Age-Friendly Insights: Planning and Care for Serious Illness

The John A. Hartford Foundation (JAHF) asked 1,034 adults 50+ in America their views on planning and care for serious illness and what matters to them. Key poll findings include:

Knowledge gaps about planning and care for serious illness persist, but both are very important to adults 50+.

There are big differences by race in familiarity with planning and care for serious illness.

97% of adults 50+ think it is important to have access to “advance care planning” when it is defined for them, yet 40% are slightly or not at all familiar with the term.

- 48% of Black and 45% of Hispanic adults 50+ are slightly or not at all familiar with advance care planning, compared to 37% of white adults.

96% of adults 50+ think it is important to have access to “palliative care” when it is defined for them, yet 55% are slightly or not at all familiar with the term.

- 70% of Black adults 50+ are slightly or not at all familiar with palliative care, compared to 55% of Hispanic and 53% of white adults.

96% of adults 50+ think it is important to have access to “hospice” when it is defined for them, while 15% are slightly or not at all familiar with the term.

- 19% of Hispanic and 15% of Black adults 50+ are slightly or not at all familiar with hospice, compared to 14% of white adults.

People want, expect and trust what matters to them will drive health care decisions if they face serious illness.

99% of all adults 50+ say that in the event of a serious illness, it is important that what matters to them be the primary consideration for decisions made about their care.

82% of adults 50+ trust that the health care system will provide them with care that takes into account what matters to them.

98% of adults 50+ say if they were seriously ill, it is important that the people making decisions on their behalf understand what matters to them.

“...These findings call for informing people about the tremendous care and support available when faced with serious illness. The time to learn more is NOW—before it’s needed—and we have resources to help. We can use these tools to increase equity by rethinking communications strategies, so that everyone has access to needed information. Whether we’re clinicians, older adults, or family members, we need to talk about what’s available and what matters.”

Terry Fulmer, PhD, RN, FAAN
President, JAHF

johnahartford.org
Clinicians need to meet their patient’s expectations by talking about planning and care for serious illness, and everyone should talk to their families about what matters to them if they became seriously ill.

Clinician-initiated conversations about planning and care for serious illness are critical to age-friendly care. Experts say these conversations need to begin long before people face these decisions.

- More than half of adults 50+ (54%) report that within the last two years, no health care professional, be it a doctor, nurse, or other staff, initiated a conversation about what matters to them in their health care.
- Just under half of adults 50+ (47%) believe people speaking on their behalf will completely know what matters most to them about their healthcare, if they became too sick to make their own decisions.
- Regardless of race or ethnicity, almost all (99%) adults 50+ think it is important for their health care team to offer specialized care that can improve their quality of life during serious illness, such as relief from pain and other symptoms.

Resources from JAHF and its partners help clinicians and families have conversations about planning and care for serious illness.

Resources can help plan for high-quality, age-friendly care.

For clinicians and professionals working with older adults

- Serious Illness Messaging Toolkit
- CAPC MOTIVATE: Marketing and Messaging Palliative Care
- Vital Talk

For older adults and family caregivers

- The Conversation Project Conversation Guides*
- PREPARE for your Care*
- Get Palliative Care*

For health system leaders and policymakers

- Educating the Public about Palliative Care
- Respecting Choices
- C-TAC resources

The poll is part of Age-Friendly Insights, a JAHF series measuring opinions on issues related to improving the care of older adults and support for family caregivers. Learn about this poll and our previous Age-Friendly Insights.

*Resource available in multiple languages