

Executive Summary of the Senior Focus Group

Awareness of Services

Most of the seniors in the group were aware of many human services available, but they also admitted that they had learned of even more services available from talking to others in the group. There was agreement that there needs to be more publicity about the vast network of human service resources that are available to them.

Access to Services

The most commonly mentioned places to seek human services help were the Senior Center and Helpline. Medical care, particularly hospital care is the main need that is not accessible on the Island. It was stated that you have to seek most of your medical care off the Island. Arranging the transportation for these off Island services can be difficult.

In regards to transportation specifically, many of the seniors find Kitsap Access to be very helpful. However, one participant who specifically needed handicap assistance found that Access was limited and did not have very flexible hours. But for all the seniors, getting transportation after 5pm is difficult. Having timelier and more frequent bus service would be very helpful. Another issue is that many of the sidewalks or walkways are not always accessible or easy to walk on, especially if you need to use a walker, cane, or have limited mobility.

The group agreed that many seniors on the Island don't access many of the services available to them because it is believed to be beneath their dignity. Many do not go to the Senior Center because they don't want to be associated with older people. They also agreed that many seniors on the Island who could use services such as Helpline and the Food Bank don't because that would be "asking for help" and would mean giving up their independence.

Another reason why many seniors may not be using services such as Helpline is because they are afraid of strangers coming to their homes. They may not be utilizing some of the community's volunteer services because they fear for their safety or being taken advantage of.

Unmet Needs

One of the most commonly mentioned needs was more and better medical care available on the Island, including legal services that could help with understanding Medicare better. In regards to dental care, most of the seniors in the group admitted they had stopped or lost their dental insurance, and that they definitely don't get dental care as often as they used to because they can't afford it.

Most of the seniors in the group currently did not have any problems with getting their prescriptions but they were concerned about rising costs and rising co-pays in the future. They agreed that even though they did not have any problems now getting prescriptions they may in the future, and they felt that others seniors were probably not getting the drugs they needed.

Other unmet needs included adult day care, better and easier access to mental health services, more low-cost or assisted housing, housing that allows for pets, lower property taxes for seniors, and emergency housing. The group also agreed that the Island needs shelters for homeless people, but that there is much community opposition to having these kinds of shelters.

Lastly, a service that many in the group felt was badly needed is companionship for seniors. Many seniors live alone and sometimes they just need someone to talk with. Many in the group also mentioned several times that the Senior Center needed to increase the size of their facility.