

We need teamwork to help older adults meet their housing needs

Tauhric Brown

STATE OF AGING IN CENTRAL INDIANA | COMMUNITY STORY



Community Stories are contributed by experts, policymakers, and practitioners. We are pleased to feature Tauhric Brown, president and CEO of CICOA Aging & In-Home Solutions as he highlights the latest statistics from the 2021 Community Assessment Survey for Older Adults. As with previous results from this survey, the upcoming release of State of Aging in Central Indiana report will place the results in context of the associated trends revealed by national, state, and local datasets.

Owning a home has been the American Dream for generations. That dream is becoming harder and harder to come by as housing prices have gone through the roof, and the cost of owning and maintaining or renting a home is making it increasingly difficult for older adults living on fixed incomes.

It's an issue that literally keeps me up at night. I've poured over new stats that show we have a housing crisis on our hands, and we're going to have to come together as a community to discuss and address the care and support needs of older adults to make sure they aren't losing the homes that they've worked so hard to own and keep.

CICOA Aging & In-Home Solutions, in partnership with the State's Division of Aging and other Indiana Area Agencies on Aging, commissioned a survey last fall, The Community Assessment Survey for Older Adults (CASOA). In it, we asked adults 60 and older across the state to rate their overall quality of life and community livability topics such as community design, employment and finances, equity and inclusivity, health and wellness, information and assistance and productive activities.

In terms of older resident challenges, Central Indiana residents scored similarly to national benchmarks in 34 areas. In three areas, Hoosiers reported a higher need compared to these benchmarks:

- Maintaining a home.
- Having safe and affordable transportation.
- Building skills for paid or unpaid work.

About the Author

Tauhric Brown is president and CEO of CICOA Aging & In-Home Solutions, a nationally accredited nonprofit agency providing resources and services that older adults, people with disabilities and family caregivers need to maximize their health, independence and quality of life. These include information and assistance, care management, home-delivered and neighborhood meals, transportation, home accessibility modifications, respite care and family caregiver support. To learn more, visit www.cicoa.org.

One of the figures that stands out to me is that 54 percent of the older adults surveyed in Marion County said they had experienced housing needs, slightly higher than the statewide average of 47 percent. It's an issue that exists in every county throughout our state. The issue is multi-faceted:

- We don't have enough available, affordable housing for people 60 and older. Only 39 percent said the availability of affordable, quality housing was good or excellent, which is trending down from the 2013 and 2017 CASOA reports.
- 65 percent said doing heavy or intense housework is problematic.
- 57 percent said maintaining their home is problematic. People who have lived in their homes for many years are finding it harder to keep up with simple maintenance they used to do themselves—things like getting appliances fixed or replaced when they wear out or even changing the furnace filter. This is trending down and falls below national benchmarks.
- 45 percent said they have difficulty maintaining their yards.
- 31 percent said finding housing to suit their needs is problematic. This also is a worsening trend since 2013 and 2017.
- 31 percent said they have difficulty having enough money to pay property taxes.

Housing Costs and Availability



39% say availability of quality, affordable housing is “good or excellent.”



31% say finding housing to suit their needs is problematic.



31% say percent said they have difficulty having enough money to pay property taxes.

Home Maintenance



65% said doing heavy or intense housework is problematic.



45% said they have difficulty maintaining their yards.



57% said maintaining their home is problematic.

Home safety becomes an issue as we age. That's why CICOA has a Safe at Home program to improve home accessibility and reduce the likelihood of falls. Last year CICOA helped launch the INdependence at Home Network, a network of volunteers who install grab bars, wheelchair ramps and other things to help low-income seniors safely age in place. Coalition members include CICOA, Servants at Work, Inc., NeighborLink Indianapolis, Greater Indy Habitat for Humanity, Shepherd's Center of Hamilton County, Easterseals Crossroads, Crooked Creek Community Development Corporation, and Koreman, LLC.

While CICOA would love nothing more than to fix these challenges, we recognize they are bigger than any one organization alone. As a convener, CICOA often calls people to join forces and work together to help at-risk seniors and people with disabilities remain safe, healthy and independent at home.

Seniors love their communities across Central Indiana. That's one of the positives of this survey. The majority say they want to remain in their communities throughout retirement, and most gave high marks to their quality of life. I'm passionate about making sure that they get their wish and can remain living independently at home in safe, affordable housing that meets their needs.

Sure, we have our work cut out for us, but I'm confident we can find solutions. If you want to get involved or if you have ideas, send me a note at <https://cicoa.org/casoa-contact/>. If you want to read more about The Community Assessment Survey for Older Adults, you can find it here: <https://cicoa.org/news-events/research/casoa/>.