**An Age-Friendly Burlington Action Plan**

**OPTIMAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING**

**As an Age-Friendly Community, in Burlington:**

Prioritizing optimal health and wellbeing among older adults involves developing strategies that address all facets of an older adult’s health needs. This includes optimizing access to and quality of health care, exercise, and nutrition resources. Older residents should receive, without discrimination, optimal physical, dental, mental, emotional, and spiritual health through the full course of their lives. Holistic options for health, exercise, counseling, and good nutrition should be both affordable and accessible. Access to coordinated, competent, and high-quality care should be provided at all levels and in all settings.

The City of Burlington identifies Agism as a public health threat, often rendering older adults invisible, and minimizing resources and attention needed to enable all community members to enjoy a full and fruitful life, contributing to the greater good, and depending on it for support as it is needed.

**Moving toward an Age-Friendly Community, in Burlington:**

* Older adults can safely access a variety of affordable opportunities for exercise within an inclusive environment. Resources are available to expand accessible and free community-based physical activity classes at senior centers, Adult Day Centers and other settings that are accessible and seek to include health professionals.
* PlanBTV and other community design projects support year-round infrastructure supporting increased physical activity among older adults.
* Older adults can access comprehensive mental health care from qualified providers, including trauma-informed mental health professionals, without fear of stigma or discrimination.
* Older adults are food secure through the combined efforts of community partners such as Age Well, Feeding Chittenden, local senior centers, and others in the “Free Food in Burlington” network. Food security considers culturally appropriate food.
* Older adults have equitable access to primary health care.
* Older adults can live safely in their home, with ready access to in-home assessments and adaptations to prevent falls.
* Older adults have ready access to programs and resources for social interaction and connection, including exercise programs, which are evidence-based interventions for suicide prevention.
* The city encourages and supports active educational programming and city policy specifically calls out agism as detrimental to healthy aging, continues to identify and advance policies and communications that combat ageism.
* The city promotes public education efforts for wellness, e.g., Vermonters Taking Action Against Cancer, promote and increase cancer screening rates among all Vermonters that meet clinical guidelines, and programs that address and reduce substance misuse of alcohol, cannabis, tobacco, and opioids to improve health and reduce chronic diseases, including cognitive decline.
* All resources and programming consider the diverse cultural, ethnic, and language background of Burlington residents and provide pathways to access and understand opportunities for all.

**Actions: City Council & The Mayor’s Office**

On April 26, 2021, City Council passed a Resolution creating the Burlington Aging Council, noting that older residents of Burlington must be valued members of the community, and that ageism and social isolation for seniors are deeply embedded in our culture leading to increased mortality and poor health outcomes. In support of increasing the conditions to support optimal health and wellness for older adults in Burlington specific actions by city government and its partners are recommended.

1. Work to promote optimal health and wellbeing for older adults in Burlington, supported by a rigorous effort at education, information access, partner coordination, advocacy at the state level for adequate program resources, and targeted investments at the local level. To properly advance this agenda **staffing support** for a reinvigorated Burlington Aging Council is essential.
2. Provide adequate funding to ensure that essential information, resources, and updates are available in multiple languages.
3. Direct City Departments, such as the Police Department to pursue partnerships with community organizations (e.g., UVMMC Emergency Department) to identify older individuals at risk of experiencing homelessness (or experiencing homelessness) so that they can more effectively connected with resources.
4. Build on the success of the CORE Adult Center (run by Burlington Parks, Recreation, and Waterfront Department) and engage partners to support the development of a part-time care facility in Burlington to assist older adults with higher intensity care needs and provide respite to family caregivers.
5. Expand the 50+ Programming of Burlington Parks, Recreation, and Waterfront Department to ensure that all older adults can access a variety of affordable opportunities for exercise within an inclusive environment. Align planning with the state’s comprehensive physical activity plan, called for in Age Strong Vermont, to decrease isolation, increase social engagement, and provide evidence-based physical activity and strength training programs to promote positive health outcomes.
6. Direct DPW and BPRW to coordinate planning efforts to increase sidewalk safety year round to encourage outdoor activity and mobility, and to put in place other supportive physical amenities to make Burlington a year round accessible active city providing opportunity for activity in support of health in line with the [WHO’ Active Aging Policy Framework](https://extranet.who.int/agefriendlyworld/wp-content/uploads/2014/06/WHO-Active-Ageing-Framework.pdf).
7. Expand funding for and promotion of the Housing Access Modifications program at CEDO, including home assessments for fall prevention and other safety upgrades for older adults living in apartments or houses in concert with community partner programs.
8. Provide a clear public resolution declaring Agism and Ablism as Agism as public health threats, and committing Burlington to actively fighting agism and ablism through policy and programs, providing resources and attention needed to enable all community members to enjoy a full and fruitful life, contributing to the greater good, and depending on it for support as it is needed.

**Summary of Key Investments:**

* Dedicated funding from the city to support:
  + City staff support for the Burlington Aging Council
  + Informational resource development, printing and web hosting, and translation services.
  + City departmental personnel dedicated time and effort (and training) to support Healthy Aging initiatives (e.g., Burlington Police Department, BPRW, DPW, CEDO).
  + Specific support to expand capacity of BPRW to build out programming and facilities.
  + Funding for the Housing Access Modification Program.
  + City specific Data and Tracking capabilities to identify the need and track the impact of investments and interventions.

**Actions: Burlington Aging Council and Age-Friendly Organizational Network (including City Departments) with Staffing Support**

* Support and advocate for evidence-based programs to ensure that older adults can safely access a variety of affordable opportunities for exercise within an inclusive environment. (State Age Strong Goal: By 2033, increase non-leisure physical activity among older adults 65+ to meet or exceed the “Healthy Vermonters” goal).
  1. Advocate for and support updates to PlanBTV and other community design projects (e.g., ECOS) support year-round infrastructure supporting increased physical activity among older adults.
  2. Identify resources to support the expansion of accessible and free community-based physical activity classes at senior centers, Adult Day Centers and other settings including hybrid classes that can be recorded for use at any time and which seek to include health professionals.
  3. Create a centralized and comprehensive dashboard of Burlington-based exercise and wellness related services provided by Senior Centers and other community groups. These resources will also be available in print format and translated into a variety of languages.
* Support programming innovation and partnerships to ensure that all older residents in Burlington are food secure.
  1. Decrease the proportion of older individuals experiencing food insecurity or at-risk of experiencing food insecurity by increasing access to and knowledge about meal service providers.
  2. Work with Age Well’s Meals on Wheels Program, Feeding Chittenden, and Burlington Free Meals and local senior centers to support an increase of supplemental free meal programs.
  3. Ensure that knowledge about the availability of such programs is accessible, with print and translated options available.
  4. Support and publicize the availability of culturally appropriate meals that represent the dietary needs and preferences of Burlington’s diverse cultural and ethnic groups.
  5. Promote and link older Vermonters to Therapeutic Horticulture, which can be easily adapted to support various aspects of aging well and provide participants opportunities to make meaningful contributions to their communities by growing healthy food and creating beautiful gardens, and natural areas.
* Support and advocate for programs that advance opportunities for all older adults to have equitable access to primary health care.
* Work with Healthcare Organizations to recruit BIPOC doctors, nurses, and other health care practitioners to Burlington. Encourage organizations to provide ongoing education and training to all local health care providers regarding the impact of systemic racism on an individual’s physical and mental health, and ongoing education and training to all local health care providers about the ways implicit bias and systemic racism affects their own beliefs and practices. Partner to increase access to medical interpreters, including ASL.
* Improve accessibility of Burlington-area public transportation to ease ability of older Burlington residents to attend exercise opportunities and get to medical appointments. This includes making sidewalks safer, especially for those with limited mobility, increasing frequency of busing routes to UVMMC satellite locations, and maintaining low-cost fare options for older users of public transportation. Fares need to be income sensitive and encourage increased use, not decreased or non-use for older residents.
* Expand the provision of resources and educational materials related to keeping older Burlington residents safely in their homes, such as in-home assessments and adaptations to prevent falls offered by Age Well. Materials need to be provided in multiple formats and translated into a variety of languages.
* Increase accessibility of pre-existing educational materials and resources relating to health and wellness by requiring the provision of translated and in-print options. Developing media kits to provide community partner organizations with information on services and educational materials.
* All older residents in Burlington can live safely in their home. Promote annual falls risk assessment and environmental scans or surveys provided by partner organizations.
* Collaborate with local community organizations and institutions, such as the UVMMC Emergency Department and the Burlington Police Department, to identify older individuals at risk of experiencing homelessness (or experiencing homelessness) so that they can more effectively connected with resources. This can also help to reduce emergency calls.
* Collaborate with partners to support the development of a part-time care facility in Burlington to assist older adults with higher intensity care needs and provide respite to family caregivers.
* Advocate for and research program approaches that ensure all older adults can access comprehensive mental health care from qualified providers, including trauma-informed mental health professionals, without fear of stigma or discrimination.
* Promote programs and help access resources to reduce the incidence of suicide among older adults in alignment with the Vermont state suicide prevention plan.
  1. Educate and provide intervention for firearm and poison control safety for older Vermonters and their families including safe storage, firearm safety training, and advance care planning that include firearms.
  2. To prevent physical and mental health problems, focus on measures to increase social interaction and connection, including exercise programs, screen and provide education and resources for suicide prevention among older residents, Vermonters with disabilities, who have served in the military, BIPOC, LGBTQ+ and/or are socially isolated.
  3. Create social hubs at schools, libraries, churches, and other locations to increase social connection and engagement (see also “Social Connection is Key” strategies).
* Advocate for and seek resources for the expansion of on-site mental health services at Burlington senior housing sites, with an emphasis on increasing the number of trauma-informed and culturally informed mental health providers.
* Collaborate with local community groups, especially in BIPOC and New American communities, to provide resources that work to dismantle the stigma against accessing and receiving mental health support with focus on older residents.
* Identify and promote educational programming and city policy development that specifically calls out agism as detrimental to healthy aging. Collaborate with partner to identify and advocate for city policies and messaging that combat ageism.
* Promote public education efforts that:
  1. Engages local hospitals and clinics to hold free, accessible physical activity and wellness program offerings throughout the year with the goal for each town to have at least one/yr.
  2. Coordinates with Vermonters Taking Action Against Cancer, promote and increase cancer screening rates among all Vermonters that meet clinical guidelines.
  3. Addresses and reduce substance misuse of alcohol, cannabis, tobacco, and opioids including among older Vermonters to improve health and reduce chronic diseases, including cognitive decline.
  4. Expands community-based falls prevention strategies including at Senior Centers, community centers, and congregate living facilities.
  5. Works with health care partners to identify and prioritize practitioner training to increase access to geriatric ear, nose and throat care, balance and strength conditioning and heart health/brain health related medical and public health interventions that decrease risk for falls, heart disease and dementia.
  6. Promotes referrals to the Vermont Association for the Blind and Visually Impaired for those who are visually impaired which can decrease risk of isolation, falls, lack of physical activity and healthy nutrition.
  7. Increases access to affordable electronic alert systems.

**We measure progress as we:**

* By 2033, increase non-leisure physical activity among older adults 65+ to meet or exceed the “Healthy Vermonters” goal.
* Decrease the proportion of Burlington adults ages 60+ who “Rarely or never gets the social and emotional support they need” by 25% by 2026 from 2023, (Data collected by Chittenden County BRFSS Survey), indicating greater access to support and mental health services.
* Decrease the proportion of older Burlington residents who have not seen a healthcare provider in the past year by 25%. (Data collected provided by Chittenden County BRFSS Survey)
* Suicide Prevention State Goal: By 2033, decrease to 21 (from 26.4 in 2021) the rate of suicide deaths per 100,000 male Vermonters age 65+ in alignment with the VT Suicide Prevention Plan to be launched in 2024).
* Decrease the proportion of older Burlington residents who have experienced a fall in the last year by 25%. (Data collected by Chittenden County BRFSS Survey)