

Utah Department of Health and Human Services, Division of Aging and Adult Services Community Needs Assessment of Vulnerable Adults: 2024 Results Brief

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This results brief summarizes the key findings from two community needs surveys completed for Utah DHHS. These surveys were administered to identify the service needs, gaps, and barriers of vulnerable adults in Utah. A full comprehensive report will be available in September 2024.

Project Overview and Methodology

The desired outcome of this project was to improve and enhance the effectiveness of the Utah Department of Health and Human Services, Division of Aging and Adult Services (DHHS DAAS) programs. A mixed methods study was conducted including an online survey for vulnerable adults (n=767), a separate online survey of stakeholders who work with vulnerable adults in Utah (n=182) and focus groups and in-depth interviews with respondents who were interested in participating in further research. Data collection for the online surveys was from January 30 to March 30, 2024. Focus groups were held with 10 vulnerable adults on July 20th and August 1st, 2024, and 11 in-depth interviews were conducted throughout July 2024 with stakeholders from across the state of Utah.

Key Findings: Stakeholders Survey

- Stakeholders believe it would be most important to collaborate with mental health partners (76%), healthcare workers (72%), and APS providers (69%) at an Enhanced-Multidisciplinary Team (E-MDT) to improve outcomes for vulnerable adults who are victims of abuse, neglect, and exploitation.
- Of those who participate in aging and disability services training, 61% believe there are aging and disability topics that are lacking where training would be valuable.

- Stakeholders pointed to social isolation, a lack of respect and dignity, and financial limitations as the biggest challenges faced by vulnerable adults in their community, especially among rural adults.

Key Findings: Vulnerable Adults Survey

- Only 49% of vulnerable adult respondents said they are familiar with Adult Protective Services (APS).
- Many respondents have either never contacted the Area Agency on Aging (62%) or are not familiar with the agency and its services (31%). Of those who contacted the agency, over three-quarters (77%) said they received the help and resources they needed.
- The primary trusted informational sources for vulnerable adults regarding aging or disability services are healthcare professionals (60%), followed by family members (45%) and the internet (42%).

Service Needs

The top-needed service reported by both vulnerable adults and stakeholders is low-income housing, at 40% and 57%, respectively.

Service	Vulnerable Adult	Stakeholder
Housing (low income)	X	X
Financial services	X	X
Day service	X	X
Transportation	X	X
Advocacy services	X	
Legal services	X	X
Caretaking/respite	X	X
Court services	X	X
In-home services	X	
Residential/facility services	X	X

*Not in true ranked order; reported by 18% or more of each survey group

Service Needs (Continued)

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Non-white rurally located vulnerable adults with an income of less than \$20,000 are more likely to indicate they are unaware if services are offered and more likely to report that they need services, particularly housing, financial services, and day service.

Service Barriers

The primary barrier in accessing services experienced by vulnerable adults is disqualification due to high income (29%). The primary barrier in accessing services for vulnerable adults as reported by stakeholders is funding (82%).

Barrier	Vulnerable Adult	Stakeholder
Do not qualify	X	
Lack of information/ guidance	X	
Not enough money, long waitlists, or staffing capacity	X	X
Availability/ access in rural areas	X	X
Transportation, distance, or language difficulty	X	X
Access/Lack of services for older adults	X	X

*Not in true ranked order; combines overlapping categories; reported by 14% or more of each survey group

Non-white vulnerable adults with an income less than \$20,000 are more likely to report they experienced barriers in accessing services, particularly a lack of information, not enough money for services to be available immediately or long waitlists, and transportation difficulties.

Unfamiliarity with Service Availability

Many vulnerable adults are generally unaware if services are available in their area, particularly professional advocacy (51%), court (47%), and

legal services (41%). Stakeholders are similarly unaware if court services (31%), and legal services

(22%) are available in their area.

Service	Vulnerable Adult	Stakeholder
Advocacy services	X	X
Court services	X	X
Legal services	X	X
Day service	X	X
Caretaking/ respite services	X	
Housing (low income)	X	

*Not in true ranked order; combines overlapping categories; reported by 21% or more of each survey group

Additional Research Findings

- In the last 12 months, one-third (33%) of vulnerable adults said they have struggled to pay for food. Another 27% have struggled to pay their mortgage or rent and 25% have struggled to pay for transportation.
- Among vulnerable adults, the majority reported it is at least somewhat important to them (88%) to remain in their home as they get older.
- For them to remain in their home as they get older, the assistance needed by vulnerable adults includes outdoor labor (43%), household organization and cleaning (39%), and home safety modifications (31%).
- Most vulnerable adults rated their overall physical health (69%) and emotional well-being (76%) as “Good” or better. Only 9% said their physical health was “Poor” and 8% said their emotional well-being was “Poor”.
- Most vulnerable adult survey responses were from non-rural counties (Davis, Salt Lake, Utah, and Weber counties). 21% (n=236) of vulnerable adult survey respondents indicated they were a caregiver of a vulnerable adult, while 66% (n=744) indicated they were an adult over 60 and 27% (n=311) said they were an adult with a disability.