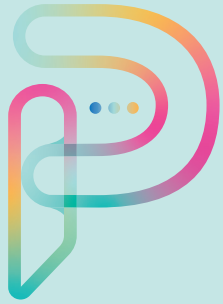




You're only as old as you feel!





Taking the pulse of our senior community

A strategic research project by the Canton Public Library

The global pandemic of 2020-2021 has impacted all aspects of our lives, but people ages 65 years and older were adversely affected with more severe illness and higher death rates. The library wanted to learn the unique needs of this at-risk population and embarked on a study in fall of 2020. We defined the scope of this project as people aged 65 years and older living in Canton Township. About 13,000 people fit this category or 14 percent of Canton's total population. The question we asked was, "how do we safely meet the short-term needs of Canton seniors?"



Getting to know our seniors

Through our research, we learned a lot about seniors in Canton.



Numbers only tell part of the story. By connecting the statistics to people, we gain insights into what is important to seniors and how to better serve them.

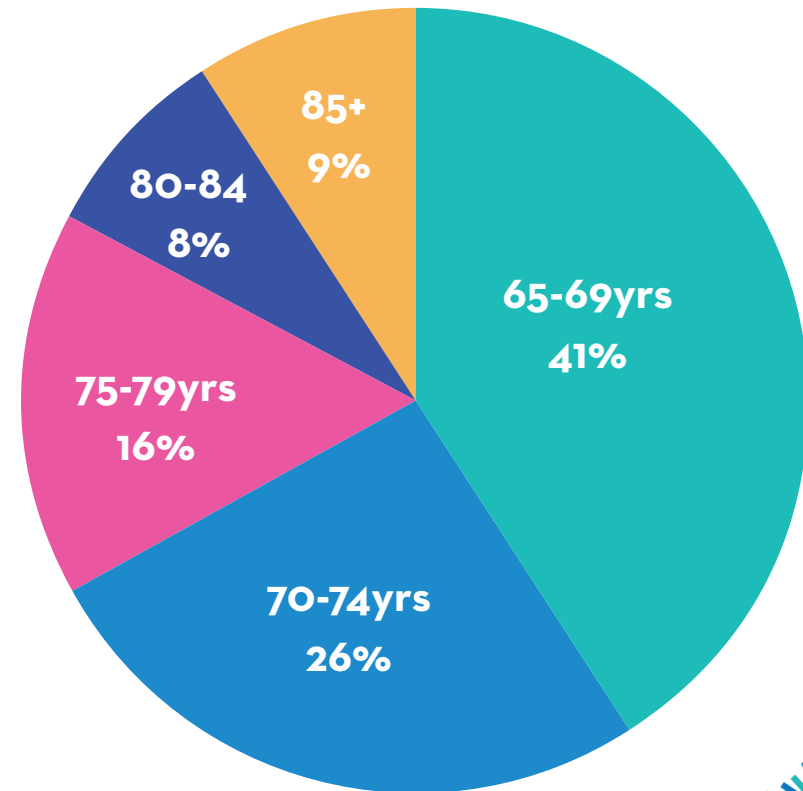
We learned that 25% of people aged 65-69 and 24% of those age 70-74 are still in the workforce. Our seniors are well educated: 34% have a bachelor's degree or higher. They are active and engaged, have a sense of purpose, and need ease and convenience in their lives.

Of the 13,000 seniors in Canton, 2,300 live alone, mostly in private residences, and 77% live with a spouse or family member. Seniors reside in about 8,250 Canton households. They have a need for companionship and a safe space to gather with friends to pursue common interests and activities.

How do we know what we know?

The CPL team conducted extensive research, using information from the Pew Research Center, Southeast Michigan Council of Governments, American Community Survey, Canton Township Community Survey, Census projections, library cardholder surveys and one-on-one interviews with community experts to get a thorough understanding of our seniors. If you'd like to learn more about our data, we are happy to share.

An age breakdown of senior population



Canton Public Library
connecting your community

Key outcomes



Three themes emerged

The library's researchers discovered three main areas where we, and other community partners, can help seniors.

Maintain control: independence and autonomy

Seniors miss their freedom. Keeping them safe and protected from the virus also meant keeping them cooped up and without the ability to do things, both routine and spontaneous.

In helping seniors maintain their freedom, we learned that seniors need the ability to age in place, and to mitigate aging in general. They require things that are easy and convenient, and they need to be able to receive help without feeling like a burden, in most cases this means receiving help without having to ask for it.



Feel relevant: purpose and usefulness

Seniors want to feel like they are leading a meaningful life but it is difficult to stay relevant and in touch in an ever-changing world. Once out of the workforce, it becomes harder to be aware of and adapt to new things.



Seniors could use help navigating the speed in which their world changes. They desire to be valued and cared for through human connection. Our seniors want to make an impact and give back. Many are thinking about the legacy that they will leave, and want to preserve memories, reflect on their lives, share experiences in meaningful ways, and focus on the next generation.

Find Joy: inspiration and enjoyment

The pandemic has been especially hard on seniors, who feel the need to make the most of the time they have. It is hard to watch grains of time sift through the hourglass, and feel that precious months are passing by in isolation.

We can help seniors maximize their time by staying occupied in enjoyable ways and helping them find inspiration to lead meaningful lives. They are looking for magical experiences that allow them to express themselves and be fulfilled. Seniors also want to enjoy their life as it is, and maintain their physical and mental wellbeing. "Use it or lose it" is a relevant sentiment for this group.



Meet our seniors

We identified 5 profiles that represent the needs of seniors in our community.

Meet George

George falls into the age range of 65-74 years old. He's active, with a "can and will" attitude and feels free to explore and participate in the world. He has a positive mindset and many social connections, including a key group of friends and family. He loves his golf outings and is a master on the grill. George participates frequently in recreational and hobby activities, seeks opportunities to give back, and has been involved in a service club and worship volunteerism. For George, his legacy is a purposeful, well-lived life.

Fundamental needs

- Personal control
- Self-expression
- To feel useful and productive
- Ease and convenience

Hurdles

- COVID Restrictions and lack of freedom
- Rapid technology changes
- Finite time on earth



Meet Penny

Penny falls into the age range of 65-74 years old. Penny has a small circle of connections, including a couple close friends and her family, with whom she enjoys spending quality time. She enjoys reading, watching the Hallmark channel and HGTV. Penny is worried about health and safety, and her overall health maintenance can be challenging. It's been hard for her to stay positive during mandated stay-at-home restrictions and she doesn't want to be a bother. Penny wants to stay in her home as long as possible, and prefers one-on-one help and quiet activities.

Fundamental needs

- Something positive to occupy her time
- Interacting in engaging ways
- Ease and convenience
- Situational tech help

Hurdles

- Health issues restrict her activities
- Mandated COVID restrictions
- Accepting help without feeling like a burden
- Using technology, like patient portals, to manage health issues



Meet Robert

Robert falls into the age range of 75-84 years old. Faith and spirituality are important to him, and he appreciates everyday things, like the birds that come to his feeder. Robert enjoys watching History Channel shows and reading his favorite authors. He has a core group of close friends, family and caretakers and still likes to go out for a drive, even though it makes his family nervous. He wants to stay in his home and has to find new safe ways to do the things he's used to doing.

Fundamental needs

Something positive to occupy his time

Personal control

Ease and convenience

Dignity

Hurdles

Lack of freedom and control

Loneliness

Finite time on earth



Meet Betty

Betty falls into the age range of 75-84 years old. She likes to be up and about, have the freedom to socialize, reserves trips on the senior bus to the Fox Theater with friends, and hits the mall for walking exercise and shopping. Betty feels amazing for her age, and she wants to make the most of it while she still can. She loves to spend time with family and friends and appreciates the freedoms that she has.

Fundamental needs

- Social connection
- Self-expression
- Receiving help without feeling like a burden
- Making the most of time

Hurdles

- COVID isolation and restrictions
- Missing hobbies and activities
- Declining abilities



Meet Dot

Dot falls into the age range of 85+ years old. She's appreciative of everyday things, like watching the kids walk past her house on the way to school. She feels cherished by her family and enjoys spending time with them, often the center of attention at family gatherings. Dot is somewhat reliant on caregivers, mostly her grown children, yet has a desire to remain as independent as she can. Faith and spirituality have become more personal as she ages. Dot doesn't get out as much as she used to but still enjoys a trip to the Dollar Store.

Fundamental needs

- Something positive to occupy her time
- Basic needs are already met
- Social connection
- Feeling valued and cared for
- Dignity

Hurdles

- Declining abilities
- Loneliness
- Lack of freedom



Opportunities

How might we develop services, programs and partnerships to serve our seniors?

Through our research, identification of core physical and emotional needs, and ideation sessions, we have been inspired to create opportunity prototypes that can be put into action to better the lives of seniors in our community.

Some of the topics we're exploring include:

Answers before questions

How do we help seniors handle the hiccups and speed bumps of life, like tracking down a COVID vaccination appointment or reading a book on an iPad, without feeling like a burden? Let's **anticipate seniors' needs** and look at how we can provide answers before they have questions, so they don't have to ask for help.



Stealthy support

How might we help seniors maintain independence by making their path smoother and easier to navigate? Let's find **new ways to do old things**, connect seniors and caregivers with resources, and make living on your own easier with safer home management and direct-to-door services.



Make magic happen

In what ways can we connect seniors to help make every day experiences more enjoyable? How might we create something magical for seniors to look forward to? How can we help them stay connected with their grandchildren? Let's **create opportunities for people to come together** in a safe space to socialize and enjoy common interests and hobbies. These opportunities are just some of the ideas we are exploring. We welcome your thoughts and ideas to come up with and implement **life-enhancing services and programs** for seniors in our community.

Our thanks to community partners who shared their expertise

TejKiran Singh, Gurdwara Sahib Singh Sabha of Michigan
Sufia Fateh, Muslim Community of the Western Suburbs
Stephanie Diago, Club 55 Canton Leisure Services
Ariel Starr, Waltonwood Cherry Hill
Bill Schlatter, SEMCOG
Dan Patton, CPL Librarian

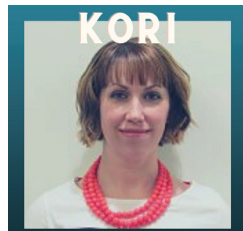


Canton Public Library Pulse Team:

Laurie Golden, Department Head Community Relations
Laura Fawcett, Program Librarian
Kori Kasara, Librarian
Amy Lee, Librarian
Kaitlyn Minshall, Communication Specialist
Tara Scott, Librarian
Susan Kennedy, Research Strategist, Look See



For more information, contact
Laurie Golden at 734-397-0999 ext. 1078





You're only as old as you feel!