As Denver's Senior Population Grows, So Do Worries About Health, Memory

By John Daley

Aug 5, 2015

Maintaining physical and mental health, and losing memory, are the top three concerns about aging for older adults in Denver, according to the United States of Aging Survey – conducted by the National Association of Area Agencies on Aging, the National Council on Aging and UnitedHealthcare. The findings were made public Wednesday at a meeting of Colorado business, nonprofit and government leaders.

What stands out in the report:

The three categories already mentioned -- physical health, mental health and losing memory ranked -- in the top three for seniors here. That’s much higher than their counterparts nationally. And it ranked higher than things like managing chronic health conditions, living independently and protecting from financial scams. Perhaps this isn’t a surprise, as Colorado prides itself on leading the nation for relatively lean and active adults.

Will the data will be used by local and state officials?

Yes. Denver has one of the fastest growing senior populations in the entire country. In the next two decades, a quarter of them will be 60 or older. That mirrors the statewide demographics. The number of seniors is set to just skyrocket in the coming decades. So these survey results could help guide policy makers in mapping out priorities and spending. And that includes a just-formed statewide task force on aging.

Mobility and independence are themes that come up frequently:

Seniors who were polled, who were concerned about living independently, say they’re concerned about becoming a burden to others and losing their memory. About a third of them also say they’re worried about getting around inside their homes on their own, and about getting out of the house and driving.

Liz McPherson, with UnitedHealthCare, says "This is the first generation of Americans that are growing up that have always had an automobile, and I think that’s going to impact their attitudes about giving up their keys, because they’re saying that we don’t have adequate transportation for them."
So transportation will be critical for that big senior wave that’s coming?

Yes, and this shows up in the survey results. Denver seniors far and away listed better public transportation, especially more buses, as the most important things that would make it easier for them to get around. Nearly 40 percent say it’s the No. 1 thing that needs to be done. But respondents complained how some areas are public transportation deserts. Funding, from both the federal and state government, for transportation or other senior needs, like housing, is just not keeping up.

Do Denver seniors think they’re ready to pay for those later years, with their own savings and income?

Seniors are living longer. That means they’ll need more money to survive on. Nearly 60 percent of Denver older adults say they’re concerned about having enough money to last them for the rest of their lives. And costs continue to rise for things like health care and housing.

What stands out nationally in these numbers?

Nationally, 42 percent of seniors think they’re “very prepared” to age. But the professionals who work with them say just 10 percent are “very prepared.” So that’s huge gap and it would seem to indicate that folks are not nearly as prepared as they think they are.