

Northwest Minnesota Age-Friendly Exchange

November 13, 2025

Community Priorities and Perspectives

Overview

Dancing Sky Area Agency on Aging (DSAAA) and Age-Friendly Minnesota (AFMN) hosted a Northwest Minnesota Age-Friendly Exchange on November 13, 2025 in Park Rapids Minnesota. This was one of six Regional Exchanges held across the state in fall 2025.

Forty cross-sector attendees from around the region gathered at Living Well at Home of the Park Rapids Area in Park Rapids, Minnesota to learn and share about age-friendly work happening in the region and the state, 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 inspire 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:

For all Minnesotans to live well as we age in community:

- *What are some potential realistic solutions?*
- *What progress has been made on key issues and gaps?*

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

- **Built Environment:**

- **Utilize grants**, such as from MN Department of Transportation, to do things like fix sidewalks.
- **Invest in projects that benefit all ages** – for example, paved trails with nearby protected seating attract all ages, from families with kids to older adults.

- **Service Access:**

- **Explore, expand or replicate strong models for service delivery**, for example:
 - Frozen meals delivered via UPS/FedEx/mail, as an alternative to home-delivered meals as a way to address food insecurity.
 - *Elevate*, a grant-based resource at Perham Health, is a multi-purpose resource that offers groceries and rides as well as events and social connection.
- **Increase internet access by bringing back the Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP)**, which offered internet service discounts for eligible households. The Federal Communications Commission ended the program in 2024.
- **Help people navigate services:** Expand models that use care coordinators, case managers, or Community Health Workers to help people navigate the system. E.g., a Moorhead Police Department staff person help people with this.
- **Strengthen or increase use of existing resources:**
 - Improve Minnesota Aging Pathways' (formerly Senior LinkAge Line) ability to help people struggling with service barriers.
 - Increase use of underutilized resources.
- **Ensure patients aren't discharged without a proper caregiver.**
- **Build a more robust Elderly Waiver program.** (Elderly Waiver helps Minnesotans 65-plus who are Medical Assistance get services at home that allow them remain living in the community.)

- **Housing:**

- **Focus on older adult homelessness;** while it's growing faster than other age groups, it's a little easier to tackle but it's a smaller group
- **Provide/earmark funds for:**
 - Landlord risk mitigation fund to encourage landlords to rent to tenants they consider risky
 - Accessibility in housing
- **Encourage local, community-based control and solutions,** over one-size-fits- all from state government

- **Explore new model arrangements**, such as:
 - Including transportation with rent
 - Homesharing, by establishing a workgroup to develop plans/contracts for implementation
- **Support condo owners to improve or modify their homes**
- **Transportation**
 - **Expand/learn from successful regional examples** of counties working across county lines related to transportation services provided by volunteer drivers – such as the Ottertail County Housing and Redevelopment Authority (HRA).
 - **Simplify use of services** to encourage more people to try it.
- **Connection, Communication, and Inclusion:**
 - **Increase recognition of older residents by community leaders**; more intentional inclusion in the process of city planning and management.
 - **Expand approach of co-locating resources** like a senior center in city hall to make communication between older residents and city staff more efficient
- **Expand Partnerships and Collaborate:**
 - **Establish stronger relationships and coordination** between entities such as city administrators and senior centers.

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 \$763,000 in Northwest Minnesota-based projects through 18 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 NW Exchange.

Several grantees shared information about their grant projects at the Exchange:

- [Advance Thief River](#) is conducting a comprehensive planning process to create a housing plan for older residents.
- [City of New York Mills](#) is adding protected seating to a new paved trail that’s being used by people of all ages.
- [Headwaters Regional Development Commission](#) is creating a regional housing plan with extensive community involvement.
- [Kittson Living at Home \(Hallock Area Senior Center\)](#) is purchasing an accessible van and strengthening its community volunteer driver program to address the shortage of transportation services in the area.

- [Living at Home of the Park Rapids Area](#) created a community calendar to help people find information about local events
- [Northwest Community Action](#) studied social isolation and transportation needs among older adults in their region, and developed recommendations to help create solutions.
- **Brink Senior Center** in Baudette is updating their community center, which serves people of all ages, with a new digital sign, a public access computer, and a new dishwasher.
- [Cycling Without Age Alexandria](#) is expanding their initiative, which pairs volunteer “pilots” with older adults and others with limited mobility for trishaw rides.

More information about AFMN Grants is 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.

Dancing Sky Area Agency on Aging

- Website: www.dancingskyaaa.org/home
- Phone: (800) 333-2433

The Dancing Sky Area Agency on Aging (DSAAA) is 1 of 7 Area Agencies on Aging in Minnesota. DSAAA serves a community made up of unique and resilient older adults, caregivers, persons with disabilities and home- and community-based providers in 21 counties throughout Northwest and West Central Minnesota.