



North Carolina's State Aging Readiness Assessment

1

February 2011



This report on the assessment of state readiness for an aging population is a result of a collaborative effort between the UNC Institute on Aging and the North Carolina Division of Aging and Adult Services spurred by Executive Order No. 54 initiated by Governor Bev Perdue. It was undertaken with the support of the Governor's Policy Office and the Governor's Advisory Council on Aging. This is one of several activities aimed at understanding North Carolina's readiness for its projected aging workforce and population. Other activities have included the Governor's Regional Roundtables and the Governor's Conference on Aging (www.aging.unc.edu/nccoa).

One key byproduct of this readiness assessment is the development of a corps of aging liaisons identified within State agencies. This corps acted as the liaison for each agency to gather the information for the readiness survey and participated as key presenters at the Governor's Conference on Aging. The role of this corps will continue beyond the assessment to a) report to the Governor's Advisory Council on Aging on request, b) help produce the web-hub of information for the general public and policymakers about NC's efforts to become further ready for an aging population, c) offer input for the State Aging Plan, d) promote ongoing communication about aging matters, e) help to dispel myths and encourage consideration of aging within their agency, f) participate in follow-up meetings, and g) help plan local assessments among constituent organizations and communities across the state.

The assessment was conducted in June 2010. We expect that the dissemination of the information resulting from the readiness assessment will increase awareness of the problems and opportunities created or exacerbated by workforce and population aging and spur planning to address these problems and opportunities. Through these efforts, we also expect that what we learn and disseminate will promote further collaboration among and within State agencies and beyond. Finally, we expect that these activities, including the assessment and the follow-up activities will strengthen NC's Aging Plan, consistent with N.C.G.S. 143B-181.1A, and assist the Governor's Advisory Council on Aging in its charge outlined in N.C.G.S. 143B-180.

Readiness Assessment Implementation

The Readiness Assessment was informed by the efforts of some other states who had undertaken similar efforts in recent years. The readiness assessment survey team decided to take a structured approach such that all agencies would have a voice in the process. Therefore, we constructed a web-based instrument that could be completed by multiple respondents, printed, and reviewed and submitted via the web or email. We chose to limit the initial phase of data collection to the point of view of the "central" or home office of each State agency rather than from that of the constituent or sub-agencies. When we say "agency" we mean the central office of the participating departments/divisions as they oversee planning for constituent agencies. When we say "departments" we are referring to sub-units to the central office in which aging liaisons may work. We identified 50 eligible agencies; 48 responded to our request for information (96% response rate). All 50 have identified aging liaisons. The assessment survey gathered data on the following:

- Studies, plans and reports
- Aging of State's workforce and response
- Effect on policies, programs and services
- Use of technology and adaptive devices

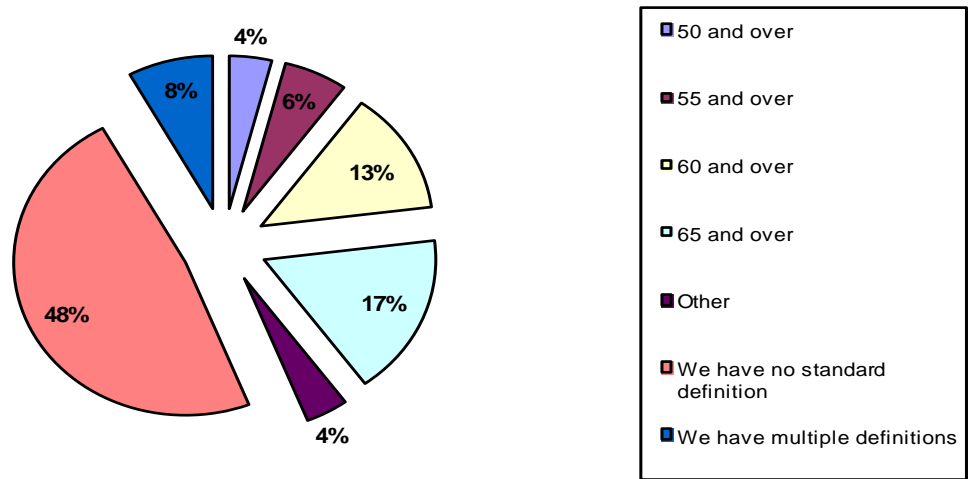
- Adaptation of built environment
- Collaboration with other organizations
- Involvement of older adults, their families and caregivers
- Use of senior volunteers
- Upcoming challenges and issues
- Programs/activities underway to assist local communities.

Readiness Assessment Results

To begin developing a baseline of information, the survey began by asking agencies about how they viewed or defined “older adult”. When a standard criteria is used, it is often set by the legal or funding source. While the relevance of this for overall policy direction is rather arbitrary, it still can have a bearing on the allocation of resources and focus of attention.

Figure 1 illustrates the variation in interpretation of age across agencies. Almost half (48%) had no standard definition of “older adult” for either planning or implementation purposes. For those with standard definitions, the threshold age varied from 50 to 65 years.

Figure 1: At what age does your agency consider a client to be an older adult?



One of the major purposes of this assessment was to understand where NC State Government stands in terms of planning for the aging of the population. According to the survey, approximately 35% of agencies have produced any documents such as plans, reports, or studies related to the effect of an aging population in the past five years.

Workforce Aging

One dimension of readiness needed is a planned yet flexible response to the critical skills and capacity gaps due, in large part, to workforce aging. The workforce is aging in many sectors of the economy and government – most of the projected growth in labor force through 2050 will be composed of workers aged 55 and over. This increase in older workers will influence the number of workers who retire based on age eligibility. With this said, many workers may have to retire later to supplement the private (if any) and public components of their retirement income. Workforce aging will affect the organization of work across public and private organizations including state government.

In their responses, agencies indicated that they were generally aware of impending issues and opportunities for their agency related to workforce aging but also generally indicated that they were not yet ready to meet these challenges. For example, 89% of agencies reported that they know the number of employees eligible to retire in the next five years for their agency. Seventy-eight (78) percent know which departments/units will likely experience the highest proportion of retirees. Similarly, 72% know which departments/units will likely experience the most critical skills/knowledge loss. On the other hand, only 6% (2 agencies) of agencies have a plan to address this skills/knowledge loss. Another two agencies also responded that they already know that they will not have any critical gaps based on current retirement projections. In terms of benchmarking, we also know that 44% of agencies have begun working on such a plan. This is key information for resource sharing across agencies related to workforce planning. Only 13% of agencies have a staff member(s) with a percentage of time designated for preparing for an aging workforce.

One best practice related to workforce planning is the implementation of formal knowledge transfer within an organization to combat the loss of important organizational knowledge that may occur as a large cohort of key people leave the organization through retirement. Table 1 indicates that over half of agencies are implementing such formal programs even if it is not necessarily a part of the overall preparedness plan for their unit. Sharing the particulars of these programs may lead to synergies among state agencies as they move forward with both planning and the implementation of such programs.

Table 1: Knowledge transfer in agencies (central agency) and departments (sub-units)

Do older employees transfer knowledge (e.g., mentoring, shadowing) to younger employees as a formal part of their job?	Percent YES 51%
IF YES, is this knowledge transfer (e.g. mentoring, shadowing) part of a larger preparedness plan in your agency?	40%
IF YES, is this knowledge transfer (e.g. mentoring, shadowing) part of a larger preparedness plan in your department?	50%
IF NO, are you planning to implement a knowledge transfer (e.g. mentoring, shadowing) program?	30%

Another best practice for recruiting and retaining workers relates to workplace flexibility. As higher proportions of workers become age eligible for retirement, it will be essential to retain some of these workers to stem critical skills/knowledge loss in state government. According to the assessment, almost 75% of agencies say that human resource policies that place a six-month restriction on rehiring make it difficult to retain workers who want to officially retire but continue to work at reduced hours. Workplace flexibility is maximized through progressive human resource policies such as flexible work hours, telecommuting, and part-time work. Table 2 describes the level of workplace flexibility within state agencies in NC. High numbers of agencies report offering flexible work hours to workers, but relatively few offer options such as job sharing. Very few supply resource material for those workers who provide care for older adults (elder care).

Table 2: Workplace Flexibility

Does your agency regularly offer your staff the following...	Percent YES
Flexible work hours	90%
Telecommuting	54%
Part-time work	44%
Flexible work places	21%
Job sharing	21%
Elder care information	13%

Workforce aging is likely to put pressure on state agencies that also must respond to the increased need for programs and services. One way to meet these pressures is to use volunteer programs to extend the capacity of the workforce. Relatively few agencies report engaging older adults to this end (15%). Those that do use older adult volunteers, do so in a variety of ways (See Table 3).

Table 3: Engaging Older Adults

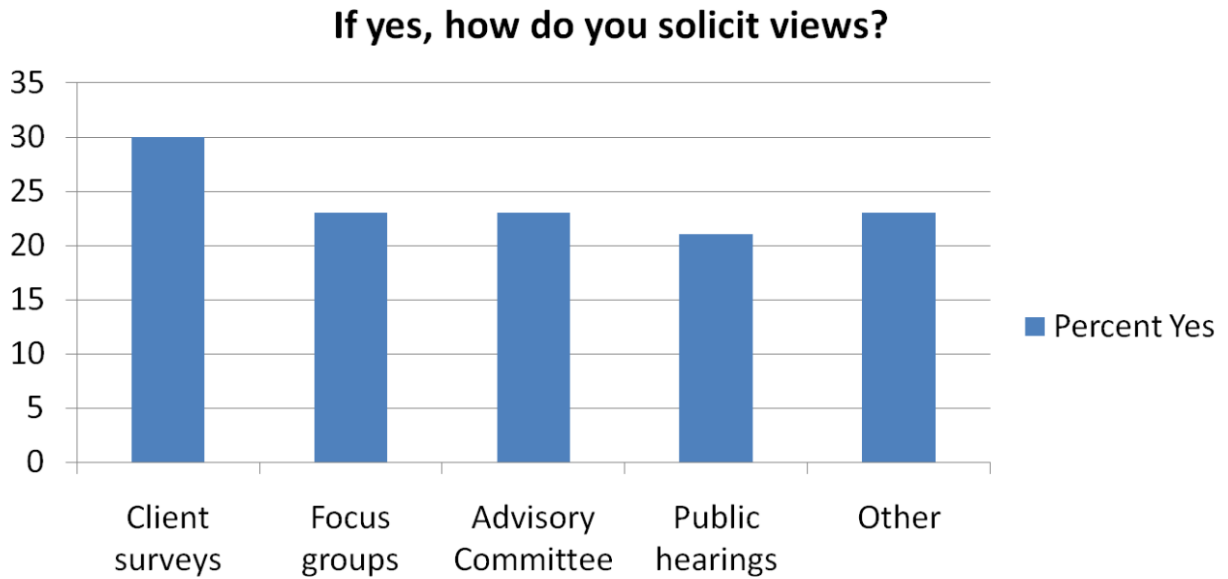
Does your agency have any volunteer programs that engage older adults to extend the capacity of your workforce?	Percent YES
In what capacity have you engaged older adults?	
Advisory committees/boards	10%
Instructors/Educators (e.g. docents)	8%
Honorary roles based on work, education or life experiences (e.g. veterans)	8%
Routine non-skilled tasks (e.g. envelope stuffing, meal delivery)	2%
Clerical/administrative support	0
Other (e.g. faith-based services, lay health advisors, youth volunteers)	6%

Effect on Programs and Services

As the number of older adults increases, there will be a growing demand for more and expanded programs and services across most agencies. This statement was corroborated by our findings from the readiness assessment. Seventy-five percent of agencies anticipate an increase in the demand for their agency’s programs and services. Only 15% of agencies report that this challenge is not applicable to their agency. Echoing the above findings, agencies appear to be aware of the challenges and opportunities that are forecasted related to population aging but few are ready to meet such challenges. For example, only about half (54%) currently track changes in client demand for programs and services. Only a little more than half of those that track changes can isolate these changes based on client age. A total of 37% have already have had to make changes in how they implement programs and services to accommodate this increase in demand. About one quarter of respondents have any agency-level policies and/or practices to increase the number of employees based on the increased need for programs/services. While no agencies have a preparedness plan in place related to population aging, 56% are currently working on such a plan. Approximately one third of agencies have a percentage of at least one staff person designated for preparing for this increased demand for programs and services.

One best practice in meeting the increased and changing needs of North Carolina’s older adults is soliciting views of older adults, their families or caregivers to shape programs and services. Forty (40) percent of agencies solicit these views through a variety of strategies (See Figure 2). Other strategies included the use of task forces, customer service feedback and soliciting feedback during their strategic planning processes.

Figure 2: Input from Older Adults, Families or Caregivers



Particularly in times of great constraints on resources, agencies will need to partner in order to meet the challenges of both workforce and population aging in our state. A substantial portion of agencies (58%) already collaborate with other organizations including other governmental agencies, private non-profits and for-profits (See Table 4).

Table 4: Collaboration to extend capacity

	Percent YES
Does your agency collaborate with other organizations (including private sector) in planning for and responding to the aging population?	58%
If YES, with what types of organizations do you collaborate?	
Other government agencies	50%
Private non-profit organizations	38%
Private for-profit organizations	25%
Other (e.g., faith-based organizations, provider associations, universities)	25%
Are there other organizations with which you <u>want</u> to collaborate, but have not yet done so?	34%

Technology and Built Environment

Technology is used and adapted to meet the many needs of older adults in maintaining quality of life and independent living. Examples of these technologies include tele-medicine, adaptive devices, such as hearing aids and screen readers, medical alerts, prostheses, and other smart technologies related to maintaining health and independence. Technology has the potential to help agencies extend their capacity to serve older adults and older adults' own capacity to maintain independence. As evidenced in Table 5, relatively few agencies have harnessed the capacity of technology to do either.

Table 5: Targeted use of technology

<i>Technology is used and adapted to meet the many needs of older adults in maintaining quality of life and independent living.</i>	Percent YES	Not Applicable to My Agency
Sponsors education programs aimed at helping older adults use technology	15%	27%
Changed how it informs, supports or delivers any such technologies	23%	42%
If NO, has plans to make changes	14%	48%

With increased age, there is a greater likelihood that the clients that agencies serve, including those with disabilities, functional limitations, and other changes due to normal aging will need to have accommodations that might include improved access to transportation, buildings, walkways, parking, zoning and home/office modifications. Strategic changes to the built environment, like technologies, have the potential to extend the capacity of the workforce and to help older adults remain independent longer. As Table 6 shows, a majority of agencies have made physical or other improvements to accommodate such changes for their staff members (62%). About half of agencies for whom it is applicable have made such accommodations for clients. Relatively few have made attempts to increase access to public transportation for staff or clients. It is important to note here that many of these state agencies (at the central office level) are not directly serving clients (hence the high numbers of not applicable in Table 6).

Table 6: Physical or other improvements to extend capacity or promote independence

<i>With increased age, there is a greater likelihood that persons may need some accommodations—In the <u>past five years</u>, has your agency made....</i>	Percent YES	Not Applicable to My Agency
any physical or other improvements, such as ergonomics, lighting, and screen size to accommodate such changes for <u>your staff members</u> ?	62%	
any physical or other improvements for <u>your clients</u> ?	30%	37%
any improvements to increase access to public transportation for <u>your staff members</u> ?	32%	
any improvements to increase access to public transportation for <u>your clients</u> ?	15%	51%

Critical Issues in Preparedness

When asked to rate the relative importance of major substantive areas of the readiness assessment, agencies tended to see meeting the increased need for programs and services and planning for an aging workforce as the two most critical issues in the coming decade (See Table 7). Agencies also had an opportunity to write in other issues they felt were critical to their agency in the coming decade. Some of these responses were particular to agencies (e.g., accessible housing, senior parking). However, one additional theme emerged – that of resource/budget constraints currently facing state leaders.

Table 7: Critical Issues in the Coming Decade

Based on a scale from 1 to 5, with ‘1’ indicating not a challenge at all and ‘5’ as the most difficult challenge	Mean (standard deviation)	Not Applicable to My Agency (%)
Meeting the increased need of older adults for more and expanded programs and services	3.6 (1.1)	21%
Planning for an aging workforce	3.2 (1.1)	2%
Improving use of technology and adaptive devices	2.9 (1.1)	2%
Changing your agency’s built environment to accommodate <u>worker</u> needs	2.4 (1.3)	0
Changing your agency’s built environment to accommodate <u>client</u> needs	2.1 (1.1)	33%

Next Steps

The completion of this phase of assessing the state's readiness for an aging population is important but only a beginning. It is vital that the findings be used to strengthen preparedness for an aging workforce and an aging population. Also essential are efforts to broaden our understanding of programs and services already targeted for older adults as well as areas needing attention. In addition, the assessment must move beyond state government to include an examination of readiness locally and in the private sector.

As next steps, the Division of Aging and Adult Services and the UNC Institute on Aging will:

- (1) Continue to support communications and collaboration among the Corps of Aging Liaisons. This will include well-planned quarterly meetings focused on areas of common interest or concern (e.g.; workforce planning, knowledge transfer), and targeted e-communications to share information about demographic trends, research findings, grant opportunities, etc.
- (2) Enlist the support of the Aging Liaisons to— (a) Share information with the Governor's Advisory Council on Aging. (b) Conduct an inventory of state programs and services targeted specifically for older adults and/or their family caregivers, and such other activities being planned.
- (3) Pilot a local assessment, mirroring the state assessment, within at least one Area Agency on Aging, multi-county planning and service area.
- (4) Maintain a web-hub of information relevant to this initiative at <http://www.aging.unc.edu/service/preparing/liaisons/index.html>