



## Age Friendly Westerly Introduction and Action Plan

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### 1. A Snapshot of the Westerly Community

Westerly lies in the southwestern shoreline of Washington County, Rhode Island and was incorporated in 1669. According to the 2020 census, the total population of Westerly is 23,359. Known for its beautiful beaches, grand public library and adjacent Wilcox park, and pink-toned granite found in buildings along the East Coast, Westerly is a community that cares about its neighbors.

Westerly is also a community with a higher rate of older residents than in both Washington County and Rhode Island overall. Eighteen percent of Westerly residents are age 65 or over and 42% are age 50 and older. Westerly's economy is largely driven by tourism and the town has become a preferred destination for retirees. The median income in the greater Westerly area is the highest in the state and unemployment is the lowest in the state. Nearly half of the population have earned a bachelor's degree, and the percentage of racial and ethnic minorities earning degrees is consistently higher than the state and nation. Residents have fewer risk factors for disease and, overall, experience fewer chronic diseases. More residents have health insurance and a primary care provider when compared with the state and national averages. Overall life expectancy is among the highest in the state. There are lower death rates due to

cancer, despite higher incidence rates, pointing toward regular preventive screening and early detection of disease.

## **2. Who Participates in our Community Assessment and Plan?**

Age Friendly Westerly is an initiative borne out of the Health Impact Collaborative of Greater Westerly. The Health Impact Collaborative, a coalition of citizens and organizations working together since 2016 to improve health and wellness, includes representation from a broad range of sectors. Additional partners have joined with the launch of Age Friendly Westerly. The following organizations are actively engaged in Age Friendly Westerly:

AARP Rhode Island  
Age Friendly Rhode Island  
Alzheimer's Association of RI  
Apple Rehab of Westerly  
The Frank Olean Center  
Habitat for Humanity  
Jonnycake Center  
The North End Neighborhood Association  
Ocean Community Chamber of Commerce  
PACE Rhode Island  
Pawcatuck Neighborhood Center  
St. Vincent de Paul of Westerly  
Tri-County Community Action  
The Village Common of RI  
WARM Center  
Westerly Hospital  
Westerly Housing Authority  
Westerly Pawcatuck Clergy Association  
Westerly Planning Department  
Westerly Police Department  
Westerly Public Library and Wilcox Park  
Westerly Senior Center  
Westerly Town Council  
Wood River Health Services

Other Westerly area partnerships working to make Westerly a more liveable community for older residents:

Basic Needs Network  
Health Impact Collaborative of Greater Westerly  
The North End Neighborhood Association  
The Ocean Community Collaborative  
The Westerly Village

### 3. Assessment Methods

Informing the Age Friendly Westerly Action Plan are two Community Health Needs Assessments – 2016 and 2019. Both followed a similar methodology, including collecting data from existing available sources (see Appendix A data sources) and conducting activities, such as key informant surveys, public forums, and community conversations, to hear directly from residents.

The 2019 process included a point-in-time Community Wellbeing Survey in three of its primary service area zip codes (02891, 02804, and 02808), collectively referred to as “Westerly.” The survey was conducted via telephone interviews in partnership with DataHaven. A total of 152 telephone interviews were conducted, assessing overall quality of life, life chances and opportunities, and health status and behaviors, among other health indicators.

Facilitated discussions with community stakeholders were held in March and April 2019. The goals of the community conversations were to determine perceptions of community health needs; to identify existing assets, gaps in services, challenges and successes in achieving outcomes; and to explore future opportunities to advance community health improvement.

#### Demographics of Participants in Community Conversations

Gender	
Female	69%
Male	31%
Age	
18-26	0%
27-34	0%
35-44	0%
45-54	19%
55-64	6%
65-74	0%
75+	75%
Race/Ethnicity	
American Indian/Alaska Native	0%
Asian/Pacific Islander	0%
Black/African American	0%
Hispanic	0%
White	100%
Other	0%

Marital Status	
Single, never married	18%
Married or domestic partnership	38%
Widowed	38%
Divorced/Separated	6%
Employment	
Employed for wages	25%
Self-employed	0%
Out of work and looking for work	0%
A homemaker	0%
A student	0%
Military	0%
Retired	69%
Unable to work	6%
Place of Residence	
Westerly	82%
Stonington	6%
Charlestown	6%
Coventry	6%

Key informant surveys were conducted in 2018 and 2021.

### 4. What We Have Learned

Some key data based on the domains of liveability:

**Housing** - In Westerly, an estimated 25% of older resident homeowners and 31% of older resident renters are housing cost burdened (spend more than 30% of monthly income on housing costs). Residents expressed concerns about the availability of affordable housing and the challenges of meeting their needs while still living independently.

**Social Participation** - 13.2% of older Westerly residents live alone compared to 11.8% county-wide, more than in any other part of RI.

**Food Security and Nutrition** - Economically insecure older adults (40% in Westerly) struggle with inadequate nutrition.

**Civic participation and Employment** - Rate of voting among Westerly seniors is higher than the US median (62.7% vs. 55.6%).

**Communication and Information** - In community conversations, residents report a lack of information about what resources are available to help.

**Community support and Health Services** - 40% of Westerly seniors are economically insecure with a household income of less than \$30,000 per year. Access to healthcare overall is favorable but limited for behavioral health specifically. Residents envisioned a community with better access to primary, specialty and behavioral health services.

**Outdoor spaces and Buildings** - Access to parks within a half mile in Westerly is higher than the median in the US. 15% of Westerly's older residents have an ambulatory disability.

**Transportation** - Local public transportation infrastructure is very limited. This issue was a top concern for residents who participated in community conversations.

At present, the next Community Health Needs Assessment is underway and due to be released in the Summer of 2022. More recent data are also available in the Rhode Island Healthy Aging Community Profile (Appendix B).

## **5. Introduction to the plan**

Based on all of the data collected through assessments, and with periodic updates and reviews, Age Friendly Westerly came together to create an Action Plan to address the issues of greatest concern to residents. Some strategies identified were quickly accomplished. Others have longer timelines. The plan is a living document that adapts to changing needs, available resources, and participant investment.

a. Mission statement – both the mission and vision statements are under development by Age Friendly Westerly.

b. A clear vision—toward an age-friendly community—and a set of values, including the voice of the 50-plus.

The Age Friendly Westerly Action Plan is implemented by the collaborative, with shared leadership and responsibilities.

The AARP Livability Index scores Westerly at 55 total as compared to other US communities. The index reveals some opportunities for improvement which inform the Westerly plan. In addition, the Town of Westerly Comprehensive Community Plan 2020-2040 includes strategies that support the Age Friendly Westerly Action Plan.

## **6. Domain-specific action plans**

Included in Appendix D is the Age-Friendly Westerly Action Plan for 2021 – 2025. The plan’s strategic framework consists of the eight domains of livability. This plan document contains elements that are also featured in the Town of Westerly 20-year Comprehensive Plan. This alignment adds additional support to the work. The Age-Friendly plan is a living document and subject to change based in emerging and emergent issues. Periodic updates will occur; see below next steps.

## **7. Next Steps**

Currently underway is an update of the Community Health Needs Assessment process, with reports expected to be finalized in the Summer of 2022. Once the data collection is complete, the Age-Friendly Westerly team will engage in further prioritization of the concerns illuminated as well as additional strategy development as needed. As such, the Age-Friendly Westerly Action Plan is anticipated to change in the coming years as new concerns from the community and opportunities emerge.

## **8. Appendices and supporting documentation**

Appendix A: Data Sources

Appendix B: RI Healthy Aging Community Profile (appendix)

Appendix C: AARP Liveability Index Score

Appendix D: Age-Friendly Westerly Action Plan (updated October 2021)

## Appendix A: Public Health Secondary Data References

- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (n.d.). Atlas Plus. Retrieved from <https://gis.cdc.gov/grasp/nchhstpatlas/charts.html>
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- United States Census Bureau. (n.d.). American Community Survey. Retrieved from <http://factfinder.census.gov/faces/nav/jsf/pages/index.xhtml>

**Appendix B: Rhode Island Healthy Aging Community Profile**

Available at [RI\\_Towncode36\\_Westerly.xlsx \(healthyagingdatareports.org\)](#)

**Appendix C: AARP Livability Index**

Available at [AARP Livability Index - Location Results](#)

**Appendix D: Age-Friendly Westerly Action Plan**

Available at [Westerly Age Friendly Westerly Webpage - Age-Friendly Westerly Action Plan](#)