of the Standards & Measures. PHAB conducted a think tank in 2020<sup>1</sup> to gather input on how to integrate healthy aging into the Standards & Measures. By defining expectations on healthy aging, PHAB encourages health departments to focus on reducing health problems and improving quality of life for older adults.