

HEALTHY AGING BEYOND BORDERS

How a community-engaged research project in Ghana is helping us understand what older adults need to age well.

THE QUESTION

What does it take to age well?

Healthy aging is more than the absence of illness. It is the ability to remain connected, engaged, secure, and supported in the places that make life meaningful.

What the study is showing

Findings show that social connection, health care access, and program participation are closely linked in later life. Many of the participating adults are navigating isolation, health needs, and limited access to support at the same time.

THE COMMUNITY

311 older adults and 21 staff, program volunteers, and administrators participated

The survey analysis is interpreted alongside community perspectives through focus groups and interviews

SOCIAL CONNECTION

41% of participating older adults met the social-isolation threshold. Co-residence did not necessarily mean connection: 54% of adults living with children were isolated, compared with 22% of those living with a spouse.

HEALTH AND CARE

39% of older adults in the study went without needed medicine or medical care during the prior year. In interviews, staff and volunteers repeatedly described medication costs, mobility limitations, and long waits for care as barriers.

DEMENTIA KNOWLEDGE

4.6/16 average correct score on the dementia-knowledge scale for recognizing symptoms; no item was answered correctly by a majority.

PROGRAM REACH

40% reported no current participation in a healthy-aging support program.

PHYSICAL HEALTH

37% rated their physical health fair, bad, or very bad.

LIVING ARRANGEMENT

54% of those living with children were isolated, compared with 22% living with a spouse.

THE RESEARCH: A SHARED INQUIRY, ROOTED IN COMMUNITY

Florida Atlantic University, the University of Ghana's Department of Social Work, and Golden Chapter Foundation are using community-engaged mixed methods to understand healthy aging, social connection, loneliness, and the resources older adults need.

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LISTEN

Center the community's voice and lived experiences



LEARN

Co-learn from context-relevant data



ACT

Co-design practical community-based solutions

Healthy aging is global, but solutions must be local.

WHAT WE HEARD BEHIND THE NUMBERS

The qualitative interviews give context to the patterns observed in the survey data.

Across interviews, the same themes recurred:

- connection depends on being able to get out,
- health care depends on being able to afford and reach it, and
- community programs can provide a valued place to belong.

CONNECTION NEEDS ACCESS



Older adults may stay home because travel is too costly, the distance is too long, or mobility has declined. Volunteers described transportation as the most immediate barrier to joining programs that participants genuinely enjoy.

PROGRAMS CAN BE A LIFELINE



Book clubs, games, health talks, exercise, creative activities, and online gatherings provide more than diversion. They create peer connection, routine, and reasons to leave the house. Hybrid options also help some members participate from home or abroad.

CARE IS NOT ONLY CLINICAL



Interviewees linked unmet health needs to the everyday costs of medicines, dental and vision care, and transport to services. They also raised the need for age-responsive care that reduces long queues and brings support closer to where older adults live.

REACH MUST EXPAND



People most likely to miss programs may be those who are already isolated, live farther away, or cannot arrange a ride. Transport support, local partnerships, and outreach beyond existing sites emerged as practical priorities for widening access.

IMPLICATIONS FOR ACTION

- **Co-residence does not guarantee social connection.** Among study participants, isolation was common, including among adults living with children. *This suggests that family proximity alone should not be treated as protection against loneliness or social exclusion.*
- **Healthcare access and program participation barriers persist.** Transport costs, mobility limitations, long waits, and out-of-pocket care costs affect both health care access and participation in social programs. *Transport support may therefore be a high-leverage community investment.*
- **Community programs are part of the healthy-aging infrastructure.** Programs offering social, recreational, and health-related activities provide routine, belonging, and connection. *Outreach must extend to those who are isolated, live farther away, or cannot arrange transportation.*



HEALTHY AGING ACADEMY

Research | Education | Community Engagement | Global Collaboration

Suggested Citation | Nketsiah, E. T., Ampomah, A. O., Agyeman, A., Gadzekpo, V., Ofori-Acquah, C. (2026). *Healthy aging beyond borders. How a community-engaged research project in Ghana is helping us understand what older adults need to age well.* (Healthy Aging Academy: Brief 2026-1). Healthy Aging Academy, Florida Atlantic University.

Acknowledgment | The evaluation team thanks the older adults who participated in the study, the research assistants who supported data collection, and the University of North Carolina and the FCAB Africa Initiative, which provided technical support and funding. Additional thanks to Golden Chapter Foundation for collaborating to advance the well-being of older adults.