

Bridging Health & Housing for Older Adults—A Local Imperative



Dennis W. Streets, MPH, MAT, LNHA
Executive Director
Chatham County Council on Aging, Inc.
dennis.streets@chathamcoa.org



Welcome to Chatham!

- Area: 709 square miles
- Council on Aging: 44+ years as non-profit—primary local portal for seniors and their families
- Nearly a third (about 24,000) of County's population is aged 60 and older



A Few Facts about Chatham Seniors

“The first sure symptom of a mind in health, is rest of heart, and pleasure at home.”—Owen Young, 18th century American lawyer and financier

Older Adults Wish to Age in Their Current Home

- 84% living in community own their homes
- 26% live alone
- Older adult households have a lower median income than the general population
- 16% of homes in Chatham are manufactured—a main source of affordable housing

Housing Concerns of Older Adults— What We Heard....

- Affordability
- Insufficient housing options
- Need for home repair, modification and upkeep
- Barriers to reaching those in unhealthy living conditions

“We work every day with clients in their homes who are in need of home repairs. Clients’ needs range from ramps to roof replacement to plumbing repairs. Our goal is to assist the clients with resources so that they can remain safely in their homes for as long as possible.”—

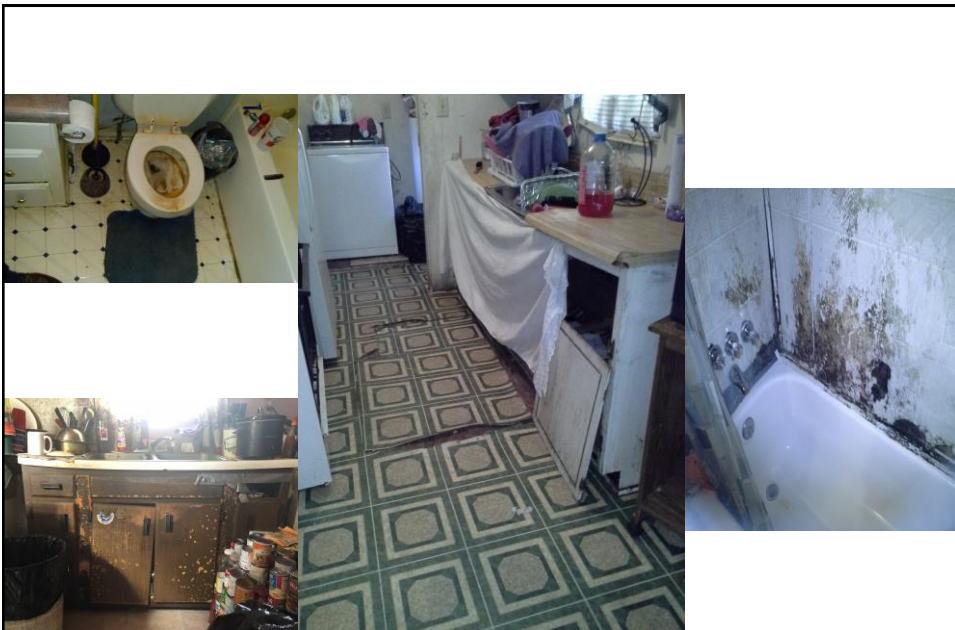
Margaret Kirkman, Chatham County Social Services

Six Problems Making Seniors Feel “Out of Their Residential Comfort”

- Unaffordable housing
- Unmet needs for long term services & support
- Social isolation & loneliness
- Unsafe or inhospitable neighborhoods & communities
- Limited or unsafe transportation options
- Aging & physically inadequate dwellings

“...environments, not people, are ‘disabled’ and independence—promoting environments improve the level of functional ability.”

Aging in the Right Place—Stephen M. Golant



What We've Done...

- Identify, meet and engage with community partners
- Elevate community awareness
- Develop collaborative database for home repair and modification using Airtable software
- Work closely with Rebuilding Together
- Maintain volunteer workforce for minor repairs
- Secured waiver of fees & expedited reviews for ramp construction
- Pursue & secure grants (e.g., Home Depot)
- Tap other resources (e.g., faith community)

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_wrM3GqM_Po



Example of Collaboration & Tapping Multiple Resources



"I wanted to see what all this banging and hammering was about," were words of excitement from Mr. Charles Alston, the second senior to benefit from the Chatham County Council on Aging's Say Yes! project.

Resources used: Home Depot Older Veterans grant, NC Housing Finance Agency, SAY YES! and County.

"It is so rewarding for our youth to participate in such projects. We can immediately see the positive difference we make. And our youth are not only learning valuable work skills but also understanding the importance of community service."—Joe Wiedholz, Boy Scout TroopMaster

What's Planned...



- Strengthen public & policymaker awareness about housing resources & related issues—2018-2023 Aging Plan
- Promote affordable housing options, including 'cottage'/smaller, well-designed homes
- Continue to help those living in substandard and inaccessible housing
- Expand help with home maintenance & yard work
- Create corps of volunteer ambassadors to help with health, housing and other areas

"There is no one prescription for aging successfully—despite what experts claim—whatever the life course pathways of aging adults, the places they occupy during their older age do matter."

—Dr. Stephen M. Golant, 2015

Why You Should Care...



Compared to the general population of older adults, unstably housed older adults visit the emergency room nearly four times as much, experience higher rates of geriatric health problems like falls and memory loss, and may even be at a higher risk of premature death.