



## Living better, not just longer

*By Ellen Waldman*

*July 14, 2020*

Last month, I attended an informative webinar called “Achieving Age-Friendly Health and Community Service in Oregon.”

It was put together by AARP Oregon and included the several speakers, including Rose Locklear, Office of Rural Health; Laura O’Byron, Rogue Valley Council of Governments – Senior and Disability Services; Dr. Laura Byerly, OHSU; Holden Leung, Asian Health and Service Center; and the moderator, Bandana Shrestha, AARP Oregon.

Each presenter offered fresh information about how we’re doing as a state with regard to our aging population’s personal health and the communities where they live.

It began by considering what is called “The Eight Domains of Livability: Age-Friendly Framework.” The components that make this up are community support and health services, outdoor spaces and buildings, transportation, housing, social participation, respect and social inclusion, civic participation and employment, and communication and information. Considering these important factors, I reflected on how Ashland stacks up in each of these domains. I think you might have your own views on this as well.

Here’s a sample of this information. In the Rogue Valley, we live in an area that’s considered a combination of rural and urban, according to state designations based on population and density. But just east of here, Lake County and the majority of Eastern Oregon is considered “frontier.” This was news to me and seemed like a throwback to the old West.

In Jackson County, 22% of the population is 65 or older. A couple of good pieces of news related to our area is that we have the appropriate level of medical providers we need for our population. However, I often hear from others about the difficulty of finding a new primary care or mental health practitioner.

There were a few other interesting statistics. The population below the poverty level in the U.S. (\$20,578 for 2 adults/1 child based on 2019 dollars) is as follows: rural 15.2%; urban 13.5%; Oregon 14.1%. This indicates there are large numbers of people living on very skimpy amounts of money. Here in Jackson County, poverty is now more apparent than ever before, and possibly even increasing. COVID-19 has created or at least contributed to this situation, and brought this disparity to more people’s attention.

The population of those 65 and older with disabilities in the U.S. is: rural 38.0%; urban 34.7%; Oregon 36.2%. The point of these percentages is to demonstrate where the needs of aging adults are throughout the state and finding better ways to meet these needs.

One excellent resource for understanding and creating age-friendly communities in Oregon is the “AARP Roadmap to Livability Collection.” This series of six workbooks can be downloaded at

[www.aarp.org/livable-communities/tool-kits-resources/info-2017/roadmap-to-livability-collection.html](http://www.aarp.org/livable-communities/tool-kits-resources/info-2017/roadmap-to-livability-collection.html).  
You can also order free copies, if that works better for you.

It provides an overview of strategies and solutions that contribute to a community addressing the needs of all ages. For those motivated and interested, the workbooks guide and encourage you to put ideas into action. Consider this project as another way to connect with our community and one another, even from home.

I'll leave you with this quote from Joe Coughlin, of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology AgeLab:  
"Having invested so much to get people to live longer, we've barely given any thought to how we can help them to live better."

Many of us in Ashland think that by virtue of living here, we have accomplished this task. See if you agree.