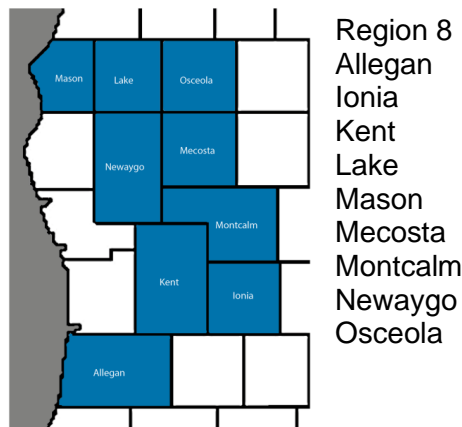


Area Agency on Aging of Western Michigan's (AAAWM) mission is to provide older adults and persons living with a disability an array of services designed to promote independence and dignity in their homes and in their communities. We are the source for seniors. As a leader of older adult service development, we pride ourselves on offering a wide range of resources to meet individuals at whatever chapter of life they are in through their aging journey, while also working to eliminate gaps in care. AAWM coordinates support and education to come alongside caregivers while also leading advocacy efforts to advance the voice of older adults and those that care for them in the public arena.



The Area Agency on Aging of Western Michigan has been and will continue to be, a leader in advocacy throughout Region 8 and Michigan. In FY23, AAWM focused on meeting one-on-one with all the legislators in our Region, with the intention of cultivating relationships, educating on our many services and programs, and the importance of area agencies on aging as a whole. We are purposeful in sharing our advocacy priorities which include:

- Increasing the Direct Care Worker wage by a permanent \$4.00 an hour.
- Strengthening the MI Choice program
- Increasing Older Americans Act funding to address unmet needs and improve program offerings
- Expanding Broadband Access

For FY24, our advocacy will continue to be focused on the above priorities. We will look to build upon our efforts to get to know our legislators, and reinforce the importance and impact, not only of AAWM, but the sixteen Area Agencies throughout Michigan.

The Area Agency on Aging of Western Michigan also enlists guidance from our Advisory Council and the Advocates for Senior Issues, both of which prioritize and strengthen AAWM's advocacy efforts.

These groups provide opportunities for older adults, throughout Region 8, to meet their legislators and ask questions pertaining to issues that affect older adults and caregivers. AFSI has a membership of three hundred, including organizations and individuals.

In FY23, AAAWM looked to strengthen and build upon its existing Older Americans Act (OAA) Partner Network. The results of these intentional efforts saw the addition of new Partners and existing Partners adding new services.

The new services are:

Association for the Blind & Visually Impaired (ABVI) – Counseling Services

Life Therapeutic Solutions Inc. – Healthy IDEAS

Ludington Mass Transit Authority (LMTA) – Assisted Transportation

Mason County Central Schools – Scottville Senior Center – Grandparents Raising Grandchildren

These services will help AAAWM increase service delivery and focus on reducing isolation throughout our service region and providing improved access to services, throughout Region 8.

AAAWM aims to enhance the services offered to seniors from BIPOC and LGBTQ+ communities in Region 8 through active collaboration with community partners and organizations dedicated to serving these populations. Our goal is to foster trust, create culturally sensitive programming, and improve access to services. By doing so, we anticipate a rise in the number of clients we serve, particularly from underserved communities.

AAAWM will continue to strive to hire diverse staff that reflects the diversity of the communities in our Region. Our efforts to provide culturally competent services requires us to consistently update and revise our training efforts so that staff receive the resources they need. This will help ensure that services are culturally sensitive and welcoming to all.

An important part of this work is measuring progress. We evaluate this progress by tracking the number of BIPOC and LGBTQ+ seniors served, and the types of services provided. We also collect feedback from clients to assess satisfaction with the services administered and identify areas for improvement. In FY24, AAAWM will engage in ongoing outreach to BIPOC and LGBTQ+ seniors through community events, social media, publication channels, intentional networking, and other face-to-face outreach. This will also increase awareness of the services available and encourage seniors to access them.

In FY23, AAAWM worked closely with our OAA Partners to address the rising costs associated with providing services during the pandemic and inflation. These discussions have led to improved service quality and a better understanding of the costs associated with each service. We will continue to collaborate with our partners, so they have the resources they need to provide these critical supports to seniors. Most of these funding conversations have focused on staffing demands to ensure service delivery is meeting the needs of older adults and their caregivers.

Funding for AAAWM's American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) will be used to enhance the ability of Older Americans Act Service Partners to meet the needs of clients within

Region 8. This funding will help address the challenges that these partners face, such as staffing shortages and resource limitations.

By investing in staffing stability and consistent service delivery, AAAMW hopes to improve the quality of care provided to older Americans within its service area. This funding will also help ensure that Older Americans Act Service Partners can continue to provide essential services to those that rely on them and expand their client base

Overall, the allocation of this ARPA funding to Older Americans Act Service Partners is an important step towards addressing the needs of older adults in Region 8. It is a significant investment in the well-being of this vulnerable population and reflects the AAAMW's commitment to providing high-quality care and wrap around support to older adults in the region.

AAAMW is monitoring its funding allocations, for FY23 and FY24, to help minimize the funding cliff that will take place when the ARPA funding is eliminated at the end of FY24. We are speaking with our OAA Service Partners on the importance of diversifying funding and seeking out long-term funding opportunities. We hope to use carryover dollars from regular OAA funding, to lessen the impact, of the loss of ARPA funding, in FY25 and FY26.

AAAMW recognizes the importance of bridging the technological gap for older adults. We continue to offer training and provide hardware to help seniors access critical services and stay connected with their loved ones. AAAMW hosted technology trainings throughout our service region, aimed at helping promote technology education and understanding.

In FY23, AAAMW took steps to address areas of need within our organization. This included a wage study review, employee evaluation updates, updating hiring practices, cross-training initiatives, regular department meetings, organizational restructuring, and intentional marketing and outreach strategies. AAAMW will continue to focus on community and statewide partnerships, aimed at bridging gaps in care for older adults.

In FY24, AAAMW expects to encounter a multitude of obstacles that could pose a significant threat to our mission of providing quality services to older adults and persons with a disability in the community. The challenges are multifaceted, with each requiring a different approach to overcome them effectively.

First and foremost, AAAMW must adapt to the changing demographics of the aging population. With the aging baby boomer generation, there will be an increased demand for services, and the organization must ensure that it is equipped to meet those needs.

AAAMW must focus on increasing access to technology for older adults, given the growing trend of digitalization. Technology can help enhance communication, reduce social isolation, and improve health outcomes. However, many older adults lack the skills and resources necessary to use technology effectively, and AAAMW must take

steps to bridge this digital divide.

Another significant challenge that AAAWM will face is addressing Direct Care Worker (DCW) pay and education. DCWs play a critical role in providing in-home and community-based services to older adults. The current compensation and training for these workers does not empower and exhibit the importance of the services DCWs are providing. Compensation falls short of the standards required to retain quality personnel and create a professionalized workforce.

AAAWM must plan for the loss of ARPA funding, which has been instrumental in supporting the organization's pandemic response efforts. It is crucial to maintain the level of services provided to older adults while also planning for a future where ARPA funding is no longer available.

Overall, AAAWM's ability to address these challenges will be critical in the upcoming fiscal year. By adopting proactive and innovative solutions, AAAWM can continue to provide essential services to older adults while ensuring that their needs are met in a changing world.