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A COMPREHENSIVE APPROACH TO INFORM THE PLANNING AND DELIVERY OF SERVICES FOR OLDER ADULTS IN GEORGIA

Alice Prendergast, M.P.H.; Kristi Fuller, M.S.W.; and James Dills, M.U.P., M.P.H.

INTRODUCTION

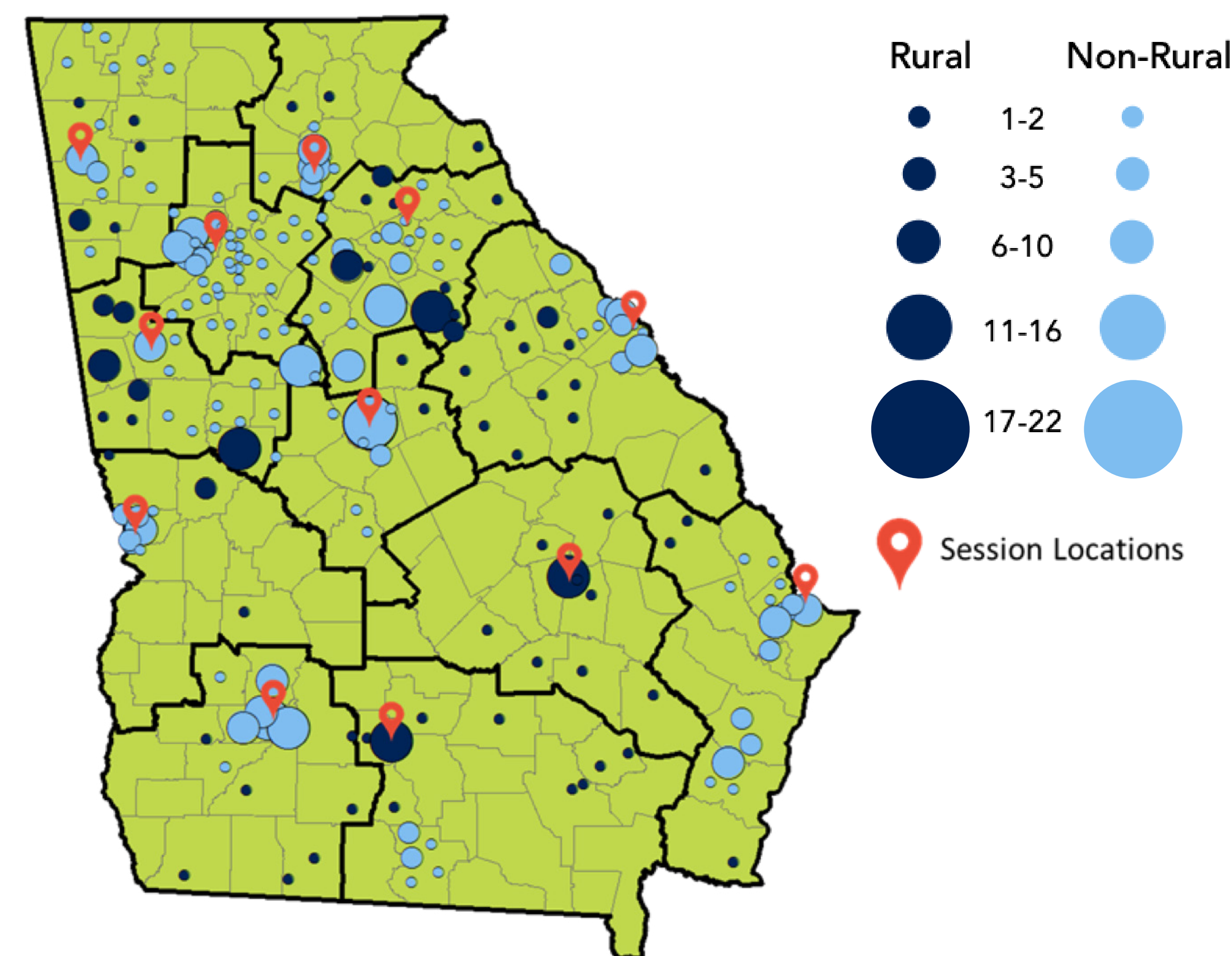
Worldwide, the older adult population is expected to grow dramatically in coming years. Current global population projections forecast that the number of individuals aged 60 or older will increase from 900 million in 2015 to approximately 2 billion in 2050. In the United States, the number of "oldest old" (those aged 85 and older), and who typically have the highest care needs, is expected to triple between 2015 and 2050.

In Georgia, the Department of Human Services' Division of Aging Services (DAS) serves as the state unit on aging and administers a variety of programs and services for older adults and people with disabilities through 12 regional agencies, known as Area Agencies on Aging. As part of DAS' funding requirements, the division must develop and seek public input on multiyear state plans for the provision of these services. Given that the need for services is anticipated to rise sharply in coming years, DAS partnered with the Georgia Health Policy Center, and sought to meaningfully inform service planning by gathering information from multiple perspectives throughout the state about the strengths and gaps in the current service delivery system. The partners also sought to increase stakeholders' awareness of DAS' role and responsibilities. Data were collected from consumers, caregivers, service providers, and other key stakeholders through facilitated, in-person community conversations in each of the 12 state regions and through an online survey.

METHODS

A uniform design was used for each community conversation, which included an overview of DAS' role and services; group identification of key, service-related priority issues; and small group discussions of system strengths, gaps, and recommendations. Participants used instant polling technology to select the top three priority issue areas from a list of ten, predetermined areas. In small groups, participants were then asked to respond to and document responses to the following questions: "What's working well?," "What's not working well?," and "What ideas or suggestions do you have?," Participants could also use feedback forms to capture input throughout the session, and completed a demographic survey. An online survey was disseminated using Qualtrics concurrently with the sessions, and collected the same data points, as well as additional, open-ended items. Descriptive statistics were run on closed response polling and survey items using SPSS. The authors transcribed and coded table notes, feedback forms, and open-ended survey questions using NVivo 12, and then analyzed the data for key themes.

Figure 1: Community Conversation Locations and Participants by Zip Code

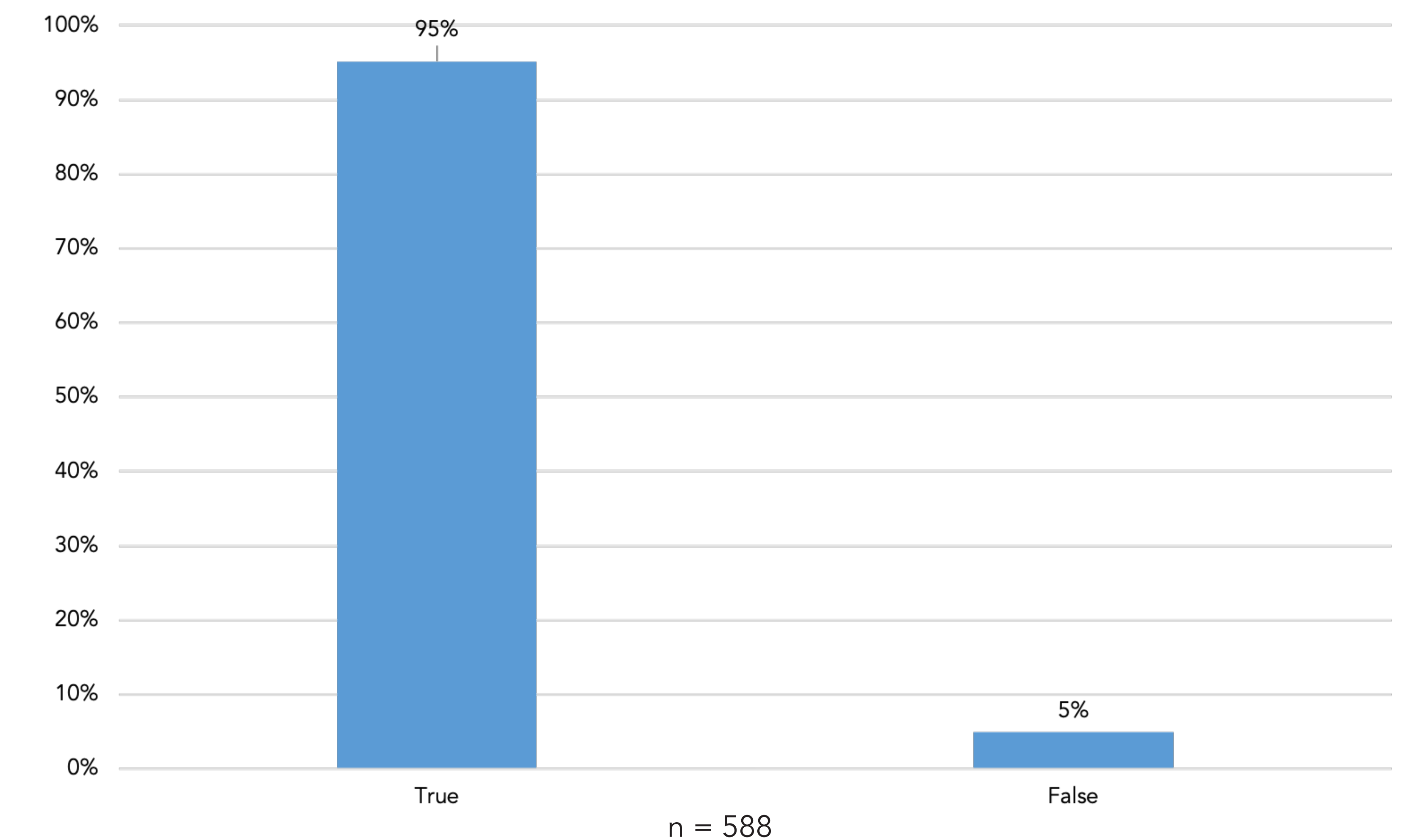


RESULTS

In total, 793 individuals attended the community conversation sessions and 188 responded to the online survey.

- Session attendees: N = 610
 - 57.1% were aged 60 or older, 21.7% reported having a disability, and 47.3% identified as consumers
 - Represented 94 of 159 Georgia counties
- Survey respondents: N = 168
 - 51.7% of survey respondents were aged 60 or older, 24% reported having a disability, and 26.9% identified as consumers
 - Represented 35 of 159 Georgia counties
- Priority issue areas: Both in-person and online participants identified transportation (67%); aging in place (66%); and physical, emotional, and behavioral health (59%) as one of their top priority issue areas
- Post-session feedback:
 - 87% reported greater understanding of DAS' role
 - 90% stated they had greater awareness of the issues and opportunities related to services in the state
 - 85% reported they were able to share their feedback during the session
 - 95% felt that the feedback collected during the session would assist the state in developing the state plan.

Figure 2: Post-Session Evaluation Results for the Question: "The Feedback Shared Today Will Assist the Division of Aging Services in Developing the State Plan."



DISCUSSION

The community conversation series and online survey afforded valuable opportunities for insights into issues affecting older adults across the state. The process incorporated the experiences and ideas of a significant number of older adults, as well as other varied perspectives and roles within the aging network.

The majority of discussions and responses centered on issues of affordability and availability with regard to housing, transportation, in-home care and assistance, and health care. Stakeholders expressed concern over spending down resources and emphasized that increased support, including financial support, is needed to aid aging Georgians and their families, especially those living in communities with fewer resources. Stakeholders also spoke highly of the aging network, specifically with regard to senior centers, dementia-related services and supports, and access to assistive technology, and felt these components are working well and should be sustained and possibly expanded. Additionally, results of the evaluation polling suggest that the series largely fulfilled its goal of increasing awareness of DAS' role and responsibilities, and that stakeholders felt that they contributed meaningfully to the development of the state plan.

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