

THE UP ISLAND COUNCIL ON AGING

STRATEGIC PLAN

July 1, 2026 to June 30, 2029



ADOPTED BY THE BOARD OF THE UP ISLAND COUNCIL ON AGING

May 5, 2026

1042 STATE ROAD
WEST TISBURY MA 02575

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UP ISLAND COUNCIL ON AGING

STRATEGIC PLAN REPORT

Director's Message

The Up Island Council on Aging (UICOA) has reached a pivotal moment in its history — one where intentional reflection meets the rapidly growing needs of the expanding communities of Aquinnah, Chilmark, and West Tisbury. Recognizing both the responsibility and the opportunity before us, we launched a comprehensive, years-long evaluation of our services and future direction.

This process has been both rigorous and inclusive. Internally, the Board and staff engaged in deep assessment and strategic dialogue. Externally, we partnered with UMass/Boston's Gerontology Institute to conduct a thorough needs assessment grounded in data and best practices. We convened numerous focus groups and listened carefully to members from all three towns, community stakeholders, and town leadership. Every conversation, every perspective, and every data point has helped shape our understanding of what older adults Up Island need now — and what they will need in the years ahead.

Through this extensive research and community engagement, we have developed a forward looking plan rooted in evidence, collaboration, and a shared commitment to service. This plan positions the UICOA to strengthen and expand its mission, ensuring we continue to support, empower, and advocate for the older adults of Up Island with clarity and purpose. While this plan is a tool to help guide our decision making in the coming years, the UICOA will continue to use new data and community feedback sessions to inform the agency as we strive to meet the goals set out in this strategic plan.

Respectfully,

Bethany Hammond

Bethany Hammond

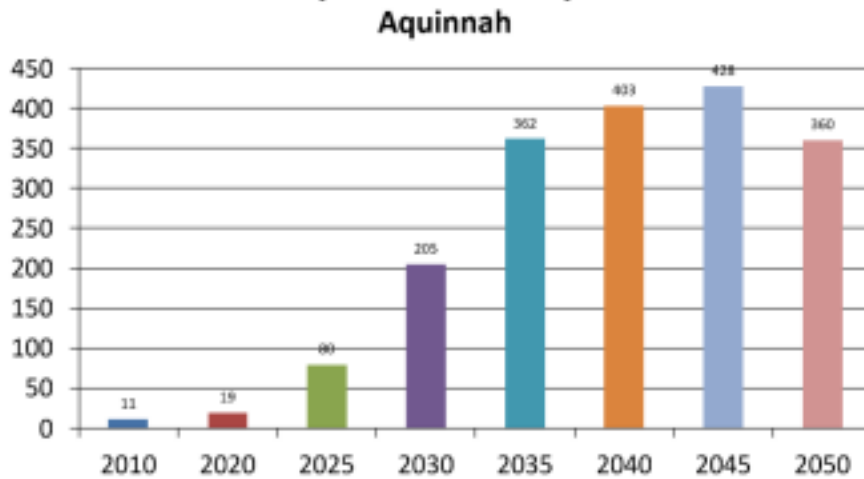
Director, UICOA

Current Environment and Forecasted Demographic Changes

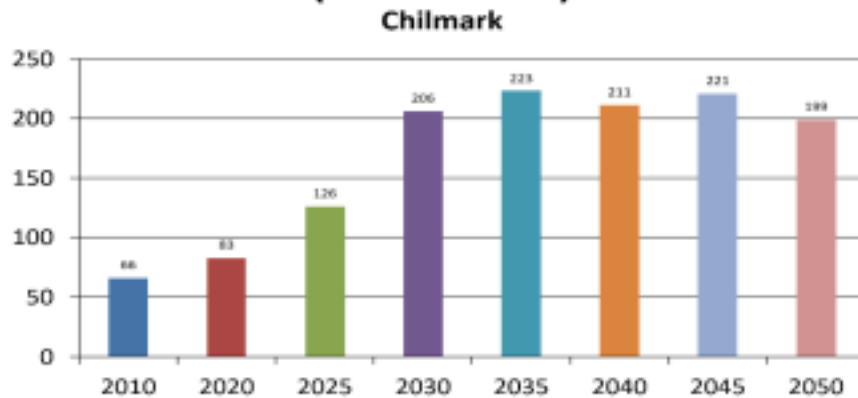
While the rapid growth of the population aged 60 and older is widely recognized, it is critical to understand that the Up Island community far exceeds the state average, where approximately 22% of residents are 60+. In contrast, individuals 60+ comprise roughly 44% of the adult population in Aquinnah, 51% in Chilmark, and 45% in West Tisbury—nearly half or more of these communities.

Based on projected rates provided by the University of Massachusetts Donahue Institute, we anticipate a significant increase in the growth of the 80+ population for each town, as illustrated in the following graphs.

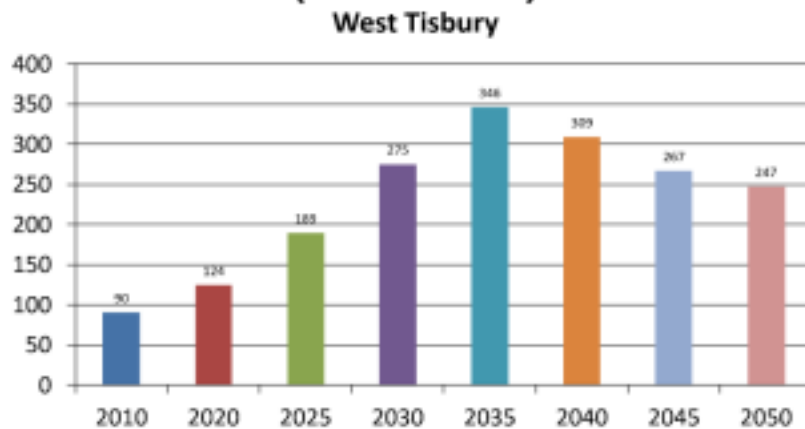
Aquinnah – Population Age 80+ (Forecast)



Chilmark – Population Age 80+ (Forecast)



West Tisbury – Population Age 80+ (Forecast)



For the time period 2025-2030, these forecasts translate to almost 300 more Up Island Older Adults who will reach 80 years during this time. The increases in this age group alone are of note as people tend to require more support and access to resources to remain living in the community as they age. This results in services provided by the UICOA to be more heavily drawn on to help support the older members of the community.

As we plan, we must proactively address both the challenges and opportunities presented by this demographic shift. The Up Island Council on Aging is committed to strengthening its capacity to meet the evolving needs of older adults. Strategic investment and thoughtful planning are essential to ensure we are prepared to meet this growing need.

Mission Statement

The UICOA supports adults aged 60 and older residing in Aquinnah, Chilmark, and West Tisbury by providing access to services, programs, and community resources. These efforts promote independent and dignified living while fostering meaningful connection within the community.

Goals

The UICOA's primary goals are to:

- Continue to provide access to diverse social, cultural, educational, and health programs
- Identify the evolving needs of older adults and adults with disabilities
- Continue to design and implement services that respond to those needs
- Coordinate health and wellness services with Town departments and partner agencies
- Maintain a welcoming and inclusive physical gathering place for residents

Scope of Services

The UICOA functions as both an adult community center and a social services agency. The current scope of programs and services include:

- Access to health and financial services
- Allocating and dispensing funds to alleviate utility, grocery, and pharmacy expenses
- Collaboration with community agencies during weather emergencies
- Application assistance for public benefits (e.g., SNAP, fuel assistance, Medicare programs)
- Outreach and home visits
- Health and wellness clinics, including fitness, strength training and balance classes
- Educational, social, and cultural programs
- Support Groups (Those living with Parkinson's Disease, Parkinson's Caregivers)
- Nutrition services, including community lunches and food pantry support

Our Strategic Priorities

- 1. Transportation**
- 2. Facilities**
- 3. Outreach and Community Engagement**
- 4. Fiscal Responsibility**

Strategic Pillars

The long-range plan is guided by four core pillars. These pillars drive how we act with older adults, the community, with each other as staff, and how we prioritize what we do.

- **Trust** – Responsible stewardship of resources
- **Independence** – Supporting mobility and aging in place
- **Connection** – Reducing isolation and fostering engagement
- **Functionality** – Supporting emotional, cognitive, and physical well-being

THREE-YEAR STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

Transportation - Vital for access to services, utilization of UICOA, and reducing isolation.

Key Issues:

- The rural nature of the three Up Island towns along with the distance many residents live from main roadways presents unique challenges to accessing transportation.
- The distance from necessary services (UICOA, medical, grocery etc.) negatively impacts the quality of life of many older adults who live Up Island, particularly those who do not drive.

Objective: Developing and managing a safe and accessible transportation program

- Acquiring an accessible vehicle
- Recruiting trained volunteer and/or paid drivers
- Coordinating with partner organizations
- Increasing visibility and public awareness

Goals:

- Provide adequate transportation options for all Up Island Older Adults to be able to access healthcare, food, and other fundamental services as well as providing enrichment opportunities
- Increasing utilization over time of these transportation options by all Up Island Older Adults
- Demonstrate improvement in the quality of life for Up Island Older Adults as a result of these transportation options

Success Measures - may include, but not be limited to, the following:

- One or more UICOA accessible vehicles acquired
- 8 volunteer and/or paid drivers recruited
- 8 volunteer and/or paid drivers trained
- 5 partner organizations coordinated with relative to transportation
- UICOA transportation options utilized by 40 up Island residents

THREE-YEAR STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

Facilities - Vital for providing a welcoming, accessible, and safe physical gathering space for older adults to access services and connect.

Key Issues Identified:

- Limited reception visibility
- Non-commercial kitchen
- Inadequate office space
- Limited access to back offices for clients

Objective: Ensure the facility effectively serves the growing 60+ population.

Goals:

- Improve reception visibility
- Upgrade kitchen to commercial standards
- Expand private workspace for staff
- Improve access to back offices

Success Measures – may include, but not be limited to, the following:

- UICOA kitchen is fully upgraded to meet commercial standards
- Number and/or square footage of private workspaces for UICOA staff increased
- Access to back offices for staff and clients improved
- Visibility of reception area for staff and clients improved
- 25% of clients who utilize the UICOA facility express that it “better meets their needs” as a result of improvements to it

THREE-YEAR STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

Outreach and Community Engagement - Vital for expanding services and assistance for older adults while in increasing community awareness and education of available services provided by UICOA.

Key Issues Identified:

- Limited community awareness of resources and services available through the UICOA.
- A need to reach older adults who would benefit from UICOA participation, but are not actively engaged currently
- The growing need for outreach and direct services exceeds the current capacity of staffing

Objective: Promote social connections to reduce isolation and to raise awareness and access to the services provided by the UICOA.

Goals:

- Expand programming in Aquinnah and Chilmark
- Increase outreach bandwidth and capacity
- Increasing program participation
- Continuing successful social activities
- Introducing gateway programming to reach younger seniors in our community
- Expand evening and weekend offerings
- Adjust staffing to support expanded hours
- Improve marketing strategies by the creation of a standalone UICOA website, rebranding the COA, creating a UICOA logo, and increasing media presence

Success Measures – may include, but not be limited to, the following:

- Increase the number of Up Island Older Adults who utilize the UICOA (both in numbers and as a percentage of Older Adults in each town)
- Deepen the support provided to 80+ Older Adults
- Participation in programs increases by 30% for all age ranges in all service towns
- UICOA website, logo, and organizational branding effort created and fully implemented

THREE-YEAR STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

Fiscal Responsibility - Vital to ensure the UICOA is positioned financially to be able to continue providing necessary services to older adults Up Island.

Key Issues Identified:

- As provided services increase, funding will need to increase to keep up with necessary space and staffing needs

Objective: To operate in a fiscally responsible manner to ensure adequate funding for programming, staffing, and facility needs as well as providing timely and transparent financial reporting for all three towns.

Goals:

- Maintain balanced budget
- Increased grant funding sources
- Effectively utilized funding provided by the Friends of the UICOA

Success Measures – may include, but not be limited to, the following:

- UICOA operating budget remains balanced through each year of the strategic plan
- Grant funding sources to UICOA increase by 10%
- All financial reporting to UICOA board and service towns is provided on or ahead of target dates
- All financial reports to UICOA board and service towns are clear and fully transparent

Strategic Plan Closing Summary

The Up Island Council on Aging stands at an important moment of transition and opportunity. The demographic realities facing Aquinnah, Chilmark, and West Tisbury make clear that the demand for services, programs, and community support for older adults will continue to grow significantly in the years ahead. This strategic plan reflects a thoughtful, research-informed response to that reality.

Through collaboration with community members, town leadership, and UICOA staff, the UICOA has developed a roadmap designed to strengthen its role as both a community hub and a vital social service provider for older adults and their families. This strategic plan is not simply a document, but a commitment—to listen, to adapt, and to serve—ensuring that the UICOA remains a trusted and responsive resource for the Up Island community for years to come.

Grounded in the core pillars of trust, independence, connection, and functionality, this plan outlines clear priorities that will guide the organization over the next three years. Investments in transportation, facility improvements, expanded outreach, and responsible fiscal management will help ensure that older adults have access to the resources, programs, and social connections necessary to age with dignity and independence in the communities they call home. At the same time, the plan recognizes that flexibility and ongoing community input will remain essential as needs evolve.

This strategic plan charts a clear path forward for the Up Island Council on Aging. It provides a strong basis for decisions regarding the exploration of potential expansion or relocation of our physical gathering space to ensure we can meet the evolving needs of a growing population in the years ahead.

By strengthening partnerships, expanding capacity, and maintaining a strong commitment to stewardship and service, the Up Island Council on Aging is positioning itself to meet the challenges of a rapidly aging population while continuing to build a vibrant and inclusive community for older adults.

Staff of the Up Island Council on Aging

Bethany Hammond, Director
Susan Merrill, Assistant Director
Rocy Turner, Outreach Coordinator
Jennie Gadowski, Administrative Assistant

Board of the Up Island Council on Aging

Cynthia Mitchell, Chair (West Tisbury)
Paul Manning, Assistant Chair (Aquinnah)
Anna Alley, Clerk (West Tisbury)
Jay MacLeod (Aquinnah)
Randy Weis (Chilmark)
Peter Cook (Chilmark)
Paul Bailey (Chilmark)
Chris Manning (Aquinnah)
Beth Kramer (West Tisbury)
Marie Larsen (Chilmark, resigned)
Kathie Olsen (Aquinnah, resigned)
Gary Haley (Aquinnah, resigned)

Strategic Planning Committee

Beth Kramer, Chair
Bethany Hammond
Paul Manning
Paul Bailey
Peter Cook
Randy Weis
Jay MacLeod
Cindy Trish, Healthy Aging MV
Anne Perschel
Bernadette Lyons, resigned
Marie Larsen, resigned

Special Thanks to Kathie Olsen and Caitlin Coyle from UMASS/Boston Gerontology Institute for their Strategic Leadership

APPENDIX -ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

BACKGROUND

Overview

The Up Island Council on Aging (UICOA), established in 1972, supports residents aged 60 and older in the towns of Aquinnah, Chilmark, and West Tisbury. The organization provides a comprehensive menu of services, programs, events, and resource referrals that promote independent, dignified living and meaningful community connection.

History

The UICOA was formed in 1972 through concurrent votes in the towns of West Tisbury, Chilmark, and Aquinnah (then Gay Head) “for the purpose of providing information and services to elder residents of the community.”

The organization initially operated from the second floor of the former West Tisbury Town Hall. It later moved to its current home at the Howes House, which was renovated and expanded specifically to serve as a regional senior and community center.

In 1994, the Howes House underwent a major renovation funded by a combination of local tax dollars and funds from the Friends of the Up Island Council on Aging, Inc., a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization whose mission is to support UICOA programs and initiatives.

Today, the UICOA is governed by a nine-member Board, with three representatives appointed from each of the three Up Island member towns.

Staffing

In FY 2026, the UICOA staff includes;

- Director
- Assistant Director
- Outreach Coordinator
- Administrative Assistant
- Part-time Kitchen Manager

The office is open and staffed Monday through Friday, 8:30 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.

In addition to paid staff, UICOA relies on a dedicated group of community volunteers whose contributions are essential to fulfilling its mission.

Communication and Marketing

The UICOA distributes a monthly e-newsletter to more than 200 recipients in FY 2026. The newsletter is also available online through the Towns' websites and in print at the UICOA. It provides information on programs, services, and issues relevant to older adults. Program and service information is also available in the 55+ column and on local television.

Partnerships

In FY2026, the UICOA collaborated with numerous organizations to expand its reach and impact, including:

- Municipal departments
- Massachusetts Executive Office of Aging and Independence
- Massachusetts Councils on Aging
- National Council on Aging
- Other Martha's Vineyard COAs
- Healthy Aging MV
- Elder Services of Cape Cod and the Islands
- Vineyard Transportation Authority
- Martha's Vineyard Hospital
- Dukes County – Vineyard Health Care Access and Health & Human Services
- Visiting Nurses Association
- MV Center for Living

Going forward, the UICOA will explore continued expansion of partnerships with additional Island organizations.

STRATEGIC PLANNING PROCESS

The UICOA Board was reconfigured in November 2023, with three appointed representatives from each Up Island town. Initial priorities included:

- Orientation with staff
- Election of Board officers
- Adoption of By-laws
- Creation of a Memorandum of Understanding among the three towns

The Board established both a Strategic Planning Committee and a Director's Search Committee.

After an exhaustive state-wide search, a new Director was hired to replace the previous Director who retired in the spring of 2024. An Outreach Coordinator was also hired, bringing staffing to full capacity. This leadership transition marked a natural and strategic time to engage in long-range planning.

Community Needs Assessment

In May 2024, the Board engaged the UMass/Boston Gerontology Institute to conduct a community needs assessment. Over eight months, the process included:

- Key informant interviews
- Focus groups
- A survey of residents aged 50+
- Summary reports of findings to the Towns' Selectboards and to the Community

The assessment was funded through state formula grant funds.

In May 2025, the board retained consultant Dave Chase to assist with strategic planning. This was funded by a gift from the Friends of UICOA and a successful Mass COA grant.

In September 2025, a full-day staff and Board retreat was held to identify strategic priorities. The retreat was facilitated by Board member Kathie Olsen.

The Subcommittee continues to refine measurable goals, action steps, and timelines. A draft plan will be presented in April 2026, with a final draft targeted for June 2026.