

Central Minnesota Age-Friendly Exchange

October 21, 2025

Community Priorities and Perspectives

Overview

[Age-Friendly Minnesota](#) (AFMN) partnered with the [Central Minnesota Council on Aging](#) (CMCOA) and to host the Central Age-Friendly Exchange on October 21, 2025 in Sartell, Minnesota. This was one of six Regional Exchanges held across the state in fall 2025.

Around 45 cross-sector attendees gathered at Resource Training and Solutions in Sartell to learn and share about age-friendly work happening in the state and the region, and to explore opportunities ahead.

This summary presents themes and highlights from the event so that attendees and other regional partners and community members can see key takeaways from the event, and use them to help guide and inspired age-friendly work moving forward.

Pulse Check: What We Heard from the Community

The event included a presentation from the Age-Friendly Minnesota Council about its big areas of work, including the [grants program](#) and the [Multisector Blueprint for Aging](#), and new developments over the past year.

Later, attendees discussed the following question in small groups and with the full room as part of a “Pulse Check” conversation:

As Blueprint implementation work continues, what are the greatest needs and opportunities that should be prioritized in the coming year?

The Pulse Check was a critical part of the Exchange. It created an opportunity for reflection and discussion among attendees, who could then share their ideas and insights with each

other, with regional leaders, and with Age-Friendly Minnesota. AFMN captured this input and is sharing it back to the community through this document.

Below is a summary of the most frequently mentioned topics, as well as ideas and issues related to finding solutions. These are far from exhaustive; instead, a glimpse into priority issues and possibilities.

Community Opportunities: Challenges and Solutions

- **Mental health:**
 - **Educate people about mental health to normalize challenges** and needing help
 - **Raise awareness about mental health resources**
 - **Train emergency responders** to deal with mental health issues

- **Transportation:**
 - **Increase education about existing services** to increase utilization of what's already available.
 - **Address barriers to volunteer driver programs**, including policy/reimbursement issues and volunteer recruitment.
 - **Create more inter-county agreements for using services across county lines**, so that transportation services can cover more areas.

- **Housing:**
 - **Invest in affordable home modifications** to allow people to continue living safely at home.
 - **Continue to seek solutions for affordability**, which remains a major issue.

- **Service access:**
 - **Address stigma around using services**—people resist the idea of needing or accepting help, and often see services as something for “other people.”
 - **Use existing services if need exists**—otherwise they may lose funding.

- **Social Isolation/Connection:**
 - **Explore innovative solutions** like mobile community centers, such as in Kanabec County.
 - **Develop more opportunities for inter-generational connection.**

- **Expanding Partnerships and Collaboration**
 - **Get key players around the table:**
 - **Payers need to be involved** in this work to identify and address where people are falling through the cracks.

- **Identify and cultivate relationships with local funders** as a way to engage them in the work and offset federal funding cuts.
- **Businesses and Chambers of Commerce** need to be involved.
- **Address the need for a regional-level framework**, so all regional partners are working toward the same thing.
- **Emphasize collaboration and coordination** among services.
- **Prioritize collaboration** as a strategy.

This input, along with community input gathered through the other Regional Exchange events, is being shared back to communities and will be integrated into Multisector Blueprint work as it continues to evolve.

Regional Age-Friendly Projects

AFMN is proud to have invested more than \$380,000 in Central Minnesota through eight Community Grants since 2023. These grants are advancing goals of Minnesota’s [Multisector Blueprint for Aging](#), which is grounded in community voices and is addressing many of the issues that emerged from the community at the Central Age-Friendly Exchange.

Numerous AFMN Community Grantees and other organizations attended or were highlighted at the Exchange and had an opportunity to share information about their age-friendly projects:

- *[Central Lakes College](#) is holding community “[Chatty Hours](#)” to provide an opportunity for social connection, and listening sessions for older adults to make the college more inclusive of older residents.
- *[City of Wyoming](#) developed an age-friendly community garden in partnership with [Fairview Health Services](#) and Chisago County State Health Improvement Partnership.
- *[Giving Voice](#) is expanding community choruses for people with dementia and their care partners into greater Minnesota
- *[Rivers of Hope](#) is strengthening supports for older adults facing domestic violence.
- *[Theatre 55](#), the only Minnesota theater dedicated to work done by people 55-plus, created videos that address the loneliness epidemic, specific to the LGBTQ and BIPOC elder community.
- *[Tri-County Action Program](#) (Tri-CAP) is expanding its volunteer driver program to serve more area residents.
- *[Veterans Resource & Enrichment Center](#) (VREC) is making accessibility improvements to its building to make it safer and easier to use for veterans and their families who come to receive services and supports.
- [Age-Flourishing St. Cloud](#) is advancing aging awareness, working to shift cultural attitudes about aging, and offering a range of programs and services for the St. Cloud area.
- [Brainerd for All Ages](#) is developing age-friendly communities initiative in the Brainerd area, with leadership from Crow Wing County.

- [Lakes Area Memory Awareness Advocates](#) is educating the public and key professionals—including law enforcement—about dementia to better equip the community to serve and support people with dementia.
- [Project Blue Star](#) aims to end social isolation and loneliness by connecting high school students with older adults to form meaningful intergenerational relationships.

**Indicates Age-Friendly Minnesota grant-funded projects*

Find more information about AFMN Grants at the [AFMN website](#).

Learn more!

This work hinges on collaboration. We encourage you to reach out with questions, concerns, and ideas.

Age-Friendly Minnesota:

- Website: mn.gov/dhs/age-friendly-mn/
- Email: mn.dhs.AgeFriendlyMN@state.mn.us

Led by the Age-Friendly Minnesota Council, AFMN champions vibrant communities where we thrive as we age. We do this through collaborative partnerships, community engagement, and innovative strategies. Age-Friendly Minnesota creates and nurtures systems that include and value all Minnesotans as we grow older.

Central Minnesota Council on Aging (CMCOA)

- Website: [Central MN Council on Aging](#)
- Phone: (320) 253-9349

CMCOA is a non-profit organization designated by the [Minnesota Board on Aging](#) (MBA) as the area agency on aging for the 14-county Central Minnesota region. In partnership with public and private organizations, CMCOA helps older adults age successfully by building community capacity, advocating for aging issues, maximizing service effectiveness, and linking people with information.