AGE FRIENDLY
minnesota

Southeastern Minnesota Age-Friendly Exchange

October 29, 2025

Community Priorities and Perspective

Overview

Age-Friendly Minnesota (AFMN) partnered with AARP Minnesota to host the Southeastern Minnesota Age-Friendly Exchange on October 29, 2025 in Owatonna, Minnesota. This was one of six Regional Exchanges held across the state in fall 2025.

Twenty-five cross-sector attendees gathered at the Steele County Historical Society 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 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:

Thinking about aging, what are the greatest needs and opportunities in your communities 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

- **Transportation:**
  - **Lack of services is a huge barrier to accessing healthcare**, especially as people must travel increasingly farther to reach care due to things like closure of local clinics in the region.
  - **Address service area boundaries to improve transportation access,** which limit how existing services can be utilized. For example, a county transportation service often cannot cross state or county lines, even if nearby.

- **Basic Needs:**
  - **People are increasingly struggling with costs of basic necessities,** including food, housing, transportation, healthcare and more – particularly with major funding cuts for services and benefits.

- **Service Access:**
  - **Address barriers to use of existing services**. People may not utilize available services for reasons including stigma, fear of scams, mistrust in an agency, etc.
  - **Reduce red tape and regulations that hinder providers.** For example, in many cases a person may only receive services from one agency at a time, which limits the services an available agency could potentially provide.
  - **Expand Elderly Waiver** so that more providers can be licensed to deliver waivered services, and more people can receive those services. (Elderly Waiver helps Minnesotans 65-plus who are Medical Assistance get services at home that allow them remain living in the community.)
  - **Healthcare access is getting harder**. Rural clinics and other healthcare facilities are closing, and transportation to healthcare in Rochester is limited.

- **Social Connection:**
  - **Invest in community centers** as important places to simply gather and visit.
  - **Ensure ongoing availability of volunteer opportunities and meaningful work—** both of which benefit both the individual and the community.

- **Communications and Information:**
  - **Increase access to technology through training and devices** to help older adults connect to information, resources and other people.
  - **Ensure continued use of non-digital communications** to reach the many people who do not use or have access to the internet.

- **Long-Term Care:**
  - **Build capacity of long-term care to support the growing number of residents who have mental health needs;** in many cases that staff aren't equipped to deal with those issues.
  - **Address barriers to attracting and retaining direct care workers** – e.g., many workers must travel long distances to get to a job at long-term care facility.

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 nearly $300,000 in the Southeastern Minnesota-based projects through 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.

Three AFMN Grantees attended the Exchange to share information about their age-friendly grant projects and the impact of that work in their communities.

- **Family Service Rochester** is conducting walk and park audits, in partnership with public and private sectors, to promote Multisector Blueprint goals related to multi-modal transportation and public spaces for all ages and seasons.
- **VINE Faith in Action** convened community leaders in Mankato and North Mankato in an effort that led to both cities joining the AARP Age-Friendly Network of States and Communities.
- **Age-Friendly Freeborn County** is playing a lead role in county-wide age-friendly work, which included a community survey funded by Age-Friendly Minnesota through a grant to Albert Lea-Freeborn County Chamber of Commerce.

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/
- Contact: 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.

AARP Minnesota

- Website: aarp.org/mn
- Contact: aarpmn@aarp.org or 1-866-554-5381

AARP Minnesota is a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization dedicated to empowering Americans 50 and older to choose how they live as they age. AARP MN strengthens communities and advocates for what matters most to the more than 2 million Minnesotans 50-plus and their families: health and financial security, and personal fulfillment.