



Windham Aging Report

Windham Region Seniors' Health Collaborative
November 2022

Executive Summary

Vermont is an aging state. We have the second highest aging population in the U.S., and Windham County is among the counties with the highest proportion of older residents in Vermont (U.S. Census Bureau, 2019). The number of people over age 60 in Vermont is projected to increase significantly, from 88,000 in 1990 to 215,000 in 2030 (AHS DAIL, 2018). The increase in mean age of Windham County residents, combined with the fact that the highest healthcare costs occur in the final six month of life, magnifies concerns related to overall care and rising costs. Older Vermonters will face ever-growing challenges in the near future, and *understanding the individual and system needs, demographic trends, and service gaps is critical to building community-driven solutions.*

Through a community-driven research and analysis process, guided by the Windham Regional Commission, the *Windham Aging* report provides an overview of critical data sets and public reports to better understand trends related to aging within southeastern Vermont. The *Windham Region Seniors' Health Collaborative*, or simply the Collaborative, began as a response to the spotlight on health needs of older Vermonters noted during the COVID pandemic. A thorough analysis of long-term healthcare needs among this population is key to a unified, informed system. The Collaborative is committed to creating positive change and has articulated the following vision:

Assure a sustainable, replicable and scalable system of care, services and incentives that will support older Vermonters (over 60) across the Windham Region. Help create an infrastructure and patterns of practice that allows citizens to attain and maintain the level of health they desire and are capable of achieving.

The *Windham Aging* report should be viewed as an ongoing effort, as data analysis related to aging in southern Vermont has opened up continued questions worthy of exploration. This report is the culmination of data analysis related to the coming stresses caused by the inevitable impacts of fewer births and more people living longer in Windham County. The Collaborative is committed to ongoing data analysis as it moves into a second phase of work, developing a *Regional Aging Plan* for the Windham region of Vermont. This next phase will focus on community action to prepare for this shift in people and resources and will require the advice and support of many in the Windham Region. We urge you to volunteer for a focused topic group or simply track our progress at www.WindhamAging.com. We are dedicated to a healthy and satisfying life in Windham County for all.

Table of Contents

Introduction	1
Demographic Trends	2
Population Trends	3
Income/Socioeconomic Status	7
Housing Trends	8
Transportation Trends	10
Preventative Health & Chronic Diseases	11
General Health Status	11
High-Risk Healthcare Categories	11
Healthcare Trends	17
Healthcare Workforce	17
Long-Term Care Facilities	19
Implications & Next Steps	20
Addendum: Mapping Organizations that Support Older Vermonters across the Region	

Figures

- Figure 1: Vermont Population Change by County, 2010-2020
- Figure 2: Town Population in the Windham Region, 1990-2020
- Figure 3: Windham County Population Changes by Age, 2000-2030
- Figure 4: Age Makeup of Windham County, 2010 & 2021
- Figure 5: Windham County Population Trends Over 60 – 2010, 2020 & 2030
- Figure 6: Windham County Projected Population Change by Age, 2010-2030
- Figure 7: Windham County Rate of Household Growth, 2010-2018
- Figure 8: Projections for People 65+ Living at or Below Poverty Level, 2030
- Figure 9: Windham County Poverty Rate by Age, 2021
- Figure 10: Vermont & Windham County Households with High Housing Costs, 2017
- Figure 11: Windham County Households with Housing Problems, 2015
- Figure 12: Southeast Vermont Transit Elderly & Disabled Trips by Type, 2020
- Figure 13: Chronic Disease Rates Windham County & Vermont, 2016
- Figure 14: Daily Vegetable Consumption, Windham County & Vermont, 2021
- Figure 15: Vermonters: Physical Activity with Age, 2021
- Figure 16: Vermont Adults, Cardiovascular Disease & High Blood Pressure, 2021
- Figure 17: Vermont Adults with Diabetes, 2018
- Figure 18: Vermont Adults Diagnosed with Cancer, 2018
- Figure 19: Vermont & U.S. Depression Trends 65+, 2011-2020
- Figure 20: Windham County Top “Hard Skills” Required for Regional Jobs
- Figure 21: Medical Personnel in Windham County
- Figure 22: Direct Care Workers, Reasons for Potentially Leaving Career
- Figure 23: Direct Care Workers, Salary Range

Introduction

In many respects Vermont is different. We are more rural and independent by nature, and we often find solutions where other areas might become mired in the problems. There is a new and predictable momentum of aging needs and numbers weighing down the future of Windham County, Vermont. We are almost 60 years old on average, and aging in greater numbers. As we look ahead, there is a need to understand what services and activities are occurring now and consider what the future needs of an aging population look like. Every one of us is moving into this rapidly expanding older group. There are only two mysteries – what type of aging process you will experience, and whether the community will have the resources in place for you to live the life you imagined.

The *Windham Aging* report is a community effort to understand current trends, and the support systems currently in place, across the Windham region. This report presents readily available data assessing the conditions and needs of older people in Windham Region now and into the future. The report addresses population trends, as well as social determinants of health, and will inform the development of a *Regional Aging Plan*, the next phase of work planned by the Windham Region Seniors' Health Collaborative. The *Regional Aging Plan* will clearly lay out the needs of older Vermonters and recommendations to address those needs as this population grows.

The Windham Region Seniors' Health Collaborative (or simply, the Collaborative) is a grassroots effort led by a group of healthcare and other professionals serving older Vermonters. The Collaborative is composed of individuals with a deep interest in building solutions to the healthcare needs of older Vermonters, and includes representatives from the following organizations and agencies:

- Brattleboro Housing Partnerships
- Brattleboro Mutual Aid Association/Thompson House
- Cheshire Medical Center, Center for Population Health
- Senior Solutions: Council on Aging for Southeastern Vermont
- Southern Vermont Area Health Education Center
- The Gathering Place
- United Way of Windham County
- Vermont Agency of Human Services
- Windham County Dental Center
- Windham Regional Commission

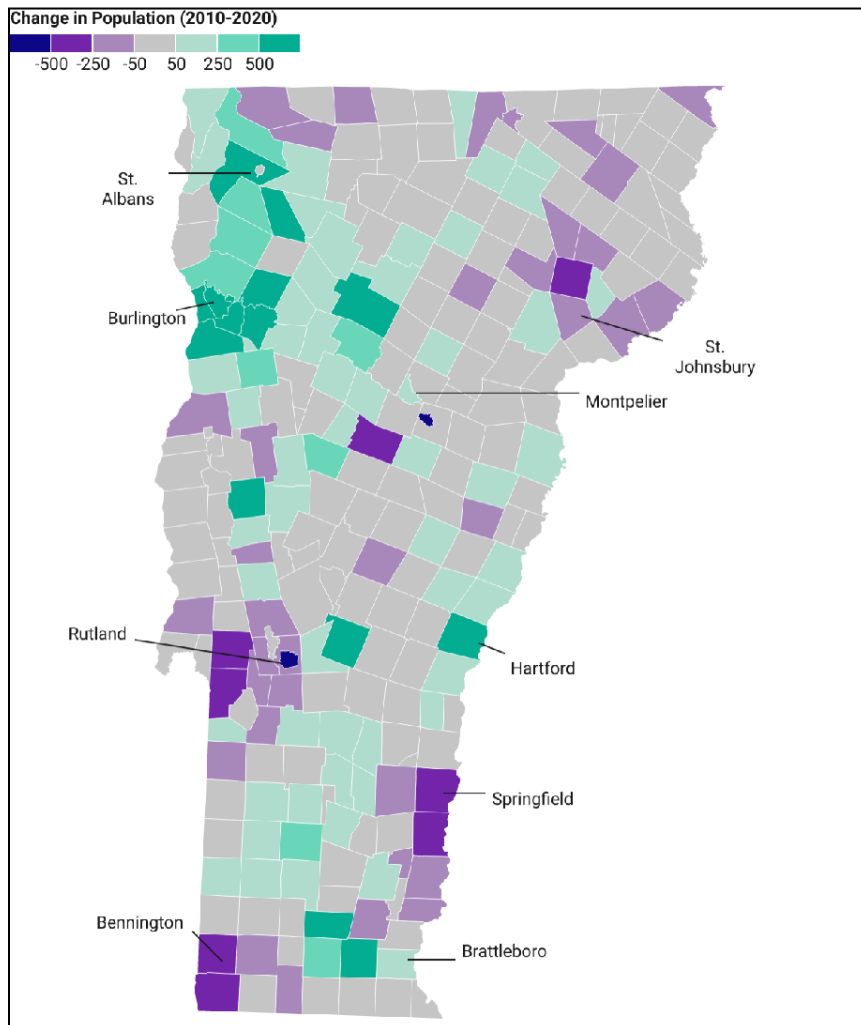
The Windham Region consists of all 23 towns within Windham County, as well as Weston in Windsor County and Searsburg, Readsboro and Winhall in Bennington County. The Windham Region is aligned with the service area of the Windham Regional Commission and serves as the geographic scope of interest within this report. The Collaborative came together out of concern for what the future will look like for older people in the Windham Region, and with a shared commitment to build collaborative strategies to support the age-shift propelling us into the future.

Demographic Trends

Population Trends: A Statewide Overview

Population growth has varied across Vermont in recent years. The map highlighted in Figure 1 below demonstrates how there can be minimal change in the statewide population, yet significant changes within certain communities and regions. From 2010 to 2020, population growth occurred primarily in resort towns across the state, as well as within and around the Burlington area (BDCC/SeVEDS, 2021). In the Windham Region, population growth over the decade was most noted within the Deerfield Valley, the region's most heavily toured area, following statewide trends. The total population of the Windham Region according to the 2020 Census is 48,500.

Figure 1: Vermont Population Change by County, 2010-2020



sources: Vermont Center for Geographic Information; BDCC & SeVEDS

Population Trends: Break-out by Towns

In an effort to better understand trends specific to towns within Windham Region, Figure 2 below highlights population changes by town from 1990 and 2020. As noted previously, communities that experienced the most growth were in the Deerfield Valley including Dover, Marlboro, Stratton, Windham, and Winhall. It should be noted there may be an issue with the population count for the town of Marlboro that is artificially inflating the region's population for 2020.

Figure 2: Town Population Change in the Windham Region, 1990-2020

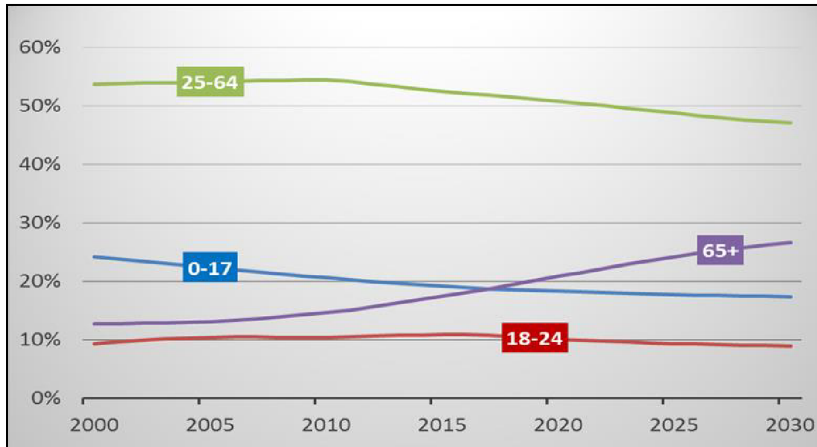
Town	1990	2000	2010	2020	% Change 1990-2020	% Change 2010-2020
ATHENS	313	340	442	380	8.20%	-14%
BRATTLEBORO	12241	12005	12,046	12,184	-0.15%	1%
BROOKLINE	403	467	530	540	10.42%	2%
DOVER	994	1410	1,124	1,798	27.18%	60%
DUMMERSTON	1863	1915	1,864	1,865	0.06%	0%
GRAFTON	602	649	679	645	2.47%	-5%
GUILFORD	1941	2046	2,121	2,120	3.01%	0%
HALIFAX	588	782	728	771	10.66%	6%
JAMAICA	754	946	1,035	1,005	10.66%	-3%
LONDONDERRY	1506	1709	1,769	1,919	8.49%	8%
MARLBORO	924	978	1,078	1,722	25.27%	60%
NEWFANE	1555	1680	1,726	1,645	2.03%	-5%
PUTNEY	2352	2634	2,702	2,617	3.81%	-3%
READSBORO	762	805	763	702	-2.52%	-8%
ROCKINGHAM	5484	5309	5,282	4,832	-4.07%	-9%
SEARSBURG	85	96	109	126	14.03%	16%
SOMERSET	2	5	3	6	70.00%	200%
STRATTON	121	136	216	440	58.31%	104%
TOWNSHEND	1019	1149	1,232	1,291	8.26%	5%
VERNON	1850	2141	2,206	2,192	6.04%	-1%
WARDSBORO	654	854	900	869	10.84%	-3%
WESTMINSTER	3026	3210	3,178	3,016	0.00%	-5%
WESTON	488	630	566	623	9.67%	10%
WHITINGHAM	1177	1298	1,357	1,344	4.62%	-1%
WILMINGTON	1968	2225	1,876	2,255	5.86%	20%
WINDHAM	251	328	419	449	21.86%	7%
WINHALL	482	702	769	1,182	36.30%	54%

source: U.S. Decennial Census and American Community Survey; BDCC & SeVEDS, 2021

Population Trends: Understanding the Aging Demographic in Windham County

The State of Vermont’s population is quickly aging. Vermont is among the oldest states in the U.S., along with Maine. Windham County is aging at an even faster rate than the state. Figure 3 highlights that the state’s population over 65 will increase by approximately 27% from 2000 to 2030.

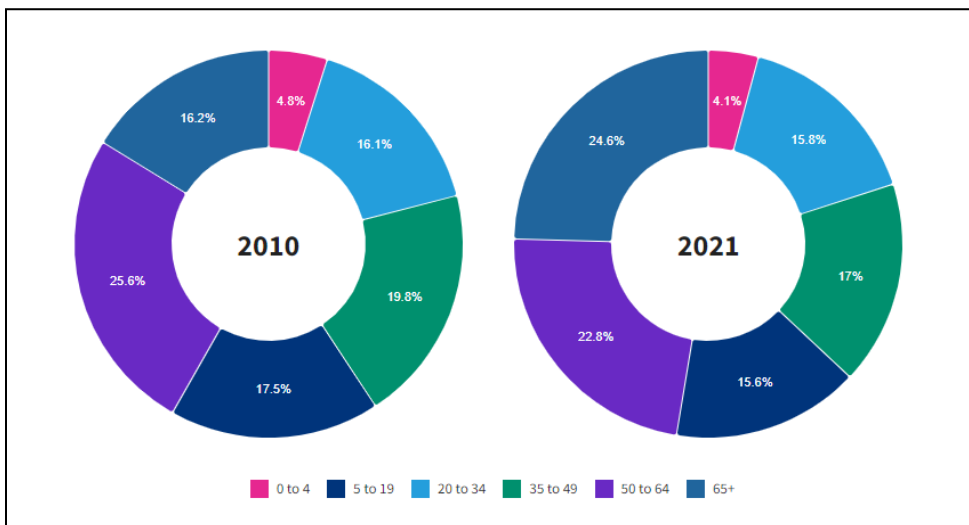
Figure 3: Windham County Population Changes by Age, 2000-2030



source: Sheehan, 2020

An analysis of the age makeup of Windham County in 2010 and 2021 in Figure 4, clearly shows that the only age group that has grown is over 65. In 2010 the over 65 group made up 16.2% of the population, but in 2021 this figure increased to 24.6% of the population. All other population age groups have decreased (U.S. Census Bureau, 2021). The same pattern of an aging demographic within the last decade holds true for both men and women (U.S. Census Bureau, 2021).

Figure 4: Age Makeup of Windham County, 2010 & 2021



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2021

The population of the Windham Region that is currently over 60 years old is 14,015 (ACS, 2020) or 31% of the total population. Figure 5 below estimates the over 60 population change in the State of Vermont and in Windham County with two different scenarios. Scenario A is based on higher growth estimates than Scenario B. The actual population in 2020 according to the new census information is somewhere in between these two scenarios. Both scenarios show that the population of older adults in the Windham Region has grown significantly and will continue to grow through 2030.

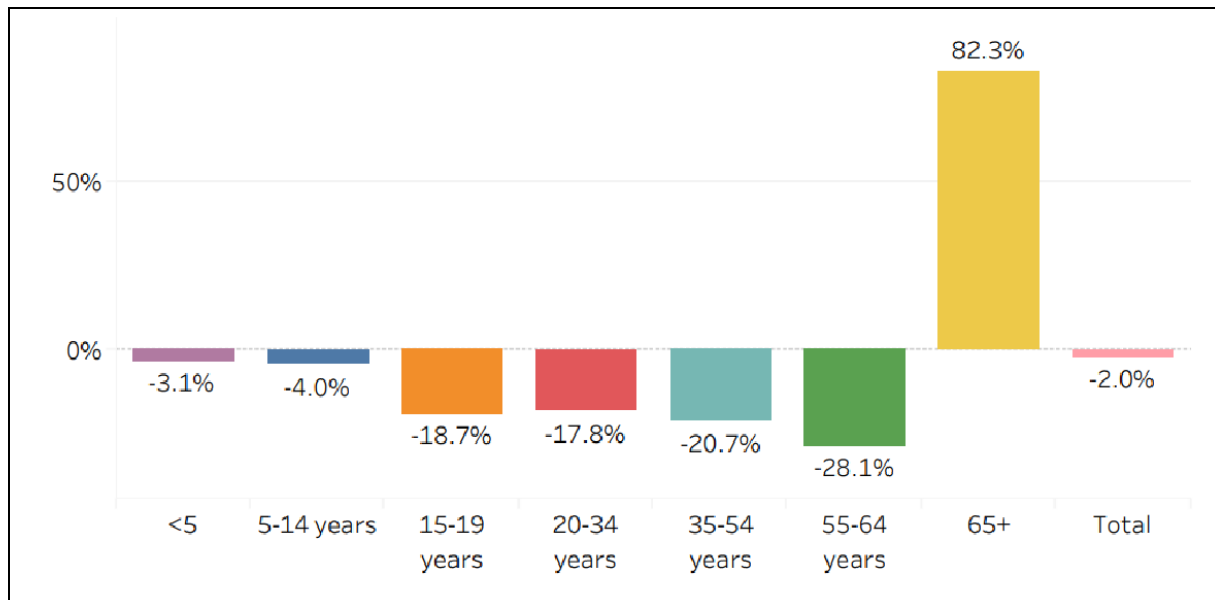
Figure 5: Windham County Population Trends Over 60 – 2010, 2020 & 2030

Scenario A 60+	Vermont	% Change	Windham County	% Change
2010 Census	132,312	---	10,537	---
2020 Projections	195,399	47.68%	16,182	53.57%
2030 Projections	237,414	21.50%	19,452	20.21%
Scenario B 60+				
2010 Census	132,312	---	10,537	---
2020 Projections	180,801	36.65%	14,380	36.47%
2030 Projections	207,188	14.59%	15,888	10.49%

source: Jones & Schwarz, 2013; BDCC & SeVEDS, 2021

The Windham County population projections presented in Figure 6 clearly show that the only age group that will increase significantly by 2030 is over 65.

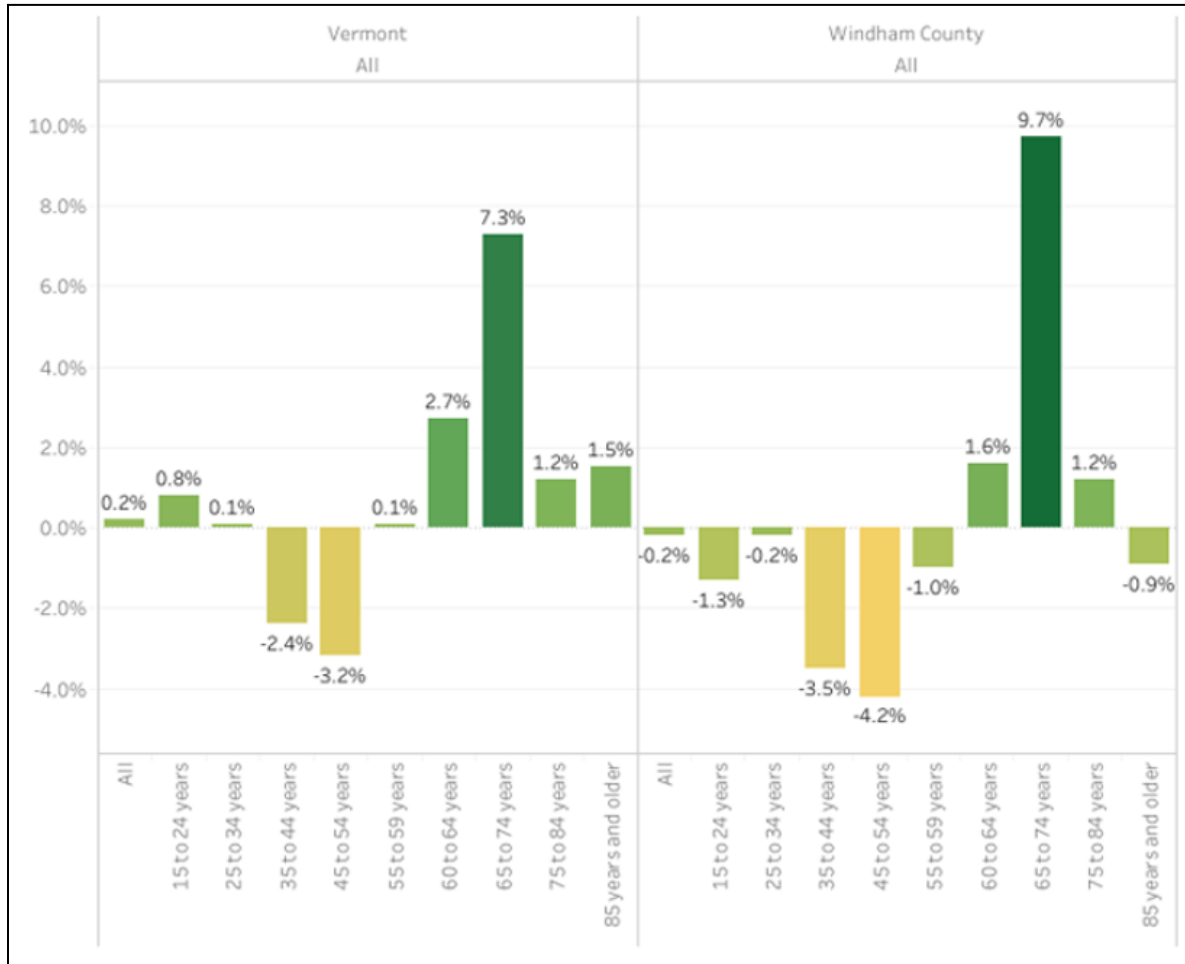
Figure 6: Windham County Projected Population Change by Age, 2010-2030



source: Vermont Department of Labor, 2021

The estimated rate of household growth by age between 2010 and 2018 is presented below in Figure 7. The largest growth rate by far in Windham County was the 65-74-year old group at 9.7%. This is higher than the state’s growth rate for the same group, which was 7.3%.

Figure 7: Windham County Rate of Household Growth by Age, 2010-2018



source: American Community Survey, 2018; Decennial Census, 2010

As much of the Windham region is made up of rural communities, it is important to note that overall rural Americans are a population group that experience significant health disparities (health disparities adversely affect groups of people who have systematically experienced greater obstacles) often characterized by indicators such as higher incidence of disease and/or disability, increased mortality rates, lower life expectancies, and higher rates of pain and suffering. Rural risk factors for health disparities include geographic isolation and limited access to healthcare specialists and subspecialists (Rural Health Information Hub, 2022).

Income/Socioeconomic Status

According to a recently released report, commissioned by Senator Bernie Sanders, wealth and income disparities were wider in American households headed by those aged 55 and older than in other advanced economies. Furthermore, longevity among older people is highly correlated with income and wealth in the U.S. (GAO, 2022).

In 2021, the population of Windham County was 45,090; including 10,822 (or 24%) aged 65+. The poverty rate in Windham County is 13.7%. That translates into 1,483 older Vermonters in Windham County living at or below the federal poverty level. The federal poverty income level for one person is \$13,590 and for two people is \$18,310. Windham County is a pocket within the state (and the U.S.) in terms of both an aging population, and a high rate of poverty.

Figure 8: Projections for People 65+ Living at or Below Poverty Level, 2030

	2019 Poverty Rate	2021 Population	2030 Projections
Vermont population 65+	6.1%	---	194,065 (29% of total)
Vermont population 75+	---	---	93,318 (14% of total)
Windham Co. population	13.7%	45,090	---
Windham Co. population 65+	approx. 1,483	10,822 (24% of total)	15,872

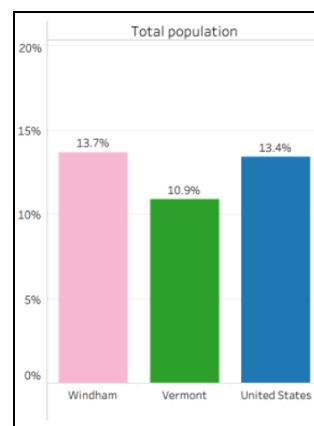
source: Senior Solutions, 2022; Spotlight on Poverty & Opportunity, 2022

A high percentage of Vermonters with Supplemental Security Income (SSI) and Social Security Disability Income (SSDI) live independently. The rate of inflation currently surpasses increases in SSI and SSDI income, creating an ever-widening resource gap among those living on a fixed income. The general poverty rate in Windham County (13.7%) is higher than the state (10.9%) and the country (13.4%) (Vermont Department of Labor, 2021), and the impact on older Vermonters is clear.

Implications & Strategies for Next Steps

As current trends point to an increase in the number of older Vermonters experiencing poverty over the coming decades, the need for strategies to combat negative outcomes will become all the more critical. Utilizing the County Health Rankings & Roadmap as a resource will allow for a framework for action.

Figure 9: Windham Co. Poverty Rate by Age, 2021



source: Vermont Department of Labor, 2021

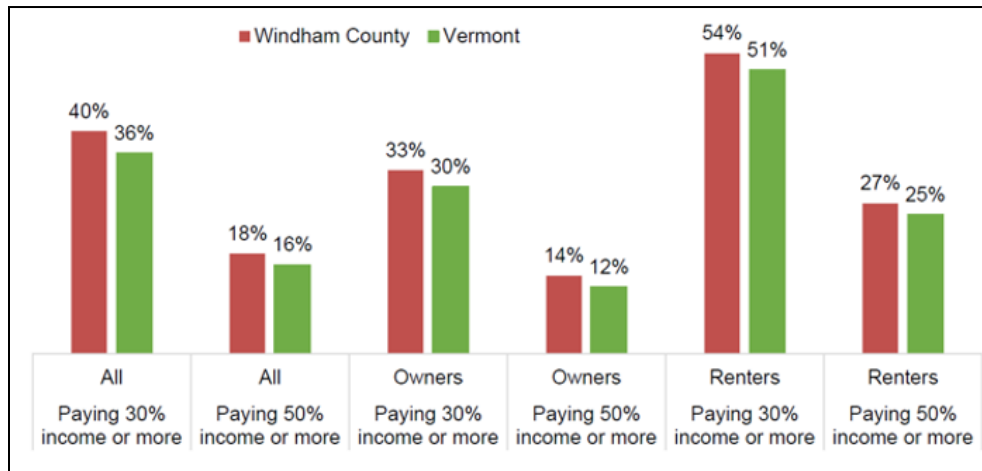
Housing Trends

Across Vermont, our residents and our housing stock is aging faster than can be addressed. As the multi-generational nature of our communities has frayed, people across the lifespan have become disconnected, with feelings of isolation and lack of social connection rising (Center for Disease Control and Prevention, 2021). Older Vermonters in particular need support in navigating the resources and programs available, such as: house sharing, aging in place supports, weatherization services, etc.

In addition to issues of isolation and siloed housing systems, the lack of housing stock in Windham County is a significant contributor to growing housing concerns. The value of housing in Windham County has been on the rise in recent years, however, it is still lower than the state overall, with the median home sale price in 2022 at \$245,000 (versus the state’s median price of \$295,000) (Vermont Department of Taxes, 2022). While housing prices have been continuously rising in Windham County since 1990, a recent surge can be attributed to the COVID pandemic, as well as the general shortage of housing currently being felt across the state. Furthermore, the Vermont State Housing Authority’s Section 8 waitlist for subsidized housing recently opened, after having closed in 2018. The current wait time for senior and disabled housing in Windham County is a full two years, and the State of Vermont prioritizes families for affordable housing over older Vermonters.

Many households, including both renters and owners, in Windham County are also considered *cost burdened*, indicating that more than 30% of their income pays for costs associated with housing. Those that allocate over 50% of their income to housing are considered *severely cost burdened*. As can be seen in Figure 10, Windham County owners and renters fare more poorly than the state overall in terms of housing cost burdens (VHFA, 2020).

Figure 10: Vermont & Windham County Households with High Housing Costs, 2017

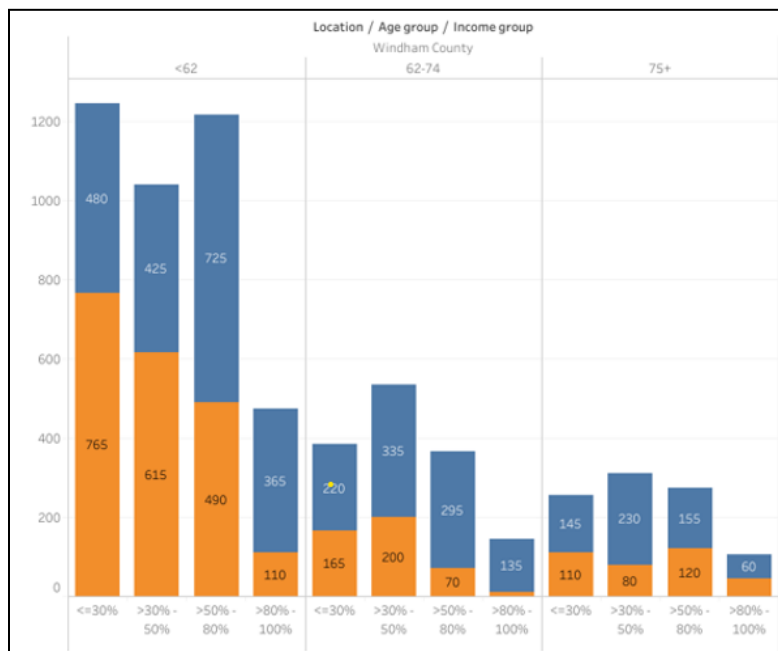


source: American Community Survey, 2017

In addition to concerns regarding housing prices across Windham County, additional issues arise as the housing stock itself ages and is in need of significant improvements, which may prove more difficult for

older Vermonters to address. Figure 11 shows a breakdown for Windham County of the number of households addressing housing issues by the age of the householder and their income group. Although the number of households facing housing problems is less among those over 62 compared to those under 62, the numbers are significant. In the over 62 age group, those at the very low income level face the most housing issues, followed closely by those at the extremely low income level and those at the low income level.

Figure 11: Windham County Households with Housing Problems, 2015
(Household types: blue/owners & orange/renters)



source: American Community Survey, 2015

Implications & Strategies for Next Steps

Within Windham County, we are not leveraging our existing housing stock to meet current needs, including the needs of older Vermonters who wish to age in place. Additional housing options must be created in order for needs to be met, and solutions should address the social isolation and loneliness often experienced among older people when generating housing solutions for this demographic.

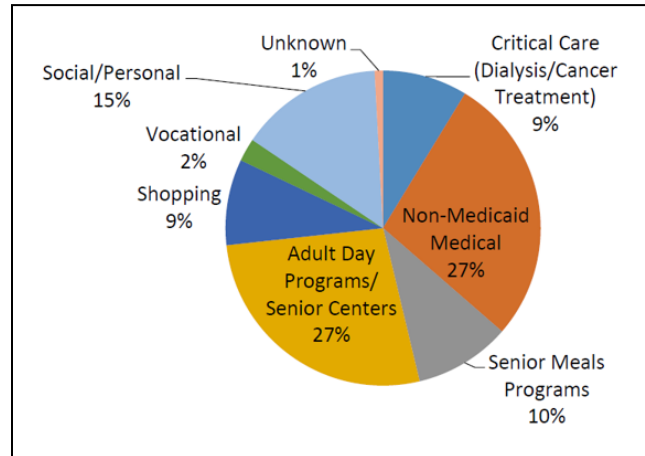
Resources to explore include:

- **National & State Organizations and Resources.** Explore AARP Age-Friendly Network, Generations United, Home Share Vermont, Sharing Housing, Inc., and the County Health Rankings & Roadmaps.
- **Local & Regional Collaborative Efforts.** Efforts should be made to support resource-sharing among Windham County housing organizations, including: Brattleboro Housing Partnerships, Brattleboro Area Affordable Housing, Efficiency Vermont, Southeastern Vermont Community Action, and Windham & Windsor Housing Trust.
- **Advocacy Efforts.** State-level advocacy to prioritize older Vermonters for subsidized housing.

Transportation Trends

Transportation is an important social determinant of health and the consequences of not having reliable transportation are compounded for those in rural areas. The availability of reliable transportation impacts a person's ability to access appropriate and well-coordinated healthcare, purchase nutritious food, and otherwise care for themselves. Rural populations most likely to need transportation services to maintain their health and well-being include, but are not limited to, older adults and people with disabilities. (Rural Health Information Hub, 2022). As the population ages, the need for transportation in rural areas will only increase.

Figure 12: Southeast Vermont Transit Elderly & Disabled Trips by Type, 2020



source: Vermont Agency of Transportation, 2020

Providing effective public transportation options to healthcare services for low-income, elderly and disabled residents decreases hospitalizations and nursing home stays, allowing them to remain contributing members of the community and lead healthier lives while keeping healthcare costs down (RHub, 2022). In 2020, the state and regional planning organizations partnered to conduct a survey of elderly and disabled public transportation riders. Riders use these services for a variety of needs including medical appointments, visits to senior centers and adult day care, shopping and social visits. (Vermont Agency of Transportation, 2020).

Implications & Strategies for Next Steps

Reliable transportation can be a barrier for rural residents due to long distances, poor road conditions, and the limited availability of public transportation options in rural areas. Potential strategies to explore for improved transportation services include:

- **Improved Infrastructure.** Building sidewalks in towns; supporting micro-transit and vanpool initiatives; and building congregate living for older Vermonters are a few such strategies.
- **Education & Outreach Efforts.** Community education efforts related to public transportation options, as well as support for older Vermonters unable to drive.
- **Collaborative Efforts.** Explore models such as Neighborhood Connections, MOOver Elderly, Disabled, Medicaid, ADA Rides; Southeast Vermont Elders & Persons with Disabilities Transportation Services; and Ride Connector for possible expansion/replication and support. the professionalization of emergency services as the volunteer-based model is no longer adequate for meeting needs.
- **Diversified Funding.** Explore new funding streams for improved transportation services.

Preventative Health & Chronic Diseases

General Health Status

Older Vermonters with chronic health conditions are more likely to fail at aging in place. While prevention efforts are often key areas of focus across the lifespan (e.g. good nutrition, regular physical exercise, avoidance of tobacco and other addictive substances. etc.), it is the management of chronic conditions that tends to be of greater concern as people age, with the management of multiple conditions the norm. The challenges of aging in place are exacerbated for those managing multiple chronic conditions. The number of aging individuals with three or more chronic conditions has increased significantly within the last ten years, and this is expected to grow to 40% among the 65 and over population by 2030 (NASEM, 2018). While preventative care is not the typical lens through which health care is focused in the U.S., it must be the focus moving forward if we hope to see a downward trend of chronic conditions.

Overall, Vermonters are healthier than adults across the U.S., with 86% of Vermonters reporting good to excellent health, and 81% of U.S. adults reporting the same. As Vermonters age, those over 65 years report good to excellent health at a rate of 81%. Education and income levels play a role in the health of Vermonters, with 71% of individuals with high school education or less reported good to excellent health, and 89% of those with some college and college reporting the same. Adults in lower income households (less than \$25,000) reported excellent health at 71%, while those making \$50,000-\$75,000 reported the same at 92% and those making over \$75,000 at 95% (Vermont Department of Health, 2018).

High-Risk Healthcare Categories

High-risk healthcare categories are especially concerning for older Vermonters. The state of Vermont has identified three behaviors that are associated with four diseases and account for more than 50% of deaths across the state. These three behaviors are: (1) lack of physical activity, (2) poor nutrition, and (3) tobacco use. These three behaviors are associated with four chronic diseases that result in more than 50% of the deaths in Windham County (VDH, 2019), see Figure 13.

Figure 13: Chronic Disease Rates Windham County & Vermont, 2016

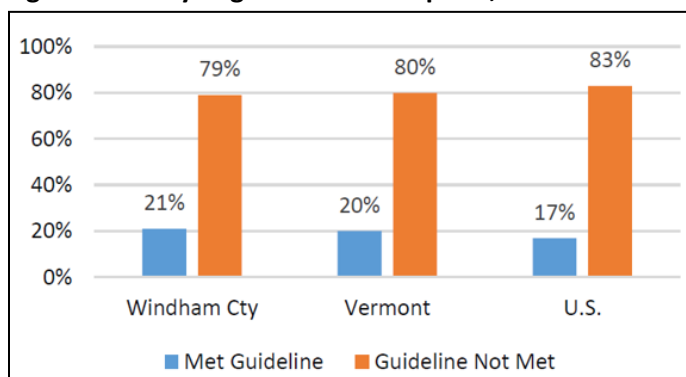
Chronic Disease	Vermont		Windham County	
	% Adults Diagnosed	% of All Deaths	% Adults Diagnosed	% of All Deaths
Lung Diseases (Asthma/COPD)	16% (12%/6%)	6%	14% (10%/7%)	7%
Diabetes	8%	3%	9%	2%
Cardiovascular Diseases	8%	21%	7%	21%
Cancer	8%	23%	8%	22%

source: Vermont Department of Health, 2019

According to the Vermont Department of Health, Windham County adults fare somewhat better than the rest of the state in terms of nutrition in the amount of vegetables and fruits eaten daily, 77% and 80% respectively. However, Windham County aligns more closely with the state overall in terms of the amount of recommended physical activity, 40% Vermont and 38% Windham County, as well as the number of current smokers, 17% Vermont and 18% Windham County (VDH, 2019).

Obesity. Vermonters fare somewhat better than others around the country in terms of overweight and obesity rates. 33% of Vermont adults over 20 years old are overweight, and 29% are obese. This compares to U.S. rates of 32% for overweight and 35% who are obese. Windham County’s rate for adults who are overweight is 32% and the obesity rate is 31%. Obesity is a serious concern because it not only reduces quality of life but impacts health outcomes including mental health (Grace Cottage, 2021). Obesity is affected by multiple factors including nutrition and exercise. As shown in Figure 14, most adults in Windham County do not meet guidelines for daily vegetable consumption, however they do fare slightly better than the state and the U.S. (Grace Cottage 2021).

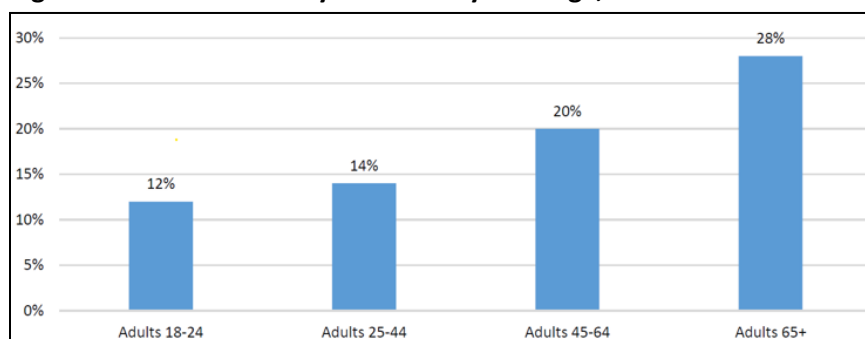
Figure 14: Daily Vegetable Consumption, Windham County & Vermont, 2021



source: Grace Cottage, 2021

Additionally, 82% of Vermonters and Windham County residents also do not meet health guidelines for the amount of recommended physical activity. The amount of physical activity that Vermonters get also declines with age, as can be seen in Figure 15 (Grace Cottage, 2021).

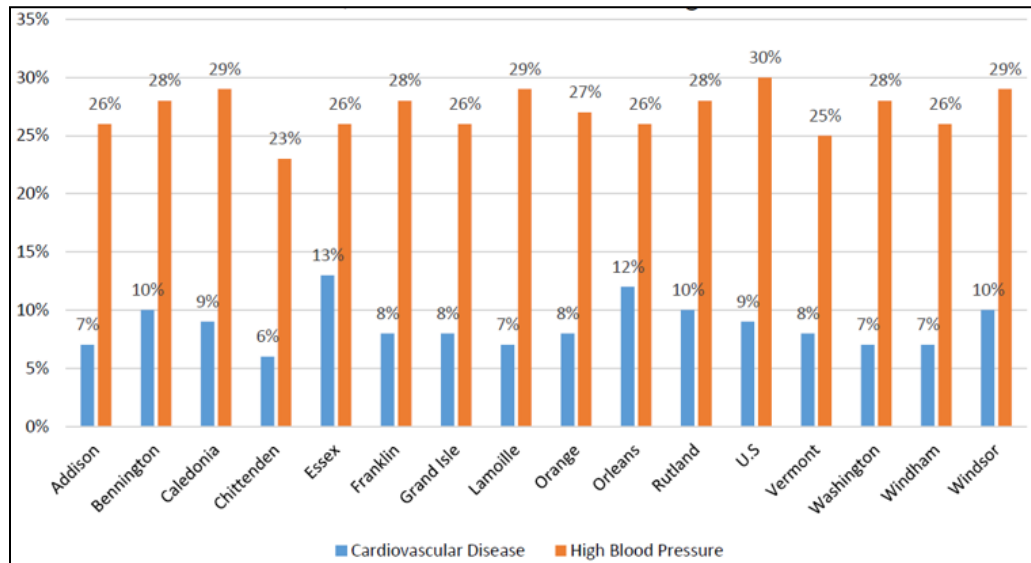
Figure 15: Vermonters Physical Activity with Age, 2021



source: Grace Cottage, 2021

Heart Disease. The second leading cause of death in Vermont is heart disease, which includes coronary heart disease, heart attack and strokes. The rate of death due to heart disease in Windham County is slightly better than state averages. Figure 16 below shows that the prevalence of heart disease and high blood pressure in Windham County and the state are slightly better than the U.S. overall. The concern is that these levels have remained fairly consistent over time (Grace Cottage 2021).

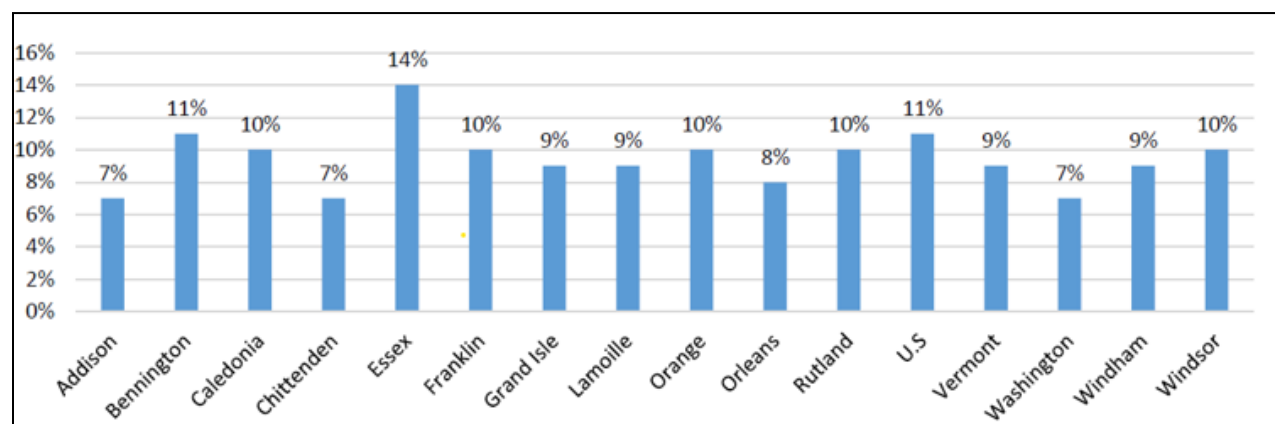
Figure 16: Vermont Adults, Cardiovascular Diseases & High Blood Pressure, 2021



source: Grace Cottage, 2021

Diabetes. Diabetes is a chronic disease that occurs in two forms, Type I and Type 2. Type 2 is more common and can usually be prevented through lifestyle changes. Adults in Windham County have a similar rate of diabetes when compared to the state overall, 9% for both in 2018 (Brattleboro Memorial Hospital, 2021). In Vermont, 18% of those over 65+ have diabetes (Vermont Department of Health, 2019).

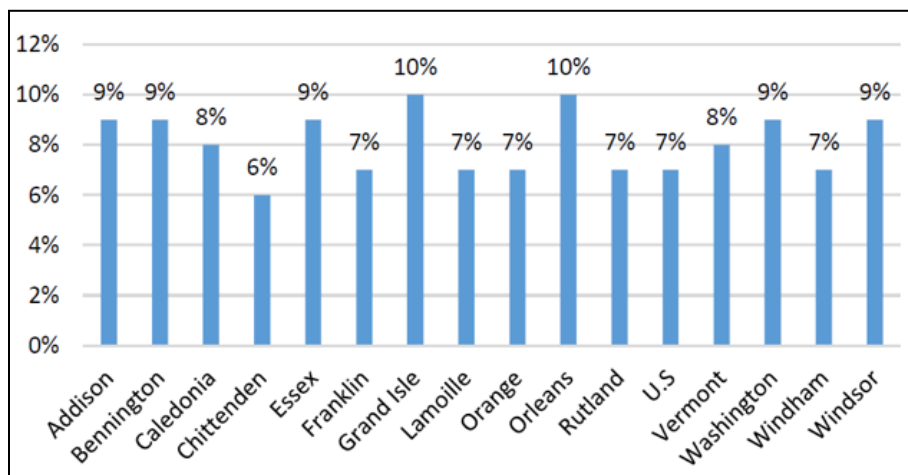
Figure 17: Vermont Adults with Diabetes, 2018



source: Grace Cottage, 2021

Cancer. Cancer is the leading cause of death in Vermont and the rate of deaths has remained constant since 2011. Approximately one in four adults will develop cancer, although less than half will die of the disease. Cancer rates are affected by genetics, the environment, and lifestyle. There are changes people can make to reduce their likelihood of getting cancer, including quitting smoking, better nutrition, and exercising daily (Grace Cottage, 2021). The likelihood of developing cancer increases with age, and women are more likely to develop cancer than men. Cancer rates in Windham County and across the state of Vermont are very similar. Although, as shown in Figure 21, Windham County rates are somewhat lower than other counties and align with U.S. rates (Grace Cottage 2021).

Figure 18: Vermont Adults Diagnosed with Cancer, 2018



source: Grace Cottage, 2021

Alzheimer’s Disease. Alzheimer’s Disease is Vermont’s fifth leading cause of death, and there are currently 13,000 Vermonters living with Alzheimer’s Disease (with an additional 25,000 caregivers supporting these individuals) (VDH, 2022). In 2030, it is estimated that there will be 17,000 individuals across Vermont living with Alzheimer’s, and that the number of caregivers will climb to 35,000 (Senior Solutions, 2022). Age is the greatest risk factor for dementia; with 5% of individuals aged 65-74; 14% of those 75-84; and a full 35% of people over 85 experiencing Alzheimer’s Disease (VDH, 2022).

Asthma and COPD. In Vermont, 18% of all adults reported having asthma at some point in their lifetime and 12% reported currently having asthma. Adults who did not graduate from high school and those with incomes closer to the poverty level have a much higher rate of asthma than others. However, Windham County adults have a lower rate of asthma than most of the state at 10%. Vermonters over 65 have a lower asthma rate at 10%, than those 35-64 and 18-34, at 12% and 14% respectively (Vermont Department of Health, 2019). COPD or Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disorder impacts Vermonters at about the same rate as the U.S. at 6% and 7%, respectively. However, adults 65 and over have COPD at a much higher rate, 13%. Vermonters with lower incomes are much more likely to have COPD than those at higher incomes. Windham County residents have COPD at about the same rate as the rest of the state (Vermont Department of Health, 2018).

Alcohol, Tobacco & Drug Use. Smoking is an at-risk behavior that causes multiple adverse health impacts including cancer, COPD and others. The prevalence of adult smoking in Windham County is similar to the state at 18% (Vermont Department of Health, 2019). Alcohol use among older adults, 65+, is reported by 53% of Vermonters. More concerning is that 25% of older Vermonters report at-risk drinking, defined as three or more drinks for men and two or more for women, at an occasion. Chronic drinking (two or more drinks/day for men and one or more for women) is reported by 5% of older Vermonters. These rates have stayed about the same since 2011. Alcohol use is concerning among older adults as people become increasingly sensitive to alcohol as they age, as well as possible adverse interactions with prescribed medications (VDH, 2020). Adults who use cannabis are more likely to participate in at-risk or binge drinking, 49%, compared to 23% who do not use cannabis (VDH, 2020). Vermont's drug poisoning mortality rate in 2018 was higher than the U.S, however, Windham County had the highest rate of drug poisoning mortality in the entire state at 32.2 per 100,000 (Aherns, et al. 2022).

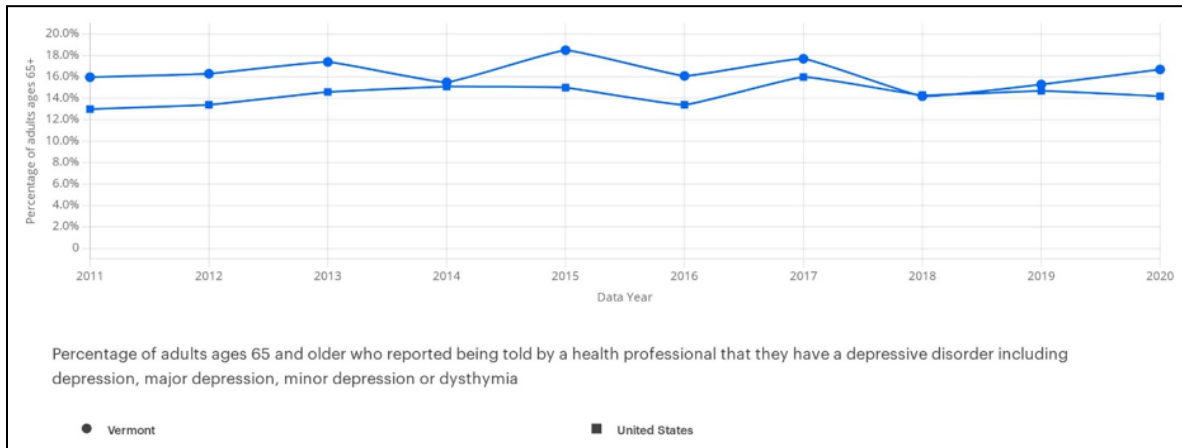
Arthritis. Almost three in ten Vermont adults have arthritis or about 28%, which is higher than the U.S. at 26%. However, 53% of Vermonters over 65 have arthritis. Adults with lower incomes are much more likely to have arthritis than those at higher income levels. Windham County adults have arthritis at a rate somewhat higher than the state at 32% (Vermont Department of Health, 2018).

Disabilities. Vermonters are less likely than adults in other parts of the country to have a disability at 22% and 26%, respectively. Windham County residents have disabilities at a slightly lower rate, 20%. As Vermonters age however, they are more likely to have a disability. Depending on the data source, Vermonters 65+ are disabled at a rate of 36% (Vermont Department of Health, 2016) or 31% (American Community Survey, 2016). Mobility disorders also increase with age. Vermonters over 65 have a mobility disorder rate of 21% (VDH, 2018). Mobility is a critical issue when considering living accommodations for older adults, many who live in older and inaccessible homes.

Mental Health & Suicide. About 12% of Vermonters report that they are experiencing poor mental health with Windham County residents reporting at a similar rate, 13%. Adults 65 and over report poor mental health at a lower rate than younger populations, 7% (Vermont Department of Health, 2018). Vermonters over 65 report that they rarely or never get the emotional support they need, 13%, at a much higher rate than younger Vermonters. Adults at higher incomes report not receiving emotional support at a much lower rate than lower income adults. Adults reported not receiving emotional support in Windham County at the same rate as the state overall at 8% (VDH, 2018).

More Vermont adults in 2018 reported experiencing depression than the U.S. overall at 21% and 18%, respectively. Windham County adults reported depression at the highest rate in Vermont at 28% (Vermont Department of Health, 2018). The percentage of Vermonters over 65 experiencing depression in 2020 is also higher than the percentage of the same population in the U.S., at 16% and 14% respectively (United Health Foundation, 2022). Older Vermonters may be depressed for many reasons, among them social isolation. In 2022, 27.9% of Vermont seniors live alone. The state ranks 20th in the U.S. for the risk of social isolation among seniors (Meals on Wheels, 2022).

Figure 19: Vermont & U.S. Depression Trends 65+, 2011-2020



source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2020

The number of suicides among Vermonters was higher in 2021 than in previous years. There were 142 suicides in 2021, while there were 116 suicides in 2020, and 109 in 2019. In Windham County, there were only 5 suicides in 2021, but there were 11 suicides in 2020 and 7 in 2019. Adults over 65 years old committed suicide less than younger Vermonters, with 33 suicides over age 65 in 2021, 52 suicides in the 45-64 age group and 45 suicides in the 25-44 age group (Vermont Department of Health, 2022).

Falls Among Older Adults. Older Vermonters were more likely to fall in 2016 than U.S. adults over 65, at 35% and 29% respectively. However, those who fell in Vermont were similarly likely to be injured in a fall as older adults in the U.S., 35% and 37% respectively. Falls are concerning among older adults not only because of a risk of death but also non-fatal injuries, including lacerations, bone fractures and head trauma (Vermont Department of Health, 2017). Older adults with fair or poor general health fell more times (4+), 41%, than adults who had one to three falls, 22%. Older Vermonters with chronic conditions, including diabetes, cardiovascular disease, arthritis, depression and obesity, are more likely to fall. Older adults with any disability are also more likely to fall, twice as likely, than others (VDH, 2017).

Implications & Strategies for Next Steps

Explore Regional Health Equity Issues. Implications for marginalized populations (e.g. BIPOC, LGBTQ+, immigrant/refugee population, etc.) are likely more pronounced when examining health outcomes, and further data research is needed in this area specific to the Windham region.

Develop Chronic Care & Community Supports. Development of a chronic care tool to identify areas of concern, and supporting chronic care coaches to assist with individual needs, should be considered moving forward. Consider expansion of the Cares model, and build community supports for areas such as: healthy eating (Food as Medicine), advanced directives, end-of-life care, etc.

Public Relations & Education. Campaigns providing resources for support to the broader community should include multiple modes of communication, including: radio and television ads, print materials, and website/social media outlets.

Healthcare Trends

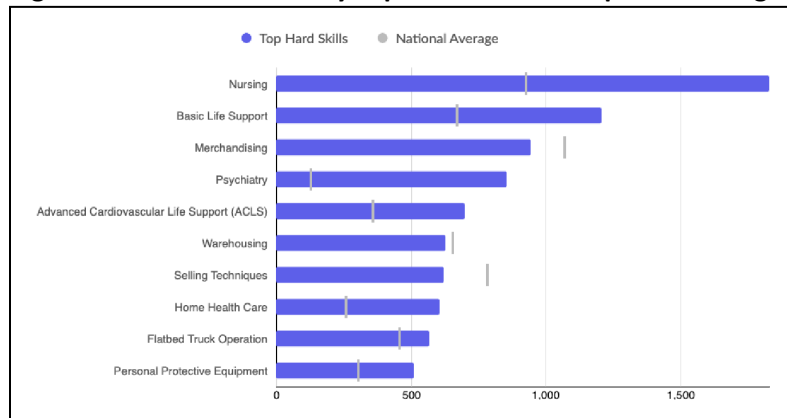
In 2018, 11 towns within Windham County were designated as Medically Underserved Areas, defined as areas with a lack of access to primary care services, including: Athens, Brookline, Dover, Grafton, Jamaica, Newfane, Rockingham Stratton, Townshend, Wardsboro and Westminster (Brattleboro Memorial Hospital, 2021). Rural areas have the highest concentration of older people and are aging faster than urban areas, and older people living in rural areas have access to fewer health care services and face longer travel times to obtain care (NASEM, 2018).

According to the Vermont Department of Health’s 2018 Physician Census, 48% of Windham County’s primary care physicians are 60 or older. Also of note is the significant shortage of dentists in some areas within the Windham Region. While towns surrounding Brattleboro and Wilmington have access to dentists, Rockingham area residents have fewer choices. Of more significant concern are towns around Londonderry and Townshend, including Weston, Windham, Jamaica, Stratton, Wardsboro, Athens, Brookline and Newfane, who have very limited access to dental services (Vermont Department of Health, 2019).

Healthcare Workforce

Having an adequate and engaged healthcare workforce is critical to aging well and underlies all other areas associated with aging. As a national issue, local solutions to the workforce shortage among healthcare workers is challenging. At a community level, engagement and retention are key and tied to community-wide solutions. Five out of the ten job categories listed as high-need relate to healthcare, with nursing at number one. Windham County has an aging population *and* healthcare workers from all disciplines are retiring. Our need for nurses is decades old. The reasons are many, and include: the wage gap between hospital nursing and nursing faculty positions; the lack of seats in nursing programs; civility and equity for nurses; the impact of Covid on nurse morale; etc. In Windham County certain jobs require “hard skills”, which has presented a challenge in terms of filling open positions. The top “hard skills” required for jobs in the region are nurses, followed by basic life support skills. A lack of workers trained in these skills is likely to significantly impact older Vermonters.

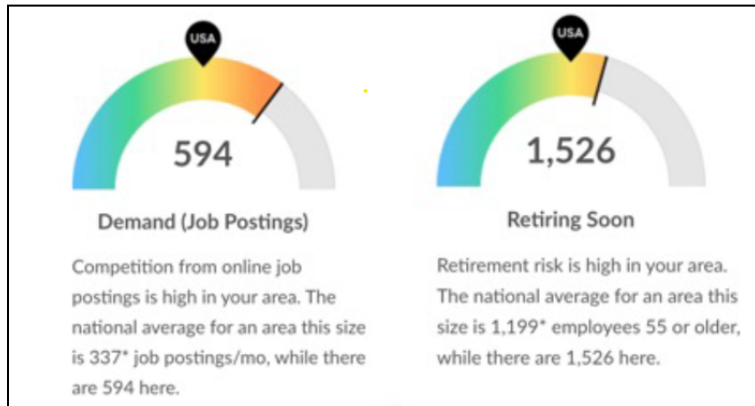
Figure 20: Windham County Top “Hard Skills” Required for Regional Jobs



source: BDCC & SeVEDS, 2021

Staffing challenges continue to increase for critical access hospitals in communities like Windham County. Equipment requirements, staffing challenges for specialty providers, and higher wage scales at regional tertiary care medical centers are changing the way healthcare is delivered nationally and in our community. It is necessary to consider both national and local trends to plan effectively for our community. An additional area of concern is the number of medical personnel in Windham County who will be retiring in the near future. As shown in Figure 21, there will be a significant number of retirements in the future, based on age alone (BDCC & SeVEDS, 2021).

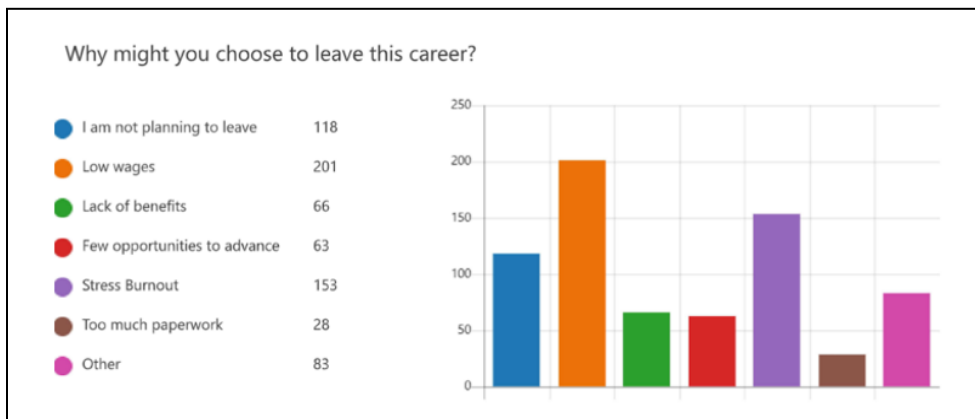
Figure 21: Medical Personnel in Windham County



source: BDCC & SeVEDS, 2021

Direct Care Workers provide aid to older adults in nursing homes, assisted living facilities, and within individual homes. Across the country, labor shortages have had a significant impact on health care systems, including care for older people. The Vermont Department of Aging and Independent Living (DAIL) reports severe impact across the state due to staffing shortages, and commissioned a survey and study to better understand root causes (O’Casey, et al. 2022). The survey found that low wages are the major obstacle to retaining workers, followed by stress, and burnout (O’Casey, 2022).

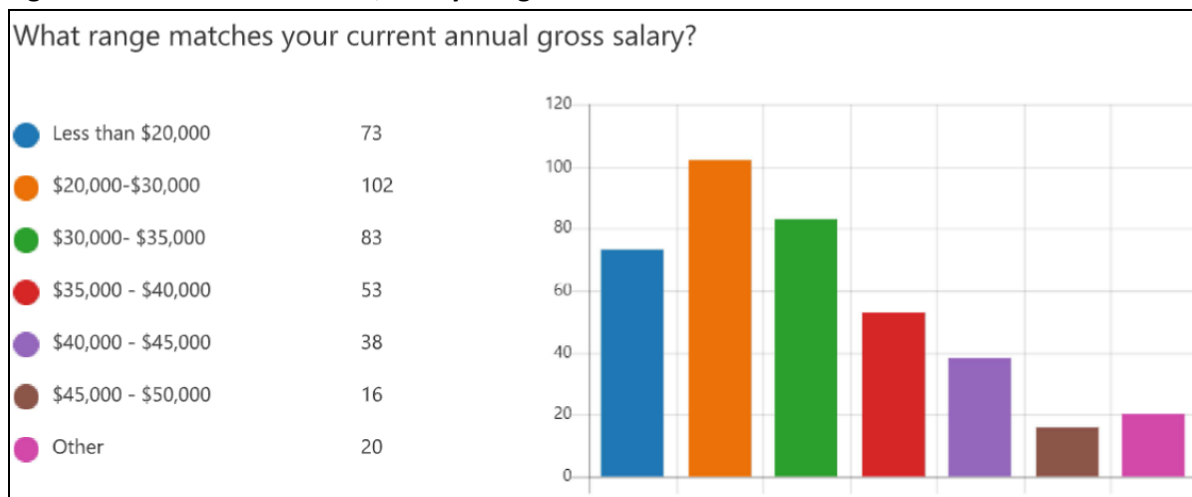
Figure 22: Direct Care Workers, Reasons for Potentially Leaving Career



source: O’Casey, et al., 2022

The DAIL-commissioned study additionally addressed salaries of Direct Care Workers and included within its series of recommendations increasing wages and benefits to this workforce.

Figure 23: Direct Care Workers, Salary Range



source: O’Casey, et al., 2022

Long-Term Care Facilities

By 2050, the number of Americans needing long-term services and supports (LTSS) will more than double to 27 million (NASEM, 2018). In 2021 there were 37 nursing homes facilities, 10 home health agencies, 15 assisted living residences, 110 residential care homes and 10 hospice programs across Vermont (Langweil & Neil, 2021). Within Windham County, there are three nursing homes, two assisted living centers, and five residential care facilities (DAIL, 2022). As current trends favor individuals aging in place, a loss of care beds has resulted in the last decade. The glaring question this opens is, *If one can not age in place, where does one go?* And adding to this complex issue, are individuals for whom long-term facilities are ill equipped to support, such as those with mental illnesses and substance use disorders.

Implications & Strategies for Next Steps

It is essential that we grow the healthcare workforce for the well being of all residents of Windham County, young and old, in the coming decades. As this is not a new phenomenon, and what has been happening for decades is insufficient to meet growing needs, creative solutions are needed. Areas worthy of exploration include the following:

- **Bold Recruitment Strategies.** Develop recruitment and incentive programs (including housing programs) for new graduates and new Americans who have healthcare credentials and/or are interested in education that leads to work in Home Health Care, Basic Life Support or Nursing.
- **Education Initiatives.** Work with the Windham Regional Career Center, Southern Vermont Area Health Education Center, Community College of Vermont, Brattleboro High School, and other community partners to create internships and other programming to interest high school students in healthcare as an educational focus before making post-secondary education plans.

Encourage U.S. students to explore nursing degrees abroad, and return home with less educational debt. Build educational opportunities for gray-market healthcare workers, and family caregivers, to obtain credentials for employment and enter/reenter workforce.

- **Collaborative Initiatives.** Work with Brattleboro Memorial Hospital (BMH) to develop a nurse tuition program for local students underwriting their tuition with a payback of work time at BMH.
- **Community Supports.** Build community-wide efforts to address housing, childcare, and transportation issues as key components to building a stable workforce.
- **National & State Advocacy.** Work with local legislators for state-level solutions, such as: establishing a VISA/Green Card program for foreign-trained healthcare workers to work in the U.S./Windham County; establishing a state-level program supporting traveling nurses; and building wraparound community supports. Advocate at the state level to make Vermont license certification manageable.

Conclusion & Thoughts for Moving Forward

It is clear when looking at the data presented within this report that *change is coming*. In the coming decades, the number of older people living in Windham county will increase dramatically. These same individuals will have more complex health needs as they live longer than previous generations, and will face challenges in aging in place as life expectancy increases. Furthermore, a shortage of affordable and suitable housing, as well as transportation challenges, will exacerbate issues, particularly for individuals living within rural pockets of the county. The question is, *How will Windham county prepare for the coming changes?*

The process of creating the Windham Aging report has illuminated many issues, yet has simultaneously brought out many additional questions worthy of continued exploration. As the Collaborative moves into its next phase of developing a *Regional Aging Plan*, many questions still remain, such as:

- How many subsidized housing units are currently available across the Windham region, and how many are projected to be needed in the coming decades?
- What current facilities and services are available for those in need of extra daily help, including: residential, assisted living, and skilled nursing.
- How many people are projected to be living with dementia in the coming decades?
- How many emergency room visits (by age) occur annually across the region?
- How many people in the Windham region are currently utilizing Medicare, and what are the future projections?

As we move into the next phase of work, it is imperative that we continue to seek out data to inform strategies and activities. While the challenges are daunting, it is by working collaboratively that we will succeed in creating a vibrant environment in which to age within southeastern Vermont.

Acknowledgements

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Windham Aging Report

Addendum: Mapping Organizations that Support Older Vermonters across the Region

In an effort to understand the service landscape for older Vermonters across the Windham Region, the Collaborative underwent a mapping process to identify organizations providing health, housing, legal, and other services. Organizations and other entities serving older Vermonters exclusively, or as a target population within a broader demographic, and located within the Windham Region were prioritized. Organizations serving the entire state were also included, if services offered focused on older Vermonters. Identification of service providers is a critical component to building a broad group of stakeholders to guide Phase II efforts, the development of a *Regional Plan for Aging*. If you represent an organization providing services to older people in the Windham Region that is not included within the information below, please reach out to: info@WindhamAging.com.

Organization	Services	Service Area	Demographic Served	Services Specific to Older Vermonters	Website	Telephone
Alzheimer's Association, Vermont Chapter	health services	Vermont	all Vermonters	No	www.alz.org/vermont	800-272-3900
American Parkinson's Disease Association (VT Chapter)	health services	Vermont	all Vermonters	Yes	www.apdaparkinson.org/community/vermont	800-651-8466
BAYADA Hospice & Home Health	health services	Vermont	older Vermonters	No	www.bayada.com	802-490-2099
Bi-State Primary Care Association	health services	Vermont	all Vermonters	No	https://bistatepca.org	802-223-2336
Biologic Healthcare	health services	Windham Co.	all Vermonters	No	www.biologichealthcare.com	802-275-4732
Brattleboro Area Hospice	health services	Windham Co.	older Vermonters	Yes	www.brattleborohospice.org	802-257-0775
Brattleboro Memorial Hospital	health services	Windham Co.	all Vermonters	Yes	www.bmhvt.org	802-257-0341
Brattleboro Retreat	health services	Brattleboro	all Vermonters	No	www.brattlebororetreat.org	802-258-3737
Cheshire Medical Center, Center for Population Health	health services	Other	all Vermonters	No	www.cheshiremed.org/about/center-population-health	603-354-5460
Dartmouth-Hitchcock Medical Center	health services	Other	all Vermonters	Yes	www.dartmouth-hitchcock.org	603-650-0499
Deerfield Valley Health Center	health services	Windham Co.	all Vermonters	Yes	https://svhealthcare.org/locations/deerfield-valley-campus	802-464-5311
Falls Free Vermont Coalition	health services	Vermont	older Vermonters	Yes	www.fallsfreevt.com	802-863-7596
Grace Cottage Hospital	health services	Windham Co.	all Vermonters	Yes	www.gracecottage.org	802-365-7357
Health Care & Rehabilitation Services (HCRS)	health services	Windham Co.	all Vermonters	Yes	www.hcrs.org	802-886-4500
Rockingham Health Center	health services	Windham Co.	all Vermonters	No	www.northstarfghc.org/rockingham-health-center	802-463-9000

Sojourners Community Health Clinic	health services	Windham Co.	all Vermonters	No	www.sojourns.org	802-722-4023
Upper Valley Community Nursing Project	health services	Other	all Vermonters	Yes	www.uvcnp.org	802-772-5607
UVM Medical Center Memory Program	health services	Vermont	older Vermonters	Yes	www.uvmhealth.org/medcenter/departments-and-programs/memory-program	802-847-1111
Vermont Senior Medicare Patrol (SMP)	health services	Vermont	all Vermonters	Yes	www.smpresource.org/Locator/VT.aspx	802-229-4731
Visiting Nurse and Hospice for Vermont and New Hampshire	health services	Other	all Vermonters	Yes	www.vnhcare.org	888-300-8853
Windham Center for Psychiatric Care	health services	Windham Co.	all Vermonters	No	https://springfieldhospital.org/the-windham-center-for-psychiatric-care	802-463-1346
Windham County Dental Center	health services	Windham Co.	all Vermonters	No	www.windhamcounty.dental	802-490-2923
Brattleboro Senior Meals	food assistance	Brattleboro	older Vermonters	Yes	www.brattleboroseniormeals.org	802-257-1236
Meals on Wheels	food assistance	Vermont	older Vermonters	Yes	www.seniorsolutionsvt.org/resources/health-wellbeing/food-assistance/meals-on-wheels	802-885-2669
Adair Heights Apartments, THM Property Management Services	housing	Brattleboro	low-income Vermonters	No	www.thmmanagement.com/adair_heights.php	802-362-4663
Brattleboro Housing Partnerships	housing	Brattleboro	older Vermonters	Yes	www.brattleborohousing.org/	802-254-6071
Stewart Property Management	housing	Vermont	low-income Vermonters	No	https://stewartproperty.net/property-location/vermont	603-641-2163
Support and Services at Home (SASH)	housing	Vermont	older Vermonters	Yes	www.ashvt.org	802-863-2224
Westgate Housing Inc.	housing	Brattleboro	low-income Vermonters	No	www.westgatehousing.org/home	802-257-2430
Windham & Windsor Housing Trust	housing	Other	all Vermonters	No	www.homemattershere.org	802-254-4604
Brattleboro Mutual Aid Association/ Thompson House	long-term services	Brattleboro	older Vermonters	Yes	www.thompsonhouse.info	802-254-4977
Garden Path Elder Living/ Bradley House	long-term services	Brattleboro	older Vermonters	Yes	www.gardenpathelderliving.org	802-246-1556
Pine Heights at Brattleboro Center for Nursing and Rehabilitation	long-term services	Brattleboro	all Vermonters	Yes	www.ineightsbrattleboro.com	802-257-0307
Springfield Health & Rehab Center	long-term services	Springfield	all Vermonters	Yes	https://nhccare.com/locations/springfield-rehabilitation	802-885-5741
Sterling House	long-term services	Windham Co.	older Vermonters	Yes	www.sterlinghouseatrockingham.com	802-463-0137
Valley Cares	long-term services	Windham Co.	older Vermonters	Yes	www.valleycares.org	802-365-7190

Vernon Homes	long-term services	Windham Co.	older Vermonters	Yes	www.vernonhomes.org	802-254-6041
Springfield Area Adult Day Services	adult day program	Springfield	all Vermonters	Yes	https://springfieldhospital.org/adult-day-service	802-885-9881
The Gathering Place	adult day program	Brattleboro	older Vermonters	Yes	www.gatheringplacevt.org	802-254-6559
Moover	transportation	Windham Co.	all Vermonters	Yes	www.moover.com	888-869-6287
Rescue Inc.	transportation	Windham Co.	all Vermonters	No	www.rescueinc.org	802-257-7679
Vermont Agency of Transportation	transportation	Windham Co.	all Vermonters	No	https://vtrans.vermont.gov	802-917-2458
Legal Services Vermont	legal services	Vermont	all Vermonters	Yes	https://legalservicesvt.org	800-889-2047
Vermont Agency of Human Services, Office of Public Guardian	legal services	Vermont	all Vermonters	Yes	https://ddsd.vermont.gov/programs/public-guardian	802-828-2143
Vermont Legal Aid	legal services	Vermont	all Vermonters	Yes	www.vtlegalaid.org	800-889-2047
Brattleboro Development Credit Corporation	general assistance	Windham Co.	all Vermonters	No	www.brattleborodevelopment.com	802-257-7731
Cares Groups: Dummerston Cares	general assistance	Dummerston	older Vermonters	Yes	www.dummerstoncares.org	802-257-5800
Cares Groups: Guilford Cares	general assistance	Guilford	older Vermonters	Yes	www.guilfordcares.com	802-579-1350
Cares Groups: Marlboro Cares	general assistance	Marlboro	older Vermonters	Yes	https://sites.google.com/view/marlboroalliance/programs/cares	802-258-3030
Cares Groups: Putney Community Cares	general assistance	Putney	older Vermonters	Yes	www.putneycommunitycares.org	802-387-5593
Cares Groups: Westminster Cares	general assistance	Westminster	older Vermonters	Yes	www.westminstercares.org	802-722-3607
Community of Vermont Elders (COVE)	general assistance	Vermont	older Vermonters	Yes	www.vermontelders.org	802-229-4731
Dartmouth Health Aging Resource Center	general assistance	Other	older Vermonters	Yes	www.dartmouth-hitchcock.org/aging-resource-center	603-653-3460
Green Mountain RSVP (Windham County)	general assistance	Windham Co.	older Vermonters	Yes	www.rsvpvt.org	802-254-7515
Groundworks Collaborative	general assistance	Windham Co.	low-income Vermonters	No	www.groundworksvt.org	802-257-5415
Mount Ascutney Regional Commission	general assistance	Windsor Co.	all Vermonters	No	www.marcyvt.org	802-674-9201
Neighborhood Connections	general assistance	Windsor Co.	all Vermonters	No	www.neighborhoodconnectionsvt.org	802-824-4343

Senior Solutions: Council on Aging for Southeastern Vermont	general assistance	Other	older Vermonters	Yes	www.seniorsolutionsvt.org	802-885-2655
Southeastern Vermont Community Action (SEVCA)	general assistance	Other	all Vermonters	No	www.sevca.org	802-722-4575
Southwestern Vermont Council on Aging	general assistance	Windham Co.	older Vermonters	Yes	www.svcoa.org	802-442-5436
Tri-State Learning Collaborative on Aging	general assistance	Vermont	older Vermonters	Yes	https://agefriendly.community	207-592-9972
United Way of Windham County	general assistance	Windham Co.	all Vermonters	No	www.unitedwaywindham.org	802-257-4011
UVM Center on Aging	general assistance	Vermont	older Vermonters	Yes	www.med.uvm.edu/centeronaging	802-656-0292
Windham Regional Commission	general assistance	Other	all Vermonters	No	www.windhamregional.org	802-257-4547
Winston Prouty Center	general assistance	Windham Co.	all Vermonters	No	www.winstonprouty.org	802-257-7852
Vermont Agency of Human Services, Vermont Chronic Care Initiative (VCCI)	state agency	Vermont	all Vermonters	Yes	https://dvha.vermont.gov/providers/vermont-chronic-care-initiative	
Vermont Department of Disabilities, Aging and Independent Living (DAIL)	state agency	Vermont	all Vermonters	Yes	https://dail.vermont.gov	802-241-2401
Vermont Department of Health	state agency	Vermont	all Vermonters	Yes	www.healthvermont.gov	802-863-7200
AARP Vermont	other	Vermont	older Vermonters	Yes	www.states.aarp.org/vermont	866-227-7451
AIDS Project of Southern Vermont	other	Vermont	other	No	www.aidsprojectsouthernvermont.org	802-254-8263
Brattleboro Recreation & Parks Department	other	Brattleboro	all Vermonters	No	www.brattleboro.org	802-254-5808
Phoenix House	other	Brattleboro	other	No	www.phoenixhouse.org/vermont	401-441-6107
Southern Vermont Area Health Education Center (SVTAHEC)	other	Windham Co.	all Vermonters	No	https://svtahec.com	802-885-2126
Vermont Ethics Network (VEN)	other	Vermont	all Vermonters	Yes	https://vtethicsnetwork.org/medical-ethics	802-828-2909
Veterans Inc.	other	Vermont	other	No	www.veteransinc.org	
Women's Freedom Center	other	Windham Co.	other	No	www.womensfreedomcenter.net	802-254-6954

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Windham Aging Report
Addendum

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