



# 2019 Senior COMMUNITY NEEDS ASSESSMENT

## KEY FINDINGS

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### WHY THIS MATTERS

The population of the older adult community in the Shenandoah Valley is on the rise, with the segment of adults age 75+ growing twice as fast as households overall. Last year, Bridgewater Retirement Community partnered with Valley Program for Aging Services and Holleran, an independent consulting and research firm, to identify the needs facing seniors living in Harrisonburg, Rockingham, and Augusta. How equipped is our community to handle the needs of an aging population? What are the challenges facing seniors today? And what are the challenges they'll be facing five years from today? This comprehensive study offers a robust overview of the current status of older adults and identifies problem areas our community needs to address to prepare for the next generation of seniors.

### KEY FINDINGS

#### Social Isolation

Key informants and caregivers view social isolation as a most-pressing issue. Seniors in our community who face isolation—from friends, family, loved ones, and community groups—may be at greater risk for illness. **Medicare spends an average of \$1,608 more a year on those with limited social connections compared to those who are more socially active.<sup>1</sup> Further, research has identified a strong link between social isolation and dementia.<sup>2</sup>**

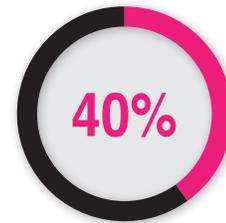
This isolation is compounded by transportation issues. Seniors unable to secure rides are far more likely to experience isolation. **66%** of surveyed respondents state that public transportation is unavailable to reach critical destinations such as health centers, grocery stores, banks, and senior centers.



of older adults in Augusta and Rockingham live alone.



do not have access to safe public transportation stops.



would like more affordable events for older adults.



## Housing

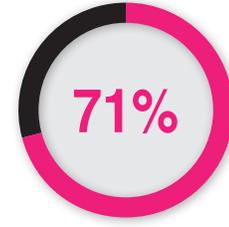
By 2024, adults 65 and older are projected to account for nearly **25%** of the total population in Augusta and Rockingham Counties, but access to affordable housing is declining. **When seniors pay more than 30% of their monthly income on housing, they are forced to choose between paying rent or paying for medicine, doctors' appointments, food, or transportation.**



of those aged 65-74 in Harrisonburg are still working.



of older adults in Rockingham County are spending 30% or more of their income on rent.



state there is not a variety of appropriate, affordable housing options available in the area for older people.

## Health Care Navigation

Community respondents report that health care navigation is the second-most common barrier preventing access to care. Augusta and Rockingham Counties face crucial shortages of health care providers. Beyond just shortages, **seniors in our community are left at the mercy of a complex bureaucracy that creates significant friction when trying to access care.** Further research indicates a correlation between quality of care and the determination and ability of a patient to navigate the system.<sup>3</sup>



consider their family or friends to be their primary source of information.

### Most significant barriers to health care

- Lack of transportation
- Inability to pay out-of-pocket expenses
- Inability to navigate the health care system

## WHAT'S NEXT?

BRC and VPAS will continue to share our findings with community leaders and the public, including at the State of the Older Adult Community Conversation at JMU later this year. Beyond talk, we must work together to address the needs identified by the study. With a forward-thinking, cooperative approach, we can work together to make the Shenandoah Valley a better place for healthy aging.

## CALL ON US

We are ready to speak with your organization and spark discussion. Email your thoughts to [foundation@brcliving.org](mailto:foundation@brcliving.org).

<sup>1</sup> David Frank, "The High Price of Social Isolation," AARP, <https://www.aarp.org/health/medicare-insurance/info-2017/isolation-higher-medicare-fd.html>

<sup>2</sup> Sutin, Stephan, Luchetti, and Terracciano, "Loneliness and the Risk of Dementia,"

The Journals of Gerontology, <https://academic.oup.com/psychsocgerontology/advance-article/doi/10.1093/geronb/gby112/5133324>

<sup>3</sup> Vos, Gerling, Linehan, Siriwardena, and Windle, "Understanding Care Navigation by Older Adults with Multimorbidity,"

JMIR Publications, <https://aging.jmir.org/2018/2/e11054/>