Older Denverites Tackle Aging, Health Management With Proactive Approach

- Denver adults 60 and older take a more proactive approach to aging than their counterparts nationally; staying mentally sharp and physically fit top priorities
- Nationally, older Americans and professionals who support them differ in what it takes to prepare for aging

DENVER (July 8, 2015) – The fourth annual United States of Aging Survey finds that adults 60 and older in Denver approach aging more proactively than their national counterparts, reporting that older Americans in the Mile-High City place a much higher emphasis on healthy eating (62 percent and 49 percent, respectively) and relaxation exercises (23 percent and 16 percent) to stay mentally sharp, compared with older adults nationwide.

Additionally, older adults in Denver rate their personal health much higher than their national counterparts (84 percent and 74 percent).

Each year the United States of Aging Survey – conducted by the National Association of Area Agencies on Aging (n4a), National Council on Aging (NCOA) and UnitedHealthcare – polls U.S. adults 60 and older for their insights on how older Americans are preparing for their later years, and what communities can do to better support this growing population. In addition to the national sample, older adults in Denver and Cincinnati were also surveyed. New in 2015, the national survey polled professionals, including Area Agencies on Aging staff, credit union managers, primary care physicians and pharmacists, who work closely with older adults to gain their perspectives on the challenges older Americans face as they age.

“The United States of Aging survey shows that older adults in Denver value physical and mental health, and actively manage their health as they age,” said George Young, CEO, UnitedHealthcare Medicare & Retirement in Colorado. “Yet, we still see many older adults need the community’s support, and this need will likely increase with Denver’s rapidly growing aging population.”

The survey found that 88 percent of older adults in Denver report they are prepared for the process of aging, yet 23 percent expect their quality of life will worsen in the next five to 10 years. However, Denver respondents generally prefer to have a positive outlook on life, with 93 percent considering themselves positive and optimistic. The top three motivating factors are a loving family (16 percent), a positive attitude (16 percent) and faith or spirituality (16 percent).
Maintaining physical and mental health are top priorities for Denver older adults

The top three concerns about aging among older adults in Denver are maintaining their physical health (50 percent), losing their memory (39 percent), and maintaining their mental health (37 percent). The 2015 survey finds that older adults in Denver are addressing those concerns.

Denver seniors are more physically active in the community than their national counterparts. They tend to visit cultural centers (49 percent) and exercise in public (42 percent) more so than older Americans nationally (39 percent and 32 percent, respectively). However, Denver older adults typically exercise the same amount as those nationally, reporting that they exercise more than two times per week or every day (62 percent and 66 percent).

When it comes to staying mentally sharp, Denver older adults say that eating a healthy diet (62 percent), keeping a positive attitude (51 percent), reading books (50 percent), maintaining an active social life (50 percent), getting enough sleep (49 percent) and regular exercise (46 percent) are the best ways to stay mentally sharp.

Older adults in Denver also identified the top causes that prevent them from staying mentally sharp, including: depression, loneliness or isolation (62 percent); inactivity (57 percent); stress (55 percent); and decreased cognitive ability (55 percent).

Older adults in Denver express confidence in current financial situations but concern about financial future

More than 8 in 10 older adults in Denver (84 percent) are confident they will be able to afford health care costs as they age, and three-quarters (75 percent) find it easy to pay their monthly bills. Despite confidence and ease in their current financial circumstances, a majority of older adults in Denver (58 percent) expressed concern about their savings and income being sufficient to last them for the rest of their lives.

Only 3 percent of Denver older adults have a financial planner manage their finances, yet they report taking advantage of discounts to help manage their finances more than seniors nationally (50 percent and 43 percent, respectively). Both groups report creating a monthly budget and sticking to it (48 percent and 43 percent), and saving money (43 percent and 39 percent) as important ways to manage their finances.

“Denver older adults continue to look to their future and know there may be challenges ahead,” said James Firman, president and CEO, NCOA. “Living longer means older Americans need to be proactive about finding resources, information and guidance that will help shore up their health, finances and confidence.”

Home is where the heart is: older adults hold tight to their houses, communities

Older adults are looking to their communities for support as they age so they can continue living in their homes and neighborhoods as long as possible. A majority of older adults in Denver have not changed residences in more than 20 years (57 percent). Though 74 percent say they intend to live in their current home for the rest of their lives, Denver seniors are much less interested than the national population in the expansion of services that would help them maintain and upgrade their homes (26 percent compared with 41 percent).
When asked what concerns they have about living independently, adults 60 and older in Denver say they are most concerned about losing their memory (43 percent). The next greatest concerns are becoming a burden to others (39 percent) and not being able to get out of their house and/or drive (36 percent).

Denver older adults are generally satisfied with infrastructure in their community (82 percent), yet 46 percent of those surveyed find public transportation “acceptable” at best, including 17 percent rating it as “poor.”

“Although Denver’s aging population has many reasons to feel optimistic about the future, those of us who are in the trenches providing vital services and support to older adults and caregivers know that there is much more work to be done,” said Jayla Sanchez-Warren, Area Agency on Aging director, Denver Regional Council of Governments. “With the release of this survey, we hope that a community-wide dialogue will gain further momentum, so that together we can make the dream of living with dignity and independence a reality for all older adults in our region.”

Disconnected: older adults, professionals are not aligned on what it takes to prepare for aging

At the national level, the survey finds that older Americans’ concerns about their later years differ from those of the professionals who support them.

The top three concerns about growing older include:

For adults 60 and older
Maintaining their physical health (40 percent)
Memory loss (35 percent)
Maintaining their mental health (32 percent)

For professionals
Protection from financial scams (43 percent)
Access to affordable housing (38 percent)
Memory loss (38 percent)

A majority of both older adults and professionals feel seniors are prepared overall for the process of aging (86 percent and 77 percent, respectively). Older adults, however, are far more confident: only 10 percent of professionals surveyed feel older Americans are “very prepared” to age, compared with 42 percent of seniors.

For complete survey results, visit ncoa.org/UnitedStatesofAging. Join the conversation on Twitter with #USofAging.

About The United States of Aging Survey
The United States of Aging Survey is an annual survey conducted by the National Association of Area Agencies on Aging, National Council on Aging, and UnitedHealthcare. For the 2015 survey, Penn Schoen Berland completed 1,650 telephone interviews from March 27, 2015, to May 8, 2015, including nationally representative samples of Americans 60 years old and older (N=1,000) and Aging Influencers (N=150), defined as n4a members, credit union managers, primary care physicians, and pharmacists. In addition, PSB interviewed an oversample of Americans 60 years old and older in Denver (N=250) and Cincinnati (N=250). The margin of error for nationally representative Older Adults is +/-3.1 percent, +/- 8 percent for Aging Influencers, and +/- 6.2 percent for oversampled subpopulations. Data from nationally
representative sample of Americans 60 years old and older are weighted to U.S. Census Bureau demographic statistics in terms of age, gender, marital status, and race.

About n4a
The National Association of Area Agencies on Aging (n4a) is a 501c(3) membership association representing America’s national network of 623 Area Agencies on Aging (AAAs) and providing a voice in the nation’s capital for the 256 Title VI Native American aging programs. The mission of n4a is to build the capacity of its members so they can better help older adults and people with disabilities live with dignity and choices in their homes and communities for as long as possible. For more information, please visit www.n4a.org.

About NCOA
The National Council on Aging (NCOA) is a respected national leader and trusted partner to help people aged 60+ meet the challenges of aging. Our mission is to improve the lives of millions of older adults, especially those who are struggling. Through innovative community programs and services, online help, and advocacy, NCOA is partnering with nonprofit organizations, government, and business to improve the health and economic security of 10 million older adults by 2020. Learn more at ncoa.org and @NCOAging.

About UnitedHealthcare
UnitedHealthcare is dedicated to helping people nationwide live healthier lives by simplifying the health care experience, meeting consumer health and wellness needs, and sustaining trusted relationships with care providers. The company offers the full spectrum of health benefit programs for individuals, employers, military service members, retirees and their families, and Medicare and Medicaid beneficiaries, and contracts directly with more than 850,000 physicians and care professionals, and 6,000 hospitals and other care facilities nationwide. UnitedHealthcare is one of the businesses of UnitedHealth Group (NYSE: UNH), a diversified Fortune 50 health and well-being company. For more information, visit UnitedHealthcare at www.uhc.com or follow @myUHC on Twitter.

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