

50+ Community Survey for Fairfax County and the Cities of Fairfax and Falls Church

Key Findings for the Fairfax Area Commission on Aging

September 2019

Key Findings

The 50+ Community Survey (50+ Survey) provided many insights into the perceptions, activities and lifestyles of this vital and growing segment of the population. The survey was sponsored by the Fairfax County Board of Supervisors to collect information to make better decisions about the alignment of resources with needs. With this report, Fairfax County and cities of Fairfax and Falls Church stakeholders can shape public policy, educate the public and assist communities and organizations in their efforts to sustain a high quality of life for older adults. This survey was supported by the [Fairfax Area Commission on Aging](#) (COA) to inform community planning and priority setting. The COA areas of focus are outlined below along with highlights from the survey.

Safe and Healthy Community

- Physical health is self-rated as excellent or good and performing daily tasks is not a problem.
- Some respondents have difficulty finding affordable health insurance.
- More than three-quarters report feeling safe in their community.
- Some respondents report feeling bored, lonely, isolated or depressed.

Housing

- The majority of survey respondents have housing that suits their needs.
- Some concerns are expressed about the variety of housing options and the availability of quality housing.

Transportation

- Most respondents indicate the availability of transportation is not a problem, but responses about the ease of use for various modes of transportation indicate some concern.
- Nearly half of respondent's report using public transportation in the last year.

Community Engagement

- Most respondents are aware of opportunities to engage in social, recreational or spiritual activities, but less than half participate in a club, recreational program or spiritual activity.
- Even fewer report using county public facilities, such as libraries, parks, recreation centers and senior centers in the last year.
- Under 25% of respondents participate in volunteer activities.

Services for Older Adults and Family Caregivers

- Most respondents do not receive frequent assistance from others.
- Time spent providing care to children, adults and older adults is the equivalent of a part-time job for some respondents.
- Some respondents feel burdened by this caregiver responsibility, but most do not participate in caregiver support groups.

Long Range Planning

- Most survey respondents rate Fairfax County and the cities of Fairfax and Falls Church favorably as a place to live overall.
- More than half of respondents are likely to remain in the area throughout retirement, but less than half view it as a good place to retire.
- Less than 15% consider the cost of living in the Fairfax County and the cities of Fairfax and Falls Church area as good.
- A high proportion of respondents' report having little difficulty finding work in retirement.

Purpose and Goals of 50+ Community Survey

The 50+ Survey captured direct input from one of the fastest growing segments of Fairfax County and the cities of Fairfax and Falls Church population. More than 25% of county residents are age 55 and older.¹ Notably, residents 65 and older are projected to have the greatest increase. By 2035, the number of residents age 65 and older is expected to increase by 54%, according to the 2018 Demographic Report published by the Fairfax County Department of Management and Budget.

Conducted as a county-wide initiative sponsored by the Board of Supervisors to create a more aging-friendly community, the 50+ Survey collected information that will be used to help county decisionmakers plan for the needs of this population, including updating the [50+ Community Action Plan](#), the 2019 Health and Human Services [Needs Assessment](#) and the Board of Supervisors [strategic planning](#) initiative. Furthermore, survey results are public and can be used by community partners and other stakeholders for advocacy and engagement activities.

Fairfax County and the cities of Fairfax and Falls Church are home to many residents age 50 and older. To meet the needs of this growing population, Fairfax area agencies must assess and transform resources and services offered for older adults to help them thrive within their community. Acknowledging the need for action in support of this population, the 50+ Community Action Plan was created to address focused initiatives around housing, transportation, safety, health and community engagement that will provide benefits for all older adults. The planning and community engagement efforts that first identified the need for the 50+ Community Action Plan continue in order to refine and implement the plan. The 50+ Survey is one tool used to obtain updated information about the needs of older residents to inform the 50+ Action Plan.

¹ 2018 Demographic Report, Fairfax County, VA.

Discussion of Survey Results

Survey questions covered topics to assess resources that support social and financial viability as well as overall health and well-being of residents age 50 and older. Such topics included retirement, housing, use of public amenities, as well as perceptions of community neighborliness and safety. Information was solicited about opportunities to work, socialize, volunteer and engage in civic activities. Perceptions about the cost of living, affordable transportation and health were also measured.

A total of 4,777 completed surveys were returned, of the 22,000 surveys mailed, for a response rate of 22%. Using this population-specific information will help county decisionmakers, residents and other stakeholders plan for an older adult community that is thriving, empowered and engaged.

This report detailing the survey results uses the 50+ Community Action Plan as a framework. The 50+ Community Action Plan Initiatives are:

- Safe and Healthy Community
- Housing
- Transportation
- Community Engagement
- Services for Older Adults and Caregivers
- Long-Range Planning

Additional data points are included from American Community Survey (ACS) 5-year tables to provide an enhanced picture of survey results within the context of the entire Fairfax area older adult population.

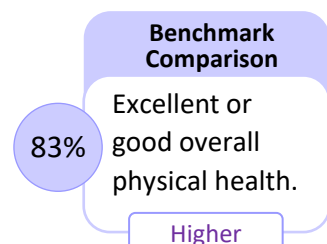
Survey responses are disaggregated by race, ethnicity, age and gender and those responses that differed significantly from the overall responses are noted and highlighted with a magnifying glass graphic. 🔍

The survey vendor, National Research Center, Inc. (NRC), benchmarks responses of similar surveys, allowing Fairfax County and the cities of Fairfax and Falls Church results to be compared against other communities. Where rating comparisons are notably different, Fairfax County and the cities of Fairfax and Falls Church results are cited in this report as being Higher than the benchmark or Lower than the benchmark.

The terms “minor, major, and moderate” were used in the NRC survey instrument to provide a scale and categorize responses. This terminology is used within the following report to consistently summarize results.

► *Safe and Healthy Community*

Health Care and Health Insurance: Most survey respondents, 83%, indicate their physical health is excellent or good and getting the health care they need, including some specialty care, is not a problem. However, nearly two in 10 respondents report that finding affordable health insurance is a problem, and the same proportion have difficulty finding information about public programs, such as Medicare, Medicaid and Social Security.





Asian survey respondents indicate challenges related to good health and finding and getting quality health care and insurance. Answers to several health-related questions indicate they have a lower self-assessment of their physical and mental health and quality of life. For example, 75% of Asian respondents rate their physical health as excellent or good compared to the overall rating of 83% mentioned above. Relative to 33% of overall responses, 42% of Asian respondents indicate that finding affordable health insurance and getting health care, including specialty care, is a challenge.



Hispanic respondents also indicate challenges around health care. A moderate proportion give lower ratings for availability of quality physical and mental health care. Hispanic respondents also indicate at least minor challenges in getting specialty health care and affording needed medications and health insurance.

Question	Asian response	Hispanic response	Overall response
Rating availability of affordable quality physical health care	46%	47%	57%
Rating availability of affordable quality mental health care	44%	38%	45%
Getting needed health care a problem	38%	34%	26%
Getting vision care	37%	29%	20%
Getting oral health care	36%	31%	21%
Finding affordable health insurance a problem	42%	40%	33%
Affording needed medications a problem	36%	36%	26%



Respondents 60-64 years of age report finding affordable health insurance as more of a challenge (41%) than other age groups.

- Almost 15,000 Fairfax County older adults, or 13% of the over 55 population, are uninsured (ACS).

Healthy Lifestyle: While 85% of survey respondents report they maintain a healthy diet, only half say they always eat healthy foods. Likewise, most respondents say they stay physically fit but only about half report regularly engaging in moderate physical activity. More than 90% report having no problem performing daily tasks and a similar high proportion have not recently experienced falling and injuring themselves at home or having hospital stays.

- 12% of Fairfax County adults 65 and older have independent living difficulties and 6% have self-care difficulties (ACS).



22% of Black respondents and 17% of Hispanic respondents indicate having enough food to eat is at least a minor problem (compared to 10% overall).



Respondents age 75 and over indicate that staying physically fit is a bigger challenge (57%) than for other age groups. By contrast, this same age group reports maintaining a healthier diet as less of a problem than all other age groups.

Female respondents indicate eating at least five portions of fruits and vegetables a day significantly more (53%) than male (45%) respondents.

Mental Health and Emotional Well-Being: Most respondents rate their mental health and emotional well-being as excellent or good. However, feelings of loneliness, isolation, boredom and depression are expressed by 10% to 14% of respondents, with 17% reporting difficulty dealing with the loss of a family member or close acquaintance.

- 38% of Fairfax County adults 55 and older are widowed, divorced or otherwise live alone (ACS).

A high proportion of respondents, 94%, report they communicate or visit friends and family on a weekly basis.

Responses to other questions reveal that some older adults have difficulty finding meaningful activities in which to participate.

Benchmark Comparison

94%

Communicating/visiting with friends and/or family one or more hours per week.

Higher



Respondents 50-54 years of age report feelings of boredom (41%) and depression (35%) to be a larger problem than other age groups.

Female respondents report greater challenges than male respondents in dealing with the loss of a close family member or friend and feel more depressed, lonely and isolated.

Safe and Welcoming Environment: More than three-quarters of survey respondents indicate they perceive Fairfax County and the cities of Fairfax and Falls Church to be a safe place to live and 95% report that being a victim of crime or physical or emotional abuse has not been a problem in the past year. Over half of respondents, from 52% to 58%, rate their community as excellent or good on questions such as valuing older residents, being open and accepting of older adults with diverse backgrounds and fostering a sense of community and neighborliness. Seven in 10 respondents feel their voice is heard in the community.



46% of Black respondents rate the sense of community in Fairfax County and the cities of Fairfax and Falls Church as excellent or good as compared to 52% overall.



Hispanic respondents give the highest ratings for neighborliness (61%) and sense of community (59%). The overall rating in both categories was 52%. In rating the openness and acceptance of the community towards older residents of diverse backgrounds as excellent or good, Hispanic respondents make up the lowest proportion at 51%.



Respondents age 75 and over report higher ratings than other age groups for neighborliness, sense of community as well as openness, acceptance and valuing older residents in the community. Female respondents report lower ratings for these same community characteristics than male respondents.

Respondents 50-54 years of age report being a victim of crime and being physically or emotionally abused as a larger problem than other age groups.

► *Housing*

In response to the three survey questions about housing, the majority of respondents convey experiencing no significant problems having housing that suits their needs. Renters account for 28% of respondents and 72% own their home, including 25% who own their home free and clear (no mortgage).

However, other responses convey concerns with the variety of housing options and the availability of quality, affordable housing. Only 18% rate Fairfax County and the cities of Fairfax and Falls Church as excellent or good in the area of affordable housing.

- Of homeowners and renters age 65 and older, 30% or 25,585 individuals, are housing cost burdened (spend more than 30% of their income on housing costs) (ACS).
- 94% of individuals age 60 and older lived in the same residence one year ago (ACS).

Benchmark Comparison

18%

Excellent or good availability of quality, affordable housing.

Lower



Respondents age 75 and over report higher ratings than other age groups in the availability of affordable quality housing and the variety of housing options.

Respondents 50-54 years of age report that having housing to suit their needs is a larger problem (38%) than other age groups.

► *Transportation*


Ease of Travel: Most survey respondents indicate availability of safe and affordable transportation is not a problem for them and nearly six in 10 report the ease of getting to places they usually visit as excellent or good. However, less than half of respondents evaluate the ease of using various modes of transportation, including walking, automobile travel or using public transportation, with a favorable rating.


Benchmark Comparison

43%

Excellent or good ease of walking in Fairfax County and the cities of Fairfax and Falls Church.


Lower

 41% of Asian respondents rate the availability of safe and affordable transportation as at least a minor problem compared to 85% overall reporting no problem.

 Black respondents indicate higher usage of public transportation at 32% compared to 22% overall.

The majority of respondents do not use public transportation. While 22% report they use public transportation up to 10 times per month, 49% indicate they have not used bus, rail, subway or other public transportation in the last year.

- Of Fairfax County adults 55 and older still in the workforce, 9% use public transportation to get to work (ACS).


 Respondents age 75 and over report significantly higher ratings than other age groups in ease of getting places – male respondents report greater ease than females. However, this same age group, 75 and over, reports having safe and affordable transportation as at least a minor problem significantly more than other age groups.

Respondents ages 55-59 report using public transportation more frequently than the overall use by all age groups. Male respondents report using public transportation more than female respondents.

► *Community Engagement*

Social and Civic Participation: There were several questions in the survey seeking to assess respondents’ knowledge about and participation in various social, recreational and spiritual activities. Respondents give high ratings to the availability of these activities and do not have a problem finding activities. However, a lower proportion of respondents spend time regularly engaged in these activities: 41% report regular, weekly participation in a recreation program or group activity and 37% report participating in religious or spiritual activities with others.

Most respondents, 85%, indicate they vote in local elections, but 91% report never participating in a civic group (such as Elks, Kiwanis or Masons). Less than 10% report regularly attending local public meetings or viewing them online.

 Asian and Hispanic respondents give a lower proportion of excellent or good ratings to several questions regarding availability of engagement activities:

Question	Asian response	Hispanic response	Overall response
Availability of information about resources for older adults	41%	42%	50%
Having opportunities to attend social events	63%	69%	73%
Vote in local elections	68%	82%	85%
Attend or participate in local government or community meetings	54%	62%	72%

- Research shows that cultural or language differences may impact the ability of individuals to fully engage in a community. 18% of individuals age 60 and older speak English less than very well (ACS).

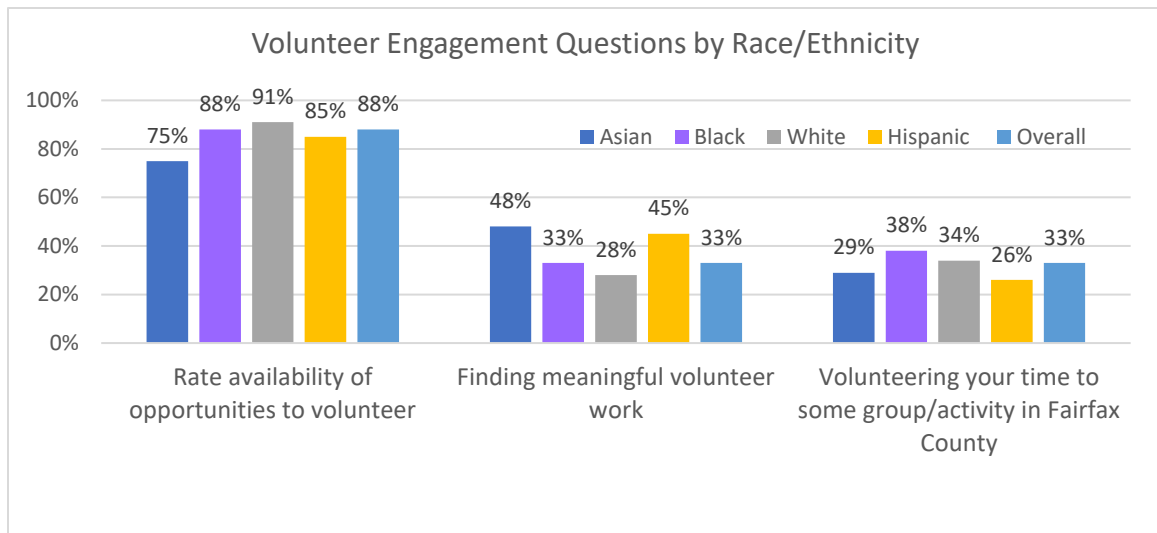


Respondents age 75 and over (90%) indicate voting in local elections more than other age groups.

Female respondents (39%), in comparison to males (30%), report a significantly higher participation in book, dance, game and other social clubs.

Volunteer Engagement: While most survey respondents are aware of volunteer opportunities, less than half find meaningful volunteer work. A lower proportion participate in regular, weekly volunteer activities: 28% of respondents participate, while 67% report never volunteering.

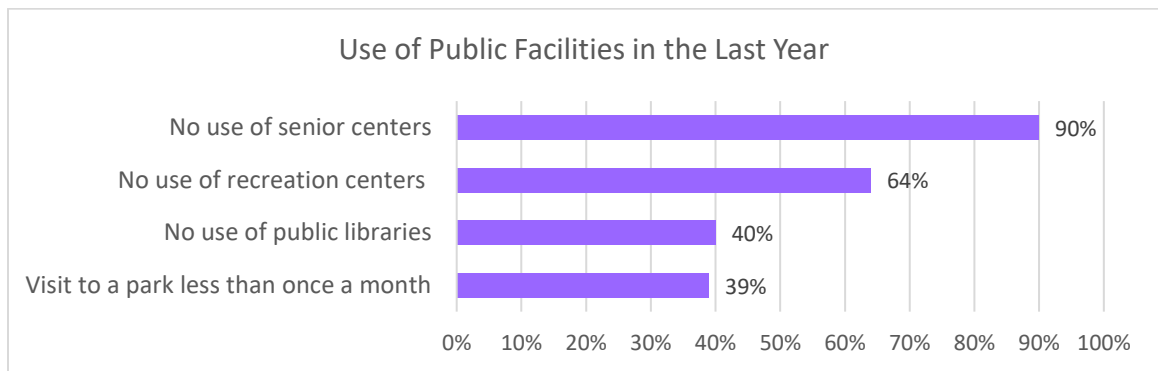
Responses to the three volunteer questions are displayed in the chart below:



Female respondents (36%) indicate greater engagement through volunteering with a group or activity than male respondents (30%). Respondents in age groups 50-54 (35%) as well as male respondents (34%) report having slightly more of a problem finding meaningful volunteer work when compared to other age groups and female respondents, respectively.

Public Facilities. The public facilities, in Fairfax County and the cities of Fairfax and Falls Church, such as libraries, parks and senior centers, are recognized by 86% of respondents with excellent or good ratings for providing opportunities for active living. However, 60% or more report that they do not use senior centers or recreation centers.

🔍 Respondents age 75 and over (30%) report higher use of senior centers and libraries than other age groups. Female respondents (30%) report greater use of public libraries than males (24%). Respondents 50-54 years of age (40%) and male respondents (36%) report visiting a neighborhood park when compared to other age groups and female respondents, respectively.



► *Services for Older Adults and Family Caregivers*

Providing and Receiving Care: A large proportion of respondents, 81%, indicate they do not receive frequent assistance from others and 60% do not provide care to others. However, up to 10% of respondents spend 20 or more hours a week, the equivalent of a part-time job, providing care to children, adults and older adults. Up to one in three additional respondents provide care to others on a regular basis.

Roughly one in four of these caregiving respondents feels at least a minor level of burden by this responsibility. Others report feeling a moderate to major level of physical burden (11%), emotional burden (14%) or financial burden (14%).

Despite feeling burdened, 96% report never attending a caregiver support group.

🔍 At least one-third of Asian respondents provide care to children, adults or older adults; 40% are financially burdened and 37% are physically burdened by providing care for another person compared to the overall of 27% and 24%, respectively.

🔍 More than four in 10 Hispanic respondents provide care to other adults, and 38% are financially burdened by providing care for another person compared to 27% overall.

More respondents than in any other age group, those ages 60-64 (45%) report providing at least one of care to individuals age 60 or older. Female respondents (43%) indicate providing care to individuals age 60 or older more than male respondents (36%).

Respondents ages 50-54 indicate providing at least one hour of care to individuals in both groups, ages 18-59 (42%) and under age 18 (44%).

Higher than other age groups, respondents 50-54 report at least a minor problem in all types of burden with providing care for another person: physical (27%), emotional (37%) and financial (35%). Respondents ages 60-64 tie the 50-54 age group in feeling physically burdened (27%) by providing care to others.

► Long Range Planning

Living and Retiring in Fairfax County and the cities of Fairfax and Falls Church: Most survey respondents rate Fairfax County and the cities of Fairfax and Falls Church favorably as a place to live and 84% have lived in the area at least 10 years. Sixty four percent have lived in the area more than 20 years. Few, however, consider living in the county to be affordable: the cost of living is considered excellent or good by 13% of respondents.

Self-reported income by respondents includes: 23% at less than \$49,999, 27% at \$50,000-\$99,999, and 51% with annual income greater than \$100,000.

- The median household income for residents 55 and older is \$94,358 (ACS).

Although less than half of overall respondents rate Fairfax County and the cities of Fairfax and Falls Church favorably as a place to retire, more than six in 10 indicate they are likely to remain in the county throughout their retirement.

Benchmark Comparison

13% Excellent or good cost of living.

48% Fairfax County area as an excellent or good place to retire.

62% Likely to remain in the Fairfax County area throughout retirement.

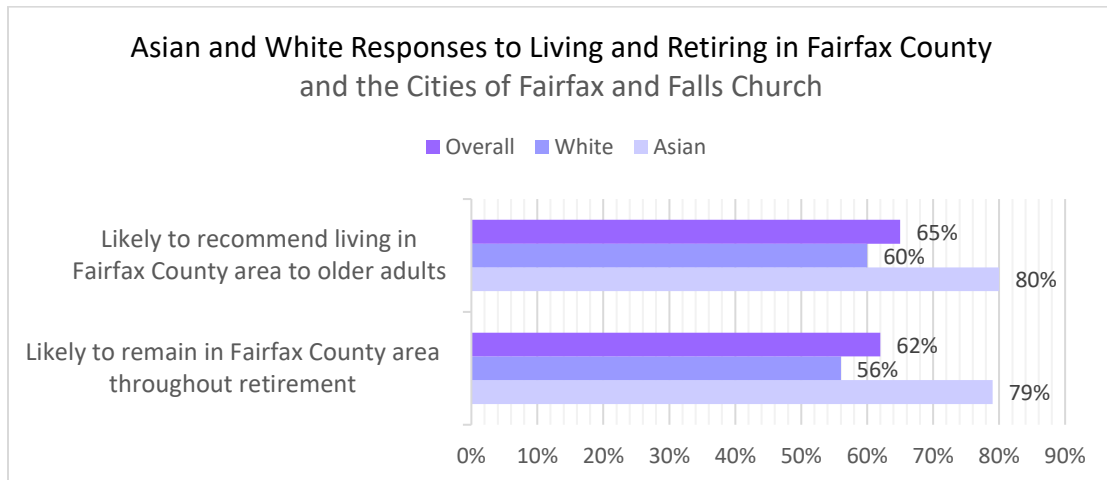
Lower

Asian respondents were most likely to recommend living in Fairfax County and the cities of Fairfax and Falls Church, 80%, compared to 65% overall, and 59% rate the area as a place to retire compared to 48% overall.

Conversely, White respondents were least likely to recommend living in the area. Additionally, only 9% rate the cost of living as being excellent or good (compared to 13% overall).

Among the age groups, respondents ages 50-54 rate Fairfax County and the cities of Falls Church and Fairfax the least favorably, as a place to live and the cost of living. This age group is also the least likely to remain in this area throughout their retirement.

The 75 or over age group rates the two characteristics, place to live and cost of living, the most favorable among the various age groups.



Working in Retirement: While 36% of respondents are fully retired, 60% are working full or part time. Employment opportunities for older adults are rated as excellent or good by 72% of respondents and 81% report that finding work in retirement is not a problem or only a minor problem. Only 3% of respondents are unemployed but looking for paid work.

🔍 62% of Black respondents rate employment opportunities as excellent or good in the area, compared to 72% overall.

🔍 47% of Asian respondents indicate that finding work in retirement is at least a minor problem, compared to 31% overall.

- 51% of Fairfax County adults age 55 and older are employed (ACS).
- 2% of Fairfax County adults age 55 and older who participate in the labor force are unemployed, compared to 3.6% of the general population (ACS 1-year data).

🔍 Respondents ages 60-64 report a higher incidence (38%) of finding work in retirement as at least a minor problem compared to other age groups. More male respondents (35%) indicate finding work in retirement to be at least a minor problem in comparison to female respondents (27%). On the other hand, more male respondents (75%) rate employment opportunities higher than female respondents (70%).

Demographics of Survey Respondents

Demographic data was collected in the categories of age, sex, race, ethnicity, household income and sexual orientation. Generally, the survey captured feedback from a representative sample of respondents who mirror the larger Fairfax County and cities of Fairfax and Falls Church 50+ population. The majority of respondents were White heterosexual females younger than age 65 with an annual income of \$75,000 or more. Detailed demographics are as follows:

Age	50+ Survey Respondents	Fairfax County 50+ Population	Fairfax County Population
50-54 years	21%	23%	7.5%
55-59 years	21%	21%	6.8%
60-64 years	19%	18%	5.8%
65-69 years	13%	14%	4.6%
70-74 years	12%	9%	3.0%
75-79 years	7%	6%	1.9%
80-84 years	5%	4%	1.3%
85-89 years	2%	4%	1.4%

Race/Ethnicity	50+ Survey Respondents	Fairfax County 50+ Population	Fairfax County Population
White/Caucasian	67%	61%	61%
Asian or Pacific Islander	18%	20%	19%
Other	10%	9%	9%
Black, African American	9%	10%	10%
Spanish/Hispanic/Latino	13%	13%	16%

Sex	50+ Survey Respondents	Fairfax County 50+ Population	Fairfax County Population
Female	54%	52%	50%
Male	46%	48%	50%

Household Income	50+ Survey Respondents	Fairfax County 50+ Households	Fairfax County Households*
Less than \$15,000	5%	5%	3%
\$15,000 to \$24,999	6%	3%	7%
\$25,000 to \$49,999	12%	10%	21%
\$50,000 to \$74,999	13%	11%	19%
\$75,000 to \$99,999	14%	11%	14%
\$100,000 or more	51%	60%	37%

*Householders age 45 years and above.

Sexual Orientation	50+ Survey Respondents	Fairfax County 50+ Population*	Fairfax County Population*
Heterosexual	96%	-	-
Lesbian	1%	-	-
Gay	1%	-	-
Bisexual	2%	-	-
*Data is unavailable for Fairfax County 50+ population and overall population.			

The full report and other related materials are available online at www.fairfaxcounty.gov/topics/50-plus-community-survey.