

Scenario 19: Aging, Social Isolation, and Food Insecurity

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### **Case Study Narrative**

Janie is a 68-year-old woman who lives alone at Denney Towers in downtown Athens. She worked full-time as a certified nursing assistant for much of her adult life, but she is now retired. She receives a small Social Security check, but much of her work was for private families and not all of her work was reported by her employers. After paying for rent and medications, she has little money left over for groceries (or anything else) each month. Janie is not eating consistently. She would like to stay in her own apartment as she gets older.

### **Health Issue**

#### *Aging*

Aging adults are the fastest growing population in America (Beatrice Remy et al., 2024). While the definition of aging is debated among scientists, it is marked by certain psychological and biological hallmarks (Mendoza-Núñez & Mendoza-Soto, 2024). These hallmarks include a decline in function, muscle and bone mass, and adaptive responses to stimuli (Mendoza-Núñez & Mendoza-Soto, 2024). Additionally, older adults have an increased susceptibility to disease and increased probability of death (Mendoza-Núñez & Mendoza-Soto, 2024). Some benefits come with aging. Aging adults may experience psychosocial gains like increased knowledge and more leisure time (Mendoza-Núñez & Mendoza-Soto, 2024). However, the death of aging peers may result in solitude for many older adults. Solitude is positively associated with loneliness, lower quality of life, and lower mental well-being (Oliveira et al., 2025). Solitude is positively associated with loneliness, lower quality of life, and lower mental well-being (Oliveira et al., 2025). Contrastingly, solitude may offer time for reflection and an opportunity to recharge

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Additionally, cultural attitude toward aging can impact how older adults are viewed and treated. Older adults are underrepresented in media and often portrayed as clueless, racist, inappropriate toward children (Intrieri & Kurth, 2018). These misrepresentations can contribute to negative attitudes and discrimination toward older adults.

Another factor with aging is that stigmatization and prejudice may negatively impact aging adults (Mendoza-Núñez & Mendoza-Soto, 2024). Research has found that discrimination based on age is associated with worse mental well-being (Mendoza-Núñez & Mendoza-Soto, 2024). Discrimination against older adults is often termed agism and is common for Americans with 80% of older adults reporting to have experienced it (Bernstein et al., 2022). Hostile agism is also associated with worse memory and lower self-esteem for older adults (Bernstein et al., 2022). Media coverage during the COVID-19 pandemic may have increased certain types of agism (Bernstein et al., 2022). One sample of 18,000 tweets was found to contain 25% agist content (Bernstein et al., 2022). Furthermore, there is limited gerontology training in medical school, which could influence ageism in healthcare (Intrieri & Kurth, 2018).

### *Food Insecurity*

In 2022, about seven million older adults in the United States experienced food insecurity (Living, 2023). Food insecurity is the condition of having limited access to nutritious foods due to a lack of financial resources or other barriers. Food-insecurity rates tend to be higher among older adults who are low income, less educated, renters, residing in the south, living alone, or living with a disability (Leung & Wolfson, 2021). Food insecurity is a critical health issue for older adults and disproportionately affects those who live alone, have chronic health concerns,

and have fixed incomes (Leung & Wolfson, 2021). A core component of experiencing food insecurity is an overall disruption in normal eating patterns which can lead to eating inexpensive, less nutritious foods, eating less than one should, and skipping meals. Older adults who are experiencing food insecurity often experience many negative mental and physical health conditions and outcomes. There is a direct association between poor health and food insecurity in older adults. The common morbidities associated with food insecurity include diabetes, hypertension, congestive heart failure, gum disease, high blood pressure, and high cholesterol (Tucher et al., 2021). Older adults with food insecurity consume lower levels of key nutrients, like protein, vitamins A and C, magnesium, calcium, and iron which can lead to malnutrition (Leung & Wolfson, 2021).

Food insecurity is a nutritional state that influences diet and physical health, but it also has significant consequences for one's psychological wellbeing. Worsened depressive symptoms, chronic stress, and lower cognitive function are also associated with experiencing food insecurity (Leung & Wolfson, 2021).

Food insecurity directly affects other poor outcomes in older adults. Older adults who are experiencing food insecurity often resort to underusing medication, due to financial constraints. If an older adult experiences food insecurity, they commonly face the choice between buying food or paying for their necessary medications (Pooler et al., 2019). Food insecurity also significantly increases the risk for falls, which are the leading cause of fatal and nonfatal injuries in adults (Leung & Wolfson, 2021). Older adults experiencing food insecurity may have poor oral health. Poor oral health disproportionately affects low-income older adults, for whom food insecurity and poor mental health may affect dental health (Lee et al., 2024). Common oral

health concerns in aging populations experiencing food insecurity are untreated decay, gum disease, and dental caries (Lee et al., 2024).

### *Housing*

Since the 1970s, fewer aging adults have been moving out of their houses (Jones et al., 2024). Approximately 88% of those aged 65 and older prefer to live in their own homes, as aging at home provides various benefits such as increased independence and the comfort of a familiar environment. However, adults in long term care facilities (LTCF) may experience adverse health outcomes such as abuse, medication errors, and pressure ulcers (Beatrice Remy et al., 2024). This comfort and safety can present many issues for older adults facing economic challenges and/or disabilities (Joint Center for Housing Studies, 2023). Specifically, those of low income may struggle with the affordability of living in their own homes, the quality and accessibility of their home, and neighborhood conditions (Molinsky, 2022). Many studies have shown that being low-income and having poor quality housing is linked to poor health outcomes (Kantz et al., 2024).

In 2021, nearly 11.2 million older adults spent more than 30% of their household income on housing costs (Joint Center for Housing Studies, 2023). Housing costs includes property taxes, utilities, and insurance fees, all of which can become expensive and difficult for older adults to pay (Joint Center for Housing Studies, 2023). Limited affordability of housing results in seniors reducing their spending on food and medical care expenses (Molinsky, 2022). Since older adults of low-income are more likely to have multiple chronic conditions and impairments, it is crucial for individuals to have a sufficient budget for their health and wellbeing (Stone, 2018). Therefore, unaffordable housing decreases the health and quality of life for adults facing income challenges who wish to live in a house that they own.

It is also important to note that the quality of a home impacts the health of low-income older adults (Kantz et al., 2024). There are many factors to consider, including heating and cooling, cleanliness, state of repair, and accessibility. (Brimblecombe et al., 2024; Molinsky, 2022). Falls are a crucial predictor of hospitalization and nursing home placement and are considered to be connected with the condition of a home (Stone, 2018). These factors are also vital to the mental health of older adults. Houses that are cold, have holes and cracks, and are cluttered are associated with poor mental health (Brimblecombe et al., 2024; Kantz et al., 2024). It is important that homes have wide spaces for wheelchairs so that individuals can navigate around their space and leave their home (Molinsky, 2022). Accessibility is critical because it can prevent social isolation and stress (Brimblecombe et al., 2024). For lower income older adults, such installations may not be feasible, which leads to diminished mental and physical health (Stone, 2018).

Furthermore, many older adults encounter complications with their neighborhood conditions, such as a lack of transportation, safe streets, and opportunities for social engagement (Molinsky, 2022). In an American Housing Survey, it was found that over half of older adults reported inaccessible and insufficient public transportation in their neighborhood, which increases isolation, poor health, and consequently, mortality (Joint Center for Housing Studies, 2023). Additionally, high-stress living environments, like poor neighborhood conditions, can exacerbate poor wellbeing in low income older adults (Kantz et al., 2024). With a low sense of perceived neighborhood safety and community belonging, this can lead to depression in older adults of low income, which in turn contributes to poor health outcomes (Gonyea et al., 2018).

*Social Isolation*

Social isolation is prevalent in older adults and is associated with more morbidity and mortality than many other risk factors of old age (Freedman & Nicolle, 2020). Social isolation is commonly defined as having low quantity and quality contact with others (Freedman & Nicolle, 2020). It is objective and can be measured by observing an individual's social network. However, loneliness is a feeling of isolation regardless of an individual's social network (Freedman & Nicolle, 2020). Loneliness is a counterpart to social isolation. Addressing both social isolation and loneliness is essential to promote the health and well-being of older adults.

For older adults, the risk of social isolation increases due to life changes such as the loss of a loved one, reduced mobility, chronic illness, and difficulty accessing transportation (Gerlach et al., 2024). A national poll conducted in 2023 reported that 37% of older US adults aged 50-80 experienced loneliness and 34% felt socially isolated (Gerlach et al., 2024). Loneliness affected women more than men and was common among those who were unemployed, lived alone, and those with poor physical and mental health (Gerlach et al., 2024). The lack of social interactions and low levels of engagement contribute to isolation and have been identified as significant predictors of loneliness (Holt-Lunstad, 2021). Strong social connections serve as protective factors, enhancing overall well-being and reducing health risks associated with isolation. Lack of access to transportation and a limited income severely limits an older adult's ability to engage in social activities, access services, and maintain social connections, increasing the risk of isolation (Gerlach et al., 2024).

Isolation significantly increases the risk of mental and behavioral health issues, including depression, anxiety, and addiction (Holt-Lunstad, 2021). It is also associated with a higher likelihood of cognitive decline, including mild cognitive impairment, dementia, and Alzheimer's



disease (Holt-Lunstad, 2021). Social isolation and loneliness have been linked to various forms of morbidity as they increase the risk for heart attack and stroke as well as type two diabetes (Holt-Lunstad, 2021). Social isolation among older adults has been associated with an estimated 6.7 billion in annual Medicare spending due to the higher rates of hospitalizations among this group (Holt-Lunstad, 2021). Loneliness and social isolation are shown to be associated with an increased risk of mortality at 26% and 29% respectively (Freedman & Nicolle, 2020). The risk of developing dementia for those experiencing high levels of loneliness was 1.58 times greater than for those with a social network (Freedman & Nicolle, 2020). This increased mortality risk can be compared to smoking 15 cigarettes a day and having an alcohol use disorder (Freedman & Nicolle, 2020). In addition, the health risks of loneliness surpassed those associated with obesity.

Preventing social isolation in older adults requires community support, technology, and policy changes. Senior programs and group activities could help older adults stay socially engaged and feel a sense of belonging. Technology also plays a growing role, with telehealth and virtual social groups making it easier to stay connected. Digital literacy training could help older adults better navigate online spaces. Improving public transportation, finding funding for senior housing with the necessary services, and raising awareness about the impact of isolation are all possible strategies. Mitigating this issue requires a collective effort from families, communities, and policymakers to ensure older adults stay well-connected and supported.

## **Impact of Culture**

### *Economic*

A pressing cultural issue presented in this case study is economic stability. Economic stability is crucial for older adults, impacting their daily living and overall well-being. As people age, their spending patterns shift, with increased expenses in areas like housing and healthcare, while spending on clothing and transportation tends to decrease (Bureau Of Labor Statistics, 2016). It is also important to note that at least one in ten older adults are living in poverty in the United States (Thornton & Bowers, 2024). Increased spending on important needs coupled with economic instability presents a challenge to meeting basic needs, therefore making it difficult to live healthy (Dobarrio-Sanz et al., 2023). Research finds that financial instability affects all aspects of life, ultimately diminishing the well-being of those older adults mentally and physically (Dobarrio-Sanz et al., 2023).

Economic stability influences various social determinants of health for older adults. A major concern for aging adults is the cost of living, specifically associated with Social Security and Medicare. Despite these benefits, older adults often spend more than two thousand dollars per year for out-of-pocket costs in healthcare expenses (Thornton & Bowers, 2024). This financial strain makes it difficult to live comfortably and affordably. Many older adults prefer to age in place, requiring in-home long term services and supports (LTSS), which is considered to be one of the most significant costs for older adults (National Council on Aging, 2024). For those facing economic challenges, these essential services may be financially out of reach.

Economic stability for older adults is also closely linked to their employment and retirement status. It has been estimated that those 65 and older and expected to live another twenty years, therefore requiring money for LTSS, housing, groceries, and other expenses (National Council

on Aging, 2020). In 2023, older adults made up 6.7% of the workforce, with 11.2 million Americans working or seeking work (Thornton & Bowers, 2024). However, around 40% of older adults leave the workforce earlier than expected due to job loss, age discrimination, and changes in health status (Thornton & Bowers, 2024). Consequently, this creates a barrier to continued income amidst rising costs of living (American Psychological Association).

Overall, economic stability is directly impacted by older adults' financial resources and health outcomes. The ability to save for retirement and maintain a stable income is essential for economic stability. However, financial disparities and lack of access to resources can worsen or prolong economic challenges. The combination of high healthcare expenditures with rising costs of housing and food further strains financial stability, consequently impacting the health and well-being of older adults.

Another important cultural aspect to consider with regards to economics is the impact of social security. One in five Americans currently receive Social Security benefits (Social Security Administration, 2019). Social security is a government organization that provides financial assistance for Americans (Social Security Administration, 2019). Americans aged 65 or older, people receiving disability benefits, or people in end-stage renal disease qualify for health insurance called Medicare (Social Security Administration, 2019). One Social Security benefit is retirement, which offers monthly payments based on lifetime earnings for those older than 62 and who have worked and paid social security taxes for more than 10 years (Social Security Administration, 2019). This benefit is not designed to replace monthly income, only a fraction of it (Social Security Administration, 2019). It is recommended that those receiving retirement benefits have alternative ways to pay expenses (Social Security Administration, 2019). Social Security income (SSI) is another benefit that provides monthly income based on reported income

(Social Security Administration, 2019). Older adults tend to underestimate their social security income, but predictions become more accurate with increased personal information like social security statements (Seiter & Slavov, 2025). To be eligible for SSI, one must be older than 62, disabled, or blind, and have little to no income or resources (Social Security Administration, 2019).

Research indicates discrepancies between states when it comes to Social Security decisions (Woehl, 2015). Disability application decisions made to the SSA system have varied rates of acceptance. Federal data shows that decision appeals increase the likelihood of award probability from 46% to 73%, which demonstrates inconsistencies within the system (Woehl, 2015). Injuries or diseases that disable older adults have may not be covered by Social Security because of these discrepancies. This presents a threat to overall health and financial stability.

Finally, another cultural impact observed within economics is the occurrence of food deserts. Food deserts are regions where people have limited access to healthful and affordable food. Food deserts are disproportionately concentrated in low-income and historically marginalized areas throughout the United States. In food deserts, healthy foods like fresh produce, whole grains, dairy, beans, meat, and fish are often expensive or unobtainable. Food deserts are directly associated with food insecurity (Leung & Wolfson, 2021). Therefore, living in a food desert puts people at risk of health problems, both physical and mental, associated with food insecurity. Low-income older adults living in food deserts have to travel farther distances in order to shop at a grocery store that sells nutritious foods (Tucher et al., 2021).

Older adults living in a food desert face many daily challenges. The limited access to nutritious foods leads them to heavily rely on convenience stores and fast food, due to the high cost and overall accessibility of fresh produce and other healthy groceries (Leung & Wolfson,

2021). Older adults also face transportation barriers, that may make accessing grocery stores difficult due to the lack of personal vehicles, inadequate public transit, or driving status.

Traveling to grocery stores would subject older adults to depend on family, neighbors, or community programs (Leung & Wolfson, 2021). Older adults may also experience mobility issues that make grocery shopping difficult, like carrying heavy bags or transporting them back to their home (Leung & Wolfson, 2021).

There are major systemic barriers affecting the lives and well-being of older adults living in food deserts. The lack of grocery stores in low-income environments is a policy issue. Grocery store chains choose to open locations in urban and wealthier neighborhoods due to the guarantee of profit (Serrat-Graboleda et al., 2021). There may be substantial gaps in assistance programs that inhibit older adults from receiving proper nutrition. For example, meal delivery services may have long waitlists or limited availability. Similarly, SNAP benefits may be insufficient for a full month's worth of healthy groceries, continuing the cycle of dependence on unhealthy, non-nutritious foods.

### *Social*

With regards to aging, community and social connection can serve as a cultural protection, and lack thereof can risk worsening this health issue. Previously, Eastern cultures held elders much higher in respect than Western cultures, such as that of the United States. Today, this trend does not prevail. Aging populations in both Eastern and Western cultures are experiencing negative treatment from younger generations (North & Fiske, 2015). This shift in attitudes towards aging adults is a leading aspect in the lack of community connection seen between these adults and younger generations. Another aspect contributing to reduced community and social connection among aging adults is the lasting impact of the COVID-19

pandemic. During the pandemic, researchers describe how a paradox of risk reduction was created. In an effort to reduce risk, aging adults were advised to avoid all forms of in-person, social interactions. In doing so, greater risk was created, as social interactions are also a major aspect of preserving health. After the pandemic, aging adults report that many of their social ties were severed, so a long-term consequence was remaining socially isolated (MacLeod et al., 2021). Ultimately, now more than ever, aging adults are lacking connection to their communities.

This cultural issue is highly important. When aging adults are strongly connected to their community, they offer invaluable expertise and service that younger generations are unable to offer (Merriam & Kee, 2014). On the contrary, aging adults can continue to learn from younger generations to increase connection. Researchers found that when aging adults learn new skills, such as using self-checkout at the grocery store or operating Skype, they feel much more socially satisfied. Furthermore, younger generations increase their positive perceptions on these generations due to the seniors adaptation to modern norms (Merriam & Kee, 2014). Lastly, aging adults need more opportunities for one-on-one connection with young individuals. In a study done to research the impact of a mentorship program that pairs a senior with a nursing student, researchers found that both seniors and students improved their perceptions of the other age demographic. (Kirk et al., 2023). The most significant finding was that 97% of participating aging adults reported increased social satisfaction due to the mentoring experience. In sum, the benefits of cultural engagement of aging adults extend much further than the aging adults themselves. All members of a community are positively impacted when aging adults play an active role.

Another socio-cultural issue faced by seniors is the overall stigma surrounding aging and its related issues. One way in which stigma affects aging adults is how it surrounds mental health. Stigma is commonly identified as a key reason why older adults are particularly unlikely to seek mental health services or other forms of help (Mackenzie et al., 2019). Stigma is a psychological and social response to individuals who possess traits that are not valued within a particular social context, often leading to social isolation and exclusion (Zimmerman et al., 2016). Among older adults, stigma can be especially impactful, as societal attitudes toward aging, illness, and dependency contribute to marginalization. A community's cultural norms play a crucial role in determining whether an older adult is stigmatized (Zimmerman et al., 2016). Additionally, older adults may internalize stigma, feeling shame or embarrassment about conditions associated with aging, such as cognitive decline (Zimmerman et al., 2016). This self-stigmatization, along with negative social interactions, can create significant barriers to seeking help. Ultimately, stigma reflects an imbalance of power that fosters negative stereotyping and discrimination against older adults, limiting their willingness to seek medical care, social services, or emotional support (Zimmerman et al., 2016).

Many societies prioritize independence, causing older adults to hesitate to seek help due to the fear of being seen as a burden. Aging is often associated with weakness and dependence, reinforcing negative stereotypes that discourage individuals from accessing financial, healthcare, or social support (Mackenzie et al., 2019). Fear of being labeled as incapable or dependent likely prevents older individuals from applying for assistance programs such as Medicaid, food stamps, or housing support. Complicated application processes and lack of accessibility can create additional barriers, making older adults feel undeserving of aid.

Perceived societal stigma toward mental illness often leads individuals to develop negative attitudes about mental health treatment, creating a significant barrier to seeking care (Mackenzie et al., 2019). Mental health issues, such as loneliness or depression, are sometimes dismissed as a “normal” part of aging rather than recognized as concerns that need attention (Elshaikh et al., 2023). Living in an environment that reinforces such stigma can cause individuals to internalize these beliefs, further discouraging them from seeking treatment (Mackenzie et al., 2019). Research highlights stigma as a major obstacle to care among the elderly, making it one of the most significant barriers to mental health service utilization in this population (Mackenzie et al., 2019).

Reducing stigma requires a combination of community support, education, and policy reforms. Senior centers and cultural groups can help normalize help-seeking by providing safe spaces for discussion and support. Additionally, increasing public awareness can help challenge misconceptions about aging, mental health, and financial assistance, creating a more supportive environment. At the policy level, improving access to culturally competent services and simplifying application processes can help reduce stigma and encourage older adults to seek the support they need. By changing societal attitudes and increasing accessibility, a more inclusive and supportive environment can be created where older adults feel valued and empowered to seek help without fear of stigma or judgment.

### **What is Needed**

As a retired older adult in Athens, Georgia, Janie represents an underserved population that needs connection to various resources across Athens. In order to adequately address Janie’s needs, a needs assessment was conducted. Below is that assessment that evaluates various socioeconomic challenges faced by Janie (University of Kansas, 2025).



*Aging Support*

There are many factors with aging that should be considered for Janie's health. As an aging woman, Janie will need more preventative care and precautions to ensure she is safe in her home and in her day-to-day life. Certain aging adults need walkers and equipment for bathing safely. Balance and physical ability decrease with age. Janie is 68 years old. Falls are a common problem for aging adults and can lead to more serious problems such as fractures. Janie will also need support with transportation and may need assistance with understanding and utilizing Social Security and Medicare. Aging is the precursor for other needs that Janie has such as social support and isolation prevention.

*Food Support*

Janie's current financial priorities include covering rent and medications. Due to her financial constraints, she is left with little money left over to pay for groceries which can lead to inconsistent meals and potential nutritional deficiencies. Janie's situation highlights a significant challenge related to food insecurity among older adults living on fixed incomes.

Food insecurity among older adults, like Janie, can result in malnutrition, exacerbation of chronic health conditions, and a reduced ability to live independently. Janie needs access to affordable, nutritious foods in order for her to maintain physical health and overall well-being as she ages in place. Many factors contribute to Janie's experience of food insecurity. Her limited income and the rising costs of groceries prohibit her from obtaining adequate nutrition. Athens has seen an increase in grocery prices, making it harder for older adults living on fixed incomes to afford a nutritious diet. Without additional assistance, Janie's ability to purchase fresh and healthy foods will remain constrained. Similarly, Janie's home in Denney Towers is centrally located, yet not entirely optimal if she does not have reliable transportation. Without proper

transportation, going to affordable grocery stores or food distribution sites may be difficult. Public transportation options in Athens provide services, yet they may not be sufficient for Janie's needs. It may be more challenging to navigate public transportation with limited mobility or when carrying groceries. Janie's location also prohibits her from accessing fresh and affordable grocery stores, yet there are many convenience stores and fast-food options that do not provide nutritious choices that will support her health in the long run.

To help Janie, it is important to explore the various food assistance and community programs that are available in Athens. There are many resources available to help older adults, like Janie, access the nutrition they need while staying in their homes.

### *Housing Support*

Janie's housing needs require careful planning to ensure her comfort, safety, and overall wellbeing as ages. Affordable, safe, and accessible housing is critical for her to remain in the apartment that she currently owns.

For Janie to age in place, she must not only be able to afford her current housing but also maintain a financial balance that allows her to cover essential expenses like groceries, medications, and utility bills. To achieve this, it is important for her to explore options for financial assistance, such as government programs, local initiatives, or nonprofit organizations that help older adults manage living costs.

Another essential consideration for Janie is the safety of the community. While downtown Athens is a centralized area with each access to stores, healthcare facilities, and other resources, safety concerns must be addressed. According to recent crime data, downtown Athens experiences higher rates of drug crimes, theft, and assaults compared to other areas in the city (Crime Grade, 2025). As an older adult living alone, Janie may face heightened vulnerabilities in

such an environment. In this case, Janie should evaluate safety measures in her apartment, such as an alarm system and updated locks on windows and doors. It is important that Janie has resources to stay informed about crime activity and connect with community members in times of need.

Transportation and mobility are also key factors for Janie's housing. The walkability of her neighborhood, access to public transportation, and proximity to essential services such as grocery stores, pharmacies, and medical facilities play a role in Janie aging in place. It is essential that Janie has access to public transit, senior-specific shuttles, or ride-sharing services to ensure she can maintain her daily routines.

As Janie grows older, the impact of age-related physical and cognitive changes will become increasingly apparent. Common aging challenges include falls, joint pain, declining vision and hearing, and cognitive decline. (World Health Organization, 2024). To support her health and wellbeing, her apartment must be modified to prioritize accessibility and safety. Some modifications could include installing handrails along hallways and staircases, adding ramps for wheelchair access, and ensuring all doorways are wide enough to accommodate a wheelchair. In the bathroom, grab bars near the toilet and in the shower, a shower stool, and a handheld showerhead can reduce the risk of falls. Adequate lighting throughout the apartment, especially in the kitchen and hallways can also mitigate challenges of declining vision and falls. Most importantly, Janie should consider a medical alert system that can provide immediate access to emergency assistance in case of falls, medical emergencies, or other unexpected incidence (National Institute on Aging, 2023).

For Janie to age in place comfortably and safely, she must address a variety of factors including affordability, community safety, and accessibility tailored to her evolving health needs.

However, much of the necessary accommodation comes at a significant cost, and Janie may not have the financial means to cover it. Balancing her rent payments, adding modifications to her apartment, and meeting other needs presents a considerable challenge. To overcome this, there are various resources available within the Athens community and throughout government programs. Leveraging these opportunities could help Janie create a secure and comfortable living environment while maintaining her overall financial stability.

### *Isolation Support*

Janie's isolation poses a significant risk to her emotional and mental well-being, as she lacks regular social interaction and meaningful engagement. Living alone with limited financial resources, she has few opportunities to connect with others, increasing her risk of loneliness and depression. Without consistent social engagement, she may experience a decline in mental health, reduced motivation for daily activities, and even cognitive decline over time. Janie needs structured and easily accessible opportunities for social connection to ensure ongoing interaction and support. Participation in community activities, social clubs, or group events specifically designed for older adults would help her build relationships and maintain a sense of connection. Reliable and affordable transportation would help to ensure she can attend these events, as well as run errands and visit friends or family. Additionally, mental health support services, such as counseling or group therapy, could help her process feelings of loneliness and develop coping strategies. The library offers resources and training on digital tools, such as video calls and social media, to help her stay connected with loved ones, even if she doesn't have a phone or internet at home. Faith-based organizations, neighborhood outreach programs, and volunteer services could also provide a strong support network, giving her regular social outlets and reducing possible feelings of isolation. Without intervention, Janie's isolation may worsen, impacting both her

mental and physical health, making it essential to connect her with resources that offer social engagement, companionship, and a supportive community.

### *Social Services*

Another critical issue to consider with aging and social isolation is the availability of social services. Aging adults require assistance to perform everyday functions that they once performed independently. Social services would address this need, but often, they are not widely available. Key social services to be examined are medication management, dressing and personal hygiene, food delivery and assistance, transportation, and financial management.

The first social service that could present an issue to older adults if not available is medication management. Medication management is the multi-level approach to ensuring the understanding and safe use of medication by older adults. This can include refining treatment plans, assessing health needs, monitoring systems, and educating on both the practitioner and patient side (Badawoud et al., 2024). Medication management is essential to preventing negative health outcomes such as overdose, or on the contrary, underdosage of essential medications. Aside from age, one risk factor to poor medication management is residing in low-income communities. In these communities, there are high levels of chronic disease and a lack of social services to meet the community's needs (Badawoud et al., 2024). One study on a population of low-income aging adults found that a majority of residents were improperly managing their medications. 70% of those in the study lacked ability to read prescription labels, open bottles, or refill medications without assistance (Badawoud et al., 2024). Ultimately, prevention of inappropriate use of medications can be done by providing services by pharmacies and physicians to monitor the use of medication by aging adults, particularly those with less socioeconomic resources.

A second important social service for aging adults is assistance with dressing and personal hygiene. Dressing and personal hygiene fall under the larger theme of self-care. Control of self-care is important in maintaining the personal autonomy and freedom of aging adults (Imaginário et al., 2018). One study found that among a population of aging adults, control over personal care was positively associated with both emotional and overall health, and it was inversely related to stress (Pope et al., 2017). Many elderly individuals struggle to identify their need for personal-care assistance (Imaginário et al., 2018). Nonetheless, given the benefits of personal care, lacking this social service could negatively impact the health of many adults.

A third social service that is needed but not widely available is food and meal delivery service. With the United States population rapidly aging, the best solution to meet the needs of most aging adults is to keep them in their homes (Wright et al., 2015). In order to keep seniors in their homes and ensure they are not facing malnutrition, home-delivery meal services are needed (Walton et al., 2020). One study of sixty-two seniors found that those receiving home meal delivery services experience a positive increase in caloric and protein intake, decreased feelings of loneliness, and overall increased food security (Wright et al., 2015).

Transportation is another social service that lacks accessibility for elderly adults. Lack of transportation is one of the strongest factors contributing to the social isolation of seniors, particularly seniors residing in rural areas (Lamanna et al., 2020). While private driving services would greatly benefit seniors, they are often costly. Simply improving public transportation and creating services to accommodate elderly on public transportation would also have a positive impact (Lamanna et al., 2020).

Lastly, the lack of availability of financial management services is a health issue faced by aging adults. Currently, while there are health scales to address seniors' mental capacity, there

are no scales to explicitly assess seniors' financial capacity as they age (Lichtenberg et al., 2024). To examine this issue, one study analyzed adults over the age of 60 who were responsible for personal checking accounts. Researchers found that many adults unknowingly had early memory loss. Of those with memory loss, significant excess spending, risky decision making, and lack of financial literacy was observed (Lichtenberg et al., 2024). This study highlights the growing need for services to assist with financial management among aging adults.

To assess Janie specifically, Janie is an older adult who lives by herself. Without any partners or children to live with her, Janie is highly susceptible to experiencing mental health challenges and social isolation. Her apartment, Denney Towers, is located off of Prince Avenue, where there are few adults her age. Thus, Janie's first need is services that socially connect her to others.

Next, while the location of Denney Towers ranks high in walkability, it scores very low in public transit options. Janie may be able to walk short distances, but it may be difficult for her to walk long distances at her age. With these challenges, Janie's next social support need is transportation assistance.

Access to transportation is closely related to Janie's need for food support. Due to her reliance on social security checks, Janie has limited income and often runs out of money for food once she had paid for her living expenses. Thus, Janie would benefit from programs that offer meals or grocery assistance. Furthermore, since much of her money that she could spend on food goes towards her medications, Janie would benefit from prescription assistance programs.

Lastly, although Janie lives on her own and struggles to keep herself fed, she would still like to remain in her own apartment rather than enter assisted living. Janie therefore needs a program to help her stay living on her own but monitor her needs and provide check-ins.

## Resources Available

There are many community agencies that address the varying needs of Athens. The following agencies address Janie's specific needs for food assistance, medication affordability, social support, living support for elders, and retiree support. Medicaid and Medicare are also important resources for older adults in need. Janie may be a dual-eligible beneficiary. Janie can apply for Medicare part D to offset the price of some of her medications. Her small social security check should also help her pay for costs. Janie can apply for a Qualified Medicare Beneficiary (QMB) Program if her income is less than \$1,235 monthly *Medicare Savings Programs*, 2025). This program helps pay for part A and part B (*Medicare Savings Programs*, 2025). Georgia SHIP (State Health Insurance Program) will also provide Janie with free information about Medicare and financial assistance programs (Georgia SHIP, n.d.). The number to reach a Georgia SHIP counselor 1-866-552-4464 option 4 (Georgia SHIP, n.d.).

### *Food Assistance Agencies*

Originating in Atlanta, Georgia, City of Refuge Athens (CoRA) is a Christian-based food assistance program. CoRA distributes perishable and non-perishable groceries at various locations throughout Athens and surrounding cities (Statham, Watkinsville, etc) (City of Refuge Athens, 2025). Distributions occur monthly at certain locations, and weekly at others. Information regarding distribution scheduling is regularly updated on their website. Groceries provided include meat, produce, bread, canned goods, and children's lunch bags consisting of sandwiches and various snacks. Regarding eligibility, anyone is eligible. No requirements need to be met to receive food. Upon arrival, those being served fill out a piece of paper with their name and number of people in their family. This form is not for eligibility, but rather for data on number of people being served at each distribution. To access CoRA, Janie would need to drive



or use public transportation, such as Athens City transit bus, to reach the distribution sites. None of the current sites are within walking distance from Denney Towers. However, if Janie is experiencing difficulty accessing their services, City of Refuge often works with individuals to ensure that they receive the food that they need. This could look like having a volunteer deliver food to Denney Towers or arranging a carpool for Janie to a distribution site. Finally, this program is free of cost. Janie would simply need to pay for transportation to the distribution sites if she chose to utilize public transportation.

In Athens, Georgia, Meals on Wheels operates out of the Athens Community Council on Aging (ACCA). The program offers meal delivery, a friendly visit, and a safety check from a volunteer. Meals are delivered to private homes. No senior will be denied a meal at Meals on Wheels and prices are determined on a sliding fee scale from free to full cost (Meals on Wheels, 2019). Meals are shelf stable, daily meals, or frozen meals. Janie would be eligible because she is food insecure and older than 60. For information about Meals on Wheels, Janie can call (706)549-4850.

Another resource to combat Janie's food insecurity is the Athens Area Emergency Food Bank. It provides food for one week for families or individuals faced with emergencies upon referral by an approved agency (Athens Area Emergency Food Bank, 2025). These families or individuals can visit up to three times in a six-month period. The Food Bank does not require eligibility based on income, race, sex, age, citizenship, or disability (Athens Area Emergency Food Bank, 2025). The only requirement is that individuals must receive a referral from an approved agency to receive assistance. Approved agencies include The Ark, The Department of Family and Children's Services, and Advantage Behavioral Health Systems. Eligible individuals must also have proof of Clarke County address and the names and dates of birth of each

household. Since Janie lives alone, she would be eligible for the “A” box that the Food Bank offers. This requires Janie to bring one double bag with her and she may choose from a variety of canned goods, boxed items (cereal, macaroni and cheese, pasta, rice), beans, fruits, vegetables, milk, eggs, meats, buttery and two Publix bakery items. For Janie to access this Food Bank, she may consider walking or having reliable transportation, as the Athens Area Emergency Food Bank is about 1 mile from Denny Towers. This would be about a 17-minute walk or 4-minute drive. This cost of using this resource is free for Janie if she has a referral.

Additionally, Our Daily Bread is a community kitchen run by First Baptist Church of Athens that offers meals and resources for those in Athens that face homelessness and extreme poverty.

There are no direct requirements for meals to be provided, but it is recommended for those who are homeless and in extreme poverty. Janie would be able to access breakfast and lunch at this location, as well as hygiene kits and health screenings. First Baptist Church of Athens is 0.2 miles away from where Janie lives, which is around a 5-minute walk that could be very accessible for Janie. The cost of using this resource is free.

The Covenant Presbyterian Church in Athens Georgia operates a weekly food drive on Thursdays. The food drive aims to serve the lower-income population in the community, specifically those who may be experiencing food insecurity. The food drive primarily operates as a drive through, but walk ups are encouraged to participate, too (*Food Pantry – Covenant Presbyterian Church*, 2019). Bags of fresh, frozen, and nonperishable groceries are distributed based on the number of people in a household. This number is gathered through a form that is filled out upon arrival before any groceries are given out. This food drive is free of cost (*Food Pantry – Covenant Presbyterian Church*, 2019). Due to the format of the food drive, those with

access to a vehicle are more likely to utilize this resource. Despite this, it is possible for people to use public transportation to travel to and from the church in order to benefit from the food drive.

The Georgia Department of Public Health administers a statewide program called the Georgia Senior Farmers Market Nutrition Program. The DPH partners with local public health districts and area agencies on aging to administer this program to eligible senior participants (Wellness Programs - Aging, 2019). The Northeast Georgia Area Agency on Aging is responsible for administering this program in Athens, Georgia. This farmers' market operates on a first come, first serve basis and only operates once during the year (Wellness Programs - Aging, 2019). To be eligible for the Senior Farmers Market Nutrition Program, one must be a Georgia resident, be 60 years of age or older, and have a household income at or below 185% of the federal poverty guidelines (Wellness Programs - Aging, 2019). For reference, a household of one will meet this requirement if they make \$27,861 or less per year. This farmers market program only has fresh fruits and vegetables available. For the 2025 season, the farmers market is coming to ACCA on July 23, 2025, at 9:30 am.

The Georgia Senior SNAP program is an elderly simplified application process that is designed to make it easier for seniors to receive SNAP benefits (Senior SNAP, n.d.). Eligibility for this program primarily focuses on age; those 60 and older qualify if they meet the following criteria: all members of your household are 60 years of age or older and purchase and prepare their food together, the members of your household are not working, the household is under the income limits to be eligible for SNAP participation, and the household has a permanent fixed income (Senior SNAP, n.d.). To apply for these benefits, form 298 is required. This form can be found on the Georgia Department of Public Health's website. The form can be mailed or faxed, but it can also be completed online. For seniors who may have difficulty completing this form, they can utilize

the free computers at a local library and a state representative can also aid in the application process.

### *Medication Assistance Agencies*

Athens-Clarke County unified government created a drug discount program that provides discount cards to lower the price of prescription drugs (Athens-Clarke County Unified Government, 2025). Using the cards, residents receive an average of 22% off retail price of many prescription drugs. More specifically, participants can receive up to 80% off generic drugs and 40% off brand-name drugs. The card can be used so long as insurance is not already covering the price of the prescription. To use the card, participants simply show the card to participating families. Regarding eligibility, any

Athens-Clarke County resident can receive a card, including UGA students. Neither age, income, race, nor existing health coverage are taken into consideration. Any participating pharmacy across Athens-Clarke County is available for residents to access this program, and the government site has links that provide information on participating websites. One highlight of this website is the feature that assists individuals in finding a participating pharmacy closest to them. For Janie, the closest pharmacy would be the downtown CVS off of broad street. The program is free of cost, and the only payment required is the remaining balance on the prescription drug cost after discounts have been applied.

### *Social Support Agencies*

The Athens-Clarke County Leisure Services Department offers a variety of programs tailored for active adults and seniors, designed to promote social engagement, physical activity (Senior / Active Adults | Athens-Clarke County, GA - Official Website, n.d.). Fitness and wellness programs are offered, including Pickleball, Pétanque, Fit & Strong, Tai Chi, and more.

The department also offers senior bingo at Heard Park with light refreshments and adult day trips that provide tours of areas around Georgia (Senior / Active Adults | Athens-Clarke County, GA - Official Website, n.d.). To access these programs, Janie would need to visit the Athens-Clarke County Leisure website or contact the department at 706-613-3800 for further assistance. Janie could also register online, as many of the programs and services allow for registration through the Leisure Services portal. These programs would not only provide Janie with a sense of community but also help keep her active and reduce her isolation. Most programs offered by the department are free, however, certain programs may require a small fee.

The ACCA has a buddy program that matches vetted volunteers aged 55 and up, with older adults based on hobbies and interests to foster supportive relationships (Athens Community Council on Aging, 2025).. Adults are matched based on interests and volunteers help participants start participating in their favorite hobbies again. Janie would be eligible for this program as she is older than 55 and can get more information by calling the Family Service Navigator at 706-549-4850. The buddy program is free and buddies meet in private homes or assisted living facilities.

The Athens-Clarke County Library offers free computer classes designed to help individuals of all skill levels improve their digital literacy (Athens Regional Library System, 2022). These classes cover a variety of topics, including basic computer skills, internet navigation, Microsoft Office, social media, and more (Athens Regional Library System, 2022). Whether participants are new to technology or looking to increase their knowledge, the library provides a supportive learning environment with hands-on instruction. The library is committed to making technology accessible to all community members, ensuring that individuals can stay connected and build essential digital skills. The computer classes are beginner-friendly and are

designed to accommodate individuals with different levels of computer experience (Athens Regional Library System, 2022).. No library card is necessary to participate, however, pre-registration is required due to limited class sizes. To register, Janie would need to call the library at 706-613-3650 or visit their website. This would be the perfect opportunity for Janie to improve her digital literacy, further connecting her with a community of people for support as well as other resources. The Athens-Clarke County Library is not located within walking distance from Janie, however, transportation assistance from Athens transit buses or the ACCA may assist with this. The classes are free of cost, which is perfect for Janie as it places no financial burden on her.

### *Living Support Agencies*

The Ark United Ministry Outreach center is a catch-all for resources. The Ark's mission is to provide numerous programs that offer emergency rent and utilities assistance, support for elderly or special needs individuals, access to food banks, and micro loans (The Ark United Ministry Outreach Center, 2025). Individuals may enroll in one program or multiple, depending on their needs. Regarding each specific program, the emergency rent and utilities assistance program is a financial support system. To be eligible, an individual must have suffered an unexpected, uncontrollable loss/reduction in income. They can also have experienced a large, unexpected cost that caused financial burden. Both incidents must have occurred in the past 90 days, and they must be a resident of one of the following counties: Clarke, Madison, Oglethorpe, Oconee. The elderly assistance program is an emergency type assistance offered once per year. To qualify, an individual must live on a fixed income, be 65 years or older, and live in Clarke County. Janie would be eligible for this program and greatly benefit. The special needs program provides medication assistance (taking not affording), as well as transportation assistance

(through gas vouchers). To qualify, an individual must be diagnosed with special needs. The food bank access program writes referrals to receive food from the Athens Area Emergency Food Bank. While Ark writes the referrals, eligibility guidelines are set by the food bank and can be found on their website. Finally, the micro loan program offers financial literacy lessons, budget education, free checking and savings account setup, and low interest microloans. To become eligible, individuals must complete an advanced budgeting session, as well as a credit counseling session offered by Ark. Additionally, individuals must be an Athens-Clarke County resident. Janie would greatly benefit from this program due to her financial burdens, and although she must attend sessions to become eligible, these sessions would be worth her time. Regarding access, Ark is located in downtown Athens off of Barber Street. Each of the programs – aside from the food bank – are accessed through the facility. Public transportation serves a bus stop very close to the facility. Janie lives within walking distance, but she can also access a public bus route. Eligibility requirements above may impact access. Regarding cost, each program is free of cost.

The Salvation Army is a Christian based international movement that bases its message on the Bible and Christian standards and principles (The Salvation Army, 2025). They provide many different services, including hunger relief, shelter, family and social services, youth empowerment, the Pathway to Hope, Project Share, and Project Hope. In Athens the hunger relief program includes a soup kitchen that is open to anyone in need. Their housing and homeless services in Athens include the Center of Hope, an emergency shelter that holds 80 beds, or the Pathway of Hope which provides housing units to those with at least one child under the age of 18 (The Salvation Army, 2025). Project SHARE is for those who have experienced a temporary crisis that threatens their home. The project will pay for the most urgent need, whether

that be a utility bill, rent, or an emergency prescription. While the eligibility is based on a comprehensive assessment with a SHARE Partner Agency, the applicant must be able to make contribution toward to expense and will have long-term relief from assistance. Project Hope is for individuals and families who have been affected by illness, a house fire, a layoff, or any relevant catastrophic event. The program offers financial relief for unexpected events that cause financial hardship. There are two locations of the Salvation Army, one being the Center of Hope and the other being the Salvation Army Corps. If Janie was in need of resources, she could visit the Corp that is about 1 mile away from her home. This would be a 3-minute drive or about a 20 minute walk if applicable. However, the homeless shelter would require her to have transportation as it is about 2.3 miles away, or an 8-minute drive. There is no cost for these resources, but many resources require an appointment to assess needs, which may be difficult to acquire if Janie does not meet the requirements based on the agency's assessment.

### *Aging Support Agencies*

The Athens Community Council on Aging is a local organization designed for assisting aging adults (Athens Community Council on Aging, 2025). The mission of ACCA is to promote a lifetime of wellness through engagement, advocacy, education, and support. The ACCA provides support to 16,000 individuals annually (Athens Community Council on Aging, 2025). Services include Health and wellness services, Long-term care ombudsman, a dementia resource center, meals, and caregiver support. The ACCA has a center for active living, which has wellness classes, health education events, social events, and gatherings. Transportation for shopping, medical appointments, pharmacy visits, shopping, community programs, and more is available for adults older than 60 (Athens Community Council on Aging, 2025). The Center for Active Living is a senior wellness center that offers fitness classes, educational seminars,



creativity and play opportunities like trivia and mahjong, and travel opportunities. Members also have unlimited access to a computer lab and are able to enjoy the CAL café. The Senior Community Service Employment Program is for adults to work an average of 20 hours per week and make \$7.25 hourly. Trainees develop marketable skills and also receive other benefits like educational opportunities and annual physical exams. Long-term care Ombudsman advocates for long-term care facility residents. LTCO provides educational opportunities and investigates and resolves complaints in long-term care facilities. ACCA also provides links to local resources and services for food insecurity, such as the Athens Senior Hunger Coalition, Meals on Wheels, Good Measure Meals, and more (Athens Community Council on Aging, 2025). Additionally, ACCA partners with programs for caregiver support like geriatric care management, Grandparents raising grandchildren, Support groups, caregiver education, and the buddy program. The Senior Community Service Employment Program is for adults older than 55 and whose family income is at or below 125% of the federal poverty level. Participants must reside in one of the following counties: Baker, Barrow, Brooks, Butts, Calhoun, Carroll, Catoosa, Chattooga, Cherokee, Clarke, Clayton, Colquitt, Coweta, Dade, Decatur, Dougherty, Douglas, Early, Elbert, Floyd, Gordon, Grady, Greene, Haralson, Heard, Jackson, Jasper, Lamar, Lee, Madison, Meriwether, Miller, Mitchell, Morgan, Newton, Oconee, Oglethorpe, Paulding, Pickens, Pike, Polk, Quitman, Randolph, Seminole, Spalding, Sumter, Thomas, Troup, Upson, Walker, Walton or Whitfield (Athens Community Council on Aging, 2025). To be eligible for the Center for Active Living, participants must be age 50+. To reach the ACCA and reach transportation services, Janie can call (706) 549-4850. More information about this program can also be requested via email [kadams@accaging.org](mailto:kadams@accaging.org). Transportation is free for those who meet low-income criteria. It is \$10 per one-way trip for individuals above the poverty threshold.

Membership at the Center for Active living is \$50/ year for Athens Clarke County residents and \$60/ year for non ACC residents. Renewal cost is \$40/ year for ACC residents and \$50/year for non ACC residents but members age 60+ may be eligible for funding.

Through the University of Georgia College of Public Health, the Cognitive Aging Research and Education (CARE) serves as a dementia educational resource for older adults (University of Georgia College of Public Health, 2025). CARE serves to provide education on dementia to older adults both with and without dementia. CARE themselves can diagnose dementia, but they also provide support and interventions to those already diagnosed by other physicians. Anyone is eligible for CARE by filling out a form on their website. CARE best serves older adults looking to learn more about dementia, obtain a diagnosis, receive support living with dementia, or learn how to support partners with dementia. As an older adult, although not currently diagnosed with dementia, Janie could benefit from CARE and use their services as preemptive education/treatment. Regarding access, Janie specifically could access through UGA public transit on the health sciences bus that goes down Prince Avenue. However, in terms of advertisement, CARE is not very well known, impacting its access. CARE does not have any costs advertised on the UGA College of Public Health website.

The Northeast Georgia Area Agency on Aging is a regional organization that helps older adults, caregivers, and individuals with disabilities access resources and services to promote independent living and well-being (Northeast Georgia Regional Commission, n.d.). It operates under the Georgia Department of Human Services, Division of Aging Services, serving a 12-county region, including Athens-Clarke County (Northeast Georgia Regional Commission, n.d.). Individuals can access services through the Aging and Disability Resource Connection (ADRC) by calling their helpline at 866-552-4464. The ADRC provides information, referrals, and

assistance in connecting with programs that support aging, caregiving, and disability needs. To be eligible for services from the Northeast Georgia Area Agency on Aging, an individual must be 60 years of age or older and a resident of one of the 12 counties within the Northeast Georgia Planning and Service Area (Barrow, Clarke, Elbert, Greene, Jackson, Jasper, Madison, Morgan, Newton, Oconee, Oglethorpe, and Walton) . The agency serves many counties across the Northeast Georgia region, with its main office based in Athens. Many services are free or low-cost, depending on the program and eligibility. Some services may have a sliding scale fee based on income, while others may have costs associated (Northeast Georgia Regional Commission, n.d.).

### **Sustainable Solutions**

Janie's story highlights the reality that there are currently many disparities in communities regarding access to necessary resources for older adults. However, research indicates there are potential solutions to be implemented on local and national levels to help with aging, isolation, food insecurity, housing, and social service availability.

#### *Aging*

While aging as a biological process cannot be prevented, solutions can alleviate the negative impacts that come with aging for many adults. For example, many older adults struggle to manage finances. One potential solution for aging is increased education for adults to promote financial literacy (Bloom et al., 2015). As adults better understand their finances, they are more likely to have enough money for future expenses. Older adults would also be prepared to make financial solutions with lessened cognitive ability (Bloom et al., 2015). Reform to the healthcare system can also adapt current healthcare policies to reflect the aging demographic. Realignment

can help promote fairness, efficiency, and sustainability (Bloom et al., 2015). Medical education could also include more about palliative care and an increased emphasis on early detection and prevention of diseases common among older adults (Bloom et al., 2015). Additionally, government assistance with in-home care would allow older adults to live in their homes for longer. Technology-based solutions have been implemented by Japan and include home health robots, fall detection systems, and increased telemedicine (Jones & Dolsten, 2024). Germany has also implemented insurance-based solutions for their aging population that include long-term care insurance and integrated care models (Jones & Dolsten, 2024). Sweden is an internationally recognized country in terms of care for the elderly. They have focused efforts on allowing adults to “age in place” with heavily funded government grants (Jones & Dolsten, 2024). In short, solutions for aging all require funding that the government could provide to increase financial literacy, invest in home and safety technology, and pay for at home care. Reforms in insurance plans and Medicaid will also improve conditions for older adults in the United States.

### *Food Insecurity*

Food insecurity remains a persistent and deeply rooted challenge that affects many older adults. Compared to the younger population, older adults face more severe consequences of food insecurity, as inadequate nutrition can increase healthcare costs, exacerbate chronic health, and diminish quality of life. Addressing food insecurity in a sustainable manner is essential. Solving this problem is not only about ensuring consistent access to nutritious food, but also to support long-term health, dignity, and independence for a vulnerable population. Various forms of research have established sustainable solutions that tackle the root causes of hunger through community-based support, policy change, and equitable access to resources.

A common program that has been both researched and implemented in various parts of the United States is *Meals on Wheels* (MoW). MoW programs play a crucial role in addressing food insecurity among low-income older adults by not only providing nutritious meals but also offering social interaction and support that contribute to overall well-being. MoW services help older individuals who may have a low-income or who face hardship when accessing or preparing food (Dickinson & Wills, 2022). MoW programs can be expanded based on the region and resources available to the community. Based on the needs of a community, a MoW program can tailor implementation in both urban and rural areas. Urban areas might leverage existing transportation networks and volunteer organizations while rural regions could partner with churches and senior centers to overcome logistical barriers. Successful MoW programs have existed in all types of communities and the most effective ones ensure that community engagement is the focus. The holistic impact of MoW allows communities to help their older population combat hunger while also promoting independence and social connection (Dickinson & Wills, 2022).

In the United States, the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) provides food benefits to low-income families to supplement their grocery budget so they can afford nutritious food that is essential to health and well-being (Berkowitz et al., 2021). While the SNAP program is usually only discussed regarding the topic of food insecurity, it also is highly correlated with reductions in impatient hospitalizations, emergency department visits, long-term care admissions, and overall healthcare expenditures (Berkowitz et al., 2021). SNAP participation has been found to adequately address food insecurity, but it also contributes to significant healthcare cost savings and improved health outcomes for low-income older adults (Berkowitz et al., 2021). The main issue with SNAP is that not all low-income older adults know

how to apply and access the benefits provided. Many older adults face challenges like limited mobility, fixed incomes, and difficulties navigating the application process which may prohibit them from ever accessing this essential support. Effective SNAP education and expansion has occurred in different regions of the United States, but all older adults would greatly benefit from these changes. The state of California expanded SNAP eligibility to Supplemental Security Income (SSI) beneficiaries in 2019, and with this there was an improved access to nutritious foods, financial relief, and reduced effort in food acquisition among participants in a study (Savin et al., 2021). Participants reported that receiving SNAP benefits enabled them to purchase healthier foods, like fresh produce and prepared meals which enhanced their diet quality (Savin et al., 2021). Additionally, the funds from SNAP helped ease the financial strain that the participants were facing which allowed them to properly take their medications and pay rent as needed (Savin et al., 2021).

### *Housing*

Aging in place is an increasingly popular trend among older adults, but it presents several challenges that must be addressed. Many older adults require specific modifications and support to maintain their independence, which necessitates outside assistance. Research has identified many resources that can be integrated into their daily lives, offering educational opportunities in home modifications, technological solutions, and social support networks.

Investing in home modifications early can serve as a proactive and cost-effective measure, reducing medical expenses and ensuring safety. Many adults do not consider these adjustments until they become a necessity, and researchers recommend private investment in modifications rather than reliance of the potential of tax credits (Tenenbaum & Kimmel, 2020).

Governmental aid programs such Medicaid Waiver programs for the chronically ill, the

Department of Veterans Affairs home modification programs for those who have disabilities or city ordinances requiring accessibility in new or remodeled residences offer support. However, eligibility restrictions may prevent those in need from accessing these benefits (Tenenbaum & Kimmel, 2020).

A broader solution to home modifications is the idea of universal design, which ensures that renovations accommodate individuals of all abilities. Research finds that education and training programs for designers and builders are important to facilitate widespread adoption of universal design principles (Tenenbaum & Kimmel, 2020). Ultimately, incentivizing early investment and universal design in home modifications is a more sustainable approach than waiting until these needs become critical and are difficult to obtain.

Technology is becoming an increasingly vital part of daily living for older adults, supporting their health, hygiene, activity, and other aspects of wellbeing (Wallace et al., 2023). Research indicates that Supportive Smart Home (SSH) technology is growing in complexity, with Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Machine Learning (ML) playing an integral role in its development (Wallace et al., 2023).

One particularly useful technological advancement for older adults is sensor technology (Wallace et al., 2023). Wearable sensors offer valuable health data but require that the individual remember to wear and use them consistently. Motion sensors help track movement throughout the home, including departure and arrivals. Door sensors can be placed at entryways, refrigerators, and cabinets which can help to obtain information about activity, nutrition or medication habits. Sensors can also exist on beds to monitor sleep quality and restlessness, which may indicate underlying health concerns. Additionally, smart pill dispensers can have

sensors that indicate if an individual has taken or missed their medication (Wallace et al., 2023).

These technological innovations have made it easier to monitor older adults while assessing their health and wellbeing. Sensor technology not only helps address concerns identified through data collection but can also alert medical personnel to potential issues within the home or affecting the individual.

Programs are also emerging to equip older adults with the knowledge and resources necessary for successful aging in place. One notable initiative is Age Self Care, which empowers senior adults to take proactive steps toward maintaining a safe and healthy living environment (Nguyen et al., 2025). This program fosters self-management, peer support, and social networking through an educational and community-based framework. Participants in Age Self Care not only learn about simple home renovations that enhance safety but also engage with peers who share similar experiences. This social aspect encourages behavior changes that improve their living conditions and create a sense of validation and empowerment (Nguyen et al., 2025). By shifting perspectives on aging, this program promotes confidence and sustainable solutions for independent living.

### *Social Support*

Solutions towards social isolation are needed for older adults, as it continues to be a significant public health issue. The Surgeon General and New York State Government highlight that the consequences of social isolation are detrimental. It is reported that social isolation is similar to smoking daily in terms of increased risk of premature death (New York State Government, 2025). Furthermore, the National Institute of Aging stresses the importance of social isolation solutions to benefit the health of all individuals. It is found that older adults who



experience social isolation are more likely to be admitted to the hospital, as well as stay longer in hospitals. This occurrence increases stress on not just older adults, but also healthcare systems and the economy overall (National Institute on Aging, 2024). Thus, the need for sustainable, social solutions is high. In terms of Janie, there are many solutions available to her.

The first sustainable solution towards combatting social isolation among older adults is allowing these individuals to participate in part-time work or volunteering. Both part-time work and volunteering are effective in minimizing effects of loneliness because it provides elderly with not only social relationships, but also feelings of belonging and contribution to their communities (DeLacey, 2023). In a six month study conducted on older adults in Hong Kong, those who began to volunteer reported statistically significant decreases in stress, depressive symptoms, and loneliness, and a statistically significant increase in social engagement (Warner et al., 2024). In a similar study of United States aging adults, it was found that adults who volunteer were associated with 43% reduced odds of depression (Xi et al., 2025). Due to the positive effects of work and volunteering, policy should be enacted to further prevent ageism in hiring processes and keep older adults in the workforce and volunteer groups.

A second sustainable solution for social isolation is participation in hobbies or group membership. In a National Poll of Healthy Aging, a majority of older adults who reported feelings of joy claimed that their joy stemmed from engaging with their hobbies (DeLacey, 2023). Furthermore, many older adults report that hobbies that involve group membership, such as group physical activities, ranked high among their values and increased their social engagement (Suragarn et al., 2021). Group fitness in particular is linked to direct decreases in social isolation and indirect decreases in loneliness (Brady et al., 2020). The fitness aspect benefits older adults' physical health, while the group aspect simultaneously benefits older

adults' social and emotional health. Many communities are working to develop a policy to increase the availability of groups for the elderly (Brady et al., 2020). Peer intervention programs targeting older adults who share cultural, linguistic, or life experiences have also proven effective in combating loneliness. A 2021 longitudinal study revealed that participants in a peer-matching program experienced decreased loneliness and depression, as well as fewer barriers to social engagement (Kotwal et al., 2021). By fostering relationships based on common backgrounds, these programs encourage trust, emotional support, and long-term engagement. Their relatively low cost and flexibility make them a sustainable option for community organizations aiming to address social isolation among older adults. Group engagement is particularly important, for a common misconception is that older adults who still have living partners are not likely to experience social isolation. In reality, a majority of elderly who reported feelings of loneliness had partners (Abedini et al., 2019). This further highlights the importance of hobbies and groups, for one individual or romantic partner cannot provide for all of the social needs of another individual.

Another researched solution to social isolation available to Janie is digital media. As technology becomes a larger part of daily life, digital inclusion plays a critical role in reducing isolation. Studies indicate that internet training programs for older adults are associated with consistent reductions in loneliness (Shekelle et al., 2024). By providing older adults with the skills to connect online through video calls, email, or social media, these programs support both social connection and independence. When offered along with other social interventions, digital literacy training not only helps close the technology gap but also promotes confidence and lasting self-efficacy among older adults. While studies found that replacing real relationships for digital ones actually increases feelings of loneliness (Novotney, 2019), much research suggests

that online connection can be a strong supplement to combatting loneliness. In a global study of adults aged 65 and older, 90% of participating adults reported that increasing their use of tablets to connect with friends and family allowed for positive change and reduced isolation (Suragarn et al., 2021). While 27% of adults in the US live alone, social isolation also occurs in senior communities (Humphreys & Switek, 2024). Among those living in isolated senior communities, there was a statistically significant reduce in reports of loneliness when internet access was increased in a short-term study (Humphreys & Switek, 2024). However, increasing internet usage among elderly adults in order to decrease loneliness should be used with caution, as opposite effects can occur. In a study conducted among older adults in China, increased internet usage to combat loneliness was actually tied to increased internet addiction and decreased pursuit of real-life support (Smith & Alheneidi, 2023). Nonetheless, with the current prevalence, as well as growing use of the internet, digital connection is sustainable and often solvent for social isolation among older adults. Policies should be enacted to both increase digital access to older adults, as well as protect these adults from scams and exploitation when using the internet.

A final solution available to Janie is to practice mindfulness and attend therapy. One study conducted on the mental health of isolated adults found that those who experience social isolation are more likely to perceive the few social interactions that they do have as negative. As a result, these individuals were less likely to desire continuation of social interaction (National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, 2020). To combat this mental detriment, mindfulness practices and therapy were both found to be beneficial. Therapy and mindfulness services available for Janie are through the Athens Community Council on Aging an Advantage Behavioral Health Systems. Athens Community Council on Aging focuses on supporting aging adults, but they do not have therapists designated specifically for their organization (Athens

Community Council on Aging, 2025). On the contrary, Advantage Behavioral Health Systems focuses on providing community mental health services, but they do not have an aging adult focus (Advantage Behavioral Health Systems, 2025). Nonetheless, both of these organizations can provide sustainable solutions to Janie.

## **Resource Handout**

### **ARK OF ATHENS**

640 Barber Street A, Athens, GA 30601  
(706) 548-8155, arkumoc@msn.com

The Ark United Ministry Outreach center of Athens serves to provide numerous programs and resources, ranging from housing to financial support. Services include:

- Emergency rent and utilities assistance
  - o Eligibility: individual must have suffered unexpected, uncontrollable loss/reduction in income OR also have experienced a large, unexpected cost that caused financial burden. Each must have occurred in the past 90 days. Must be a resident of one of the following counties: Clarke, Madison, Oglethorpe, Oconee.
- Elderly assistance program to assist older adults once per year.
  - o Eligibility: individual must live on a fixed income, be 65 years or older, and live in Clarke County.
- Special needs support program provides medication assistance (taking not affording), as well as transportation assistance (through gas vouchers to those living with special needs).
  - o Eligibility: individual must be diagnosed with special needs.
- Food bank access program writes referrals to receive food from the Athens Area Emergency Food Bank.
  - o Eligibility: guidelines are set by the food bank and can be found on their website.
- Micro loan program offers financial literacy lessons, budget education, free checking and savings account setup, and low interest microloans.
  - o Eligibility: individuals must complete an advanced budgeting session, as well as a credit counseling session offered by Ark. Individuals must also be a resident of Athens-Clarke County.

### **ATHENS AREA EMERGENCY FOOD BANK**

640 Barber Street, Athens, GA 30601  
(706) 353-8182, athensareaemergencyfoodbank@gmail.com

The Athens Area Emergency Food Bank provides food for one week for families and individuals faced with emergencies upon referral by an approved agency (The Ark of Athens, the

Department of Family and Children's Services, and Advantage Behavioral Health Systems). Services include:

- Boxes with canned goods, boxed items, beans, fruits, vegetables, milk, eggs, meats, bakery items

#### ATHENS-CLARKE COUNTY LEISURE SERVICES – ACTIVE ADULTS

205 Old Commerce Road, Athens, GA 30607

(706) 613-3800, [registration@accgov.com](mailto:registration@accgov.com)

The Athens-Clarke County Leisure Services Department is a local government agency that offers recreational and wellness opportunities tailored for active adults and seniors, supporting physical activity, lifelong learning, and social engagement. Services include:

- Fitness and wellness programs such as Pickleball, Pétanque, Fit & Strong, and Tai Chi
- Senior bingo events at Heard Park with light refreshments (fee: \$4 for residents, \$6 for non-residents)
- Adult day trips to cultural and historical destinations across Georgia
- Online registration for most programs via the Leisure Services portal

Program fees vary by activity and residency status, with many offerings available free of charge or at low cost.

#### ATHENS-CLARKE COUNTY LIBRARY COMPUTER CLASSES

2025 Baxter Street, Athens, GA 30606

(706) 613-3650, [refdesk@athenslibrary.org](mailto:refdesk@athenslibrary.org)

The Athens-Clarke County Library is a public institution dedicated to promoting lifelong learning and digital access for all community members. The library offers free computer classes aimed at improving digital literacy for individuals of all skill levels. Services include:

- Basic computer skills and internet navigation
- Training in Microsoft Office and social media platforms
- Beginner-friendly, hands-on instruction in a supportive learning environment

Classes are open to the public without the need for a library card. Pre-registration is required due to limited class sizes.

#### ATHENS-CLARKE COUNTY UNIFIED GOVERNMENT PRESCRIPTION DRUG DISCOUNT PROGRAM

Clarke County Health Department | 345 North Harris Street, Athens, GA 30601

(706) 389-6921, no email provided

Athens-Clarke County unified government created a drug discount program that provides discount cards to lower the price of prescription drugs for Athens-Clarke County residents. Services include:

- Discounts on prescription drugs. Up to 80% off generic and 40% off brand-name drugs.
- Card can be used if insurance is not already applied to reduce cost of drug.
- Eligibility: any Athens-Clarke County resident providing home address.
- Cost: free program, only cost of drug after discounts apply.

#### ATHENS COMMUNITY COUNCIL ON AGING

135 Hoyt Street, Athens, GA 30601

(706) 549-4850, [rpulliam@accaging.org](mailto:rpulliam@accaging.org)

The Athens Community Council on Aging (ACCA) has many community partnerships and services designed to support the aging population in Athens-Clarke County.

- Transportation to appointments, shopping, pharmacy, social events, and more
- Eligibility: Age 60+
- Cost: Free for those who meet low-income criteria, \$10 for those who don't
- Center for Active Living offers fitness classes, educational seminars, travel opportunities, and play such as trivia
- Eligibility: Age 50+
- Cost: Funding is available for individuals over the age of 60. Membership is \$50 initially and \$40 for membership renewal
- Senior Community Service Employment Program allows adults to work 20 hours a week and gain marketable skills and have access to annual physical exams. Employees are paid \$7.25 weekly
- Eligibility: Adults older than 55 whose family income is below 125% of the federal poverty level.
- Cost: Free, workers are paid \$7.25/hour

#### CITY OF REFUGE ATHENS

565 Tallassee Road, Athens, GA 30606

(800) 826-4673, [cityofhopeathens@gmail.com](mailto:cityofhopeathens@gmail.com)

City of Refuge Athens is a Christian-based food assistance program serving various cities in Northeast Georgia. Services include:

- Free perishable and non-perishable grocery distributions. Groceries include meat, produce, bread, and canned food.
- Free kids' lunch bags. Items include sandwiches and various snacks.
- Free tutoring for elementary school children during school. Across various public, elementary schools in Athens-Clarke County school district.
- Free professional classes for adults to become certified in various work fields. Located at main facility.
- Eligibility: open to anyone.
- Cost: free

**COVENANT PRESBYTERIAN FOOD DRIVE**

1065 Gaines School Road, Athens, Georgia, 30605

(706) 548-2756, [covenantp@covpresathens.org](mailto:covenantp@covpresathens.org)

Covenant Presbyterian Church in Athens, Georgia operates a weekly food drive. The format of the food drive mimics a drive thru, where participants can drive up and bags of fresh, frozen, and non-perishable goods are brought to them by volunteers

- Walk-ups are available
- Eligibility: Anyone who is in need can participate, no questions asked
- Cost: Free

**FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH OF ATHENS: OUR DAILY BREAD**

355 Pulaski Street, Athens, GA, 30601

(706) 353-6647, [admin@downtownministries.org](mailto:admin@downtownministries.org)

Our Daily Bread is a community kitchen run by the First Baptist Church of Athens that offers meals and resources for those in Athens that face homelessness and extreme poverty. Services include:

- Breakfast and lunch meals
- Hygiene kits
- Health screenings

**GEORGIA SENIOR FARMERS MARKET NUTRITION PROGRAM**

Georgia Department of Public Health, Georgia Senior Farmers Market Nutrition Program, 2

Peachtree Street, N.W., 10th Floor, Atlanta, GA 30303

404-657-2900, [farmers.market@dph.ga.gov](mailto:farmers.market@dph.ga.gov)

The Georgia Senior Farmers Market Nutrition Program provides eligible older adults with vouchers to purchase fresh, locally grown fruits and vegetables from approved farmers markets.

- Eligibility: you must be 60 years of age or older and your household income must be at or below 185% of the federal poverty level.
- The program is administered through local Area Agencies on Aging across Georgia, like the Athens Community Council on Aging. Benefits are distributed on a first-come, first served basis during the market season.
- Participation in the program is free. Eligible seniors receive \$20 to \$50 in coupons annually, which can be used at participating markets.

**MEALS ON WHEELS**

135 Hoyt St, Athens, GA 30601

(706) 549-4850, eanthony@accaging.org

Meals on wheels delivers meals to older adults and offers safety checks and a friendly visit.

- Recipients choose a meal weekly that suits taste and dietary restrictions
- Daily meals, Frozen meals, or shelf-stable commodities
- Eligibility: food insecure adults older than age 60
- Cost: Cost is determined on a sliding scale, but no senior will be denied a meal

#### NORTHEAST GEORGIA AREA AGENCY ON AGING

305 Research Drive, Athens, GA 30605

(866) 552-4464, aging@negrc.org

The Northeast Georgia Area Agency on Aging is a regional organization operating under the Georgia Department of Human Services that supports older adults, caregivers, and individuals with disabilities in maintaining independence and quality of life. Services are accessible through the Aging and Disability Resource Connection (ADRC), which provides:

- Information, referrals, and assistance for aging and disability services
- Support for caregivers and individuals with chronic conditions
- Connection to in-home care, nutrition services, transportation, and more

Eligibility is limited to individuals age 60+ in the Northeast Georgia region. Many services are free or low-cost, with some offered on a sliding fee scale.

#### SENIOR SNAP

Georgia Senior SNAP, P.O. Box 537, Avondale Estates, GA 30002

(404) 370-6236, seniorsnap@dhr.state.ga.us

Senior SNAP is a specialized version of Georgia's food assistance program designed to simplify the application process for seniors. It provides monthly electronic benefit transfer funds to help eligible seniors purchase groceries.

- Eligibility: All household members must be 60 years of age or older, household members must purchase and prepare meals together, there must be no earned income from employment in the household.
- Senior SNAP is available statewide across Georgia. All applications can be submitted online, by mail, or by phone.
- There is no cost to apply for or participate in Senior SNAP.

#### THE BUDDY PROGRAM

135 Hoyt St, Athens, GA 30601

(706) 549-4850, rpulliam@accaging.org

The Buddy program pairs older adults with volunteers based on interest to help them pursue their hobbies and interests.



- Companionship, volunteers meet with older adults in homes or assisted living facilities
- Eligibility: Age 55+
- Cost: free

#### THE SALVATION ARMY

490 Hawthorne Ave, Athens, GA 30606 & 784 N Chase Street Athens, GA 30601  
(706) 543-5350, athensga@uss.salvationarmy.org

The Salvation Army is a Christian based international movement that provides services from hunger relief, shelter, family and social services, youth empowerment with programs like Pathway to Hope, Project Share, and Project Hope. Services include:

- Soup kitchen open to anyone in need
- Center of Hope Emergency Shelter with 80 beds
- Pathway to Hope that provides housing units to those with at least one child under 18
- Project Share provides help for those in temporary crisis that threatens their home
- Project Hope is for individuals and families who have been affected by catastrophic events

#### UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA COGNITIVE AGING RESEARCH AND EDUCATION CENTER

Institute of Gerontology, Hudson Hall | 102 Spear Road, Athens, GA 30602  
(706) 542-2539, carecenter@uga.edu

The Cognitive Aging and Research Education center through the University of Georgia College of Public Health serves as a dementia educational resource for older adults. Services include:

- Educational programs on dementia to older adults both with and without dementia.
- Education on preventative and protective measures to those without dementia.
- Diagnoses of dementia.
- Support to loved ones who have family members with dementia.
- Eligibility: anyone who fills out forms on CARE website.
- Cost: no costs listed.

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**Personal Reflections***Elizabeth Greene*

Working through Janie's case with my group gave me more insight into the number and variety of problems that people can face. The challenges that Janie faced had a domino effect. Because Janie's income was not properly reported, she did not get properly compensated in her social security checks and therefore could not afford food and medication. Despite financial challenges, Janie still wanted to live in her home in Denney Tower. Gathering information from community agencies was daunting at first because there seemed to be a lot of problems that need to be tackled. Organizing the type of support that Janie needed made it easier to find resources in Athens that could help her. In my career, I want to be aware of local agencies to refer my patients to based on their needs.

This project helped me learn how to assess someone's needs and then research local agencies that would appropriately address those. I learned that problems are multi-faceted and not always simple to solve. I also learned that eligibility for a lot of programs has low-income requirements. This limits accessibility for people who are in need but do not need income eligibility. Additionally, I learned the importance of ensuring income is properly reported. This limited Janie because her social security retirement check was lower than it should have been. This matters because it can lead to reforms for stricter income reporting to prevent people like Janie not being properly compensated for her work. The cost of medication also needs to be lowered to make it more affordable and healthier, affordable food should also be more widely available for people. Going forward, policy change needs to aim to enact the changes.

*Madison McDonald*

Throughout the process of creating this in-depth needs assessment alongside my group, I have gained a deeper understanding of how to identify and evaluate community resources that could help vulnerable people in various communities. My passion for helping the aging population has also grown throughout this process. Gathering information from community and governmental agencies was a valuable experience that revealed both the strengths and limitations of current resources available to older adults living with a fixed income. The focus of our case study, Janie, is an older adult living on a fixed income in downtown Athens. Each month she has little money left over for groceries, or anything else, after paying for her rent and medications.

Janie's story is reflective of many older adults in the United States. Our case had many different concerns, like food insecurity, aging, social isolation, housing, and social service availability. These concerns have a substantial impact on Janie's overall health and wellbeing and have a similar impact on others who experience them as well. Throughout the research process, we found many resources available not only to Janie, but to those in a similar situation as well. The main issue I saw with these resources was a lack of information on how to actually utilize them. For example, there are many community agencies that work solely on combatting food-insecurity in Athens, yet it is possible that older adults (who would greatly benefit from this assistance) are unsure how to get connected with these resources. Similarly, governmental assistance programs, like Senior SNAP, are available, but not all older adults know how to apply for these benefits. This experience has taught me that simply having resources available is not enough—accessibility, guidance, and awareness on the resources are just as important. I have learned that one of the most powerful tools we can offer as future public health professions is not

just support, but also advocacy and education to help bridge the gap between various resources and people who need them most.

Moving forward in my public health career, I hope to use the insight gathered throughout this semester to better inform and empower the aging population. Our aging population must not only know about the available resources, but they must feel confident in using them. Whether through outreach, policy advocacy, or direct service, I plan to carry this understanding into my future career to help reduce barriers and improve overall health outcomes for older adults like Janie.

*Emily Rosenfeld*

After evaluating Janie's scenario, I have gained a deeper understanding of the challenges faced by older adults, especially those of lower income. Initially, I found the scenario overwhelming, unsure of where and how to begin assessing such a complex and vulnerable case. However, after extensive review of websites, academic literature, and local Athens resources, I now feel confident in my ability to leverage community support to address individual hardships.

For Janie's case, I was interested in identifying what is needed and available for her to age in place, with specific considerations to safety, accessibility, and affordability. Among the various challenges, housing proved to be more complex than I anticipated, as Janie must also balance other financial obligations, ultimately needing to utilize free and easily accessible resources in the community. While Athens offers resources for temporary and unexpected difficulties, many programs have eligibility requirements and screening procedures, raising concern about whether Janie would qualify based on specific criteria or service availability. With this in mind, I realized that Janie may need additional support, such as access to discounted medications and free food, to offset her housing expenses.

Overall, this case study has provided an enlightening perspective on the real-world difficulties that many face daily, especially the persistent worries surrounding housing security, health, and general wellbeing. Research indicates that unstable and inefficient housing can lead to many physical and mental health issues. When combined with other daily stressors such as food insecurity, social isolation, and aging, these struggles become even more pressing. As a health promotion student, this experience has deepened my compassion and empathy for the members of my community, strengthening my commitment to providing meaningful support in the future.

*Lexi Ruffin*

Ultimately, from conducting this case study, I learned the importance of both health education, as well as access to resources. Regarding health education, I mainly recognized how I was privileged to not only know how to find resources but understand what was being offered and how I might use a given resource. For example, when searching for social support services, I encountered problems with finding programs for adults who did not have special needs in terms of social needs, but rather they needed community spaces and connectiveness. I think it's important to recognize that if I, as someone with extensive health education, found it confusing to understand various programs, then there are incredible barriers to care for those who actually need the resources. Regarding access, another challenge encountered in the case study was not just social isolation due to older age and less connections, but also due to physical barriers. Many of the resources aimed to help Janie find community would require her to access her own transportation or public transportation. While we could easily write that Janie could simply take the Athens transit bus that has a stop right outside her apartment, this is not solvent for many older adults. Ultimately, this case study matters and is important going forward because it

highlights the importance of enabling others and meeting people where they are. As healthcare professionals, how can we enable others to not only want to better their health but *know* that they are able to be better. Further, how can we provide realistic solutions to enable others to improve. Often, there could be one solution that could solve all of an individual's health disparities, and we could know the steps to get these individuals resources, but the solution is not realistic for their life. It is crucial that we meet people where they are and understand that a sustainable solution looks different for every individual, for no two health journeys are the same.

*Tiffany St. Clair*

Working on Janie's case as part of this community needs assessment project taught me how deeply social isolation can affect older adults' overall well-being, particularly in underserved communities. Janie's situation, marked by limited mobility, reduced social interaction, and a lack of access to support services, highlighted how non-medical factors contribute to health disparities. Through researching local organizations like the Athens Community Council on Aging (ACCA) and the Northeast Georgia Area Agency on Aging, I explored the types of programs currently available to support older adults, including Meals on Wheels, wellness checks, and adult day health services. Although these services exist, I found that barriers like transportation, awareness, and funding limitations often prevent the most isolated older individuals from accessing them. This matters because it highlights the importance of looking beyond clinical care to address the social determinants of health. Janie's experience reflects the reality that many older adults, especially those living alone, can be overlooked by systems designed to support them. The gaps between available services and actual service use reveal an urgent need for better outreach and coordination among community agencies. Understanding these challenges is critical for anyone planning to work in health promotion or



community-based public health. Moving forward, I plan to use this knowledge to guide how I approach health education and advocacy work. I want to focus on initiatives that not only provide resources but also ensure those resources are accessible to individuals most at risk of social isolation. This could include promoting partnerships between agencies like ACCA and local housing communities or churches to better reach isolated seniors. Janie's case reminded me that public health must be person-centered, and that social connection is a vital, yet often overlooked, component of overall health.