Seniors nationally more optimistic about their health and finances, but Dallas seniors, not so much on finances

By Pamela Yip
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Staying healthy is a huge priority for seniors, according to the results of a national survey being released today at an aging conference in Dallas. Americans 60 and older are more motivated than in the past two years to improve their health by exercising regularly and setting health goals, according to the third annual United States of Aging Survey.

The survey was conducted by the National Association of Area Agencies on Aging, the National Council on Aging, UnitedHealthcare and USA TODAY. The results will be released at the n4a Answers on Aging Annual Conference and Trade Show, the largest gathering of professionals who serve seniors. The conference runs through Wednesday at the Hyatt Regency Dallas.

N4a stands for the National Association of Area Agencies on Aging, which represents more than 600 members.

Area Agencies on Aging were established by the federal government nearly five decades ago. They serve as the go-to source for older adults and caregivers seeking community resources for a variety of needs. According to the survey, more than one-third of seniors say they exercise every day, compared with 26 percent in 2013.

“For many seniors, high activity levels correspond to a positive perspective on life,” the survey said. “Seniors who exercise daily are much more likely than those who never exercise to say the past year of their life has been better than normal, rather than worse.”
The survey reveals insights on how U.S. seniors are preparing for their later years and what communities can do to better support an increasing, longer-living senior population.

“More Americans are living longer lives than ever before,” said Rhonda Randall, chief medical officer, UnitedHealthcare Retiree Solutions. “It is highly encouraging to see more older Americans taking charge of how they age, making deliberate choices and setting goals to help themselves live healthier and more independently during their extended senior years.”

Seniors in Dallas are slightly less likely than seniors nationally to say their health has been better in the past year, the survey said. However, they are as likely as seniors nationally to say that their health will improve in the next five to 10 years.

“Dallas seniors are much less likely to exercise daily than seniors nationally,” it said.

Financially, seniors nationally are increasingly confident in their financial stability this year, compared to 2013 and 2012. Sixty-nine find it easy to pay monthly bills, continuing an upward trend from 64 percent in 2012.

Also, 49 percent of seniors are concerned their savings and income will be sufficient to last the rest of their lives, down 4 percentage points since 2013. But in Dallas, seniors are more likely to believe their financial situation will remain the same in the future than seniors nationally, who are more hopeful it will improve, the survey said.

What’s more, Dallas seniors are less convinced than seniors nationally that their community is prepared to meet the needs of a growing senior population, according to the survey. “While Dallas seniors are as likely as seniors nationally to anticipate needing support with transportation, they are less likely to think their community provides adequate access to transportation than seniors nationally.”

That should be a wake-up call to urban planners in our region. Transportation is a critical need for seniors. Without a way to travel to healthcare appointments and social activities, seniors endanger their physical and emotional well-being.

As the population in the Dallas area ages, ensuring seniors have access to reliable transportation is essential.

The United States of Aging Survey involved 3,279 telephone interviews from April 3 to May 6, including nationally representative samples of Americans 60 and older and adults 18-59. The margin of error for the national samples is plus or minus 3.1 percentage points and between 6.17 percentage points and 6.2 percentage points for oversampled subpopulations. Data from general population samples, the regional oversampled audiences and the oversampled audiences of seniors are weighted to U.S. Census Bureau demographic statistics in terms of age, gender, marital status and race.