

FOR THE EXCLUSIVE USE OF IBRADLEY@BIZJOURNALS.COM

From the Nashville Business Journal:

<https://www.bizjournals.com/nashville/news/2024/02/01/senior-housing-nonprofits-funding-aging-at-home.html>

SUBSCRIBER CONTENT:

Residential Real Estate

Rising cost of living, depleted funds create 'perfect storm' for Nashville seniors



Sallie Hussey is the CEO of FiftyForward.

FIFTYFORWARD



By [Ian Bradley](#) – Reporter, Nashville Business Journal
Feb 1, 2024



Many plans Nashville's aging population had for their silver years are being upended by the city's growing cost of living. Those Nashvillians hoping to age at home aren't seeing their dollars spread as far as they need, and the problem shows no signs of improving.

The number of cost-burdened households in America has reached a record high – 22.4 million families, according to the Joint Center for Housing Studies of Harvard University – and Nashville is no exception. The city's elderly residents, many of whom live on a fixed income are particularly impacted.

“From the perspective of the increased cost of rental properties, lots of seniors are on a fixed income, and nonprofits and others are trying to figure out how to subsidize that, and a lot of seniors, like most Americans, aren't able to put money away to be able to live in these high-cost markets,” Marshall Crawford, president and CEO of nonprofit The Housing Fund said. “They're being forced to live, like everyone else, outside the city, but they lack proper transportation and things like that. Nonprofits don't have enough resources to be able to address all the seniors [needs] around those particular issues, and that's just for the renters.”

Those seniors who own their homes face a raft of other challenges, [namely maintenance](#) and increasing property taxes.

Nashville has over 92,000 older residents, according to the Metropolitan Social Services 2022 Community Needs Evaluation, and more than half of those seniors who rent pay more than one-third of their income on housing – making them cost-burdened.

The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development defines “cost-burdened” as paying more than 30% of one's income on housing, which can lead to difficulty paying for necessities such as food, clothing, transportation and medical care.

“There's not enough dedicated resources. Just think about the Barnes Fund, how many organizations can actually apply? How many houses can they take care of or provide support to?” Crawford said. “There aren't enough nonprofits that are serving the senior population, and there aren't enough resources to entice others to play in that space.”

Since it was founded a decade ago, the Barnes Fund - Nashville's housing trust fund - has awarded nearly \$110 million to 33 nonprofits, which has seen the creation of 3,865 new rental homes, 395 new for-sale homes and the rehabilitation of 460 owner-occupied homes.

Those units are making a difference, but the city needs a lot more, and soon. Metro's 2021 Affordable Housing Task Force reported the city needs to add 18,000 affordable homes by 2030.

Beyond the front door

On a fixed income, a little help can a big difference helping seniors stay in the city – and its not just residents living below the poverty line at risk. But what help is available is getting stretched thin.

“We’ve seen a gigantic increase in need and expense, but a decrease in revenue, especially around our Meals on Wheels program, FiftyForward Fresh,” Sallie Hussey, CEO of FiftyForward, a senior-focused nonprofit organization said. “The overarching challenge for us and other organizations is the need is only increasing. We’ve had to be creative, not just about food but about addressing multiple issues facing older adults across Middle Tennessee. Twenty-five percent of the state will be over the age of 60 in a few years.”

In addition to its food delivery service, FiftyForward offers a range of supportive care services including home care management, a conservatorship program and adult day services at seven facilities throughout the Middle Tennessee area.

The organization's services aren't free, but they are cheaper than for-profit options.

FiftyForward's Friends Adult Day program costs \$100 a day, whereas the annual median cost of in-home care is \$57,200, or about \$156 per day.

Hussey said the current bottleneck of demands and costs was predictable, and something she and her colleagues have been preparing for by reducing costs where they can, but even so, certain sources of funding have dried up.

“We just don't have support and FiftyForward gets very little state funds. Five or six years ago accredited senior centers would get \$50,000 to help provide programs and services to older adults. That money is gone,” Hussey said. “We can help with that but

there are very few funds to help older adults and family members unless you're below the poverty line or on TennCare or Medicaid. Older adults find themselves fending for themselves, and certainly in terms of financial support, you have to really be at rock bottom to get any support if you want to age at home."

C.J. Sentell, CEO of The Nashville Food Project, a FiftyForward partner organization, said nonprofits, especially senior-focused ones, are in the midst of a "perfect storm."

"Senior programs in particular have seen a marked increase in demand and a drop in revenue, not only is individual philanthropic revenue down, but the demand is going up as the federal pandemic relief programs are ending people are losing access to SNAP and EBT and seniors are a big part of that," Sentell said. "At the same time food costs are going up."

West End Home Foundation is a local foundation that focuses exclusively on providing grants to senior-focused organizations, including FiftyForward. Executive Director Dianne Oliver said West End has seen an increased amount of funding requests from organizations they've funded for years, and requests from newer groups.

"One of the frustrations is that public funding is not keeping pace with increased demand. The Older Americans Act is up for reauthorization this year and the price tag I've seen attached to it is level funding," Oliver said. "There's no way we'll be able to meet the increased through the federal dollars that are coming through. State funding is not increasing, and private dollars are a very small part of the equation."

Housing is one of the organization's top funding priorities, alongside food, nutrition and health care. Oliver said housing is more and more becoming the dominant funding focus but without more funding coming through, more people are going to be left waiting for help.

"I think the tipping point has already happened. All the agencies we support have waiting lists," Oliver said. "They can't serve everybody, and that's just the reality."