# MIT AgeLab
# PLAN Webinar Series
## September 2021

As part of a new monthly webinar series at the intersection of longevity planning and the future of advice, the MIT AgeLab hosted an interactive presentation for panelists and corporate members of the Preparing for Longevity Advisory Network (PLAN). The September webinar, titled, "Can We Talk? What Clients Really Want to Talk About," was led by AgeLab Director Joseph Coughlin and AgeLab Research Scientist Julie Miller, who discussed findings from multiple surveys that together explored perspectives of financial professionals and financial advisory clients.

The webinar explored clients' willingness to discuss different topics with their financial professional and clients' ideas about the different roles that the ideal advisor might play for them. The webinar also explored these topics from another angle - that is, from the standpoint of advisors. Webinar participants who were financial professionals discussed their own individual perspectives on the breadth of the financial advisor role, and the efforts they have made in their own practices to engage with clients on topics beyond money alone.

## What clients want to talk about

The presentation examined survey results on topics outside of the realm of finances that clients were willing to discuss with advisors. Significant numbers of clients – although not a majority – reported career changes, housing, and caregiving as topics that they have consulted or would consult a financial advisor about. While health was the number one topic that clients reported being on their mind these days, a very small number of clients reported being willing to discuss their physical health with their advisor. Conversely, financial professionals who responded to the PLAN survey reported being highly willing to discuss any topic. The audience discussed some possible reasons why some clients may not always be open to discussing topics outside of finances alone, including client anxiety and common perceptions of the advice industry:

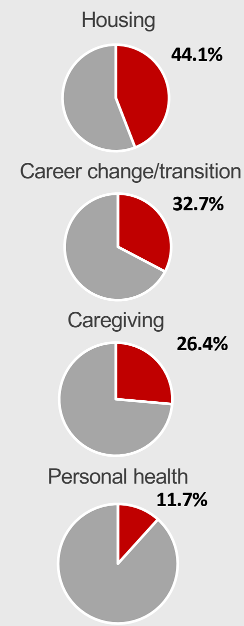
*"Clients are unaware of advisors offering longevity-related resources - they have accepted that advisors do not offer these types of services."*

*"Some topics might be more appropriate for older advisors who are close to the client's age, where the FA might be seen more as a peer."*

*"[Clients] never want to think of a day when they can't drive … or will have a health [event] that will take away from their fun."*

*"The industry has defined success as assets under management rather than success in guiding clients into and through retirement."*

Clients were willing to discuss…




## Strategies to foster new conversations

The presenters turned to the audience to discuss the strategies they use to expand their conversations with clients, as well as the questions they use to encourage clients to open up about their lives. Financial professionals in the audience mentioned the importance of creating space for the clients to bring up topics that are important to them, as well as initiating themselves with comprehensive planning across the client's life:

*"We need to give clients enough space to talk about 'unexpected' topics, and that's sometimes uncomfortable for advisors and clients."*

*"'Willing to discuss' doesn't mean we have to have the solution. I reiterate to clients often that I know people that can help them."*

*"My team and I always lead with comprehensive planning: vision, goals, values … It is a more relevant conversation, where the discovery of feelings enhances the relationship. They need to feel that they matter to you."*

*"I ask the simple question: How were the past 18 months for you and your family? Then listen for the next 20 minutes and let them really go deep."*

*"I often ask, "What's your definition of a successful retirement?"*

## What professionals are hearing from clients

The presenters asked the financial professionals in the audience what topics clients were bringing up to them in their conversations. Audience members named a wide range topics that their clients had brought to them, including family dynamics, age-related relocations, health anxieties, their children's student loans, and how to live a better life in older age:

*"How much is too much to give to the children."*
*"Concerns about dementia and loss of mobility."*
*"Getting adult kids involved in planning for retirement."*
*"Quality of life – how to spend their time better."*
*"Student loans for children."*

*"Caregiving!"*
*"Family dynamics."*
*"Buying a car."*
*"Home healthcare."*
*"Moving to assisted living."*
*"Estate planning."*

## The value of deeper conversations

The audience shared some positive consequences they've experienced from having deeper conversations with clients, including the opportunity to differentiate one's practice, to help younger clients prepare for an uncertain future, and to redefine the definition of success for the professional so that it encompasses more than just return on investment:

*"Clients are not even thinking their advisors can address [these] issues (and most do not!) – an opportunity to differentiate!"*
*"Personal health and caregiving are becoming critical in conversations - not just with older clients but with younger clients that have to possibly look after their parents."*
*"Let's make a financial plan for life, not only for retirement. No matter the age of the client, this can be of great value."*
*"The more we engage in these topics, the less we need to discuss why xyz investment did not beat the S&P 500."*

## Key takeaways

According to financial professionals themselves, expanding the boundaries of permissible conversations with clients is an essential part of the future of the advice industry. And many clients report interest in talking with their advisor on topics like career changes, housing decisions, and caregiving. Financial professionals are hearing their clients bring up topics that may appear superficially unrelated to the domain of finance but are deeply tied to clients' lives and therefore to their financial wellbeing.

But creating a space for new conversations to happen may require strategic thinking by financial professionals. A financial professional may need to be mindful of client anxiety in broaching new conversations; he or she may need to demonstrate qualifications to discuss new topics. Most broadly, financial professionals may need to reframe the image of the industry itself toward a more holistic version of longevity planning.

The context of how we live in retirement has changed, and a new approach to anticipating, planning and preparing for older age is accordingly needed. We invite financial advisors, retirement planners, and others in the retirement industry to join PLAN to contribute to the understanding of the future of advice and be among the first to learn key research take-aways.

**Invite others to join plan!**
agelab.mit.edu/plan