

THE  
NEW YORK  
ACADEMY  
OF MEDICINE



# AGE FRIENDLY BROOKLYN

## Executive Summary

### **Introduction:**

Nearly a third of New York City's 1,168,268 million adults aged 65 and older live in Brooklyn. These 337,741 individuals comprise 13% of the borough's 2.6 million residents. By 2040, this population is projected to grow to over 428,845, becoming 15% of the population.

This report explains the findings of research conducted on Age-friendly Brooklyn, an initiative launched by the Borough President's Office with The New York Academy of Medicine (NYAM), which works to ensure that Brooklyn remains inclusive and welcoming to its older citizens.

Age-friendly Brooklyn is working to:

- Regularly solicit feedback from older people about their quality of life to inform neighborhood planning processes;
- Create new opportunities for health and well-being and increase social, physical, and economic participation;
- Better connect older people with information and resources; and
- Mobilize older people and their service providers to advocate for local Age-friendly improvements.

We received 1,895 survey responses. Respondents were concentrated in northern Brooklyn. Nearly 67% were aged 65 and over, and the majority were female (72%). Of the 1,755 people who answered the race/ethnicity question, 43% identified as black. A majority (65%) of respondents identified as heterosexual, and nearly one-third preferred not to answer the question about sexual orientation. We did not ask about income but used Medicaid as a proxy. Over one-third of respondents reported receiving Medicaid. Nearly a quarter of our survey participants benefited from the support of caregivers to meet their daily needs, and 16% were caregivers themselves.

### **Key Findings:**

As part of Age-friendly NYC, the City's long-standing partnership between the Academy, the Mayor's Office, and the City Council, Age-friendly Brooklyn uses a framework developed by the World Health Organization that asks older people about their daily lives with respect to eight areas. Collectively, these are known as the Eight Domains of an Age-friendly Community:

#### 1. Outdoor spaces and buildings

- Forty-five percent of respondents said benches were either "very available" or "available."
- Sixty-five percent of respondents reported safe and well-lit streets and intersections were "very available" or "available."
- Over 42% of survey participants felt that clean and well-maintained sidewalks were "very available" or "available," and another 44% of survey participants selected "somewhat available." However, 14% stated they were "not available."

#### 2. Transportation

- While 80% of survey participants responded positively about the availability of public transportation, comments referenced the need for elevators at subway stations and accessible buses. In addition, survey participants who were caregivers were more likely to report that public transportation they could use was "not available."

#### 3. Housing

- While 90% of respondents said they planned to stay in their current housing a year from now, among those who planned to move, affordability was the most commonly reported reason, and gentrification and new development were mentioned as threats to housing security in several comments.

#### 4. Social participation

- Two-thirds of survey participants said that places to socialize that are accessible and welcoming (like community centers, community organizations, or religious organizations) were “very available” or “available.” However, because significant survey outreach was conducted at Brooklyn senior centers, as well as other public venues, such as libraries and faith-based organizations, our sample may be biased toward those who are already socially engaged.

#### 5. Respect and social inclusion

- While about half of respondents reported that welcoming and accessible local businesses were “available” or “very available,” numerous comments mentioned the need for increased access to supermarkets and other venues to purchase affordable, healthy food.
- While 47% of survey respondents reported that free or affordable opportunities to attend educational or cultural institutions were “very available” or “available,” 34% reported only “somewhat available,” and 18% reported that these types of opportunities are “not available.”

#### 6. Civic participation and employment

- Fifty-two percent of our survey participants felt that opportunities to volunteer were “very available” or “available” while 10% felt that volunteer opportunities were “not available.”
- Twenty-one percent of our survey participants were currently in the workforce, and nearly 10% were seeking employment.
- Fourteen percent of survey participants reported a lack of access to job opportunities. Respondents who were not employed were more likely to report that job opportunities for people of all ages were “not available.”

#### 7. Communication and information

- Over two-thirds (68%) of survey respondents felt that access to news and information in their native language was “available” or “very available.” Nearly 25% said “somewhat available,” and 8% said “not available.”

#### 8. Community support and health services

- Respondents felt they had language access to primary and specialty care (72%) and mental health services (63%). However, 10% felt they did not have access to mental health services in their native language.

## Conclusion

Brooklyn’s senior community is expanding, and it is vital to keep these vibrant residents happy and engaged in their neighborhoods. A large population of older people can stimulate economic growth and bring added social and financial capital to communities and institutions, as long as older people can remain actively involved in public life. Older adults have a strong economic impact on Brooklyn, as reported in the Brooklyn Chamber of Commerce’s economic assessment in 2017. Older adults are civically engaged and frequently vote at higher rates than voters of other age groups. Improving on the Eight Domains of an Age-friendly Community is a priority for the Brooklyn Borough President’s Office.

The report details 33 recommendations to improve life for older Brooklynites. These include:

- Install more CityBenches throughout the borough, prioritizing neighborhoods with large concentrations of older people reporting ambulatory difficulty.
- Ensure clean and well-maintained sidewalks and well-lit intersections, prioritizing neighborhoods with high rates of falls hospitalizations.

- Provide additional training for bus drivers to pull up to the curb to allow people to safely embark/disembark without difficulties.
- Expand Fair Fares NYC to Access-A-Ride.
- Expand supportive housing for individuals aged 55 and over.
- Partner with existing entrepreneur and workforce-development programs to support older adults seeking work, as well as advocating for companies to hire and retain seniors.
- Increase funding to expand computer and tech classes administered by the New York City Department for the Aging (DFTA), the Brooklyn Public Library (BPL), the New York City Department of Parks and Recreation (NYC Parks), and Older Adults Technology Services (OATS).

## **Next Steps**

**To address the challenges identified through the Age-friendly Brooklyn survey, Brooklyn Borough President Eric Adams has committed to the following:**

- Schedule a full briefing on this report and recommendations for aging service providers, the Brooklyn-wide Interagency Council on Aging, the Brooklyn Public Library, LiveOn NY and AARP membership, and older Brooklynites.
- Engage agencies and community boards on relevant recommendations through Borough Service Cabinet.
- Define budgetary needs in greater specificity and advocate for funding-related recommendations through city, state, and federal budgetary processes.
- Leverage the Uniform Land Use Review Procedure (ULURP) process to make neighborhoods more age-friendly.
- Optimize 2020 Census participation among hard-to-count older people.
- Establish an Age-friendly Brooklyn Task Force to advance implementation of recommendations and consideration of additional initiatives.