

Executive Summary

Role of Dane County Area Agency on Aging

The Dane County Area Agency on Aging (AAA) is one of the three Area Agency on Aging in the State of Wisconsin. Dane County AAA serves individuals age 60 plus and their families in accessing services that will help older adults continue living in their own homes and communities. The amount of assistance that is provided depends on the needs of the older adult. These services can be short-term, such as getting signed up for a prescription drug program, or long-term, such as someone who has a chronic health condition receiving ongoing support from a case manager.

Examples of community-based services include congregate and home-delivered meals, caregiver support, case management, and help with benefit questions. Some of these services are provided on a donation basis and are delivered at the local level.

The Dane County AAA is the designated County Aging Unit. The Aging Unit is appointed to act as a planning and policy development body for older adult programs in the county that are funded by the federal Older Americans Act and state supplemental funding.

The mission of the Dane County AAA is to advocate for older adults and to enable them to maintain their full potential and enhance their quality of life; to affirm the dignity and value of older adults by supporting their choices for living in and giving to our community; and to create and promote opportunities for communication among the entire community.

Contact Info & Hours of Operation

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Dane County Department of Human Services (DCDHS) developed a new vision statement “Empowered people thriving in safe, just and caring communities” in 2020 that is supported by six values: accountability and transparency, collaboration, racial justice, diversity, empathy, growth and learning.

Our focus for the 2025-2027 Aging plan is rooted in racial justice, diversity and collaboration and our long path vision centers on creating an inclusive, age-friendly community where older adults can thrive, remain independent, and live with dignity, regardless of their physical, cognitive, economic or other status and intersectionalities. Our current and future plan for aging services and program echoes the values and the vision developed by DCDHS as well as the core values of person-centeredness, equity and advocacy identified by the State Office on Aging.

Our Way Forward

Older adults are calling for a shift in the way we think and talk about aging. Rather than focusing on the limitations of aging, older adults across the nation want to focus on the opportunities of aging. Older adults are seeking ways to maximize their physical, mental/emotional, and social well-being to remain independent and active as they age.

Healthy aging is “a lifelong process of optimizing opportunities for improving and preserving health and physical, social and mental wellness, independence, quality of life and enhancing successful life-course transitions” (Health Canada, 2002). This definition takes a comprehensive and holistic view of health that includes physical, mental, social and spiritual well-being. It also means continuing to live a long, productive and meaningful life by having the option to stay in one’s home, remain engaged in the community, and maintain social and emotional well-being through meaningful civic and social participation.

A Vital Investment

Older adults provide a wealth of experience, knowledge, support and love to younger generations. If we are to reap the benefits of the many contributions that older adults make to their families, communities and nation, and to curb soaring health care costs associated with chronic disease, healthy aging must move to the forefront of the social policy agenda. If left unaddressed, the aging of the population will have far-reaching social, economic and political impacts that will far outweigh the cost of investing in healthy aging now. In addition to the demographic and political imperatives of an aging population, there are several key reasons to invest in healthy aging:

- Older adults make significant contributions to the richness of life and to the economy of our community
- Healthy aging can delay and minimize the severity of chronic diseases and disabilities in later life, thus saving health care costs and reducing long-term care needs
- Existing evidence compels us to build on existing opportunities, to put in place interventions that are known to be cost-effective, and to show leadership by supporting innovative approaches

The **2025-2027 Aging Plan** developed by the Dane County Area Agency on Aging (AAA) outlines our strategic framework for addressing the current and future needs of the aging population and their caregivers within Dane County, WI. Our aging plan is:

- A roadmap for enhancing services for older adults and their caregivers, creating supportive systems, improving accessibility, and ensuring that older adults can live independently and with dignity in their own communities
- A framework to engage in policy/system/environment change work across multiple sectors
- A living document
- An iterative process to build on existing services and create new services with a focus on sustainability
- A pivot from our previous process by:
 - Centering equity

- Incorporating health data and data from other sectors
- Extensive engagement with communities who have underutilized/not utilized our services and/or organizations serving them
- Engaging with potential new partners
- Identifying gaps in data, program planning, service delivery

Community engagement is a cornerstone for developing and sustaining effective social programs, as it ensures that initiatives address real needs, foster trust, and build local capacity. Intentional and extensive engagement with the older adult community—especially those who are not connected to our services, community leaders and service providers in the aging and other sectors informed and shaped Dane County AAA’s Aging Plan’s goals and strategies. Major themes identified via community engagement and quantitative data collection include but is not limited to:

- Affordable and accessible housing with universal design; support with home modification.
- Affordable and accessible transportation that also ensures language access
- Aging supports, services and programs to help older adults age in place in their own homes and communities
- Age-friendly systems and supports in the homelessness service system
- Safe spaces and supports for LGBTQ+ older adults that are welcoming
- Gathering spaces for older adults in the BIPOC and immigrant communities
- Alignment of health and social services to better coordinate supports for older adults and their caregivers and their care recipients; coordinated support of grandfamilies
- Culturally and linguistically appropriate services and language access in older adult programs and services
- Access to knowledge and information about services for older adults not connected to aging services
- Mental health supports and programs that is trauma informed and offered with cultural humility; accessible and relevant programming to reduce isolation and loneliness in LGBTQ+ and BIPOC communities

Challenges and Opportunities for Dane County AAA

Dane County’s older adult population is growing and will be for the next two decades. They come with different backgrounds, beliefs, customs, abilities and experiences requiring varied levels of care and support systems. Dane County AAA must be proactive and provide leadership in shaping age-friendly communities and care ecosystems to advance healthy aging along with partners from various sectors. We also need to be innovative and find efficiency in our service delivery and programs to ensure sustainability. Some of the challenges and opportunities identified by Dane County AAA are as follows:

- **Funding:** With an ever changing political and funding environment and post-COVID cut backs, it is imperative to find effective and efficient ways to provide needed services to older adults. Dane

County AAA must seek partnerships across sectors to look for braided funding opportunities and expand funding streams.

- Older American Act (OAA) Regulations: Dane County AAA must be in compliance with the new OAA regulations during this plan period that may stretch our limited existing resources.
- Innovative/cost-effective services and sustainability: With limited funding and an expanded client base, it is essential to find innovative and cost-effective services with a sustainability mindset. It will also become important to use data-driven decision making to identify and serve those in greatest economic and social need.

Although there are challenges, the time is right for creating new and unique opportunities to support older adults in a cohesive and collective manner. Some of the opportunities are:

- Renew focus and interest to work across silos and systems to integrate services and promote healthy aging across the lifespan.
- Leverage resources and expertise across systems to collaborate and co-create age-friendly and inclusive care ecosystems and communities that help older adults thrive in Dane County.
- Advocate for braided funding opportunities and policies that span multiple sectors to provide holistic care to our aging population.

By aligning resources, enhancing services, and fostering a culture of inclusivity, our hope is to provide older adults with the tools they need to thrive in their later years and age in place. Through continued community engagement, collaboration, advocacy, and innovation, we will work to create a community where aging is not a burden, but a fulfilling and respected phase of life. This plan also lays the groundwork for multisector partnerships in the future to create collaborative care ecosystems and foster age-friendly environments that empower older adults and promote quality of life across the lifespan.

Long-term Vision for Dane County AAA

Our long-term vision centers on creating an inclusive, age-friendly community where older adults can thrive, remain independent, and live with dignity, regardless of their physical, cognitive, economic or other status and intersectionalities. To achieve this vision, Dane County AAA must evolve into a comprehensive, forward-thinking organization that anticipates and continually adapts to the diverse and changing needs of the aging population. This vision is built on the foundation of integrated services, community engagement, collaboration with other sectors, advocacy for sustainable policies and funding and the use of innovation and data to improve outcomes for older adults.

This approach will help Dane County AAA to provide critical services for older adults today and be well- positioned to meet the demands of a rapidly-growing aging population in the future. The long-term success of Dane County AAA will depend on our ability to create systems of care that are responsive, equitable, and sustainable, ensuring that all older adults can age with dignity, independence, and respect.

This is our CALL to ACTION. This is our JOURNEY not our DESTINATION!