THE OSGOOD GROUP

Lake County Senior Service Sector Stakeholder Interview Report

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FINAL

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Methodology

- As part of the comprehensive Fact Base developed for the Lake County Senior Services strategic plan, The Osgood Group (TOG) engaged stakeholders across the County who serve seniors. These conversations provided a “boots on the ground” perspective and helped validate and test insights emerging from other components of the Fact Base.

- Lake County Senior Services provided TOG with senior services stakeholders across Lake County and surrounding areas. The interview pool reflected a cross-section of the senior services sector, including all three Lake County Commissioners, municipal leaders, funders, administrators and frontline staff from service providers.

- TOG developed an interview guide with input from Lake County’s Senior Services staff to ensure questions addressed both current operations and future priorities.

- TOG conducted 51 in-depth stakeholder interviews over Zoom. Interviews were scheduled for 45 minutes, though many extended beyond the allotted time due to the depth of insight and level of engagement from participants.

- All interviews were recorded to ensure accuracy in analysis, and participants were assured that their input would remain confidential and would be reported in the aggregate only.

- TOG reviewed and analyzed transcripts using a structured qualitative process. Responses were coded, grouped, and synthesized into themes. Verbatim quotes are included throughout this report to reflect stakeholders’ voices directly and add depth.

- This report summarizes key findings, patterns, and implications from the analysis.

Stakeholders Interviewed (1/1)

Thank you to the following individuals who shared their time and insights!

Stakeholders	Title	Organization
Suzie Begovic	Vice. President, Branch and Business Manager	KeyBank
Dick Bennett	Executive Director	Lake County YMCA
Lynn Berner	Senior Grants Specialist	Catholic Charities
Michelle Bertman *	Director, Lake & Geauga County	Catholic Charities
Jennie Best	Director, Community Services	Lifeline, Inc.
Morris Beverage III	Commissioner	Lake County Commissioner
Carol Billetter *	Director	Madison Senior Center
Jessica Boalt	Director	Geauga County Department on Aging
Jason Boyd	County Administrator	County Administrator
Judy Burr *	Executive Director	Project Hope for the Homeless
Ben Capelle	CEO	Laketran
Suzanne Casar *	Executive Director	Job & Family Services
Amy Cesa *	Director	Willoughby Senior Center

Stakeholders	Title	Organization
Shannon Cianciola	Managing Attorney	Cianciola Law LLC
Toni Marie Ciliberto *	Program Manager	Western Reserve Community Development Corporation
Angi Daugherty *	Executive Director	Family Pride of NEO
Dione DeMitro	President & CEO	United Way Lake County
Julia DeWolf *	Director	Kirtland Senior Center
Carrie Dotson *	Executive Director	Lifeline, Inc.
Robert Fiala	Mayor	City of Willoughby
Ken Filipiak	City Manager	City of Mentor
Kim Fraser	Executive Director	Lake County ADAMHS
Meredith Fratantonio *	Executive Director	Lake County Free Clinic
Gini Geffert	Assistant Director	Lake County Veterans Service Office
Dante Giancola	Director, Government Affairs	Western Reserve Area Agency on Aging
Grace Giangiacomo *	Director	Eastlake Senior Center

Stakeholders Interviewed (1/2)

Thank you to the following individuals who shared their time and insights!

Stakeholders	Title	Organization
Adrienne Green	Director, Geriatric Services	Signature Health, Inc.
Kara Hanzie	Executive Director	Ohio Living Breckenridge Village
Patricia Kidd	Executive Director	Fair Housing Resource Center
Spence Kline	Agency on Aging	Catholic Charities – Cuyahoga County
Frank Leonbruno	Sheriff	Lake County Sheriff
Doug Lewis	City Manager	City of Painesville
Pam Lewis	Parish Nurse	St. Gabriel's Church
Bob Liddy *	Director	Wickliffe Senior Center
Morgan McIntosh	Commissioner	Lake County Commissioner
Jennifer McLaughlin	Manager, Volunteer Guardian Program	Lifeline, Inc.
Karen Mcleod	Executive Director	Extended Housing
Katrinka Morgan *	Home Repair Mgr. / Events Coordinator	Lake-Geauga Habitat for Humanity
Renee Ochaya *	Director	Mentor Senior Center

Stakeholders	Title	Organization
Jackie Oliverio *	Manager	Lake County Council on Aging
Paul Pahoresky	Managing Member	PRP & Associates
Danielle Phillips *	Director, In-Home Services	Lake County Council on Aging
John Plecnik	Commissioner	Lake County Commissioner
David Radachy	Director	Lake County Planning & Development
Abigail Staudt	Managing Attorney	The Legal Aid Society of Greater Cleveland
Joseph Tomsick *	CEO	Lake County Council on Aging
Mary Udics	Assistant Administrator	Job & Family Services
Tyler VanDrei	APS Supervisor	Job & Family Services
Michael Vanni	Mayor	City of Willowick
Tina Witt *	Director	Perry Senior Center
Chris Yano *	Director	Fairport Senior Center

Summary Findings

- **Stakeholders are aligned: Aging in place *is the central aspiration* for older adults in Lake County**. Achieving this requires accessible services, transportation, housing options, and opportunities for social connection.

- **Lake County offers a wide range of services supporting seniors.** Many programs and resources exist across the County to support older adults. As a result, many seniors are able to access needed services without leaving Lake County.

- **The senior service system is difficult for seniors and caregivers to navigate.** The system is not organized around how individuals seek help, and entry points can be confusing. In addition, some seniors connect to services after a crisis rather than earlier when support could prevent decline.

- **Homebound seniors, low-income seniors, and seniors experiencing behavioral health challenges are most likely to fall through the cracks.** These populations face the greatest barriers to accessing services and are often the hardest to reach through traditional services.

- **Geography and language barriers can make services harder to access for some seniors.** Seniors living in more rural areas of the County and those facing language or cultural barriers may have greater difficulty connecting to available supports.

Summary Findings

- **Social isolation is a major threat to seniors' health, safety, and independence.** Loss of mobility, transportation, or social networks can quickly disconnect seniors from services and community life. Stakeholders are concerned that once isolation sets in, many seniors only receive help when there is a crisis.

- **Workforce shortages are placing pressure on the ability of organizations to adequality meet demand.** Organizations report increasing difficulty recruiting and retaining staff for senior service positions. Much of this is due to low compensation and lack of support for workplace trauma and exhaustion. As a result, many services are at or near capacity.

- **Coordination across the senior service system is limited.** Providers throughout the County frequently collaborate in an informal way (leveraging personal relationships with one another), but intentional coordination is lacking. Those with less established personal relationships (especially those representing smaller organizations) struggle to be connected and aren't aware of how they relate to the larger senior services sector.

- **The County itself is the most logical convenor of the senior service system.** Many believe the County is well positioned to bring providers together and strengthen coordination across organizations serving seniors. More specifically, stakeholders mentioned Alyea as a key leader in this work (now and in the future) given her knowledge of the sector and the trust providers have in her.

- **Levy funding is widely viewed as the financial backbone of senior services in Lake County.** Stakeholders fear that changes to levy funding (either in decreases or shifts in focus) will reduce core services supporting seniors or would eliminate them entirely. For levy funded organizations, there is confusion about how funding decisions are made.

Detailed Findings:
Aspirations for Seniors

Aspirations for Seniors

Q: What are your aspirations for the seniors in Lake County?

Themes	# Mentions
Seniors can afford to live at home	**45**
Seniors are safe at home	**38**
Services are easy to find and use	**34**
Seniors are not lonely and isolated	31
Seniors are treated with dignity and respect	26
Seniors stay connected and engaged in the community	19

n = 51: Interviewees could provide more than one response.

"The goal for seniors is simple: to stay in their homes as long as possible."

- **Seniors can afford to live in their homes and communities.** Affordable housing allows seniors to remain in familiar surroundings without being forced to leave their communities due to rising costs. In addition, those who wish to downsize should have options without being 'priced out.'
- **Seniors are safe in their homes as they age.** The supports are in place to protect their health and well-being, allowing them to age in place with confidence and independence.
- **Services are easy to find and simple to navigate.** Seniors and family members who care for seniors can quickly understand their options and access services when needed, without confusion or delay.
- **Seniors are not lonely or isolated.** Strong relationships and regular social connection support their physical health, emotional well-being, and overall quality of life.
- **Seniors are treated with dignity and respect.** Every interaction honors their value, autonomy, and contributions..
- **Seniors remain connected and engaged in their communities.** They have meaningful opportunities to participate, contribute, and maintain a sense of purpose and belonging.

Aspirations for Seniors - Verbatims

"We want seniors to be able to stay where they're comfortable and not be forced out because they can't afford it."

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

"We need to make sure seniors feel valued and not forgotten."

"Aging in place is what everybody wants. People want to stay in their homes, and we need to make sure they have the support to do that."

"We want seniors to stay connected and not be sitting in their homes with nobody around them."

"We want seniors to remain part of the community and not feel like they're on the outside."

"The goal is keeping people independent but also making sure they're safe and someone is looking out for them."

"These are people who have lived full lives. They deserve to be treated with dignity and respect."

Detailed Findings:
Senior Services – SWOT and Related Insights

Senior Services: Strengths

Q: What are the strengths of the senior service sector in Lake County?

Themes	# Mentions
Wide range of services	**27**
Strong network of providers who work well together	**26**
Availability of transportation services (Laketran)	18
Senior centers as important hubs for socialization and services	17
Dedicated staff and providers	14
Levy funding provides stable, reliable financial foundation	13
Meals on Wheels and nutrition programs provide critical support and safety check	12

n = 51: Interviewees could provide more than one response.

- The wide range of services is provided by a **large network of organizations serving seniors**, including both large agencies and smaller community-based providers.
- **Providers collaborate well and actively coordinate with one another to support seniors.** Organizations and leaders are willing to work with one another to ensure seniors receive the services they need.
- **Laketran provides essential access to medical appointments, food, and social engagement**, enabling seniors to continue functioning in the community.
- **Senior centers play a critical role as social anchors and hubs for senior services.** They provide meals, programming, information, and opportunities for connection that combat isolation and support overall well-being.
- **The senior services workforce is highly dedicated.** Staff are recognized for going beyond their roles to ensure seniors are supported, safe, and cared for.
- Stakeholders recognized **levy funding as the financial backbone of senior services**, allowing programs to exist at a scale and consistency that would otherwise not be possible.
- **Meals on Wheels and other nutrition programs** deliver essential nutrition while also serving as informal wellness checks, often identifying issues before they become crises.

Additional Mention:

- **Faith-based organizations serve as trusted support systems for many seniors.** Churches often function as informal entry points into the broader service network, providing social connection, guidance, and assistance.

Strengths of the Senior Service Sector - Verbatims

"I think Lake County is fortunate. There are a lot of different providers, and most needs can be met by somebody."

"Providers here work really well together. If we can't help someone, we know who to call."

"Lake County has such a strong network of folks who collaborate. If something can't work here [Lake County], it would be hard to make it work anywhere else."

"Laketran is a huge asset for our seniors. I don't know what we'd do without them."

"People in this field really care. They go above and beyond for seniors."

"Sometimes the meal delivery person is the only person that sees that senior all day."

"There's a lot of passion here. People are committed to helping."

"The levy is critical. Without it, a lot of these services wouldn't exist."

"That funding is the backbone of senior services in Lake County."

"The senior centers are really the heart of the community for a lot of people."

Senior Services: Weaknesses & Opportunities

Q: What are the weaknesses of the senior service sector in Lake County?
Q: What are the opportunities for the senior service sector in Lake County?

Weakness	Opportunity
System is difficult to navigate. Seniors and families don't know how services are connected to one another. Many rely on hospital discharge planners, or word-of-mouth to find help rather than following a clear path.	**Train people/staff who build relationships and trust with seniors** and can then help them navigate the system (vs. meeting a one-time need or providing a referral).
No single place to start/unclear entry point. Seniors often enter the system only after interacting with a hospital, faith organization, or social worker rather than through a clearly recognized front door and these different doors have different information and abilities to connect seniors with services.	**Establishing a single point of entry/'front door'** with well-trained staff can help seniors find the most appropriate services efficiently and effectively.
Services are fragmented. The system functions as a collection of strong programs rather than a unified experience centered on the senior.	**Designate an organization to serve as the convener of providers and other trusted organizations** to: better coordinate services; improve seniors' ability to connect to the services they need; and trouble shoot system-wide issues.
Communication and awareness of services is inconsistent. Seniors often learn about services 'by chance' when attending events, or after a significant life event.	**Increase direct, relationship-based outreach to seniors before they need help.** Reach seniors earlier, before a crisis, so they understand what exists and feel comfortable accessing services when needed.
System is reactive, not preventive. The system is equipped and (according to many stakeholders) better resourced to react to major issues rather than properly supported to prevent issues for seniors (ambulance service vs. grab bars).	**Build relationships with seniors early to support long-term independence.** Connect with seniors while they are healthy and independent to help them prepare for the future.
System is not built around how seniors need to engage with it. Seniors must adapt to being a part of a 'transactional' system rather than a system that functions to serve seniors as they need to be served.	**Design services around trusted relationships and personalized engagement, not one-time transactions.** Continuity, trust, and human connection would help seniors successfully engage with services.

n = 51: Interviewees could provide more than one response.

Senior Services: Weaknesses & Opportunities

Q: What are the weaknesses of the senior service sector in Lake County?

Additional opportunities mentioned:

- **Improve awareness and public understanding of senior services.** Stakeholders described an opportunity to more clearly communicate what services exist and how seniors access them. Many seniors and families do not understand the scope of available support until they are already in crisis.

- **Provide more opportunities for ongoing social connection and relationship-based support.** Stakeholders emphasized that isolation is one of the greatest risks facing seniors and described the importance of building consistent, trusted relationships with them, not just delivering services, to help seniors remain connected and independent.

n = 51: Interviewees could provide more than one response.

Weaknesses of and Opportunities for the Senior Service Sector - Verbatims

"Families don't know where to begin. They're calling everywhere trying to figure out who can help."

"There really isn't one front door. People get into the system by accident more than by design."

"There are a lot of good programs, but they don't always connect. It depends on who you know."

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

"There needs to be better communication about what services exist."

"Most people come into the system after something happens—a fall, a hospitalization, or a crisis."

"We have services, but seniors and families don't always know about them."

"We're helping people once things have already gone wrong. It's way more expensive this way."

"You have to know how to work the system. It's not built for the person using it."

"A lot of seniors trust their church before they trust an agency."

"People don't know what exists until they're already in crisis."

Senior Services: Missing Services & Causes

Q: What senior services are missing or falling short in serving seniors?

Missing Services/Gap	Mentioned Causes	# Mentions
Transportation does not satisfy all senior needs (but is close).	Transportation **prioritizes efficiency and shared routes over individualized assistance due to staffing constraints, the number of vehicles and scheduling logistics**. While efforts have been made to provide flexible, door-to-door support, there is more work to be done for this to be efficient and effective.	**37**
Affordable/appropriate housing is limited.	Rising housing costs, limited development of senior-accessible units, and long waitlists mean insufficient availability. **Fixed incomes make it difficult for seniors to compete in the broader housing market.**	**34**
There is a shortage of in-home care workers.	**Low wages, difficult working conditions, and competition from other sectors make it hard to recruit and retain caregivers**. Workforce supply has not kept pace with the growing senior population.	30
Mental and behavioral health needs are under-addressed.	Stigma, reluctance to seek help, and workforce shortages mean many seniors **are not getting needed mental health support**. In addition, public and private funding has historically prioritized physical health over behavioral health.	30
Information is difficult to access without access to technology.	Increasing reliance on **websites, online applications, and automated systems creates barriers for seniors without internet access or digital literacy.** Print newsletters are less efficient and only accessible to seniors who can travel to locations where they are distributed.	28

n = 40: Interviewees could provide more than one response.

Senior Services: Populations Not Served

Q: What populations are not being served well (age or geographic area)?

Themes	# Mentions
Homebound seniors	**39**
Seniors without family or caregiver support/isolated seniors	**35**
Low-income seniors	34
Seniors with physical health and mobility limitations	31
Seniors with mental and behavioral health needs	29
Seniors living in rural or geographically isolated areas	26

n = 51: Interviewees could provide more than one response.

"The people who need help the most are the ones we never see. They're sitting at home alone, and nobody even knows they need help."

- Homebound seniors who are unable to leave their homes due to physical limitations are **less visible and harder to connect to services.**
- **Seniors without family support are at greater risk of isolation and unmet needs.** Without someone to check on them or help navigate services, they are more likely to fall through the cracks.
- Low-income seniors face ongoing challenges maintaining housing, accessing care, and meeting basic needs. **Fixed incomes and rising costs leave many financially vulnerable.**
- **Seniors with declining physical health and mobility limitations face increasing difficulty remaining independent.** As needs increase, available supports do not always keep pace.
- Seniors with **mental and behavioral health needs are often underserved.** Stigma, reluctance to seek help, and workforce shortages limit access to appropriate care.
- **Seniors living in rural/geographically isolated areas have more difficulty accessing services (east of Painesville).** Distance, transportation limitations, and fewer nearby resources create additional barriers.
- Stakeholders also mentioned that **seniors with language barriers are less likely to access services**. These language and cultural barriers make it more difficult for some seniors to learn about and connect with available support.

Senior Services: Risks/Threats

Q: What is the greatest risk or threat against senior services being delivered well?

Themes	# Mentions
Workforce burnout and retention issues	**42**
Rising demand from a growing senior population	**39**
Long-term funding sustainability	34
Increasing complexity of senior needs	33

n = 51: Interviewees could provide more than one response.

- Stakeholders described **increasing burnout of senior service staff**, with many vacant positions or difficult to fill and sustain over time.
- Stakeholders emphasized that the number of seniors needing support will continue to grow, placing additional pressure on existing programs. Many questioned whether the system will be able to **keep pace with future demand**.
- While the system is currently well-supported, stakeholders are unsure if financial resources will be sufficient over time. Maintaining services will depend on **continued financial support with increased funding over the next ten years.**
- Stakeholders noted that seniors are **presenting with more significant and more complex needs than in the past.** These situations require more time and coordination, placing additional strain on the system's capacity to respond effectively.

Threats for the Senior Service Sector - Verbatims

"We can't find people to do this work anymore. And the people we do have are exhausted."

"We don't have other funding sources here. There's nothing waiting to replace it."

"Everything depends on the levy. If that funding ever goes away, the system would fall apart."

"Staff burnout is real. People love the work, but they can't sustain it long-term at this pace."

"The seniors we're serving now have much more complicated needs than they did even ten years ago."

"Isolation is one of the biggest threats to seniors' health and well-being."

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

"It's not just one issue anymore. It's health, housing, isolation, and finances all at once."

"Everything is moving online, but a lot of seniors don't have the skills or access to use it."

Detailed Findings:
Priority Focus

Priority Focus

Q: Where should the priority focus be for senior services moving forward? Where should investments be made?

Themes	# Mentions
Hire more system navigators/intake specialists	**41**
Raise pay or increase incentives for direct care workers	**39**
Increase flexible and accessible transportation options	37
Invest in infrastructure to coordinate the sector	34
Expand the number of small home repairs	31

n = 51: Interviewees could provide more than one response.

"We don't need more programs—we need more people who can actually help seniors get to them."

- Providers and families often spend significant time determining where seniors should go for help. Hiring additional navigators and intake specialists would **improve system efficiency and connect more seniors to services faster**. Caseloads are already high for those currently in these positions, and adding more staff to this front line would reduce bottlenecks.
- Compensation is a critical/significant barrier to staff retention. Increasing pay or incentives would **help stabilize the workforce and maintain existing service capacity**.
- Transportation providers like Laketran are trusted and effective but limited in flexibility because of funding. Expanding existing services would **deliver immediate impact by helping more seniors stay connected and independent**.
- Coordination is essential but often occurs informally. Investing in coordination infrastructure would **help maximize the effectiveness of existing services and partnerships**.
- Small home issues often escalate into larger safety risks or force seniors to leave their homes. Supporting minor repairs and accessibility improvements would **help seniors remain safely at home and reduce the need for higher levels of care.**

Detailed Findings:
Senior Service Providers

Perspectives on Senior Service Providers

Q: What organizations/providers are best known in the senior services sector?
Q: What are they known for?
Q: What is your perspective on them?

Organization / Provider	# Mentioned	What Stakeholders Say They Are Known For	Stakeholders Perspective of Them
Lake County Council on Aging	47	• **"The place everyone calls first" when a senior needs help** • Running Meals on Wheels	• Highly visible as a lead senior services agency • Leadership is seen not to collaborate with others • Sets priorities for seniors and has limited flexibility to adapt to real-time needs • Board level leadership is unaware of day-to-day operations
Laketran	29	• **Providing dependable transportation when seniors can no longer drive** • One of the few options available for non-drivers • Seniors "rely on it" and "count on it"	• Respected leadership • Highly innovative as a 'systems-thinker' • Scale of service is capped by funding
Senior Centers	22	• **Places seniors go to see friends and avoid being alone** • Serving as gathering points where seniors learn about services • Helping seniors stay active after retirement or losing a spouse	• Only serves a small percentage of the population • Highly favored by the senior services levy
Faith-Based Organizations	18	• **A familiar first place many seniors turn when they need help** • Providing rides, meals, and informal support quietly behind the scenes • Checking on older parishioners who stop showing up • Supporting seniors who would never call a formal agency	• An 'invisible force' for good • Deeply underutilized • Unknown potential for servicing seniors
Western Reserve Area Agency on Aging	14	• **Helping seniors and families determine what they qualify for** • Coordinating services for seniors with complex medical needs • Acting as a "system navigator" for Medicaid-eligible seniors • Working behind the scenes across multiple providers	• Confusion on their role vs. Council on Aging • Unknown to some stakeholders

n = 51: Interviewees could provide more than one response.

Perspectives on Senior Service Providers

Q: What organizations/providers are best known in the senior services sector?
Q: What are they known for? Q: What is your perspective on them?

Organization / Provider	# Mentioned	What Stakeholders Say They Are Known For	Perspective from the Sector
Lake County Job and Family Services	9	• **Handling Medicaid and financial eligibility for seniors** • Helping low-income seniors access benefits • Assisting when seniors can no longer live independently • Connecting seniors to long-term care support programs	• Unclear role regarding senior services
Healthcare Systems (Lake Health, UH, Cleveland Clinic)	8	• **Seeing seniors for medical needs** • Recognizing when a senior may be unable to return home safely • Referring seniors into the senior services system after hospitalization (this is sometimes their first point of entry) • Acting as a turning point when seniors' independence declines	• Underutilized in their connection and support of seniors and care givers • Not represented well at community forums or discussions regarding senior services

Additional Mentions (less than 3x):

- **Public safety and first responders**, including police and fire departments, who check on seniors during emergencies, conduct wellness checks, and sometimes are the first to recognize when a senior could no longer live safely at home.
- **Libraries and township-level services**, which are trusted, familiar places where seniors seek information, attend programs, and maintain connection to their community.
- **Housing providers and senior living facilities**, which are important when seniors transition out of independent living and need more structured support.
- **Food pantries and community-based assistance programs**, which help seniors with basic needs and often serve as informal safety nets for those not connected to formal senior services.

n = 51: Interviewees could provide more than one response.

Senior Service Providers: Overlap

Q: Are there services that overlap or compete? What drives these services to overlap or compete?
Q: Is there role confusion? Q: Is the overlap helpful or necessary?

Area of Overlap	# Mentioned	Where It Is Confusing	Where It Is Helpful
Navigation, intake, and referral	31	Seniors are referred between multiple organizations, and **each provider completes its own intake and eligibility process**. This results in seniors repeating their situation and providers spending time determining where the senior should go.	Multiple organizations are able to help seniors find services, and **seniors can enter the system from different places** such as hospitals, churches, or service providers.
Too many senior centers throughout the County	27	Senior centers operate independently, and stakeholders noted **overlap in programming and participation**, with many of the same seniors attending multiple centers. This raises questions about how resources are distributed and whether levy funding is being used as efficiently as possible across locations.	Senior centers are often the primary place seniors connect to services and socialize. Having **multiple locations makes services more accessible and keeps support close to where seniors live**, particularly for those who may not travel far.
Outreach and wellness checks	24	It is **not always clear which organization is checking on a senior** or following up when concerns arise.	Meals on Wheels, senior centers, churches, and township staff **all have regular contact with seniors and may notice when something has changed.**
Transportation coordination and ride support	18	**Seniors and families are unsure who to call for transportation help,** or which service is most cost effective: Laketran, a senior center, or a church.	**Seniors have additional options (e.g., churches, senior centers, and volunteers) for rides.** This is especially helpful when Laketran cannot meet scheduling or accessibility needs.
Support for basic needs (food, home support, informal help)	11	**Providers are not always aware of help seniors are receiving through churches, volunteers, or informal supports.** This sometimes creates an overabundance of food and services as these efforts are not coordinated – creating waste and inefficiencies.	**There are additional providers of support to 'fill the cracks' for needed services when larger agencies cannot meet demand.** Churches, food pantries, and volunteer groups are among the many who serve in these roles.

n = 51: Interviewees could provide more than one response.

In general, stakeholders want clearer roles and a shared understanding of responsibilities. Many spend significant time determining which organization should take the lead, and stronger clarity would reduce duplication and allow providers to focus on delivering services.

Senior Service Provider Overlap/Confusion - Verbatims

“Everyone is trying to help—but no one is clearly in charge.”

“There’s a lot of good work happening, but it doesn’t always feel like one system.”

“Seniors get bounced around from one place to another, and every stop starts the process all over again.”

“We spend too much time figuring out who should help instead of actually helping.”

“People don’t know if they should call Laketran, the senior center, or someone else—it shouldn’t be that hard.”

“Sometimes three groups are helping the same person, and sometimes no one is—it depends on who happens to know about them.”

Senior Service Providers: Creating Better Coordination

Q: How could senior services be better coordinated? What is needed/desired?

Themes	# Mentions
A clear convenor within the sector	**40**
Better communication between providers	**39**
More consistent provider connections/coordination	**35**
More clarity about available services	**34**
Shared data across providers	**30**
Better coordination with healthcare systems	**30**

n = 51: Interviewees could provide more than one response.

"If anyone can bring this system together, it's the County—and Alyea is the one people already look to."

- Stakeholders described the need for **a central entity to bring organizations together, set direction, and help align efforts**, rather than relying solely on informal relationships. Currently, **the County (Alyea) is seen as a trusted convenor and connector** of sector providers and is seen by stakeholders as a sector leader.
- Communication was described as **inconsistent and often dependent on who providers know personally**, making it harder to stay informed about what others are doing.
- Coordination happens **unevenly across the system**, with providers often working independently even when serving the same seniors.
- **It is not always clear what services exist or how to access them**, making it harder to connect seniors to appropriate support.
- Stakeholders described having **no shared way to see which seniors are receiving services**, requiring staff to call other organizations to gather information.
- Transitions between hospitals and community services were described as **a point where seniors can lose connection to support**, particularly after discharge.

Detailed Findings:
Levy Funding

Levy Funding:

Q: What are the strengths of the senior levy funding? How does it best help providers and the community?

Themes	# Mentions
Provides critical gap funding where other public and private dollars cannot	**16**
Consistent and dependable source of funding	**15**
Keeps senior issues top of mind for the commissioners/community	**14**
Can provide seed funding for important senior-related projects	**13**

n = 23: Interviewees could provide more than one response.

- Foundation funding in Lake County is limited, and levy funding fills the gaps where public and philanthropic dollars are not available, ensuring **critical services are available to seniors who would otherwise not be served**.
- The predictability of levy funding allows providers to maintain staff and continue services without interruption. This stability enables organizations to **plan ahead and deliver services consistently over time**.
- The presence of the levy keeps senior needs visible in public discussions and decision-making. This ongoing focus helps ensure that **senior services remain a community priority**.
- Levy funding has allowed organizations to start new programs and expand services in response to emerging needs. This flexibility allows providers to **develop solutions that address gaps and strengthen the system**.
- Some stakeholders noted that **levy funding helps ensure seniors can receive services within their own community** rather than relying on resources outside the county.

Strengths of the Levy Funding - Verbatims

"The levy is what allows us to serve people who fall through every other funding source."

"The levy gives organizations the ability to respond when new needs emerge."

"There just isn't a deep foundation base here. The levy fills that role."

"You can't build services on one-time dollars. The levy is what makes continuity possible."

"It's what allows programs to grow instead of just survive."

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

"It makes it possible for seniors to get help here, instead of having to look outside the county."

"The levy keeps seniors in front of decision-makers."

Levy Funding: Weaknesses and Opportunities/Improvements

Q: What are the weaknesses of the senior levy funding?
Q: What are the opportunities to improve applying for, receiving, or the use of senior levy funding?

Weaknesses	Opportunities
Perceived uneven distribution of funds. Some organizations described differences in funding levels that were difficult to understand, particularly when organizations offering similar services received different amounts.	**Increase clarity around how funding decisions are made.** Providing clearer explanations of allocation criteria and methodology would help providers better understand funding levels and build confidence in the process.
Limited transparency into allocation formulas and decisions. Organizations noted they do not always know how funding amounts are determined or how priorities are set.	**Communicate funding priorities and decision-making criteria more openly.** Sharing how decisions align with community needs would help providers plan and align their work. Stakeholders also expressed a **desire to see outcomes from how levy dollars are used by providers.**
Application and reporting process can be 'clunky' and time-intensive. Smaller organizations described the administrative burden as challenging given limited staff capacity.	**Streamline the application and reporting process.** Simplifying requirements could allow providers to focus more time on delivering services.
Organizations become reliant on levy funding to sustain services. Many described levy funding as essential, creating concern about the impact if funding were reduced or unavailable.	**Use levy funding strategically to strengthen long-term sustainability.** Supporting diversification and capacity building could help organizations remain stable over time.
Funding levels have not kept pace with rising costs. Workforce costs and service demand have increased faster than funding levels. Recent awards to some have decreased even though costs have increased.	**Align future funding with services in demand and changing costs.** Adjusting this focus will help ensure the most essential services are funded at appropriate levels.
Smaller and newer organizations face challenges accessing funding. Limited administrative capacity and lack of existing relationships can make it harder to compete.	**Identify emerging and smaller providers and create intentional ways to support them.** This could expand service reach and ensure more are receiving services throughout the County.

Weaknesses of and Opportunities/Improvements for the Senior Service Levy - Verbatims

"I don't think anyone really understands how the funding amounts are decided."

"You spend so much time managing the process that it pulls you away from actually serving seniors."

"It's harder for newer organizations to break into the system."

"There's no clear formula that people can point to."

"The process takes a lot of time—especially for smaller organizations without dedicated grant staff."

"Greater transparency would help everyone plan better."

"If providers understood how decisions were made, there'd be a lot more confidence in the system."

"Costs keep rising, but funding hasn't kept up with what it actually takes to deliver services."

"People just want to know what the expectations are and how to align with them."

Levy Funding: Threats

Q: What are the threats against the senior levy?

Themes	# Mentions
Public resistance to property taxes and levy renewals	**16**
Lack of public understanding of what the levy funds	**15**
Competing levies	**12**
Perception that seniors are already well-supported	**10**

n = 19: Interviewees could provide more than one response.

- **Rising property taxes and general tax fatigue have made some voters more hesitant to support additional levies.** This creates concern that future levy renewals may become more difficult to pass.
- Many residents **do not fully understand what the levy funds or how it supports seniors in the community**. Many believe it only funds senior centers. This lack of awareness makes it harder to build and sustain public support for the levy.
- The senior levy **competes with other levies for schools, safety forces, and public services**. This creates a risk that voters may prioritize other funding needs over senior services.
- Some in the community believe **seniors already have sufficient support through programs like Social Security and Medicare**. This perception can reduce urgency and weaken support for maintaining or expanding the levy.
- **Changes in political leadership at the State and County level, generational turnover, and the absence of any particular crises** highlighting senior needs were described as potential risks, as these factors could reduce urgency and long-term commitment to maintaining the levy.

Threats to the Senior Service Levy - Verbatims

"People are reaching their limit on property taxes—it's getting harder to ask them for more."

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

"The need isn't always visible, so people underestimate how critical these services are."

"There's real tax fatigue out there, and the levy isn't immune to it."

"Seniors don't always win when they're up against other community priorities."

"People don't realize how much would disappear if the levy wasn't there."

"Most people have no idea what the levy actually pays for."

"People assume Medicare and Social Security take care of seniors, but that's just not the reality."

"The public thinks it's just senior centers—they don't see everything else it makes possible."

Detailed Findings:
Additional Insights

Additional Insights

- Stakeholders shared that **younger seniors often delay engaging with services because they do not see themselves as needing support.** Many adults in their 60s and early 70s do not see themselves needing senior services and therefore do not access preventative programs. This contributes to **lower participation in early intervention efforts and limits investment in preventative care**, while increasing the likelihood that **support will be accessed later, when needs are more complex, urgent, and costly to address**.

- **Small, community-based organizations operate on the margins of the formal system.** Faith-based groups and grassroots organizations often support seniors informally, but they are not fully integrated into the broader service network (or not invited to the table for community discussions because leaders don't know they exist).

- **There is no clear process to help seniors transition to higher levels of housing (or wraparound) support.** This leaves seniors and families to navigate complex and stressful decisions without coordinated guidance.

- **Financial exploitation and scams are an increasing risk for seniors, particularly those who are isolated or less familiar with technology.** Losing money to scams can threaten seniors' financial stability and their ability to remain independent and may also make them **more hesitant to use technology that could otherwise help them stay connected and access services**.

Additional Insights

- **Senior issues are increasingly complex.** Legal status, guardianship, capacity, and exploitation risk are straining the system. The current infrastructure is not well equipped to manage these layered cases effectively.

- **Veteran-related supports are under-leveraged.** Veteran services came up as a meaningful resource stream for some seniors but not consistently integrated into how people think about navigation/referrals. Stakeholders believe that veterans are not always aware of services available to them.

- **Caregiver strain is a threat.** Several interviews pointed to caregiver burnout/limits as a tipping point that accelerates unsafe living situations or forced transitions for seniors into new living arrangements.