

Lake County SENIOR SERVICES

2026-2029 Strategic Plan

Welcome,

We are pleased to introduce Lake County's three-year Senior Services Strategic Plan. This plan establishes a clear direction for how the County will focus its efforts as our population of older adults continues to grow and their needs continue to evolve.

Lake County is a special place to call home. We remain committed to ensuring older adults can live safely, stay connected, and age with dignity in the communities they know and love.

Older adults are not a single group with a single set of needs. Their circumstances, priorities, and experiences vary widely. This strategic plan gives Lake County a clear direction for responding to those varied needs and focusing our efforts in the years ahead.

Nearly a year of listening, research, and thoughtful discussion informed this work. We are grateful to the residents, caregivers, providers, community leaders, and partners who shared their experiences and perspectives. We also thank the Lake County Commissioners for their steadfast commitment to older adults and the members of the Senior Citizens Advisory Panel for their active participation throughout the planning process. Their collective input helped shape our priorities and the future we are working toward.

The work does not end with the adoption of this plan. As we move forward, we will continue listening to residents and working alongside the providers, municipalities, and community partners that serve older adults every day. Their knowledge, experience, and continued partnership will be essential to bringing this plan to life.

We are proud of Lake County's longstanding commitment to senior services. Together, along with our community partners, we will build on that commitment and help Lake County's older adults thrive.

Sincerely,

Jason W. Boyd
County Administrator

Alyea Barajas
Senior Services Manager


DON'T STAND BY,
STAND UP AGAINST
ELDER ABUSE!
If you suspect elder abuse or
neglect, call 440-350-4000
press option 1
1840
Lake
WORLD ELDER ABUSE
AWARENESS DAY
Building Strong Support for Elders
Observed June 15th

BACKGROUND

Lake County's commitment to senior services is long-standing.

The Board of Lake County Commissioners has supported senior services through a dedicated levy, first passed in 1992, which created a county-wide funding source for programs and services that help older adults remain safe, supported, and connected in their communities. Since that time, the Commissioners have taken an active role in stewarding this public investment by strengthening their understanding of what Lake County's older adults need and to ensure rigor in how taxpayer supported funds are allocated.

In 2012, the Commissioners established the Senior Citizen Advisory Panel to help guide how levy funds are allocated, and in 2015, the Commissioners engaged MCS Consulting to deepen the County's understanding of demographic changes, senior needs, and the role of levy-funded services. This work helped shape a more structured approach to senior services administration and decision-making. As a result, the County:

- **Hired dedicated senior services staff** to provide more focused internal capacity and coordination.
- **Implemented reporting requirements** for levy-funded providers.
- **Required an annual application and budget process** to support more consistent review and decision-making.
- **Issued recipient agreements** to formalize expectations with funded providers.
- **Moved to a reimbursement-based funding process** to strengthen accountability for the use of levy funds.
- **Addressed service gaps** by establishing a dedicated Adult Protective Services unit, creating the Lake County Volunteer Guardian Program, and funding nonmedical in-home care services.
- **Moved home repair services from the Lake County Council on Aging to the Western Reserve Community Development Corporation** (WRCDC) to expand the scope of available services.
- **Relocated the Retired & Senior Volunteer Program (RSVP) to the County under Senior Services and reenvisioned it as the Lake County Volunteer Network (LCVN) to strengthen volunteer recruitment and engagement.** The LCVN is supported in part with federal funding.



THE CURRENT PLANNING IMPETUS

In the spring of 2025, the Commissioners and Senior Citizens Advisory Panel, based on learnings from the 2015 work and empirical observations from the field over the last decade, made the decision to launch a search for an assessment and planning consultant to make the next big leap and provide insight into how the County could:

- Respond to unmet needs or emergent issues among older adults.
- Provide flexibility to expand and adapt services as demographic and community needs evolve.
- Promote long-term service stability and sustainability.
- Develop a sustainable financial model for future planning.
- Streamline operations, improve coordination, and reduce redundancies across agencies.
- Integrate administrative functions and shared services to enhance cost and resource efficiency.

After an extensive search, proposals from 13 qualified consultants were scored and ranked. Interviews were completed with the top four firms, and reference checks were completed for the top three. Follow up interviews were held with two firms. The decision to engage The Osgood Group was made based on the analytical grounding of their planning approach and their experience in assessment and strategic planning for health and human services nonprofits and county governments.



THE STRATEGIC PLAN PROCESS

The Osgood Group was asked to address these questions in the design of their research and strategic plan for the County's Senior Services.

- How effectively are current services meeting senior needs?
- Which demographic trends and emerging needs should shape future priorities?
- How can levy resources better support vulnerable and harder-to-reach older adults?
- Where do administrative or service delivery redundancies exist?
- What funding models can support sustainable growth with potentially flat revenue?
- What programs, partnerships, or structural changes may be needed for the future?

The Osgood Group designed a comprehensive needs assessment and strategic planning process using its FactBase™ approach to address these questions and create a shared understanding of the challenges and opportunities facing senior services in Lake County. The assessment was completed between September 2025 and May 2026 and included:

- **A comprehensive market study** that assessed senior needs and service demand across Lake County, drawing from a statistically sound representative sample of adults age 30+ with emphasis on individuals age 55+ and those who care for an older adult living in Lake County.
- **Analysis of all senior center usage data** to better understand program participation and overlap across centers.
- **Review of unit-level and usage data available through the Lake County Council on Aging** to better understand their reach and those served.
- **Observational research** gathered through visits to nine levy-funded senior centers in Lake County to get a sense for each of the facilities and their unique characteristics.



- **More than 75 stakeholder interviews** with the Senior Citizens Advisory Panel, community leaders, and service providers to get a comprehensive view of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats from the many experts throughout Lake County.
- **Benchmarking of 10 best-practice communities nationwide** to get a sense for how other communities are addressing growing need in this demographic.
- **Secondary research** on regional and national senior service trends and best practices.
- **In-depth analysis of the County's current levy funding process** to better understand the follow of funds and compare the process to best-practice allocation methods.

These full reports are available to the public via the Lake County website.

Throughout the process, learnings were reviewed and discussed with the County Administrator and Senior Services staff. The work also included quarterly meetings with the Senior Citizens Advisory Panel, report-outs and discussions with members of the Senior Services Levy Coalition, and a public presentation of summary findings to the County Commissioners in mid-May.

Seven key findings emerged which form the foundation of this strategic plan:

1) Lake County's senior population is proportionately large (relative to other regions benchmarked) and growing, while levy dollars to support them are projected to remain constant.
2) The levy distribution and process need to change to align with best practices and meet growing demand.
3) There is strong demand for aging in place services – in Lake County and across the country.
4) The County has many assets and strengths to leverage in meeting demand.
5) Senior centers are important but serve a limited population.
6) Finding services ('navigating the system') is harder than it should be.
7) Lake County needs better data across organizations in the sector to improve efficiency and sustainability.



MOVING FORWARD: THE 2026 – 2029 STRATEGIC PLAN

The County has strong assets in place, including dedicated levy funding, committed providers, and dedicated County leadership. The work ahead is to align those assets around clearer priorities, stronger coordination, better data, and a more disciplined funding approach that aligns with best practices across the country.

The following strategic plan is intended to address the core challenge: how to respond to increasing demand/need, particularly for Lake County's most vulnerable older adults, with relatively flat levy dollars. The challenge requires increased efficiency in order to ensure the sustainability of services for older adults. The plan's goals address this challenge by focusing the levy dollars for greatest impact, positioning the County as the sector leader, establishing one 'front door' to address navigation challenges, developing the County's Senior Services infrastructure, and building out a shared data system.

NOTE: The goal numbers in the following plan are included for reference only and do not indicate priority or sequence. The goals and their associated strategies will be advanced concurrently throughout the plan.

VISION

Lake County is a sought-after community where every older adult can live safely, stay connected, and age with dignity in the place they call home.

MISSION

Lake County Senior Services leads, coordinates, and strengthens the network of services for older adults and their caregivers so they can easily navigate and connect to the support they need.

"In Lake County, the levy isn't supplemental, it's essential."

-Senior Service Provider



LEVY FUNDING

GOAL 1: Restructure the current levy funding model by ending the practice of allocating funds based on historical funding levels.

Rationale:

The senior services levy funds critical services for older adults across Lake County. Like other parts of the country, Lake County is facing, and will continue to face, a surge in demand for senior services, but this is even more significant here given the high proportion of older adults residing in the county. The largest cohort (ages 60-64) will reach age 65 by 2029, and the size of this cohort will remain stable until about 2039 before it begins to decline. While demand surges, levy funding is expected to remain constant. This means that the same dollars need to serve more people, requiring a shift in the funding allocation model — away from historical allocations toward programs, supports, services, and providers that can best address the County's stated priorities, which will be informed by the assessment research.

This goal requires the development of new funding allocation guidelines (for the 2028 funding cycle) that prioritize:

- Vulnerable older adults who experience the greatest economic need, social need, or are at risk of institutional placement
- Specific age-in-place services to meet market demand identified in the assessment
- Increased and easier access to information for older adults and caregivers to more quickly connect them to the services they need (one 'front door' and centralized intake)
- Demonstrated programmatic and provider quality and impact
- Systems to support the collection of consistent sector-wide data for better decision-making
- Approaches to providing resources and services that align with national best practice in senior service funding and meet local needs

SECTOR LEADERSHIP

Goal 2: Elevate Lake County Senior Services leadership role to convene, align, and guide the senior services provider sector (and adjacent sectors) toward a more coordinated and responsive system of supports for older adults.

Rationale:

The assessment process confirmed that Lake County has important assets on which to build including a broad range of services, committed and long-standing providers, and local investment by municipalities. The findings also confirmed the need for stronger sector-wide leadership and alignment to drive efficiency, eliminate duplication, and set cross-sector priorities. Stakeholders consistently identified needs that would improve service quality and accessibility for older adults, including the need for a clear convenor, better communication among providers, more consistent coordination, greater clarity about available services, shared data systems, and stronger connections to adjacent systems such as healthcare, housing, transportation, and behavioral health. While many organizations are working hard and working well together to meet older adults' needs, coordination across the system is too heavily dependent on informal/personal relationships. Strengthening the County's leadership role will create the structure needed to drive efficiency, bring providers together, set shared priorities, reduce fragmentation, and guide the sector toward a more coordinated, sustainable, and age-in-place focused system of support for older adults.

"Everyone is doing good work, but it doesn't always feel like one system."

-Municipal Leader



"There needs to be one place people can go and know they'll get connected to what they need."

-Senior Caregiver



ACCESS AND NAVIGATION

Goal 3: Establish Lake County's Senior Services Department as the front door and central intake for older adults and caregivers, supported by coordinated assessment and follow-up, enabling residents to more easily find, understand, and access the supports they need.

Rationale:

Navigating the senior services system in Lake County is difficult not only for older adults but also for caregivers who are responsible for getting services for the older adults they care for. Generally, people know that senior services exist, but many do not know the specific services and supports available or which they might need. (Note that caregivers were the heaviest users of information and referral services and were twice as likely as older adults themselves to contact a referral source. Thinking of them as a "target audience" is critical). This will become even more significant as the needs of aging adults become more complex, requiring not only clear entry points but also consistent assessment, coordination, and follow-up so individuals do not slip through gaps as their needs evolve. Given the constraints on available funding, efficiency here is critical. The strongest communities for older adults invest in central intake as the main starting point for information, triage, and referral. This creates one clear place for older adults and caregivers to begin, without requiring them to know which service they need or which agency to contact. It also allows outreach and marketing to be coordinated through one trusted source, rather than placing that burden on individual providers or expecting the public to navigate a fragmented system. The County structure is best positioned to provide the stability, accountability, and long-term sustainability needed for this central front door. Community partners can and should continue to serve as trusted access points, but those access points must route people quickly and consistently to the County's central intake function so older adults and caregivers are not left to navigate the system on their own.

CAPACITY BUILDING: ORGANIZATIONAL INFRASTRUCTURE

Goal 4: Build the internal infrastructure needed for the County to lead, manage, and sustain an efficient and effective senior services system.

Rationale:

Lake County Senior Services currently has a small internal infrastructure which must be built out to take on the leadership and system-management role envisioned in this plan. The plan goals require the County to build a new operating structure that can support central intake, sector convening, levy funding redesign, provider accountability, shared data, public communication, and implementation management. Benchmarking and best practice research shows that regions considered 'great' for older adults have clear and consistent internal functions for intake, assessment, triage, provider oversight, reporting, and coordination even when direct services are delivered by outside providers. To align with these practices, Lake County Senior Services will need to build the staffing, systems, processes, technology, communications capacity, and role clarity needed to lead and sustain this work over time.



"We haven't told the story well enough for people to understand why the levy matters."

-Senior Service Provider



"There are more seniors every year, and the system isn't growing at the same pace."

-Health System Leader



CAPACITY BUILDING: SHARED DATA

Goal 5: Build a shared data system that strengthens decision-making, accountability, and outcomes across Lake County's senior services system.

Rationale:

The assessment required our consultants to look at participation data across the County, which is critical data for this plan and, in general, going forward. The process was cumbersome and required significant manual manipulation. As the County strengthens its leadership role, builds central intake, and refines the levy funding process, shared data will become essential to understanding who is being served, who is not being reached, where needs are emerging, and whether funded services are producing meaningful results. A more consistent approach to data collection, reporting, and analysis will allow the County and its partners to make better decisions, improve accountability, and focus resources where they have the greatest impact for older adults.



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