

*Area Agency on Aging of Western Michigan (AAAWM)*

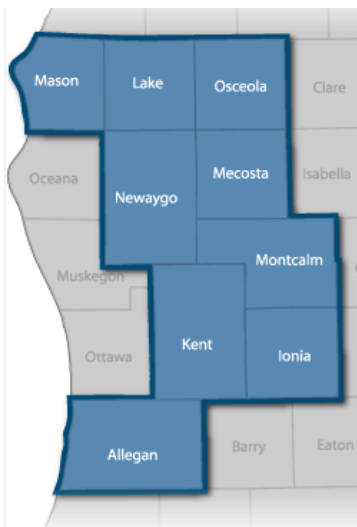
*Annual Implementation Plan FY 2022*

*Draft Plan Summary*

The mission of the Area Agency on Aging of Western Michigan (AAAWM) is to provide older persons and persons with a disability an array of services designed to promote independence and dignity in their homes and their communities.

AAAWM strives to be recognized as the expert in quality person-centered programs within the West Michigan community by utilizing funding from the Older Americans Act (OAA), Kent County Senior Millage, and other resources. As the leader of older adult service development, we are the ultimate informational source for valued adult services.

The Planning Service Area (PSA) for AAWM Region 8 is made up of the following nine counties:



AAAWM Region 8 Counties (9):

- Allegan
- Ionia
- Kent
- Lake
- Mason
- Mecosta
- Montcalm
- Newaygo
- Osceola

AAAWM has a dedicated and experienced staff with expansive knowledge of the aging process and aging network. Through decades of retention, AAWM staff and Service Partners are committed to providing high quality, innovative and person-centered services to seniors and those with disabilities.

AAAWM has long been a “best-kept secret” in West Michigan. It is common for older adults and their families to seek out information concerning services and supports *only after facing a crisis situation*. To help navigate this situation and educate the public, we have instituted marketing initiatives that directly tie into increased community awareness and coordinating with partners to optimize service delivery during the ongoing pandemic. This continues to be done through social media posts, email newsletters, articles, virtual events, and media interviews.

As an example, our *WZZM 13 On Your Side Sandwich Generation Sponsorship* wrapped up in November 2020. This 12-month program was a large success and included a commercial, monthly interview segments, featured branded articles, and display ads. Our 30 second commercial aired 193 times and received 613,000 unique impressions (watched by an individual) throughout the year. As of March 2021, we again are taking part in a similar sponsorship with WZZM that will run through December 2021.

This and other partnerships have expanded outreach to older adults, their caregivers, family and friends who otherwise may not have known about AAAWM or the array of services available.

## **Fiscal Year 2022**

AAAWM's primary focus for FY 2022 may continue to be affected by the Covid-19 pandemic. Regardless of the extent or aftermath of the pandemic, services will continue. AAAWM supports its Service Partners as they tirelessly navigate new and innovative ways to ensure older adults can remain safely in their own homes and communities. This also includes addressing pandemic fatigue among Service Partners and AAAWM Staff. Mental health trainings will begin in the summer of 2021.

As such, AAAWM will focus on those services that are most critical to the health and well-being of older adults. Nutrition, Transportation, and In-Home Services, as well as Caregiver Support and Care Management are priority. AAAWM will persist in implementing innovative ideas for service delivery.

## **Challenges, Changes, and Adaptations:**

Before the pandemic, the minimal amount of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) that was needed was readily available for those staff who required the use of such equipment in the home. Although in-home caregivers have always practiced safe and sanitary care, more shielding PPE is now needed than originally required for all tasks. Partners are challenged with a new expense, additional time performing tasks and restrictive movement.

Technology has allowed most staff to work from home. With the addition of new laptops, Microsoft Teams, and ZOOM, many staff have been able to adapt and find a new normal with day-to-day communication, connecting to colleagues and Service Partners. These technologies have made a big difference in allowing staff to stay in touch, "see" each other, and also have group meetings virtually. Teams has allowed AAAWM staff to have their office phones on their computer. Once back to the office, the office phone sitting on a desk will be a thing of the past.

Isolation and loneliness have long been an ongoing issue for older adults. The Covid-19 pandemic has exacerbated the issue, confining many older adults to their homes with little opportunity for interaction with others. Additionally, family caregivers are also facing new challenges. Those living with their loved one may feel extra stress and have less access to respite opportunities creating fatigue. Some who care for loved ones and do not share a home, face the additional stressors of managing care from a distance and navigating a new and changing system of service delivery.

The number of qualified Direct Care Workers who provide a vital service to help our aging and disability community remain at home, has reached a crisis. Due to the overwhelming number of women who work in the field, many have needed to stay home during the pandemic to care for children who might otherwise be in school. With a shortage of workers within this economic bracket community-wide, the resource of direct care workers has been hit especially hard.

AAAWM Service Partners have adjusted quickly to pandemic challenges. Although there are many unknowns regarding when and how some businesses can return to “normal”, Service Partners are continually developing plans for how to safely return to providing all services for older adults. In the meantime, Partners are providing many services in new and creative ways. Highlighted below are some examples:

**Transportation** partners have adapted and are still providing vital rides for those in need. Required face masks, more frequent cleaning and sanitizing along with limits on the number of riders are all the new norm. Essential medical trips or essential shopping trips are being provided by partners, with the limit being three clients to a bus.

Many programs for seniors and family caregivers, including **Disease Prevention/Health Promotion** and Caregiver resources have adapted and are offering on-line or virtual programming to the participant’s home.

**Service Partners** are making daily wellness calls to participants who have requested them. These calls serve to improve the senior’s social and emotional well-being.

Ensuring older adults have access to healthy, nutritious food remains a top priority. Meal programs have seen significant changes over this past year. This system was designed to provide food to older adults in need. The system was not funded or intended to provide food to **all** older adults who live at home. Covid-19 significantly changed this as all older adults were considered “at-

risk” and were encouraged to stay at home. This has exponentially increased the number of people who qualify for nutrition services.

**Home delivered meals** previously guaranteed a visual check on clients and social interaction through conversation. Now, food is left at doorsteps and the client is called to make sure they are okay. This helps to keep both the client and the driver safe.

**Congregate meals** offered social interaction and activities along with a meal. Some Nutrition Partners are now offering grab and go meals or clients have been added to home delivered meal routes. Many congregate hosts are calling clients to provide them with social interaction. Bingo is now virtual.

The system has encountered capacity issues both in procuring food as well as delivering increased amounts of food. This has led to some decrease in client choice; however, meal programs remain committed to providing meals that meet nutritional standards. In 2021 older adults benefited and enjoyed the Quarantine food boxes and the weekly produce boxes through statewide collaborations.

Hopefully this summary has helped to highlight some of the successes, challenges, and changes that have taken place for our Service Partners and AAAM. We are looking forward as we move into fiscal year 2022.