



Madera County Local Aging & Disability Action Plan Listening and Learning Sessions Summary

Background

The SDSU Center for Excellence in Aging & Longevity, the Madera County Department of Social Services, and key community stakeholders have been working collaboratively on developing a Local Aging & Disability Action Plan (LADAP). The Listening and Learning Sessions are an integral part of this process, designed to complement the survey data previously gathered for deeper engagement with the community. After gathering the survey data, the session questions were crafted and approved by the advisory board to ensure they addressed the most relevant issues.

These sessions aimed to gain a deeper understanding of the priorities and challenges faced by older adults and individuals living with disabilities in Madera County. The data gathered directly from the community during these sessions is intended to inform the creation of the LADAP.

Five Listening and Learning Sessions were scheduled, with two sessions facilitated in both English and Spanish. Outreach to older adults (50+), caregivers, and service providers in Madera County was conducted via social media, website promotion, and flyers.

Date	Location	Number of Participants
9-10-24	1. Frank Bergon Center, City of Madera	65
9-10-24	2. Sierra Senior Center, Oakhurst	19
9-11-24	3. Chowchilla Senior Center, City of Chowchilla	41
9-11-24	4. Department of Social Services, City of Madera	20
9-12-24	5. Ranchos Hills Senior Center, City of Madera	38
		Total: 183

Instrument

A facilitator guide was created to ensure structured and effective discussions during the Listening and Learning Sessions. This guide served as a critical tool to engage participants, maintain focus, and ensure consistency across different groups. It outlined key topics and provided prompts and questions to encourage open dialogue and meaningful contributions. By establishing a well-defined framework, the facilitator guide fostered an inclusive environment where diverse perspectives could be shared and valued.

To enhance accessibility, the guide was translated into Spanish, allowing non-English-speaking participants to fully engage in the discussions. This inclusivity enriched the data collected and improved the overall outcomes of the sessions.

The guide included five key questions in each the following themes:

1. Outdoor Spaces & Buildings
2. Transportation
3. Housing
4. Social Participation, Volunteer Activities, Civic Engagement with Respect & Social Inclusion
5. Health Services and Community Supports
6. Communication and Information

During the sessions, a brief overview of the process was provided, outlining steps for the guided discussion. The facilitator guide was utilized at each roundtable to ensure focused discussions and efficient note taking, capturing key points and ensuring all relevant topics were thoroughly covered.

Sampling Method and Analysis

Participants were part of a nonrandom convenience sampling due to the method of recruitment. To ensure input from a diverse population, the Listening and Learning Sessions were held in different supervisorial districts at various times of the day, with extensive promotion efforts. These efforts included meeting older adults where they congregate, such as senior centers, to maximize participation. The sessions were also widely advertised through community stakeholders, signage, flyer distribution, word of mouth, and social media. To further encourage attendance from diverse participants, outreach materials were translated into Spanish. At each event, hot meals were provided, and an opportunity drawing was held.

Content analysis was applied to quantify and analyze the presence, meanings, and relationships of certain words and concepts to identify clear themes and trends. The results of this content analysis are presented in this report.

Limitations

The Listening and Learning Sessions did not require proof of residency in the neighborhood, nor did they restrict participants from attending multiple sessions. As a result, it is not possible to attribute feedback from a specific neighborhood directly to its residents. While unique feedback from geographic regions will be shared with County staff, the overall themes in this report are presented as an aggregate of all Listening and Learning Sessions.

Many of the sessions attracted community-involved, mobile, and financially stable participants who actively attended senior center locations where the sessions were held. This created a challenge in identifying barriers to aging in the community for less active or engaged older adults who did not complete the survey or participate in the sessions.

Key Findings

Outdoor Spaces and Buildings

- An overwhelming majority of participants stated they can get to the places they need to go; however, they expressed concerns about transportation accessibility and safety, which may limit their mobility as their needs change.
- Nearly all participants who use public transportation to get to places in their community cited issues with an insufficient number of buses and limited operating hours.
- Better lighting, sidewalks, and crosswalks would make it easier and safer to walk around the neighborhood. Several participants noted concerns about the short duration of crosswalk signals and speeding cars, which sometimes did not abide by fundamental transportation laws (such as stopping at stop signs).
- Safety and cleanliness of parks and green spaces are major concerns. Many participants stated they would use parks but there is a lack of security, a large presence of homeless individuals, stray dogs, and the removal of resources like grills. Less than 10 percent of participants shared positive feedback about parks. In some communities, while there is a notable absence of public parks, many residents reported having large backyards that serve as their outdoor open space.
- One point of particular interest highlighted in a session was the lack of public restrooms. Some participants mentioned this as a major concern and worried about going out because of the unavailability of public bathrooms. It is unclear if this was a sweeping concern for residents or not discussed due to the sensitive nature.

Transportation

- Many participants own their own vehicles and drive themselves. They also shared that they drive friends and neighbors to locations such as senior centers, grocery stores, and medical appointments.
- Most participants leave their homes multiple times a week, many citing a strong sense of connection to their local senior center, which serves as a hub for socialization.
- The biggest concern regarding transportation is bus transit, including insufficient routes, difficulty navigating the system, and a lack of schedules, particularly at night and on weekends. In some communities, there is an overall absence of public transit options.
- Many residents who do not currently use public transportation expressed that they would feel comfortable using it if needed, but emphasized the need for education on routes, schedules, and how to reach bus stops.
- About 90 percent of participants do not use rideshare programs like Lyft or Uber, citing significant safety concerns, difficulties with navigating round trips, and costs as the main

reasons. Additionally, some participants mentioned that rideshare options are either unavailable in their community or limited to larger cities, resulting in long wait times and higher expenses.

- There were mixed reviews about the Dial-a-Ride program. Some participants described it as a valuable transportation safety net that is easy to schedule and reliable, while others reported issues with calling for a ride, lengthy scheduling times, service not being reliable, and a lack of availability in certain areas.
- Several unhoused individuals voiced safety concerns stemming from the lack of proper infrastructure, such as crosswalks and sidewalks. This absence of safe pathways, combined with insufficient traffic enforcement, heightens the risk of dangerous encounters with vehicles. Notably, three participants reported being hit by a car this year.
- Multiple participants shared there was no respect for pedestrians or a similar statement.

Housing

- Nearly all participants who do not own their homes expressed concern about the possibility of needing to move at some point. The majority cited high cost of housing and increasing rent, while others worried about their mobility and care needs.
- For homeowners, many expressed concerns about the high costs of modifying their homes to meet their needs. A significant number of participants also voiced worries about scams from repair companies or home improvement services.
- Most participants did not know where to go for help with housing; however, some mentioned social services, social workers, In-Home Supportive Services (IHSS), home health providers, and hospital workers as potential resources. There were many participants who believed there was some help available but lacked knowledge on how to access available resources.
- While most participants felt their current housing needs were met, there were concerns about future needs, including a lack of affordable senior housing and assisted living facilities.
- Many unhoused individuals who participated in the Listening and Learning Sessions shared that while services are available, they are not tailored to their needs—such as providing food that requires cooking facilities they do not have.

Social Participation, Volunteer Activities, Civic Engagement with Respect & Social Inclusion

- Many participants visit senior centers regularly, and most expressed a sense of inclusion in activities and social opportunities. However, several individuals highlighted the need for more engaging events, such as dances, bingo, crafts, trips, and potlucks.
- There was a strong sense of community among participants, many of whom emphasized the importance of socializing with friends and family. Most reported socializing daily, while others did so at least a few times a week.

- There was a surprisingly low number of participants who expressed interest in intergenerational opportunities beyond family and community holiday events, such as Halloween parties, parades, and other seasonal celebrations. However, participants identified a significant need for tech expertise, indicating a desire for programs to bridge generational gaps through technology training and support.
- Most participants felt welcomed in their community, with many noting that differences in political viewpoints, socioeconomic status, and other factors were generally respected.
- A high majority of participants acknowledged that there were sufficient opportunities for socializing, volunteering, and civic engagement, but they expressed a desire for more variety in activities and improved scheduling to better accommodate their needs.
- Participants suggested various activities and events they would like to see, including bingo, physical exercise classes, karaoke, trips, and the opportunity to learn about service organizations or volunteer opportunities. However, they also noted concerns about consistency in programming, transportation, and accessibility, emphasizing the need to accommodate individuals with vision, hearing, or mobility challenges.

Health Services & Community Supports

- An overwhelming number of participants indicated that they must travel outside their community for healthcare, with many reporting that it takes 45 minutes to an hour to access care in areas such as Fresno, Merced, and Clovis.
- Most participants did not know where to find services for at-home care but recognized its importance and expressed a desire for more resources.
- Several participants reported difficulties in obtaining prescriptions due to a lack of nearby pharmacies, with some stating it can take weeks to fill their prescriptions.
- Multiple participants mentioned using Camarena Health, but several expressed issues including long wait times, insurance challenges, and concerns about the quality of care.
- The hospital closure in Madera, although set to reopen, raised significant concerns among residents. Many shared personal stories on how the closure impacted access to care, with some stating they lost a loved one due to the lack of nearby medical services.
- A significant number of participants expressed concerns about accessing emergency services, especially in urgent situations or during natural disasters.
- Most participants were familiar with food insecurity programs, and many highlighted the availability of options such as fruits and vegetables at the Food Bank, food pantries, and churches.

- There were several concerns about the discontinuation of Meals on Wheels in the community. Additionally, multiple participants expressed a desire for hot, nutritious meals to be served at senior centers.

Communication and Information

- Most participants reported receiving information about community events primarily from senior centers, with additional sources including social media, television, news, radio, flyers, and word of mouth from friends and family.
- Participants had mixed opinions on the easiest way to receive information. Among those who use social media, Facebook emerged as the preferred method. In contrast, participants who do not use the internet expressed concern that they were “missing out” on important updates especially with the lack of a community newspaper.
- Most participants used a cell phone or tablet, but only about 40 percent reported using a computer. Those who do use a computer feel comfortable navigating the internet for tasks such as paying bills, engaging on social media, and shopping on Amazon. In contrast, participants who do not use a computer expressed concerns about fraud and scams, as well as a lack of knowledge about how to use the internet.
- Participants provided a variety of suggestions for enhancing information sharing within the community. Mail and social media were among the most popular responses. Other ideas included using banners throughout the community and distributing flyers at local venues such as senior centers, grocery stores, post offices, churches, and laundry rooms in apartment complexes. Many participants also expressed a desire for a community newspaper.

Conclusion

The Listening and Learning Sessions held across Madera County underscore the vital importance of including community voices in the development of the Local Aging & Disability Action Plan (LADAP). These sessions provided insights, highlighting both the strengths and challenges faced by older adults and individuals living with disabilities.

The active participation and honest feedback from the community have been instrumental in identifying key areas for improvement, such as transportation, housing, healthcare, and social participation. The themes and concerns raised during these sessions will guide the creation of a comprehensive and responsive LADAP that truly reflects the needs of Madera County’s diverse population.

It is through inclusive and participatory approaches that we can ensure community members are heard and valued. This collaborative effort between the SDSU Center for Excellence in Aging & Longevity, the Madera County Department of Social Services, and community stakeholders exemplifies the power of listening and learning from those we serve.