

CONTEXT

In 1965, Congress passed the Older Americans Act (OAA) which created structures at the federal, state, and local levels to administer programs for older adults. Area Agencies on Aging (AAA) are designated by the State of Oregon to carry out OAA, Oregon Project Independence (OPI), and other mandated services at the local level. AAAs are responsible for analyzing the needs of seniors and assessing the existing services and implementing new services where needed in the region they serve. Region 9's AAA is a Type A agency, which administers Oregon Project Independence and Older Americans Act programs. Through the Area Agency on Aging, the State of Oregon contracts for services to seniors and people with disabilities.

Region 9 Area Agency on Aging (Region 9 AAA) provides services within Hood River, Wasco, Sherman, Gilliam, and Wheeler counties, which comprise the Planning and Service Area (PSA) for the region. MCCOG, an ORS 190 agency established in 1979, is the governing entity for Region 9 AAA. The boundaries of MCCOG coincide with those of Region 9 AAA, facilitating coordination with local governments in this large rural and frontier region, and expediting service delivery.

The five counties served by Region 9 AAA (Hood River, Wasco, Sherman, Gilliam, and Wheeler) have a combined area of approximately 6,796 square miles (Oregon Blue Book). According to the Population Research Center at Portland State University, the total population of the region is estimated to be 55,825 as of April 2016. People age 65 and older ($n = 10,286$) constitute 18.4% of the Region 9 population, but 32.5% of the population is 55 and older ($n = 18,139$), indicating an immediate need to plan for providing services for a growing population of elders.

Wasco County is designated "urban," with 33% of its population considered "rural." But Hood River County is designated "rural," with 52% of its population considered "rural" (ACS). Three counties, Sherman, Gilliam, and Wheeler, are considered "frontier." Population estimates for these three frontier counties show that by 2030, more than one-third of their total populations will be age 65 or older. (POP) If trends in State funding for AAA programs does not increase, the burden of support will fall hardest on these counties.

On the brighter side, while these counties have fewer and smaller population centers than Wasco and Hood River counties, they so have the benefit of families that have lived in the region for generations; these are people who know each other personally and watch out for each other. One of our volunteers, who was raised in the "frontier" region and is a retired Adults and People with Disabilities (APD) caseworker, now does outreach in these counties. She is familiar with the well-established patterns of community support through personal relationships, and religious and civic groups. The population of older adults is the most at-risk group in "frontier" counties, since they may be living alone and away from population centers. These vulnerable elders may be the most likely to require services of both the AAA and APD.

AAA SERVICES

Some of Region 9 AAA services are contracted with local service providers, including 12 Senior Nutrition Programs in the five-county area. Other programs and services provided by our AAA through staff and volunteers include: helping people remain in their homes (Oregon Project Independence, OPI), information and referral (Aging and Disability Resource Center, ADRC), health and wellness (Living Well with Chronic Conditions, Powerful Tools for Caregivers, Wisdom Warriors, Strong Women, Walk with Ease and Tai Chi), outreach (Friendly Visitor Program), advocacy (Senior Advisory Council, SAC), Area Plan administration, help with Medicare questions (Senior Health Insurance Benefits Assistance program, SHIBA), Medicare Fraud investigations (Senior Medicare Patrol), Elder Abuse Awareness, tax counseling, and the DHS Money Management program. Legal services and elder abuse investigations are available through APD.

POPULATION PROFILE

The five counties served by Region 9 AAA (Hood River, Wasco, Sherman, Gilliam, and Wheeler) have a combined area of approximately 6,796 square miles (Oregon Blue Book). According to the Population Research Center at Portland State University, the total population of the region is estimated to be 55,825 as of April 2016. People age 65 and older ($n = 10,286$) constitute 18.4% of the Region 9 population, but 32.5% of the population is 55 and older ($n = 18,139$), indicating an immediate need to plan for providing services for a growing population of elders. For

example, Hood River County saw an influx of “middle aged migrants who likely moved into the county due to economic opportunities” (HR POP report p. 13) who will eventually need aging services. The five counties vary in the proportion of those aged 65 and older. Hood River County has the lowest percentage at 14.5%, followed by Wasco County at 20.3%, Sherman County at 24.9%, Gilliam County at 26.7%, and Wheeler County at 31.9%. These percentages are, except for Hood River County, much higher than the 16.4% average for all of Oregon (POP). Population forecasts for 2030 show an increase in the 65+ age group in all five counties. Even in Hood River County, the population 65 and older is expected to grow from 14% in 2016 to 21% in 2030; the 60+ population will be 28%. The estimates for age 65 and older in 2030 are: Wasco County 24%, Sherman County 37%, Wheeler County 39%, and Gilliam County 41% (POP).

Sherman, Wheeler and Gilliam counties have among the lowest population densities in the state at 2.1, 0.8 and 1.6 residents per square mile respectively (Quick Facts). The Native American population of Region 9 for the most part resides in Celilo Village and on the Warm Springs Reservation, although tribal members and their families live throughout the PSA. Celilo Village is an unincorporated town 13 miles east of The Dalles in Wasco County that includes members primarily of the Yakama, Warm Springs, Umatilla, and Nez Perce tribes. The Warm Springs Confederated Tribes is partly located in southern Wasco County on the 640,000-acre Warm Springs Reservation. The confederation includes three tribes: The Warm Springs, Wasco, and Paiute tribes. The Warm Springs Tribe is made up of the Upper Deschutes (Tygh), Lower Deschutes (Wyam), Tenino, and John Day (Dock-spus) bands. The Wasco Tribe is made up of The Dalles (Ki-gal-twal-la) and Dog River bands. Several Paiute bands from southeastern Oregon were removed to the Warm Springs Reservation in 1869 (CRITFIC). Persons aged 65 or older who live alone are another group of concerns to the AAA. Those who live in rural areas are more vulnerable, partly because they live far from services. Whether they live in town or in the country, living alone can make a person more at risk for becoming isolated, and susceptible to nutritional, social, and medical deficiencies (AARP).

Currently, more than 6,000 adults with a disability live in the five-county area (ACS). As the aging population grows in number, we will see more older adults living with a disability. Region 9 AAA will work with Eastern Oregon Center for Independent Living (EOCIL), which has offices in The Dalles and Pendleton, to serve those living with a variety of disabilities. According to demographic study data provided by DHS, in our PSA there are 12,049 total persons aged 60 and over, 5,841 (48%) of whom live in rural or frontier areas in Region 9’s five-county PSA. Of those, 931 live in poverty. The largest minority group is Hispanic, with 557 persons aged 60 and over, mostly living in Wasco and Hood River Counties. Of those, 105 live in poverty. There are 170 Native Americans aged 60 and over, mostly living in Wasco County, with 38 of them living in poverty. Other minorities age 60 or over in the PSA include Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, Asian, African American, and those who identified as being from two or more races; this group numbered 266, with 22 persons living in poverty. There are 7,123 adults over the age of 60 who live with a disability; 3,046 who live alone; and 411 with limited English proficiency.

Region 9 Population Profile (ACS 5-year estimates, 2010-2014)

Characteristics	Region 9 AAA	Wasco County	Hood River County	Gilliam County	Sherman County	Wheeler County
Total population	52,780	25,281	22,427	1,915	1,865	1,292
Age 60+	12,049	6,208	4,220	538	563	520
Age 60+ in poverty	931	427	320	157	75	49
Hispanic, 60+	557	177	363	9	2	6
Hispanic, 60+, in poverty	105	34	0	0	8	0
Native American, 60+	170	146	0	10	11	3
Native American, 60+ in poverty	38	30	0	0	8	0

Native American Tribes		Warm Springs, Yakama	Warm Springs			
Other minority, 60+) Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, Asian, African American, 2 + races)	266	114	132	13	7	0
Other minority, 60+, in poverty	22	13	8	0	1	0
60+ with disability	7,123	3,950	2,204	361	338	270
60+ living alone	3,046	1,527	1,75	153	145	146
60+ limited English proficiency (LEP)	411	137	271	3	0	0
Rural or frontier, 60+	5,841	0	4,220	538	563	520

Target Population

The core mission of Region 9 AAA is to assist the most vulnerable seniors. We are mandated by the Older Americans Act to target resources to seniors that:

- Are isolated from family, friends or community and/or living alone; increasingly this group includes seniors who are alone all day as the family or caregivers may be working multiple jobs.
- Have financial issues (inability to pay for health care, food, housing, utilities) and include those who do not own their own home or are in female headed households.
- Are of an ethnic minority including Hispanics, Native Americans, limited English speakers, as well as Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) seniors.
- Are 85 years and older.
- Are in poor physical or mental health (depression, cognitive problems including Alzheimer's disease or dementias, or emotional problems).
- Require protection from abuse, fraud and physical harm.

As noted earlier, the entire population of the Region 9 AAA is rural-or frontier-based, with many elders living alone by choice or necessity. We know that social isolation can be detrimental to health, and that social participation, including contact with family and friends, faith-based activities, caring for a pet, and participating in volunteer work can contribute to a healthy outlook and positive attitude (AARP). Our programs encourage social contact and participation, and we will pay especial attention to our most remotely dwelling elders. Our seniors who live in rural and frontier areas are most at risk of losing their independence and their ability to remain in their homes. OPI is a primary service in helping seniors to remain and age at home. We are in the process of expanding our information, education, referral and advocacy efforts. Our OPI Coordinator helps seniors aged 60 and over, as well as younger persons with a diagnosis of certain dementias, solve barriers to staying in their homes. We continue to build relationships in the Hispanic/Latino community, with a current focus on Hood River County, related to senior services. Initial discussions have identified the following areas of need: development of a nutrition program, and vocational training of young Hispanics for entry level health care positions (e.g. caregivers). Developing programs that incorporate the aging Hispanic community is an essential role the AAA will facilitate with partners in Hood River County. Region 9 AAA has made progress in overcoming some of the challenges to developing a network within our minority communities. We have established relationships with agencies that serve low-income minority individuals, especially Hispanics. Both One Community Health and the Next Door's Nuestra Comunidad Sana (a

non-profit organization promoting the physical and mental health and well-being of the Hispanic communities of the Mid-Columbia) have been introduced to Region 9 AAA services to create awareness and encourage referrals. The growing Hispanic population has yet to dramatically impact senior service providers, but this will be an issue in the future. Increased outreach has been directed towards Native Americans in the region over the past year, and efforts to reach this target group will continue. AAA staff attended the annual Native Caring Conference to promote our services. Our current Care Coordinator is Native American, which may facilitate contact with the native populations at Celilo Village and Warm Springs that have been difficult to engage up to this point. Region 9 AAA also serves people living with disabilities aged 18 and older, mainly through information and referral and the senior nutrition program, including home delivered meals. We also refer individuals with specific questions to Eastern Oregon Center for Independent Living (EOCIL), which maintains an office in The Dalles to serve Hood River, Wasco, and Sherman counties. An EOCIL office in Pendleton serves Wheeler and Gilliam counties. The director of the EOCIL office in The Dalles is a member of the AAA Senior Advisory Council.