

# Live Beyond Expectations

## Regional Strategic Plan Wrap Up Report

2020-2025



Helping people live longer, healthier lives  
in the Atlanta region.



## Vision

# ONE **great** REGION

## Mission

*Foster thriving communities for all within the Atlanta region through collaborative, data-informed planning and investments.*

## Goals



**Healthy, safe, livable communities** in the Atlanta Metro area.



**Strategic investments** in people, infrastructure, mobility, and preserving natural resources.



Regional services delivered with **operational excellence** and **efficiency**.



**Diverse stakeholders engage** and take a regional approach to solve local issues.



**A competitive economy** that is inclusive, innovative, and resilient.

## Values

**Excellence** – A commitment to doing our best and going above and beyond in every facet of our work allowing for innovative practices and actions to be created while ensuring our agency's and our colleague's success.

**Integrity** – In our conduct, communication, and collaboration with each other and the region's residents, we will act with consistency, honesty, transparency, fairness and accountability within and across each of our responsibilities and functions.

**Equity** – We represent a belief that there are some things which people should have, that there are basic needs that should be fulfilled, that burdens and rewards should not be spread too divergently across the community, and that policy should be directed with impartiality, fairness and justice towards these ends.

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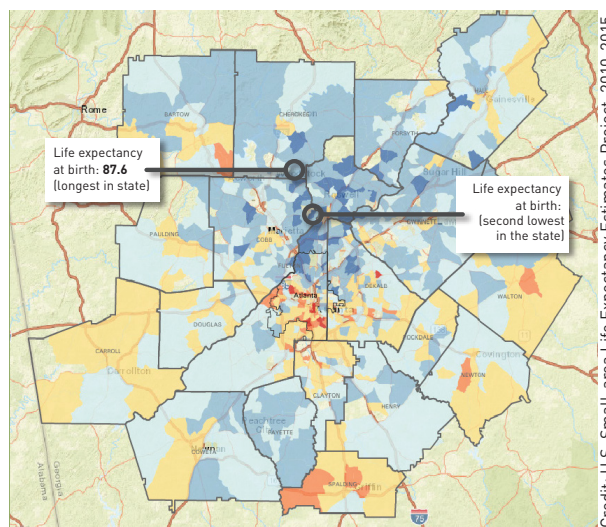
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# Overview

In 2019, the Atlanta Regional Commission (ARC) Board approved the Live Beyond Expectations (LBE) 2020-2025 regional plan. This strategic framework aimed to redirect initiatives within ARC, particularly the Aging and Independence Services (A&IS) department, that could influence both the length and quality of life. The original plan document acknowledged the roles that geography, infrastructure, environment, and socioeconomic status play in an individual's health outcomes. It also explored the geographic patterns of life expectancy across the Atlanta region. This framework highlighted some of the largest disparities in the region, including that "in metro Atlanta, lifespans differ greatly based on geography. [Some residents] can expect to live to age 87. Less than ten miles away... life expectancy is 63 [years]. That's a 24-year difference. Disparities can be found within every county in the region." Asserting that "life expectancy is shaped by numerous and complex factors," the report concluded that a "long-term, interdisciplinary approach, rooted in data, is the region's greatest hope for overcoming this lifespan gap."

Quality and length of life are multi-generational trends that are unlikely to be fully reverse in just six years. ARC identified four objectives to focus its work on from 2020 to 2025. These goals were to :

1. Inventory key areas of focus
2. Enhance existing partnerships and expand engagement with new partners
3. Increase awareness of disparities in life expectancy and the factors that drive them
4. Marshal resources to address disparities



Data from community follow-ups indicated that

Varying Life Expectancies in the Atlanta Region pursuing these objectives had a tangible impact on health conditions in communities with low life expectancy. This report documents the progress achieved as of 2025 and highlights the effectiveness of a place-based strategy in addressing vital conditions. It remains true that "the agency has a deep reserve of resources, including research and data analysis and community planning in transportation, housing, arts, and employment sectors," along with deeply committed community partners and a federal mandate to plan, advocate, and provide services for older adults. ARC is committed to ensuring that everyone, regardless of location, can age well in a supportive community.

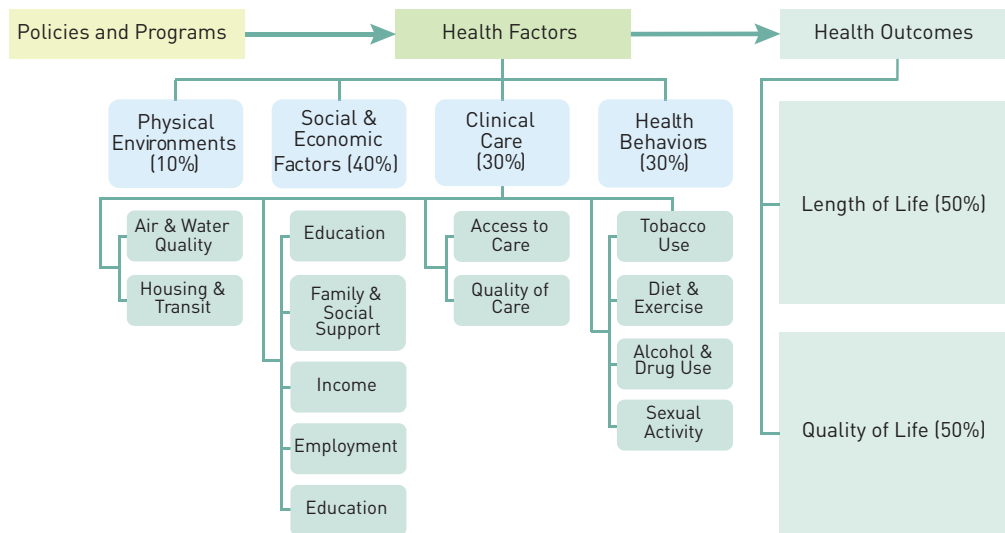
# Execution

For the duration of the plan, ARC, working closely with a steering committee composed of internal and external members, sought to pursue its set goals creatively. At times, this work was highly experimental. Measuring impacts on life expectancy presents many challenges: as a longitudinal measure, accurate measurement requires decades of data. The shifting landscape of public health throughout the plan’s time frame exacerbated these challenges. Nonetheless, ARC made progress toward accomplishing the goals outlined in the plan. This section highlights achievements and efforts made toward each goal, as well as the opportunities for continuation identified for LBE 2026-2031.

## Inventory Key Areas of Focus

### Strategies

- ◇ Identification of low-life expectancy (LLE) census tracts in each county using the U.S. Small Area Life Expectancy Estimates Project (See Appendix A)
- ◇ Production of County Snapshots, which compared vital conditions in the lowest and highest life expectancy tracts in each county
- ◇ Focus groups held with residents of each Low-Life Expectancy (LLE) census tract, lasting 120 minutes and facilitated in a community resource center within or near the census tract or on Zoom to maximize accessibility
- ◇ Prioritization events where larger groups of residents were asked to prioritize and contextualize the focus group findings at community events located within or near the census tract
- ◇ Stakeholder feedback where service providers, elected officials, healthcare professionals, and other related parties were asked to provide context and direction to the prioritization and focus group efforts
- ◇ Life expectancy tracker where quantitative variables from the American Community Survey and the Metro Atlanta Speaks survey were continually monitored and updated yearly

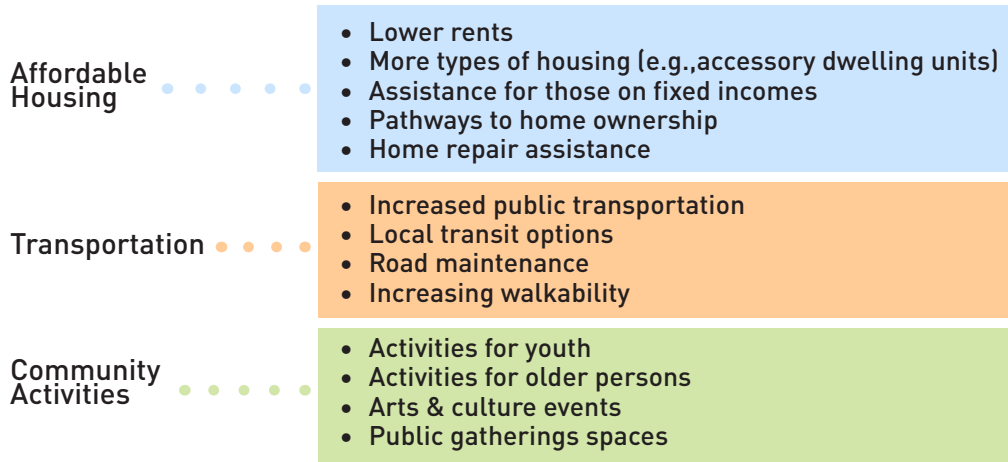


## Achievements

These efforts produced data that is both quantitatively and qualitatively rich, shedding light on the experiences and conditions of LLE areas. Between each phase of community engagement, this project involved many more participants than previous efforts to gather public input within A&IS. The team held over 30 events over two years to sustain this dedicated inquiry, with some events drawing several hundred residents. In each census tract, the findings became clearer at each stage, providing reassurance that the research process was uncovering genuine patterns and helping to focus the team's efforts on actionable goals.

Across each county, the specific focuses varied slightly (see Appendix B for full findings). However, throughout the region, housing, transportation, and community programming consistently rose to the top of the list of concerns for participants.

### Top Issues Across the Atlanta Region



## Opportunities for Continuation

In the coming years, this work can be enhanced with ongoing efforts to listen, translate, and investigate resources, concerns, and disparities in LLE census tracts. Although this process was thorough, it is now several years old. More opportunities for iterative feedback beyond initial phases will allow ARC to continue to develop targeted interventions. Focus groups with more experienced facilitators and additional resources for transcription and analysis will yield more rigorous results, supported by staffing expansion and strategic partnerships established since the first rounds. Additionally, there will be opportunities to continue to incorporate holistic health measures into other engagement efforts, such as the annual Metro Atlanta Speaks survey. Greater alignment, reflection, and repetition will benefit the next chapter of this plan.

## Enhance Existing Partnerships and Expand Engagement with New Partners

### Strategies

- ◇ Partnered with service providers in each LLE tract to identify residents for focus groups in 2022
- ◇ Facilitated a webinar for local elected officials in 2022, sharing the findings of focus groups in LLE area
- ◇ Updated county snapshots to include learnings from community engagement
- ◇ Held quarterly steering committee meetings with stakeholders from across the region to provide input on plan execution
- ◇ Hosted Live Beyond Expectations Summit in May 2025, inviting service providers, municipal staff, and local elected officials to a day-long program of sharing information and resources, discussion, and planning exercises
- ◇ Achieved designation as an Age-Friendly region in July 2024, partnering with AARP to bolster planning efforts for older adults, and including LBE as the strategic frame for adopting Age-Friendly Communities in the Region
- ◇ Launched a mini-grant program in 2024-2025, providing 18 organizations with \$3,000 to pilot or expand place-based initiatives in LLE communities
- ◇ Created a video tool to explain the work that the AAA does to a general audience in 2025



## Achievements

These efforts successfully integrated LBE into broader planning initiatives and fostered relationships. By building relationships early through focus groups, the rollout of the later mini-grant program was successful, attracting many applicants who were aligned with LBE's goals. The LBE summit attracted representatives from every county within the AAA service area. The Age-Friendly designation served as a meaningful recognition of the region's progress towards becoming a place where all older adults can age well.



## Opportunities for Continuation

This work will continue as the team builds new relationships and maintains existing partnerships. Opportunities to strengthen these relationships through mechanisms like newsletters, more formal convenings, and repeated, structured engagement will support these efforts, expanding outreach and increasing understanding of the conditions that promote healthy aging.

## Increase Awareness of Disparities in Life Expectancy and the Factors that Drive Them

### Strategies

- ◇ Participated in existing information-sharing collaboratives at the local and county level by attending sessions focused on health equity and presenting regular updates on LBE
- ◇ Presented to individual internal and external partners upon invitation, including the ARC Community Planning Academy, Atlanta Legal Aid, various county commissions and boards of health, Piedmont Health Systems, and professional organizations such as the Georgia Gerontology Society, the Southeastern Association of Area Agencies on Aging, and the Southern Gerontology Society
- ◇ Held LBE Summit in May 2025, sharing findings and opportunities for intervention
- ◇ Analyzed client data for aging services and incorporated findings into technical assistance and quality monitoring process
- ◇ Provided input to internal ARC departments and workgroups, using LBE learnings to inform engagement with other ARC planning processes such as Developments of Regional Impact, Climate Connections Workgroup, the Regional Development Plan, Human Services Transportation, and GA Commute Options

### Achievements

By collaborating with a diverse network of partners, the team was able to leverage informal relationships to access new partners that were beyond their initial reach. Presentations were consistently well received and often prompted requests for further engagement or additional resources.

In reviewing the client access served by ARC-funded service providers, the team experienced an average 17% increase in clients benefiting from ARC aging services grant funds in LLE areas across the region. In 2024, older adults living in LLE areas were twice as likely to receive services compared to older adults throughout the entire region.

## Opportunities for Continuation

The consistently positive feedback regarding speaking engagements and slide decks that the team received shows the value in continuing these efforts. Due to the five-year timeframe anecdotal successes could not be thoroughly evaluated, providing an opportunity for further analysis. Additionally, different types of partners may be attracted to specific explanations or data that others might not, leading to varying understandings or limited awareness. Ongoing research can explore these questions, and future studies can build on this work by incorporating more systematic follow-ups and investigating results.

## Marshal Resources to Address Disparities

### Strategies

#### ◆ 2022-2023 External education and non-monetary support for projects including:

- Co-location of Fayette Health Clinic in LLE tract by Fayette County Board of Health
- Good Samaritan Health Clinics in Fulton LLE tract
- Mercer Health Equity Navigator outreach in Henry and Fayette LLE tracts
- Scholarships for after-school programs in Cobb LLE tract by the Community Foundation for Greater Atlanta, connecting them to eligible providers
- Senior-focused community events in DeKalb LLE tract with DeKalb Human Services
- Support for DeKalb Health and Housing Collaborative launch with DeKalb Human Services
- Incorporation of LLE tract partners into Advisory Committee on Aging through citizen member participation

#### ◆ 2024-2025 Mini-Grant Program

- These programs were highly flexible, targeted grants of up to \$3,000 that funded projects in LLE communities that either piloted or expanded access to a program that addresses one of the needs identified in our community engagement. This initiative supported 26 organizations across more than 40 projects. This report will highlight three case studies to provide a range of examples.

#### ◆ AID Atlanta: Member Emergency Assistance Fund

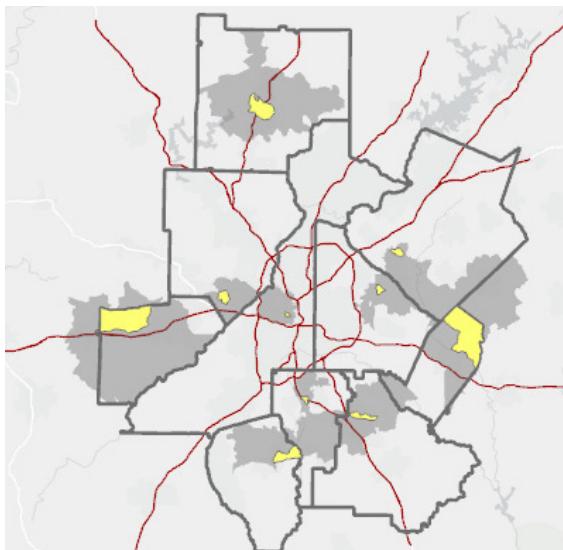
This grant allowed us to provide critical resources that directly address transportation and food insecurity—two barriers that often prevent individuals from accessing HIV essential services. One of the most impactful initiatives we launched was the provision of 52 Uber medical rides.

For many of our members, transportation can be a daunting obstacle, particularly when it comes to attending important medical appointments. The Uber rides provided a reliable solution, ensuring that individuals could reach their healthcare providers without the added stress of insufficient funds.

We witnessed firsthand the relief and gratitude expressed by members as they shared how these rides enabled them to prioritize their health and well-being. In addition to the rides, we purchased 47 food cards aimed at alleviating hunger and food insecurity among our members. To date, we have successfully given out six of these food cards, with plans to distribute the remainder systematically. By collaborating with case managers, we leverage their expertise to identify eligible recipients based on specific area code parameters, ensuring we reach those who need assistance the most during their scheduled case management meetings. The response to the food cards has been overwhelmingly positive, with members expressing deep appreciation for the support.

◇ **Foodwell Alliance**

FWA was founded in 2015 when Jim Kennedy, chair of Cox Enterprises, and Bill Bolling, founder of the Atlanta Community Food Bank, had an idea to build healthier communities across metro Atlanta by connecting and supporting members of our local food movement. Since then, FWA have supported more than 300 community gardens, urban farms, and orchards in the Atlanta Region. To date, FWA has engaged thousands of people annually around the issues of local food and provided more than \$6 million in direct resources.



Map of the Atlanta region that shows where the mini-grant programs occurred (shaded gray) and where the LLE tracts are (shaded yellow)

- We currently serve 45 urban farms and 161 community gardens in the city of Atlanta and our five-county service area of Clayton, Cobb, DeKalb, Fulton, and Gwinnett counties. Additionally, we serve 45 orchards in the Atlanta region, extending beyond our service area to include Cherokee, Douglas, Fayette, Forsyth, Henry and Rockdale counties. For this specific mini-grant project, we addressed the need for long term access to fresh, locally grown produce by planting a new orchard in the garden at Pat Maxwell's Place. Pat Maxwell's is a restaurant at 2710 Jefferson Street Austell, GA 30168, a neighborhood in one of the zip codes ARC identified as experiencing extreme health disparities. It is also located within an Environmental Protection Agency-Inflation Reduction Act (EPA-IRA Disadvantaged Community).
- Once fruit begins producing for an average orchard, the orchard has the potential to provide 9,800 annual servings of fruits, nuts and berries grown without artificial pesticides or fertilizers (economic value of \$8,000+ annually). Over a 20-year period, this equates to 212,281 servings, an economic value of \$150,000+. The orchard will serve residents in the neighborhood and the City of Austell. Beyond planting the orchard, we have trained an orchard steward to provide ongoing maintenance for the health of the orchard via on site visits, online workshops and workshops off-site."

◇ **NETWorks Cooperative Ministry**

With generous funding from the Atlanta Regional Commission (ARC), NETWorks Cooperative Ministry provided \$3,000 in emergency rental assistance to stabilize housing for five individuals experiencing homelessness or housing insecurity within the 30087 ZIP code. This included three women over the age of 60 who formed a shared living arrangement, and a single grandmother over 60 caring for her dependent grandchild with developmental disabilities. All recipients were low-income, at risk of or actively experiencing homelessness, and faced significant barriers to maintaining stable housing due to the rising cost of living in 30087.

This project prioritized older adults, individuals with disabilities, and multigenerational caregiving households—ensuring that support addressed both immediate need and long-term sustainability. With ARC support and NETWorks case management, all five individuals were placed in affordable units, enabling them to regain stability and independence.

◇ **Close collaboration of Age-Friendly and LBE process**

## Achievements

The mini-grant cycles provided funding opportunities for community initiatives that typically would not receive support through ARC's traditional, often larger, grant processes. The mini-grant process impacted neighborhood-level programs by providing funding of \$3,000 or less for initiatives within LLE communities. ARC estimates that over 2,000 residents of LLE communities received direct services such as food deliveries, transportation assistance, utility bill/rent relief, health workshops, or free community programming. This work was highly flexible and directly responded to the priorities that residents had identified in ARC's community engagement. Besides the material benefits, these partnerships were instrumental in raising the profile of ARC among smaller community based organizations, positioning the agency as an connector in tangible improvements in people's lives.

In June 2024, AARP Georgia designated ARC as an Age-Friendly Region. Reflecting the agency's commitment to assuring all residents of the Atlanta Region live healthy lives, the program provides resources to help participants plan and develop initiatives supporting the 8 Domains of Livability: outdoor spaces and buildings; transportation; housing; social participation; respect and social inclusion; work and civic engagement; communication and information; and community and health services. LBE serves as the strategic approach used to develop ARC's Age-Friendly Action Plan, providing a unique framework to apply Age-Friendly concepts that reflects the region's specific focus on serving first those most in need, so that all residents of the region thrive.

## Points for Continuation

As mentioned earlier ARC aims to develop more thorough follow-up and evaluation processes for non-monetary projects. Often, ARC provided educational resources on an issue and learned about a resulting project, but the agency did not always have sufficient information that would confirm causation or how much our efforts made a difference compared to other factors. Finally, the agency hopes to continue to increase attention on specific neighborhoods maintaining the micro-place based focus. This can be challenging at times due to the larger geographies that most organizations serve, such as county-wide boards. Communicating the importance of attention to neighborhood-level initiatives can be challenging in these broader contexts. However, ARC has successfully worked with county and regional partners in the past and looks forward to expanding that work.

Since recognition as an Age-Friendly Region, the LBE process has incorporated AARP's paradigm as a useful framework for understanding vital conditions. Expanding partnership and funding opportunities open up new horizons for the next iteration of this plan.

## Conclusion

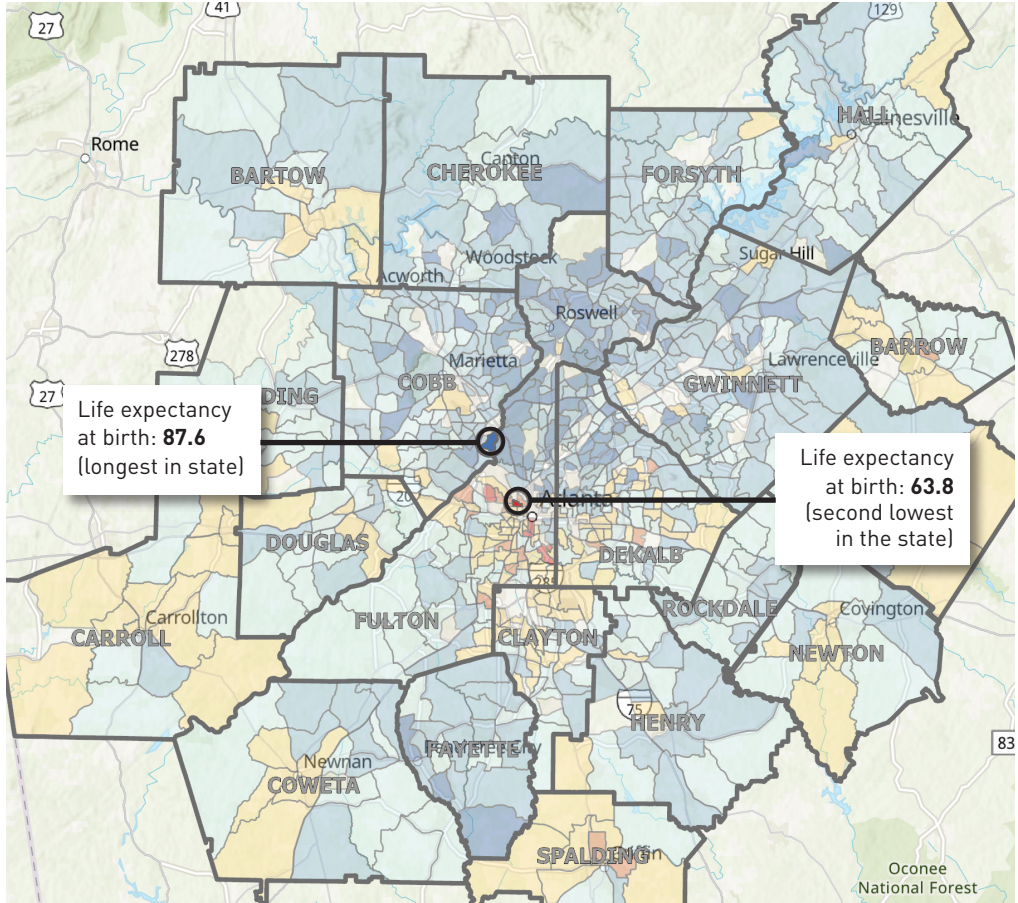
Over the last six years, ARC has experimented with various approaches to intervene in variables that impact life expectancy at the census tract level. Although not all of these efforts were equally successful, they offer valuable lessons in how future initiatives can continue to serve those in the greatest socioeconomic need as required by the Older Americans Act.

Moving forward, ARC will continue to utilize data-driven approaches to understanding vital conditions across the region. In LBE 2026-2031, there will be a renewed attention to health geographies in metro Atlanta, grounded in the robust community engagement, innovative interventions, and long-standing relationships that ARC has cultivated in the 2020 iteration of this framework.

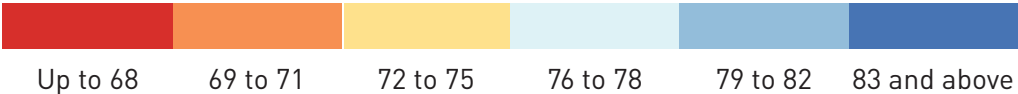


# Appendix A: Life Expectancy in Years

## Atlanta Region Life Expectancy in Years

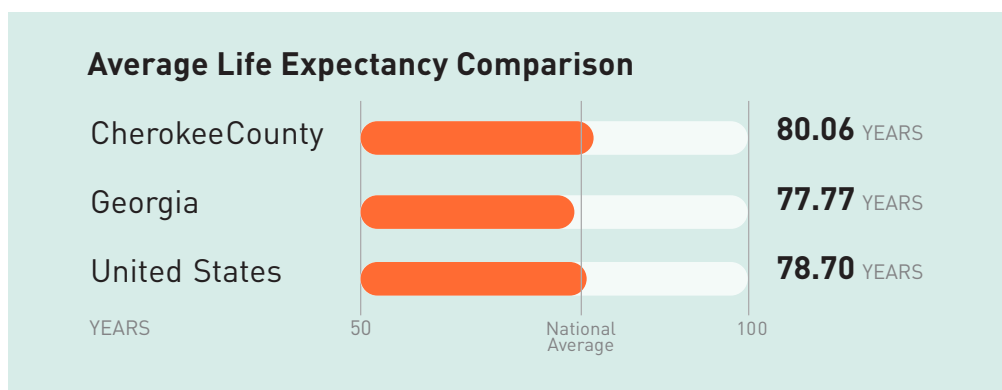
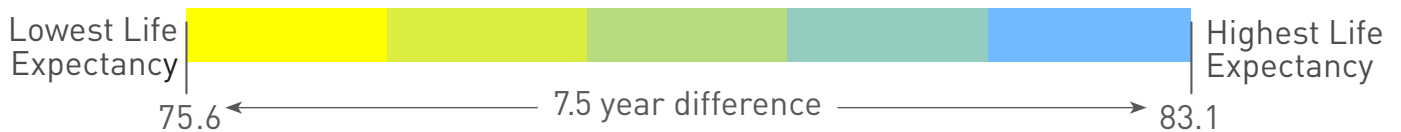
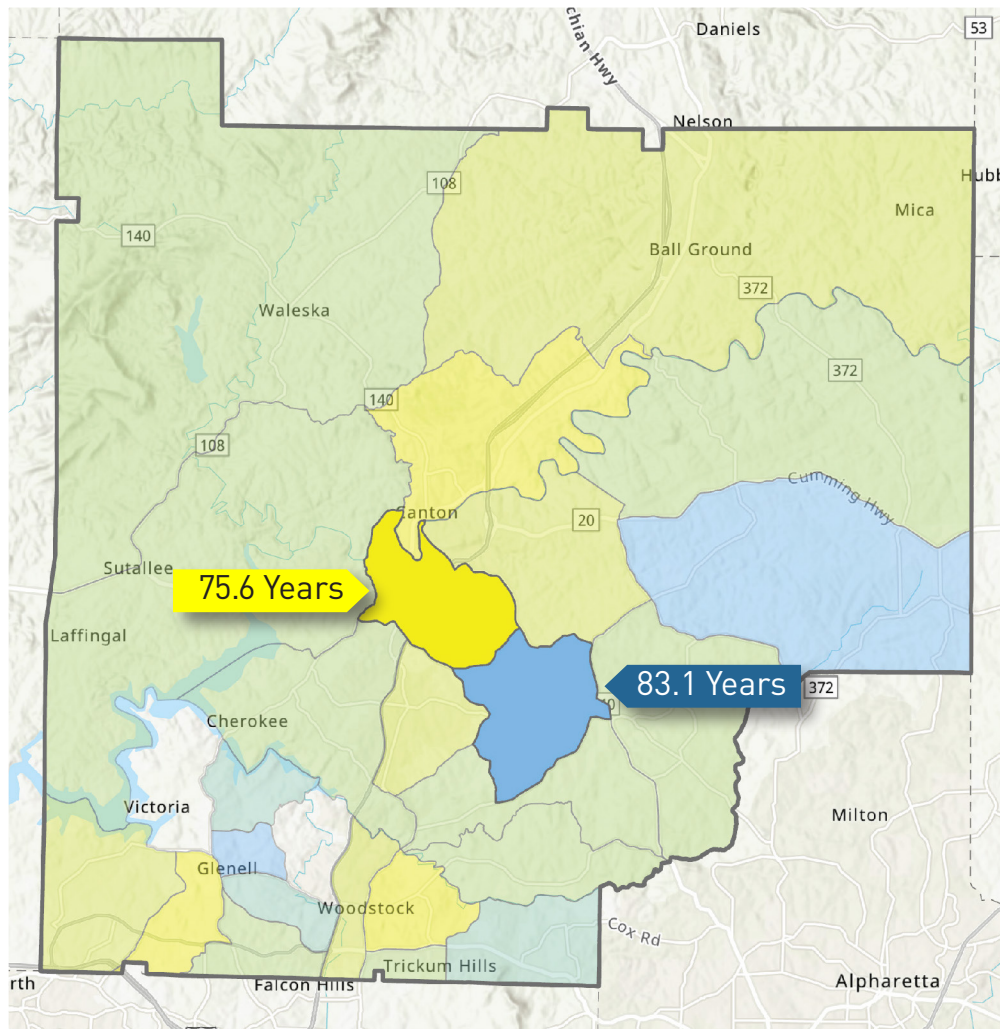


Life Expectancy at Birth



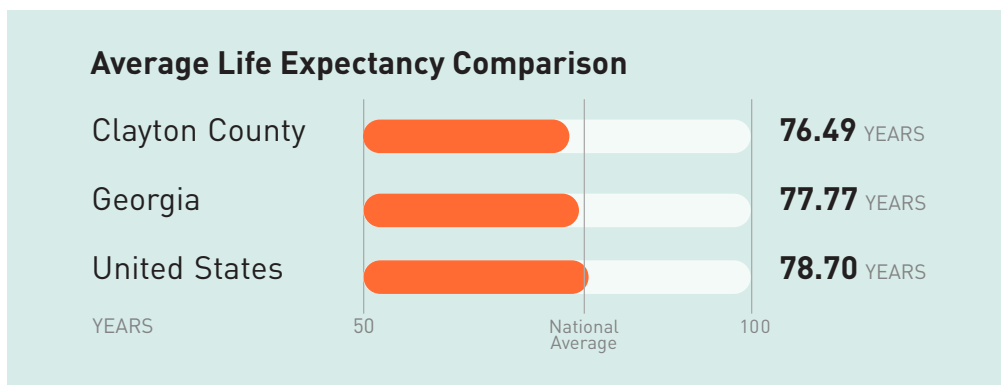
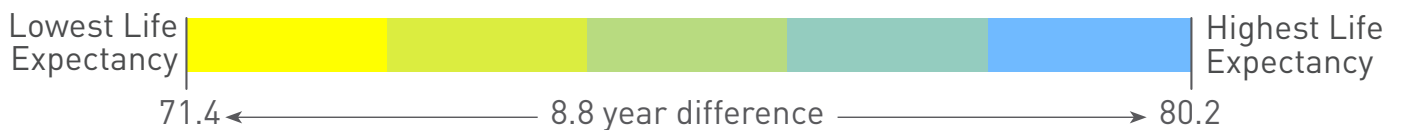
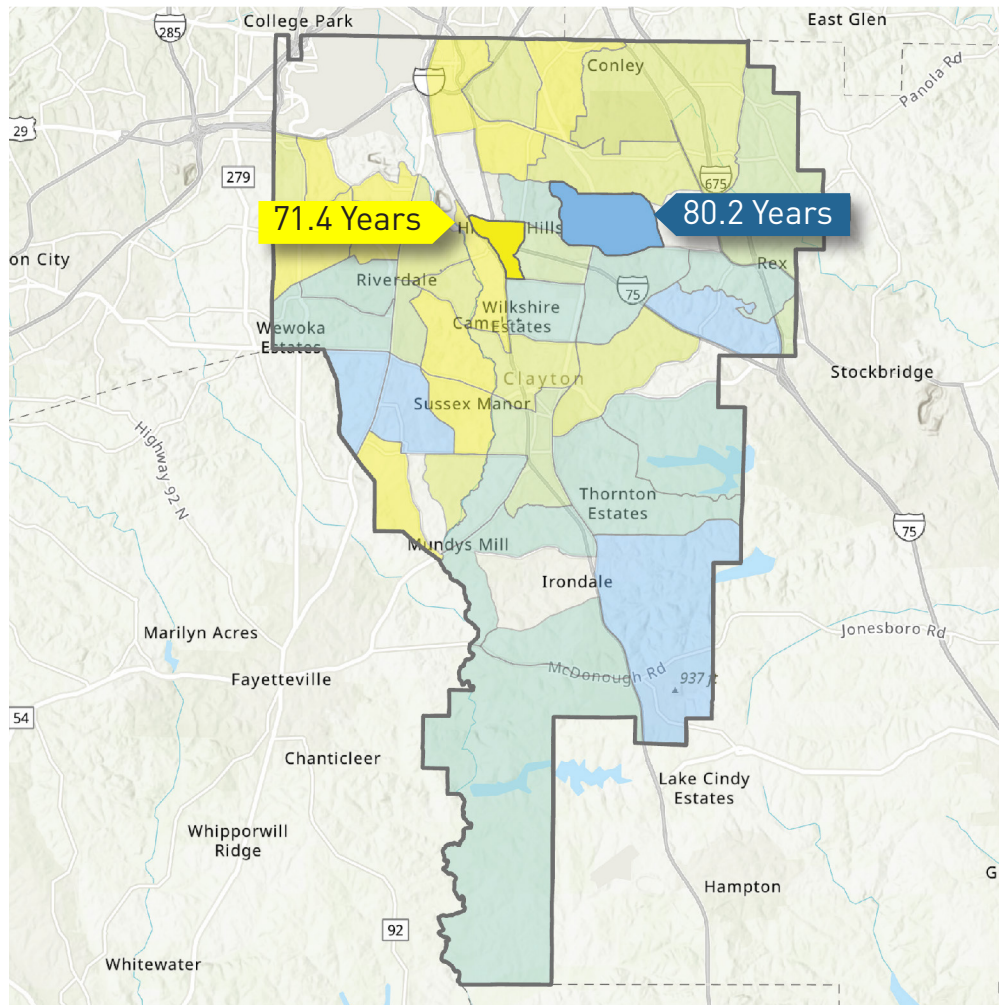
Source: U.S. Small-area Life Expectancy Estimates Project, 2010-2015

# Cherokee County Life Expectancy in Years



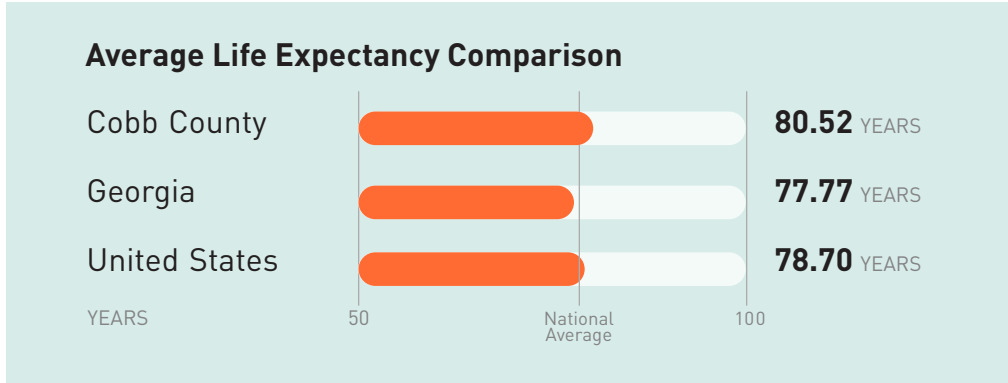
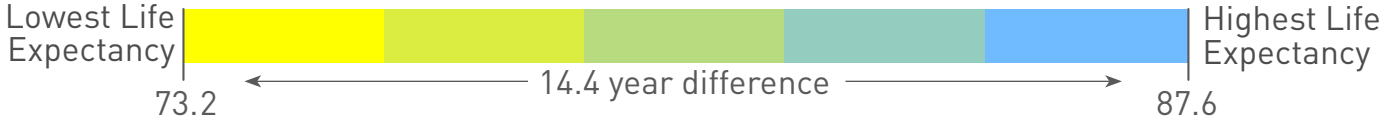
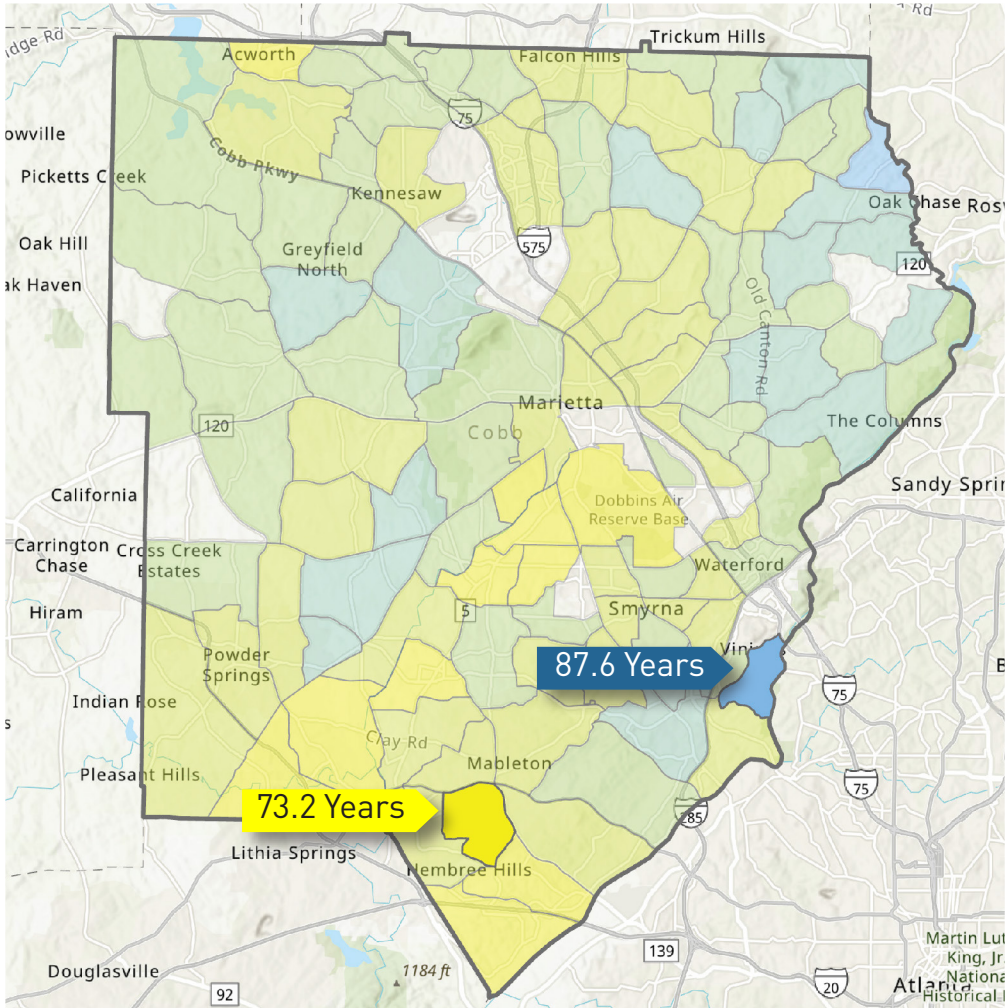
Sources: U.S. Small-area Life Expectancy Estimates Project, 2010-2015 Life Expectancy Bar Charts: Robert Wood Johnson Foundation Life Expectancy Tool, January 2020

# Clayton County Life Expectancy in Years



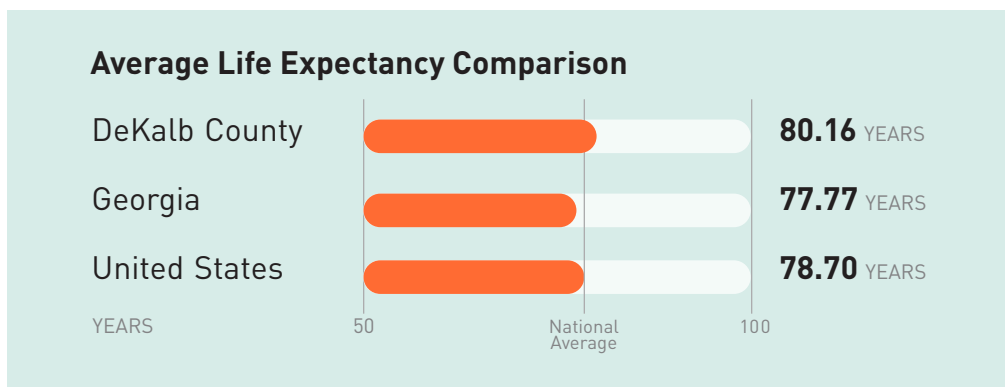
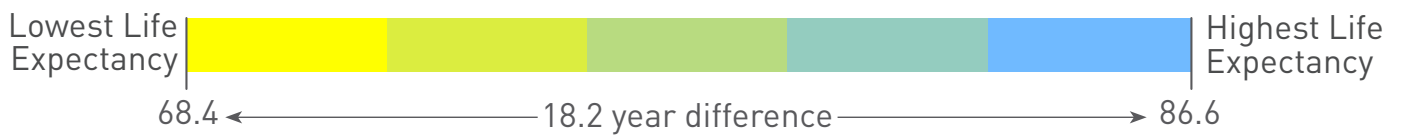
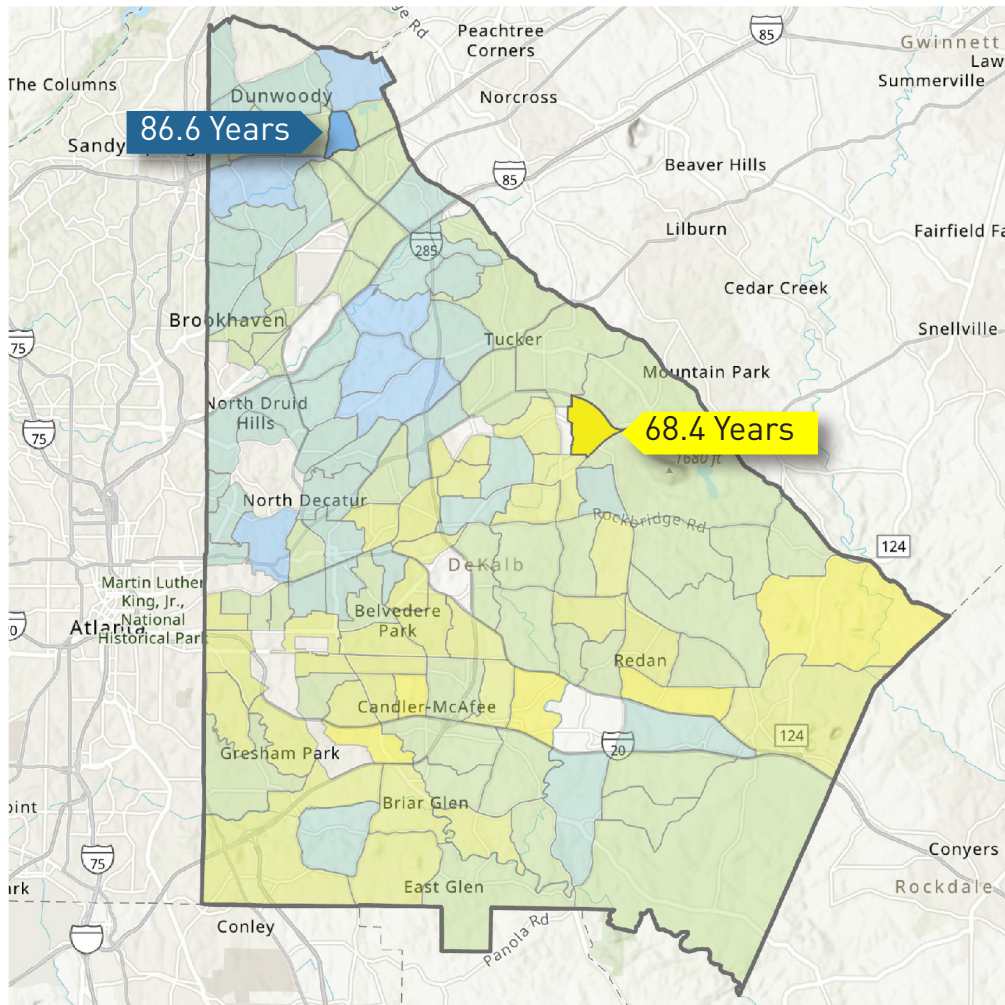
Sources: U.S. Small-area Life Expectancy Estimates Project, 2010-2015 Life Expectancy Bar Charts: Robert Wood Johnson Foundation Life Expectancy Tool, January 2020

# Cobb County Life Expectancy in Years



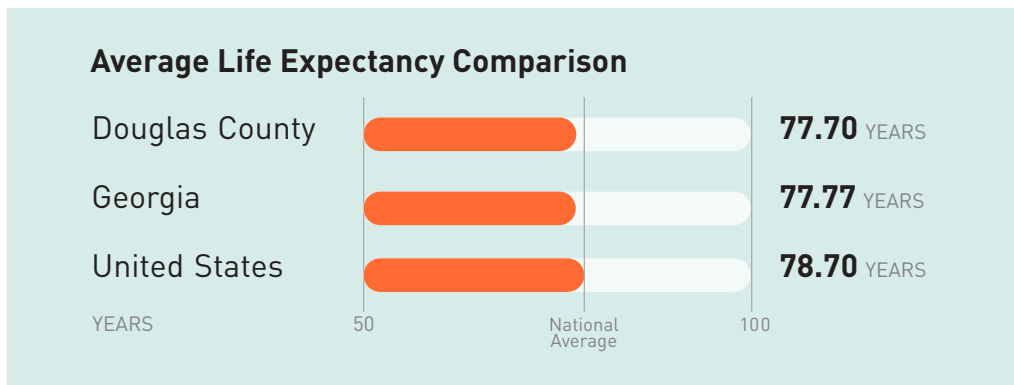
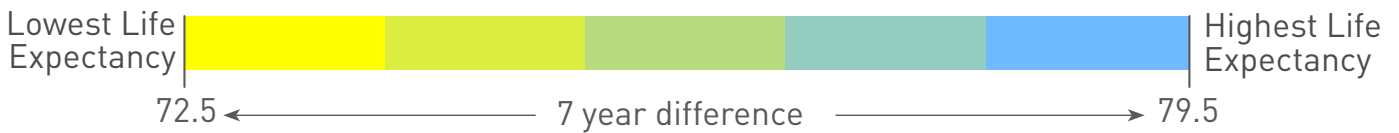
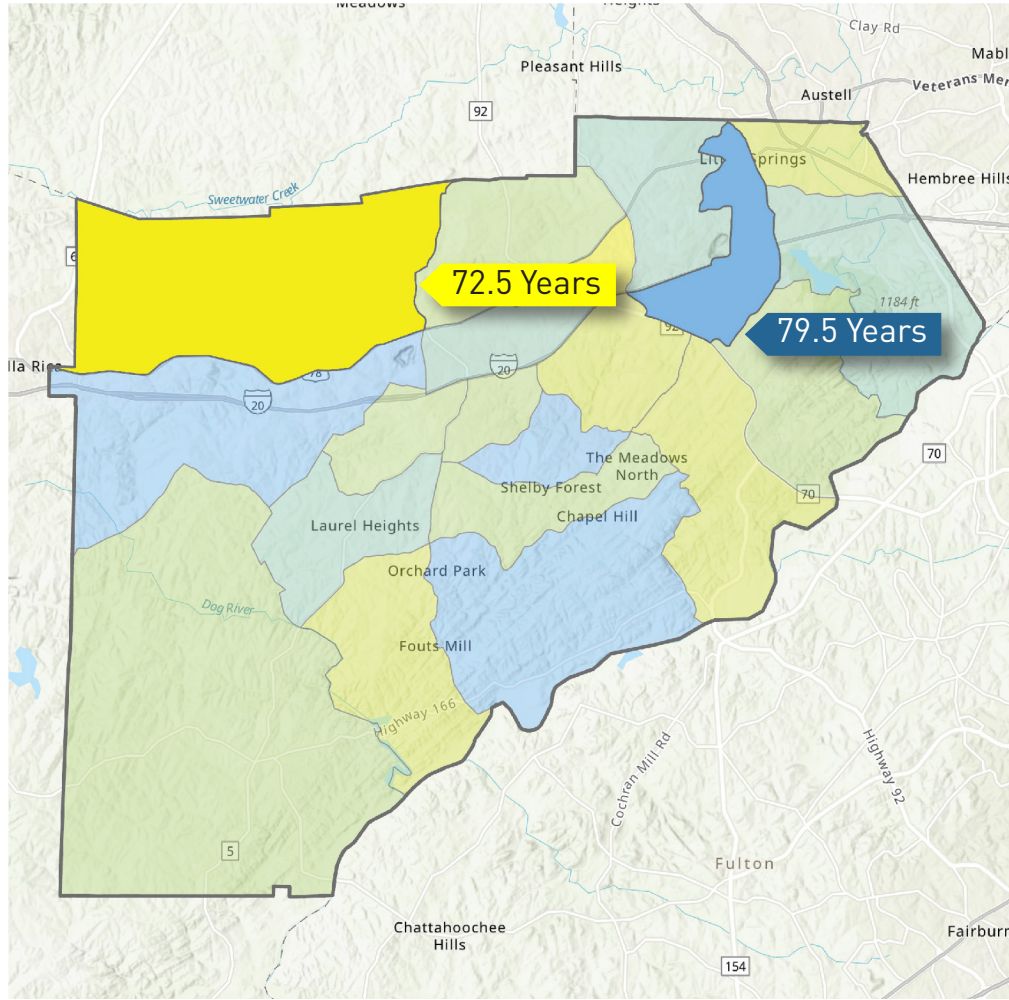
Sources: U.S. Small-area Life Expectancy Estimates Project, 2010-2015 Life Expectancy Bar Charts: Robert Wood Johnson Foundation Life Expectancy Tool, January 2020

# DeKalb County Life Expectancy in Years



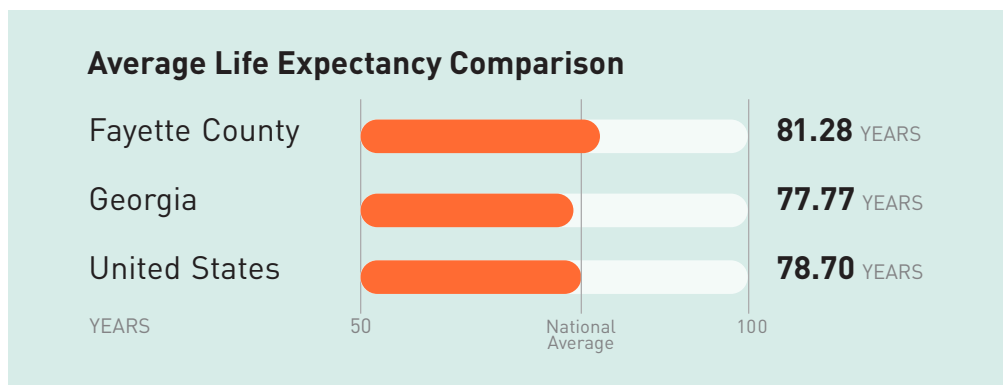
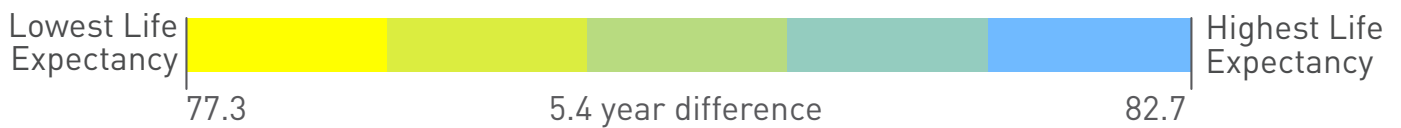
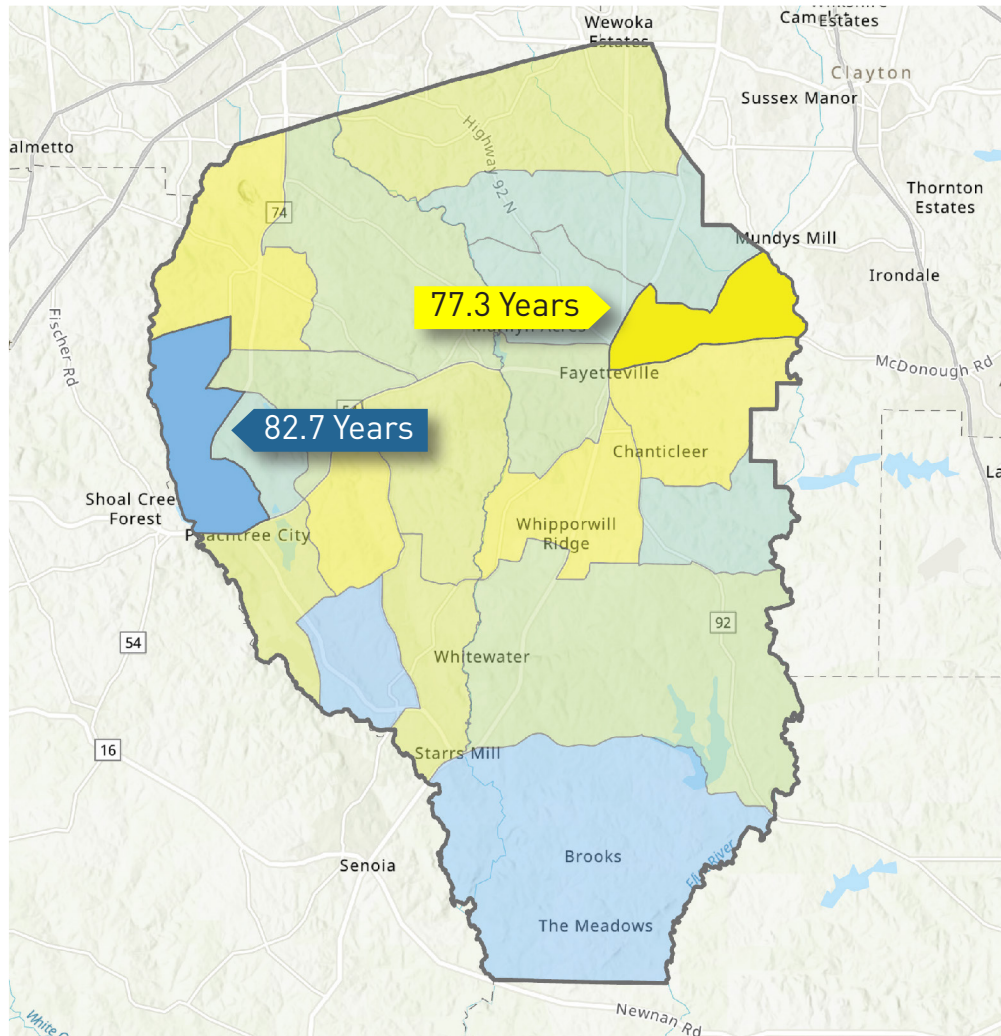
Sources: U.S. Small-area Life Expectancy Estimates Project, 2010-2015 Life Expectancy Bar Charts: Robert Wood Johnson Foundation Life Expectancy Tool, January 2020

# Douglas County Life Expectancy in Years



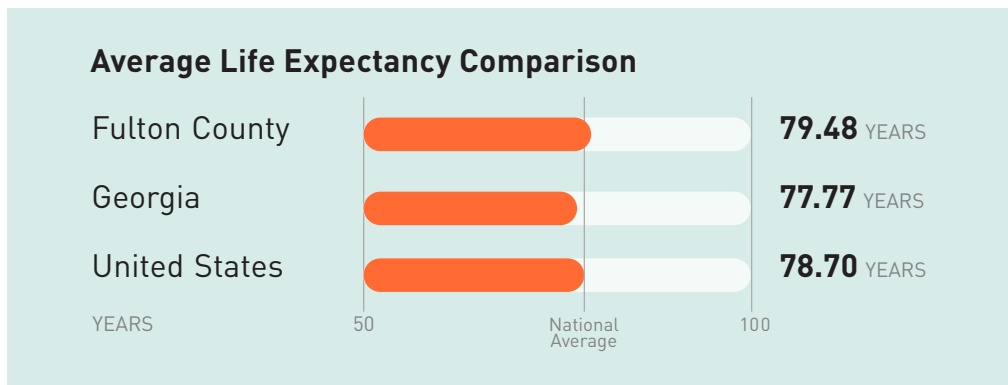
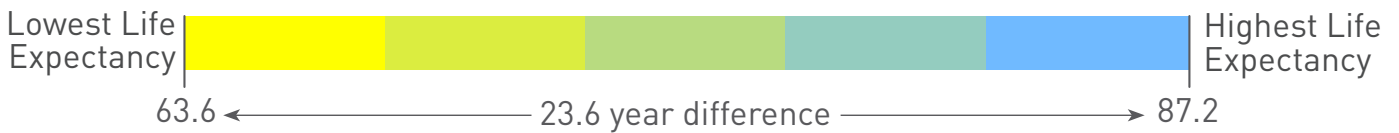
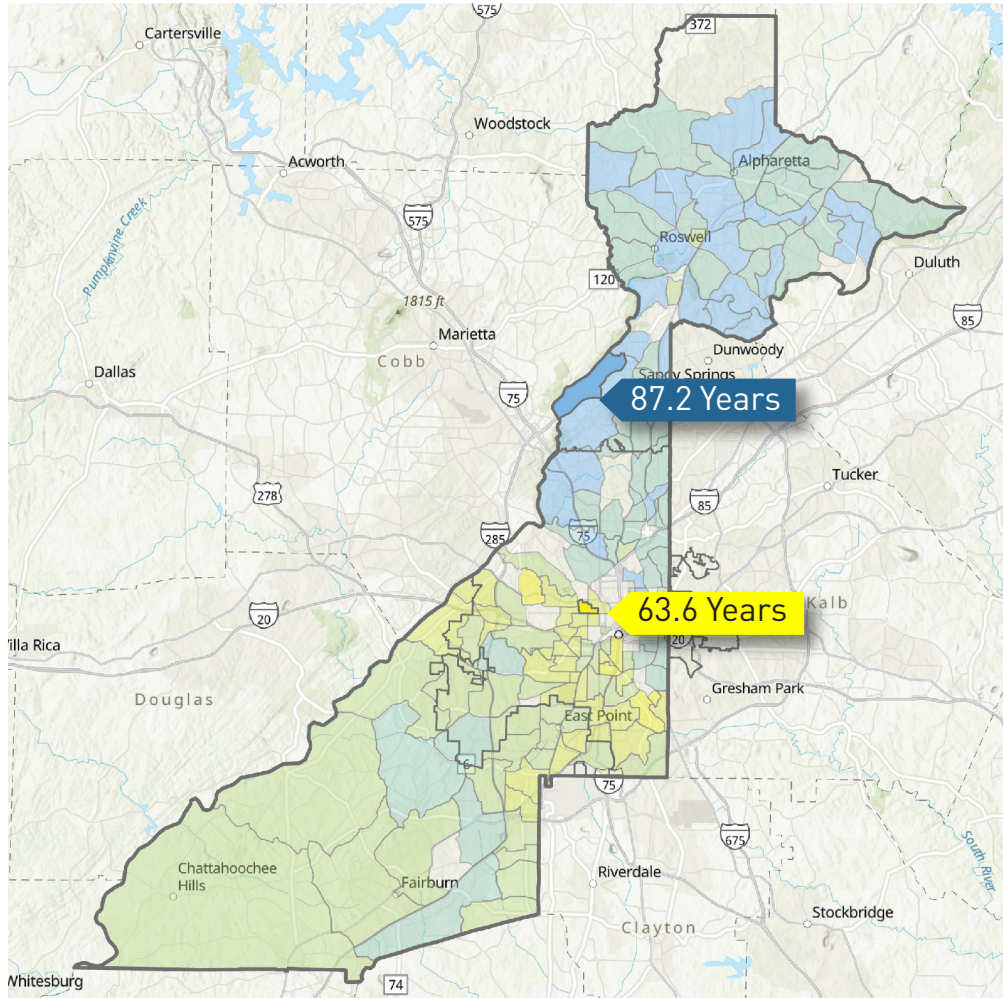
Sources: U.S. Small-area Life Expectancy Estimates Project, 2010-2015 Life Expectancy Bar Charts: Robert Wood Johnson Foundation Life Expectancy Tool, January 2020

# Fayette County Life Expectancy in Years



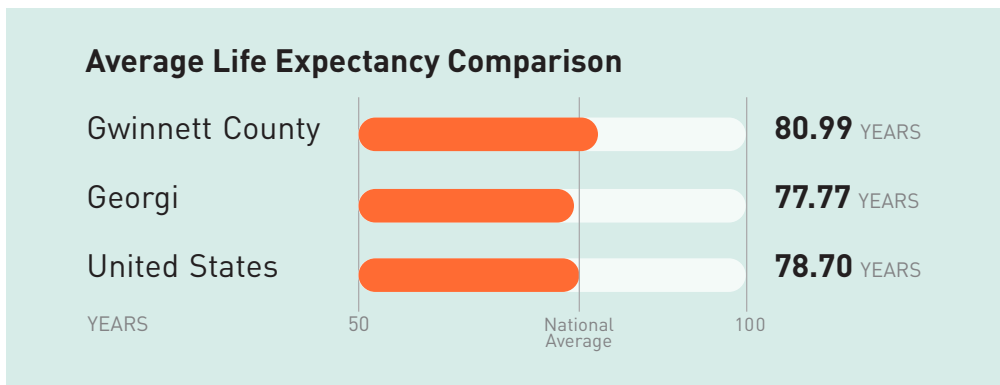
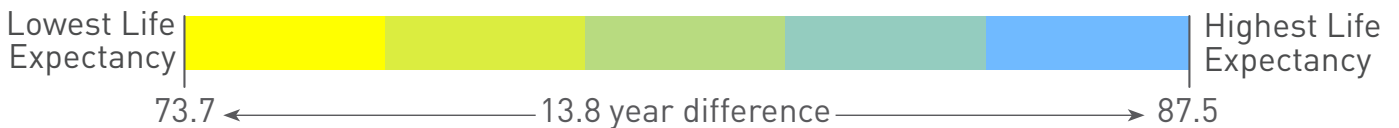
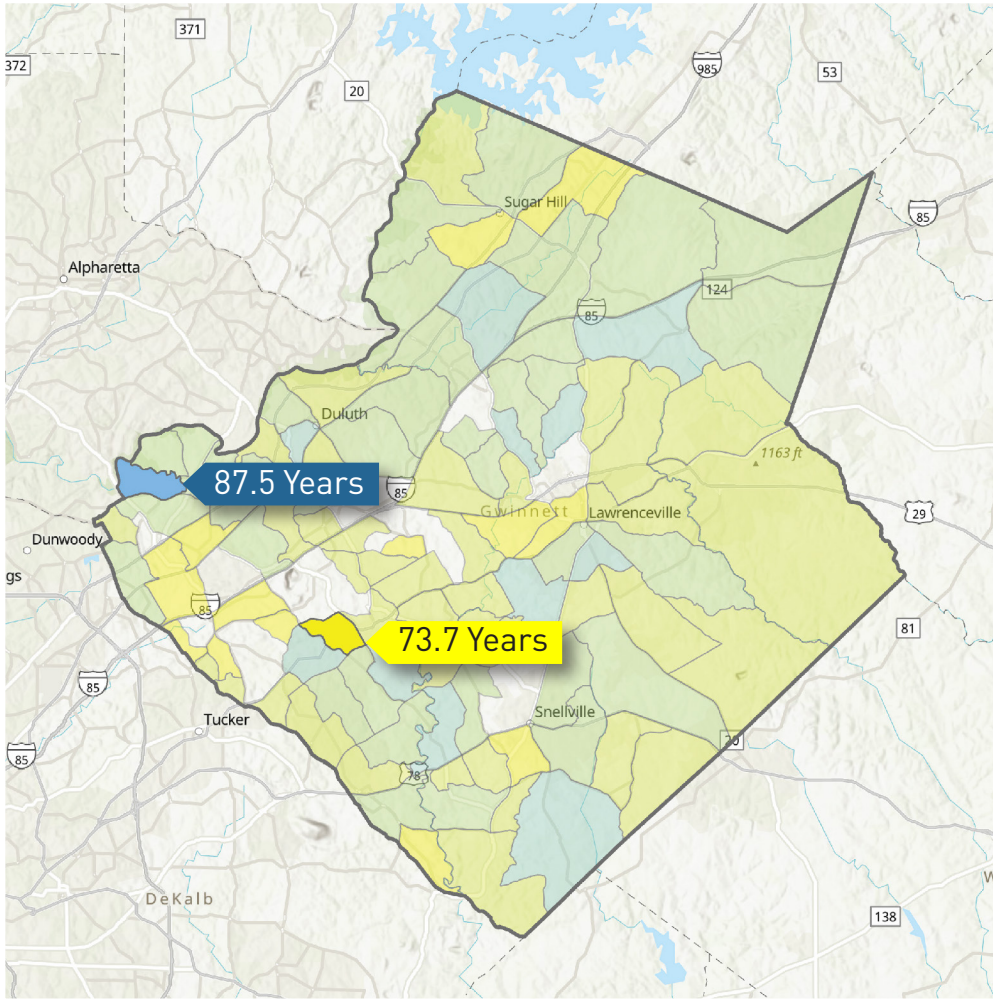
Sources: U.S. Small-area Life Expectancy Estimates Project, 2010-2015 Life Expectancy Bar Charts: Robert Wood Johnson Foundation Life Expectancy Tool, January 2020

# Fulton County Life Expectancy in Years



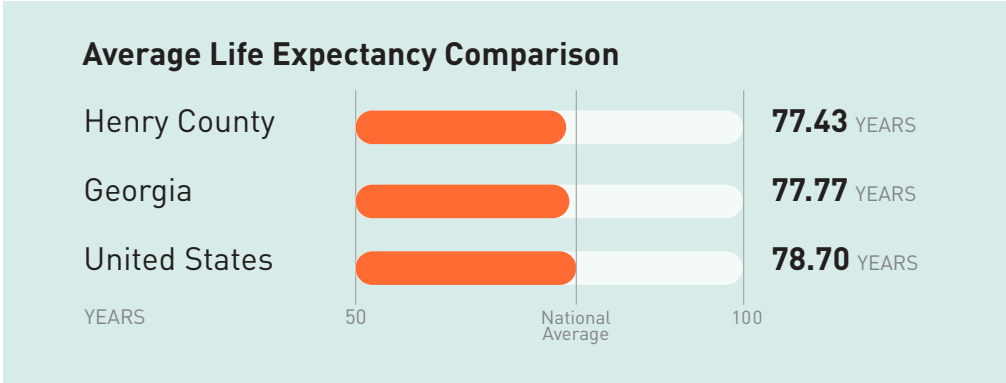
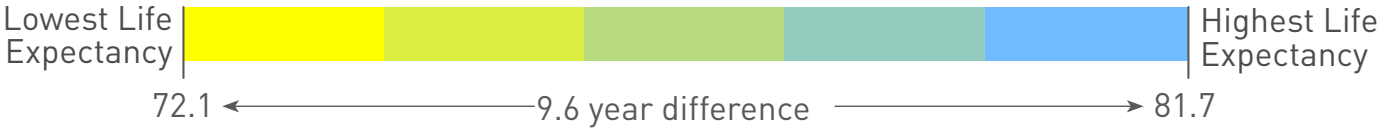
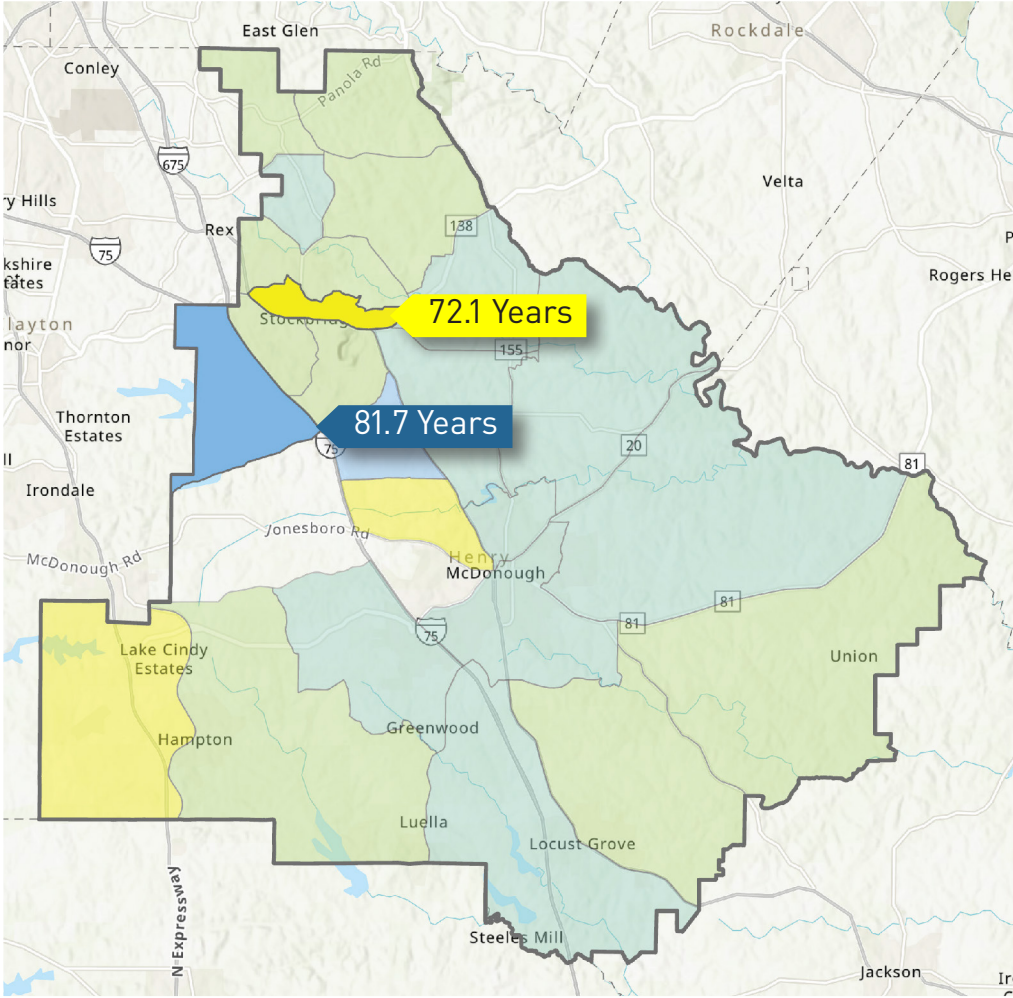
Sources: U.S. Small-area Life Expectancy Estimates Project, 2010-2015 Life Expectancy Bar Charts: Robert Wood Johnson Foundation Life Expectancy Tool, January 2020

# Gwinnett County Life Expectancy in Years



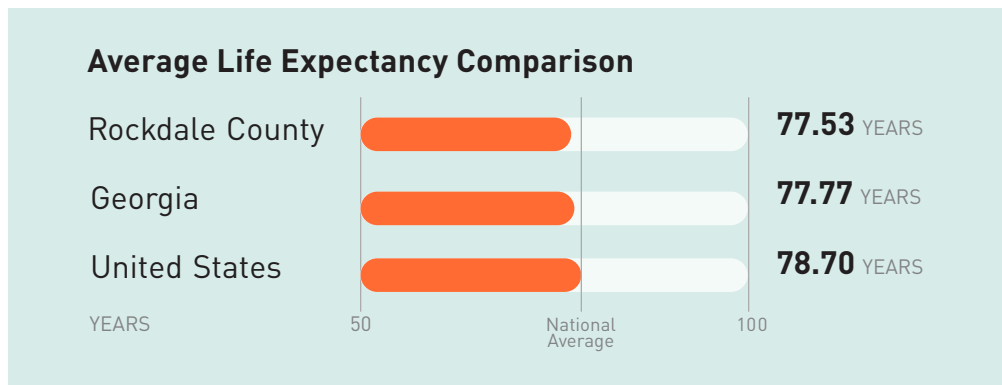
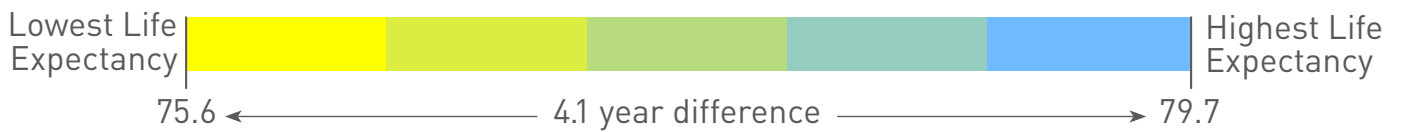
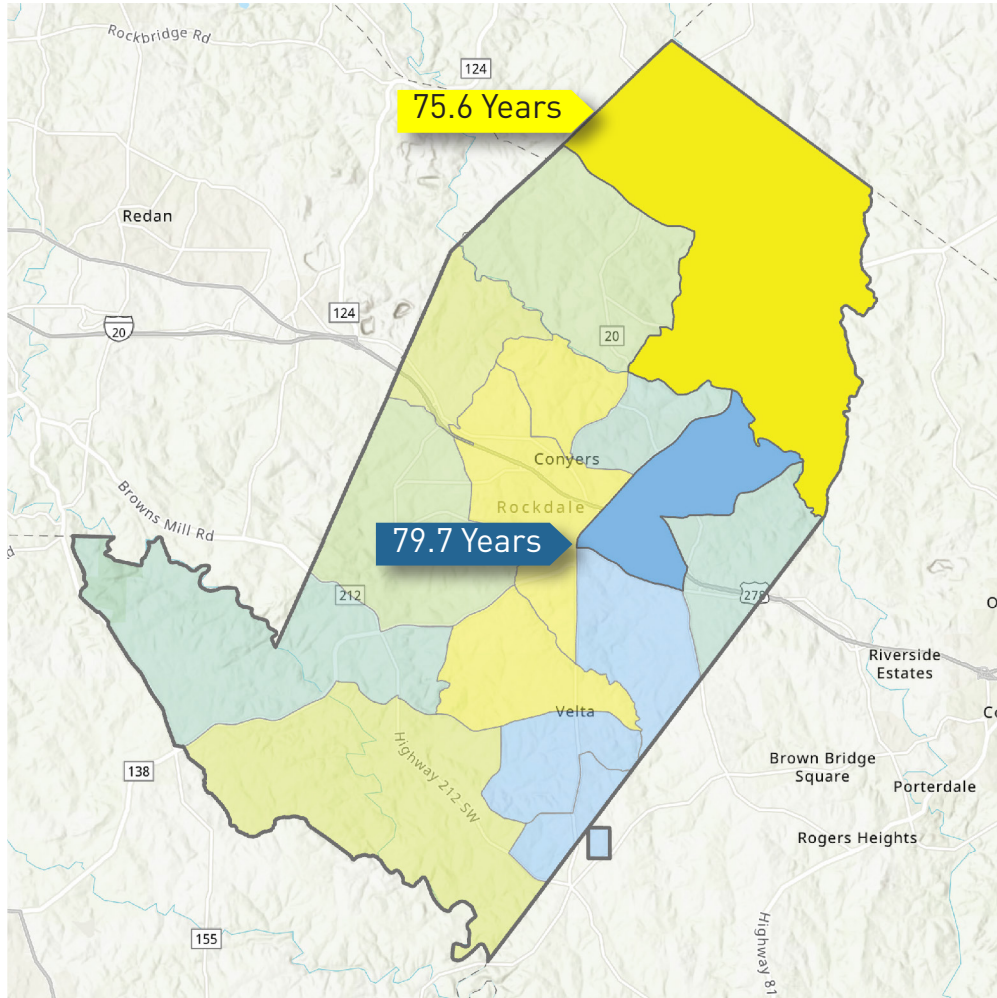
Sources: U.S. Small-area Life Expectancy Estimates Project, 2010-2015 Life Expectancy Bar Charts: Robert Wood Johnson Foundation Life Expectancy Tool, January 2020

# Henry County Life Expectancy in Years



Sources: U.S. Small-area Life Expectancy Estimates Project, 2010-2015 Life Expectancy Bar Charts: Robert Wood Johnson Foundation Life Expectancy Tool, January 2020

# Rockdale County Life Expectancy in Years



Sources: U.S. Small-area Life Expectancy Estimates Project, 2010-2015 Life Expectancy Bar Charts: Robert Wood Johnson Foundation Life Expectancy Tool, January 2020

# Live Beyond Expectations Top Issues

	<b>Cherokee</b>	<b>Clayton</b>	<b>Cobb</b>
<b>Top Issue</b>	Affordable Housing	Affordable Housing	Youth Activities
<b>Second Issue</b>	Increased Transportation Options	Safety*	Community Activities
<b>Third Issue**</b>			Walkability

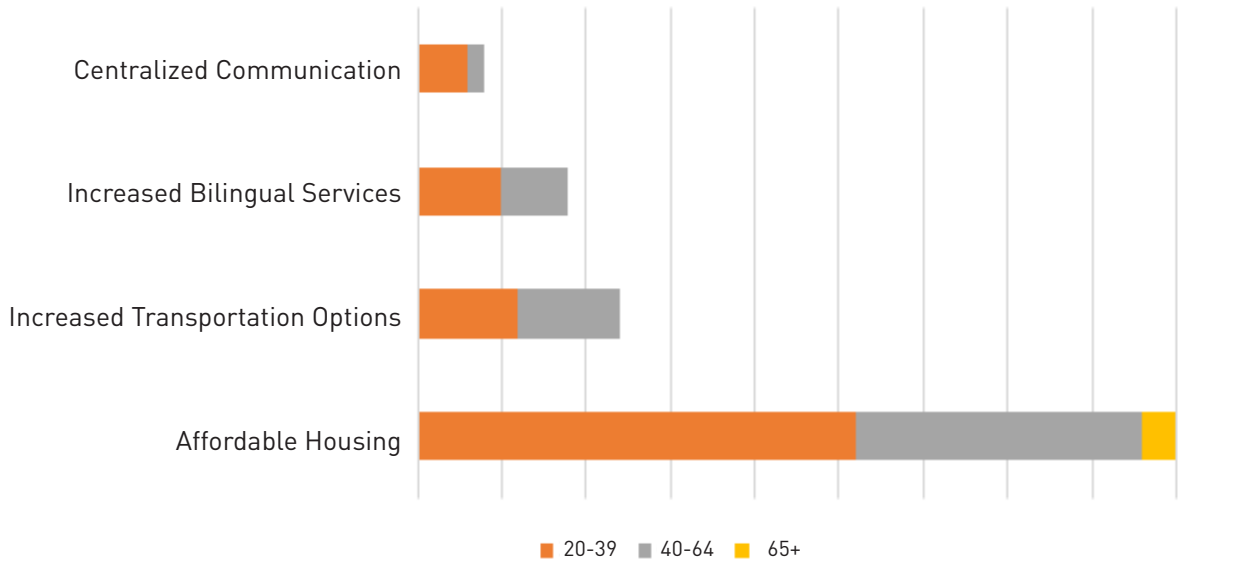
	<b>DeKalb</b>	<b>Douglas</b>	<b>Fayette</b>	<b>Fulton</b>
<b>Top Issue</b>	Affordable Housing	Affordable Housing	Affordable Fresh Foods	Affordable Housing
<b>Second Issue</b>	Road Maintenance	Community Activities	Walkability	Homelessness Resources
<b>Third Issue**</b>			Community Programming	

	<b>Gwinnett</b>	<b>Henry</b>	<b>Rockdale</b>
<b>Top Issue</b>	Affordable Housing	Affordable Housing	Youth Activities
<b>Second Issue</b>	Affordable Healthcare	Increased Transportation	Increased Communication about Resources
<b>Third Issue**</b>		Affordable Healthcare	

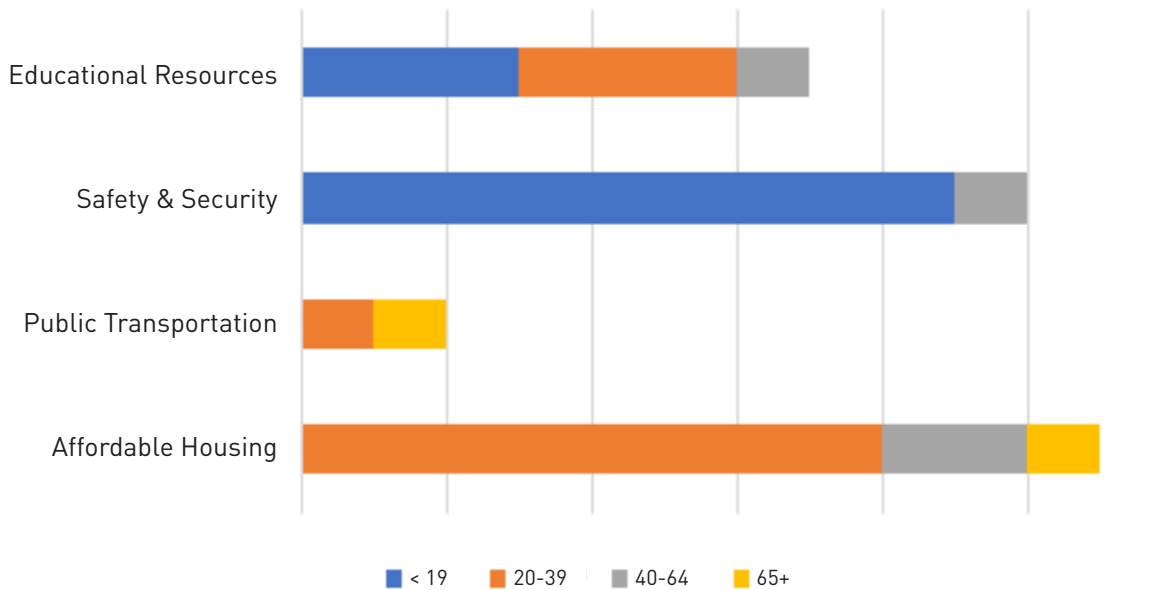
\*Those voting for safety in Clayton expressed that this was due to a lack of community spaces and programming for youth, so it's been coded alongside services

\*\*Third Issue only denoted if there was a tie or a very close count between the second and third issue

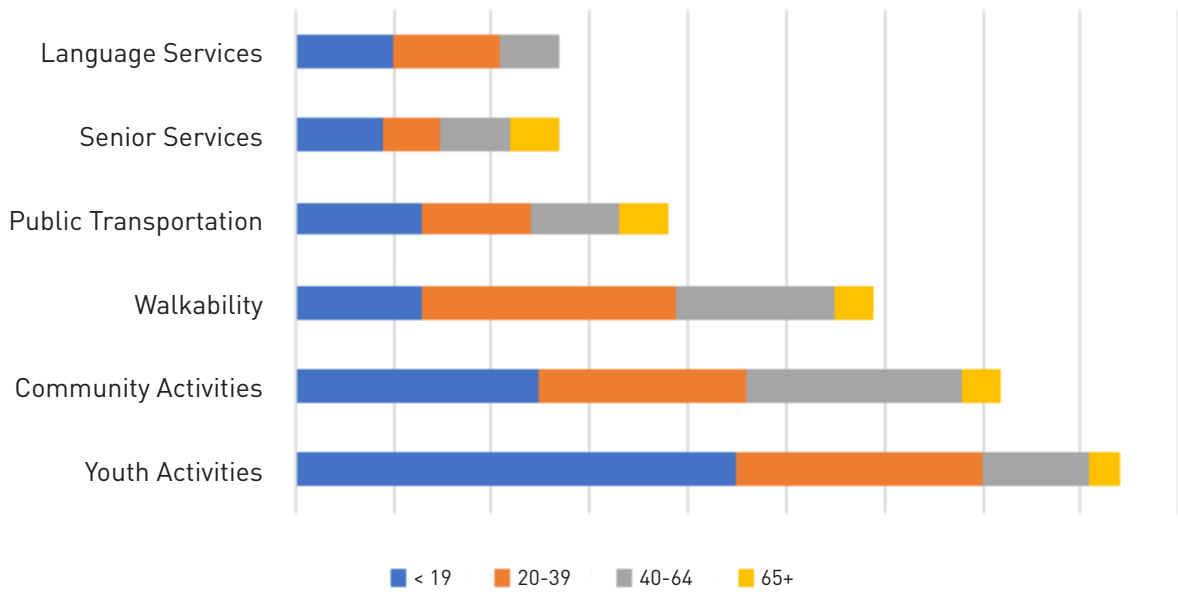
# Cherokee County Survey Results



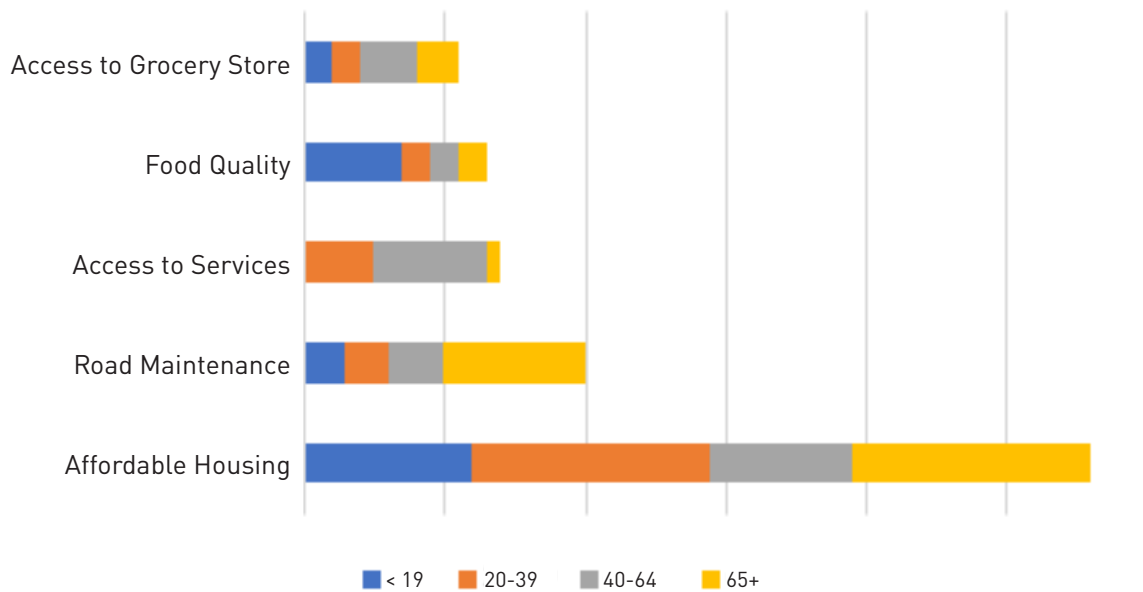
# Clayton County Survey Results



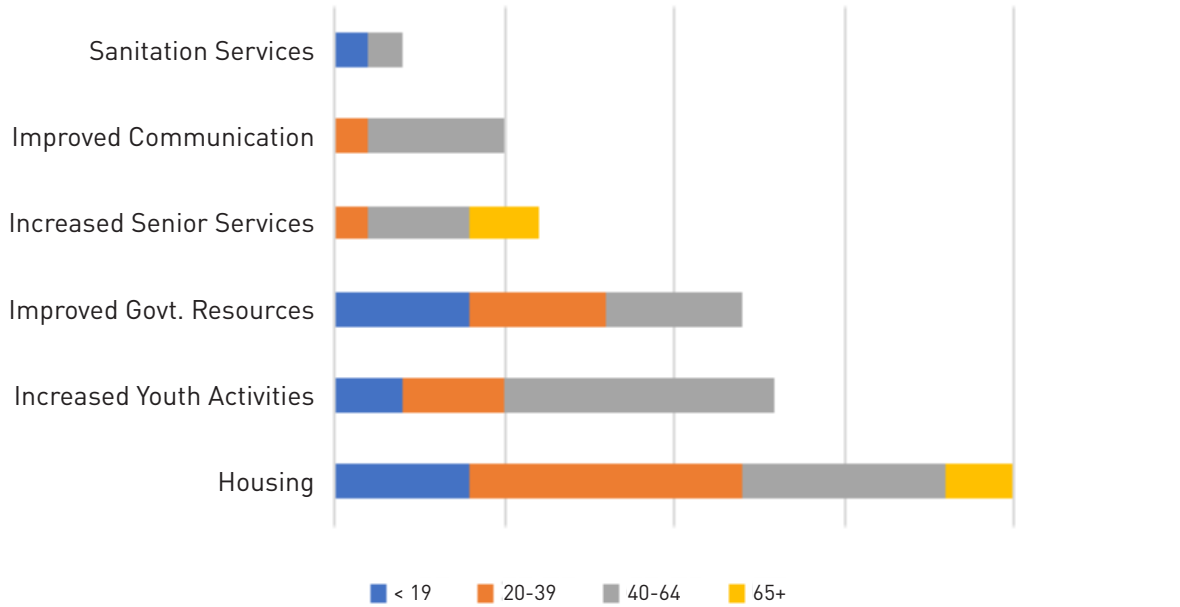
# Cobb County Survey Results



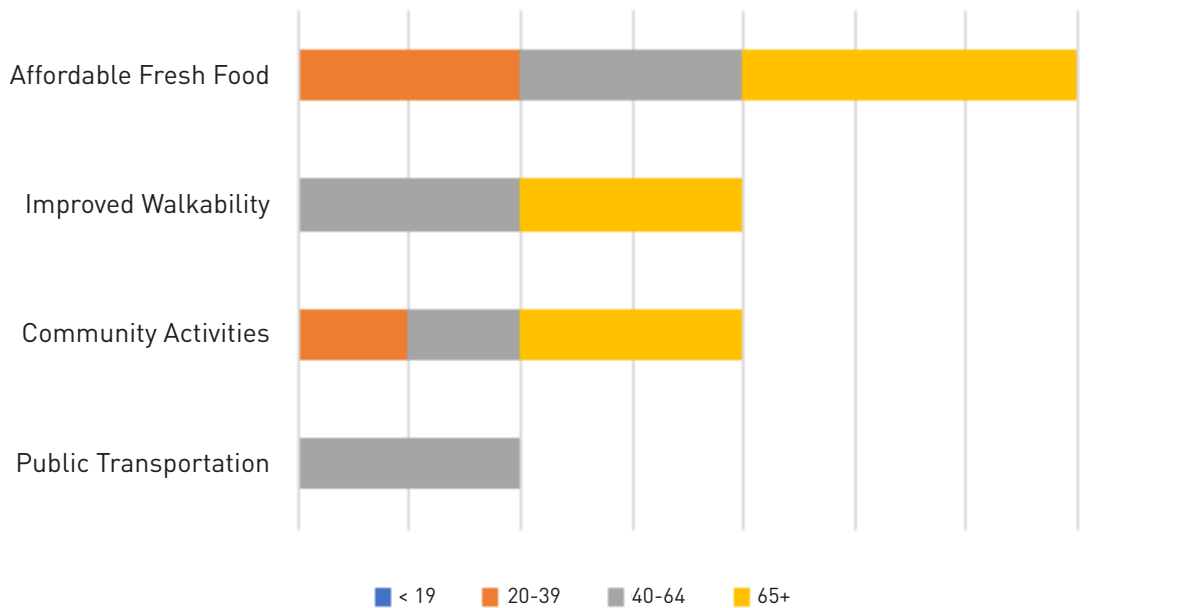
# DeKalb County Survey Results



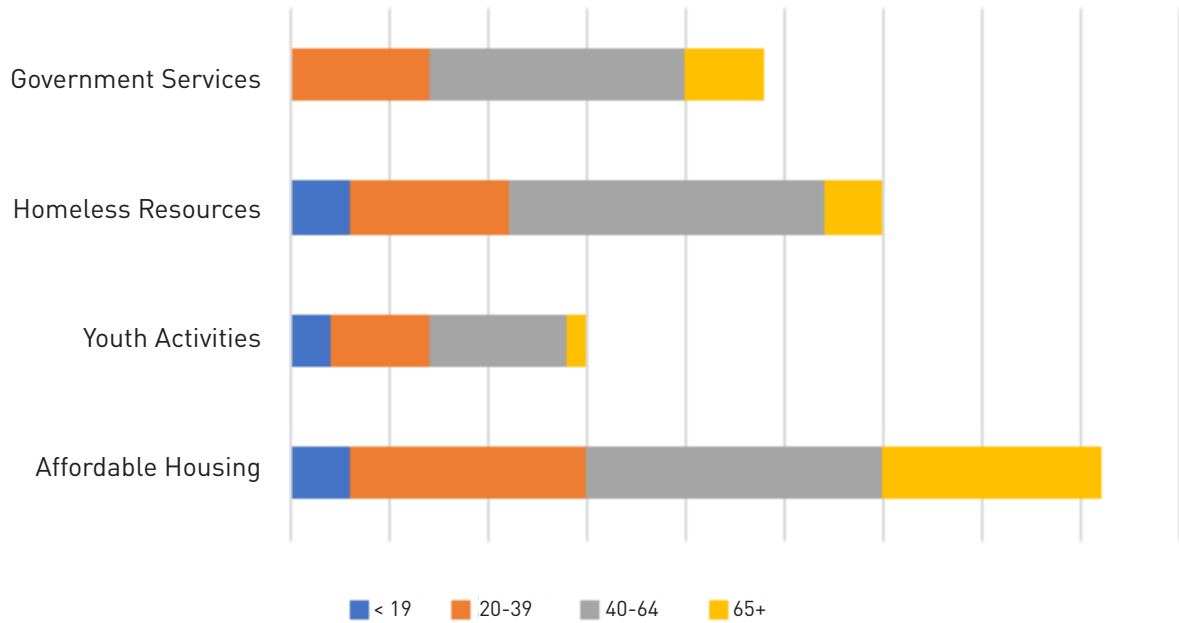
# Douglas County Survey Results



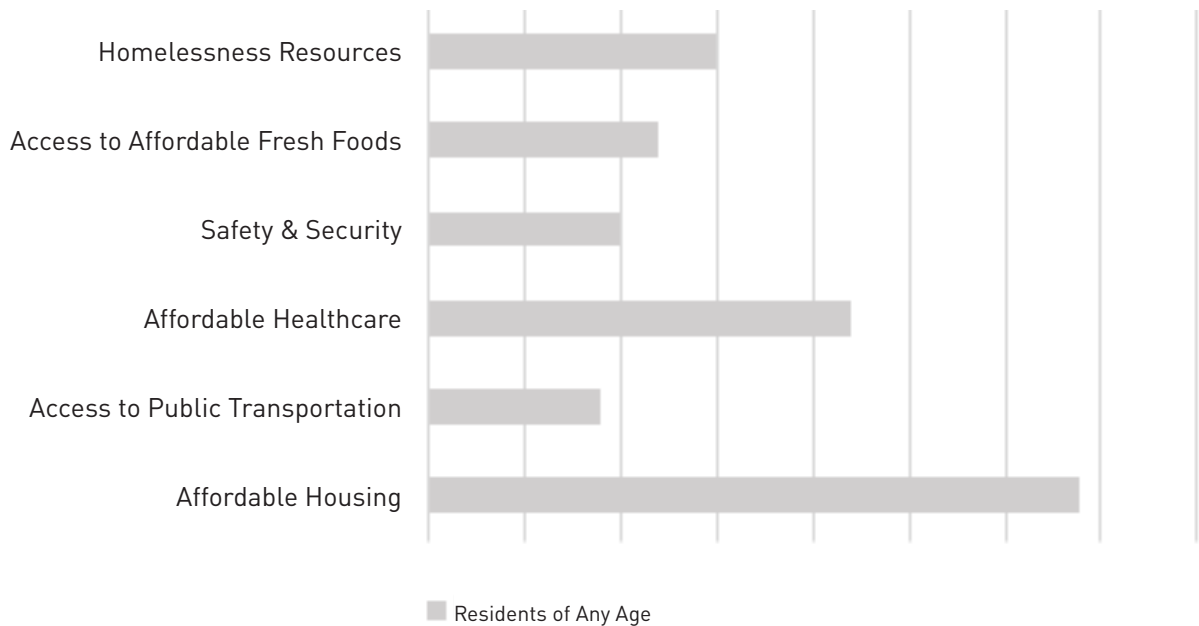
# Fayette County Survey Results



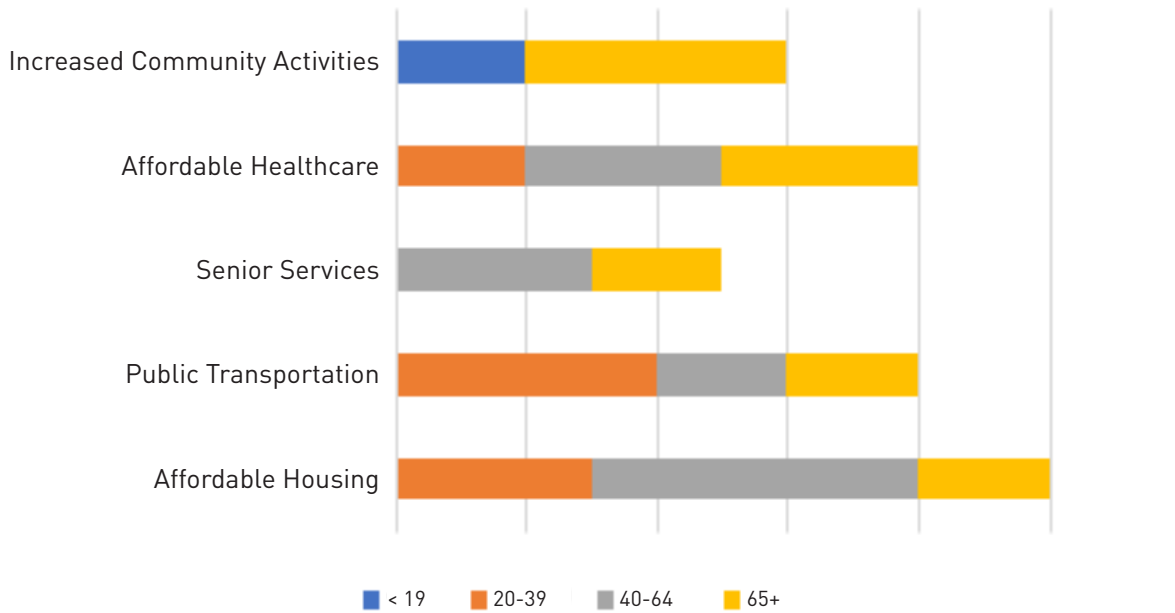
## Fulton County Survey Results



## Gwinnett County Survey Results



## Henry County Survey Results



## Rockdale County Survey Results

