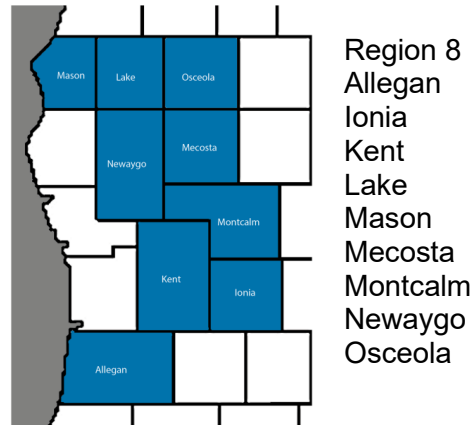


Through internal expertise, external partnerships, and advocacy, The Area Agency on Aging of Western Michigan (AAAWM), provides older adults, adults with disabilities, and their caregivers equitable access to services that promote independence and dignity in their communities.



AAAWM was established in April of 1974, one of sixteen regional Area Agencies on Aging on Michigan at that time and one of over 600 area agencies in the nation. The Planning Service Area (PSA) of the Area Agency on Aging of Western Michigan (AAAWM) (Region 8) is comprised of nine counties: Allegan, Ionia, Kent, Lake, Mason, Mecosta, Montcalm, Newaygo, and Osceola.

We understand that the aging process is unique for everyone, and we are committed to offering tailored services to meet the needs of all older adults.

As of March 2024, AAWM is finalizing our new agency Strategic Plan for 2024-2026. We reformatted the plan to be a more intentional and easier to disseminate document to reference by all staff and community partners. In this plan, we have updated AAWM's mission and values and added a new vision statement.

Our overarching goals for the next three years include engaging in new initiatives and partnerships by diversifying funding, expanding to meet unfulfilled needs, and launching the Essential Care at Home program. We plan to build brand awareness by increasing referrals and implementing a new database to track those referrals and strengthen outreach and support region wide.

We will work to have a greater impact on policy changes and improve our legislative influence by representing those we serve and communicating their needs. Lastly, to maintain a collaborative and productive workforce we will be updating our recruitment, hiring, onboarding, development, and retention practices along with providing staff more agency educational opportunities.

Specifically for 2024, a few initiatives we have planned are to enter at least one new partnership emphasizing the need for senior housing, we will be creating a Return on Investment (ROI) procedure for outreach initiatives and through advocacy we will help pass the Long-Term Care

Ombudsman (LTCO) increased funding of \$3 million to add 33 new LTCO positions state-wide. In FY24, with the financial support of American Plan Rescue Act (ARPA) funding, we are implementing a database that will create efficiencies in monitoring spending, tracking outcomes, processing contracted partner payments, and running reports. The database is planned to be fully implemented by October 1, 2024.

We continue to monitor the Older Americans Act funding and anticipated end to the ARPA dollars at the end of FY24. We maintain ongoing conversations with our partner agencies and review spending monthly to ensure spending is on track and identify any spending trends throughout the year. Our OAA spending is currently on track with our sustainability plan factoring in the end of ARPA to ease any funding cliff in the coming years.

Beginning in Fiscal Year 25, new Caregiver Service Standards will be implemented, prompting us to revamp our Caregiver Supplemental program to address urgent needs within this framework. We plan to utilize a Caregiver Resource Grant, in Fiscal Year 24 to support the introduction of this program. Moreover, over the past two years, we have successfully run the Grandparent Back-to-School Gift Card Program to assist grandparents who are raising their grandchildren with the expenses of school supplies. Given its success, we intend to make this an ongoing annual initiative under the Caregiver Supplemental program starting in Fiscal Year 25.

In the last couple years, we have seen two adult day center partners close their doors leaving an increased need for this service. In FY25, we have one new adult day center apply for Kent County Senior Millage funds with the potential of also applying for Older Americans Act funding in FY26. This additional partnership would help address the increased need for adult day care with the previous centers closing. We will continue to have conversations with our current adult day partners regarding the demand and their capacity and foster conversations with potential new partners.

We often think of nutrition services as being a Home Delivered meal or Congregate meal and though these are essential, we know nutrition needs are beyond a meal. In preparation for an FY26 start, we are exploring options and partnerships to introduce additional nutrition services to our region including nutrition education and counseling to support further nutrition needs for clients and their caregivers.

AAAWM is dedicated to enhancing its Options Counseling services as a cornerstone of our commitment to comprehensive care. Collaborating closely with community partners, we are diligently expanding our network to offer clients an extensive array of community resources. This collaborative effort ensures that individuals seeking assistance can access vital services tailored to their specific needs and circumstances. Furthermore, we are prioritizing the reinforcement of our firewalls to maintain the integrity and impartiality of our services. This proactive measure ensures that we uphold the highest standards of ethical conduct, guaranteeing that our clients receive unbiased guidance and support in navigating their options. Our unwavering dedication to transparency and conflict-free service provision underscores our

mission to empower individuals to make informed decisions and achieve their desired outcomes with confidence.

Emphasis on serving those in greatest social and/or economic need has always been priority. This expectation is communicated to partners regularly, reflected in our policies and procedures and discussed when seeking new partnerships. We want our services to reach those in most need and we seek out partnerships that serve a diverse population. We are taking a close look at our FY23 year-end service data to identify areas we can improve and increase our impact throughout the region. We work closely with partners to emphasize the importance of collecting data and using prioritization tools to ensure we are serving those most in need.

AAAWM is actively exploring innovative strategies to leverage Social Determinants of Health (SDOH) data effectively in reaching underserved communities. Our focus is on understanding the intricate interplay between social, economic, and environmental factors that impact health outcomes. This proactive stance underscores our commitment to advancing health equity and ensuring that our services are accessible and responsive to the diverse realities of these communities.

AAAWM is dedicated to broadening its presence in educational events, with a strategic focus on attending expos and marketing events, particularly targeting underserved communities. This deliberate approach allows us not only to showcase our services but also to engage in meaningful discussions and cultivate relationships. By actively participating in these events, we aim to foster connections and bridge gaps within these communities, ultimately contributing to their empowerment and access to essential resources.

The Area Agency on Aging of Western Michigan values diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI); which is why we welcome individuals from all walks of life to work, partner, or participate with us. As an agency, we strive to provide an environment where all involved feel valued, celebrated, and heard. By committing to DEI, we foster growth and innovation while fulfilling our mission.

AAAWM increased service to the African American population from FY2022 to Fy2023 by 1% (443 unduplicated individuals). Our service to LGBTQ+ seniors increased by .09% during that timeframe and also had an increase of 31 individuals self-identify as transgender. While we do not currently have a year's worth of demographic data to look at for FY2024, we anticipate that our agency will continue to increase its service to BIPOC, LGBTQ+ and veteran seniors through our ongoing plan which you will find below.

1. Collaborate with community partners: Partner with community organizations that serve BIPOC and LGBTQ+ seniors to build trust, develop culturally sensitive programming, and ensure that services are accessible.
2. Hire diverse staff: Hire staff that reflects the diversity of the communities we serve. We have made improvements to our hiring process such as posting job openings in community newsletters and websites that are sent out to a diverse group of individuals.

We are also asking a question surrounding diversity and inclusion in all interviews to see how staff can advocate for and bring diversity and inclusion into their role.

3. Provide training: Provide training to staff and volunteers on cultural competency, including understanding different cultural norms, beliefs, and values. This will help ensure that services are culturally sensitive and welcoming to all.
4. Engage in ongoing outreach: Engage in ongoing outreach to veteran, BIPOC and LGBTQ+ seniors through community events, social media, and other outreach efforts. This will help increase awareness of the services available and encourage seniors to access them. AAAMW has booths at Grand Rapids Pride Festival and Rock the Block (catered to BIPOC) and look to attend more cultural events.

The Area Agency on Aging of Western Michigan (AAAMW) is committed to educating our staff, providers, and caregivers on implicit bias, cultural competencies, and root causes of racism. When individuals begin employment at AAAMW, they are required to take an asynchronous course provided by MiGen (Michigan LGBTQ+ Elders Network). This course topic is titled, "Introduction: Serving LGBT Older Adults." This course covers using inclusive language and walks through how to engage with older adults in the LGBT+ community. AAAMW staff are also required to take 2 virtual courses annually addressing these topics. Those courses are titled "Cultural Competence" and "Understanding Privilege."

AAAMW offers trainings for our partner agencies (providers) throughout the year and includes topics on implicit bias and cultural competencies. For example, we provided a training on how to address microaggressions in the workplace. AAAMW has offered workshop topics through Family Caregiver University and the Caregiver Resource Network that fall within the categories of implicit bias and cultural competencies as well and will continue to do so. If staff, service partners, or caregivers' express interest or need for a specific training topic, a training will be identified and provided at our agency, or information will be shared if there is a training provided by another organization that an individual may attend.

In preparation for any reduction in federal funding, AAAMW has planned to seek alternative funding options. One funding stream is the Kent County Senior Millage, which in FY24 has provided over \$15 million in direct service to supports older adults in Kent County. The state Caregiver Resource Grant is being used to expand services to support caregivers and help bridge other gaps in need region wide. AAAMW is seeking two transportation grants that will help our current transportation partners with rising costs in addition to support possible service expansion. AAAMW's plan, is to use carryover dollars from regular OAA funding to lessen the impact of the loss of ARPA funding in FY25 and FY26. AAAMW continues to monitor the current OAA partner spending to ensure sustainability over the coming years to avoid any funding cliff.

In Fiscal Year 24, our advocacy efforts centered on fostering stronger relationships with legislators in our region, enhancing communications, and increasing engagement to bolster our advocacy initiatives. Noteworthy achievements include co-hosting a coffee hour with one legislator and collaborating on an event focused on scam prevention with the Attorney General. Additionally, we successfully lobbied for an \$.85 increase in the wage of Direct Care workers. Federally, we advocated for the reauthorization of the Older Americans Act.

For FY 25, our focus remains steadfast on advancing critical priorities. Firstly, we aim to fortify the Ombudsman program by securing a \$3 million expansion, facilitating the addition of 33 new Ombudsmen statewide. This endeavor aligns with our commitment to ensuring the needs of long-term care facility residents are met effectively. Concurrently, we advocate for a \$4.00 per hour increase in pay for Direct Care Workers, acknowledging the indispensable role they play in the healthcare ecosystem. Moreover, we advocate for adjustments to the MI Choice Medicaid participant asset limits to reflect inflation and labor costs, thus enhancing accessibility to essential services.

In FY25, we are taking a multifaceted approach to advocacy, spanning ten key priorities. Foremost among these is the expansion of the Ombudsman program, alongside initiatives to bolster Direct Care Worker wages and promote health equity. Additionally, we champion administrative enhancements within the MI Choice Program, aimed at optimizing service delivery and improving outcomes for program participants.

Reflecting back over the past year, AAAWM and our contracted partners have had many successes to celebrate. Our FY23 year-end data for Older Americans Act shows that our network of partners served 16,760 clients which is a 13% increase from FY22. We continue to see an increase in clients served post-pandemic with clients welcoming back in-home help, using transportation to get around more, and senior centers are back open and providing in-person programming.

FY23 was the second year we conducted the Back-to-School Gift Card Program which provides financial assistance for purchasing school items for grandparents raising grandchildren. In FY23 we assisted 48 households and one household consisting of a grandfather and three grandchildren, sent in a handwritten note thanking AAAWM for the assistance which “helped a great deal” to purchase their school supplies. In FY23, our Disease Prevention/Health Promotion department re-branded to “Engaging Wellness”. This has been a region-wide effort in increasing the marketing for the classes and adding new locations to ensure we have at least one in each of our counties. We have seen an increase in attendance for these classes with the additional marketing push.

In FY23, we were able to use a state grant to translate our most frequently used service materials to the most spoken languages in our region and in FY24, we are working on translating caregiver-specific resources to those same languages with the Caregiver Resource Center grant. This will increase access to service information for both caregivers and clients. We are also in process of updating our phone system and marketing for in-person classes and trainings to make interpreter services and accommodations more readily available. Another success in FY24 has been signing with Salesforce to implement a database to track spending, process provider payments, better track outcomes, and create reports. This database will save staff time by making data entry more automated, reduce potential for human error, and lessen the time it takes to pay providers.

We have a new Regional Direct Service Request for Dementia Friends this planning year. It is our hope that we will expand the Dementia Friends Michigan program by adding more Dementia

Champions to facilitate sessions. AAAWM will also be networking with other Area Agencies in Michigan to train their staff to be able to run their own Dementia Friends program in their region. This will all lead to an increase in community knowledge about Dementia and Dementia Resources. There is a plan to continue to host an informational session that provide dementia education, raises awareness, challenges stigma surrounding dementia, and share community resources and supports.

AAAWM is looking to begin delivering Primary Care Services throughout our PSA. These services will be delivered in the community, where residents reside. This program is a comprehensive initiative aimed at evolving healthcare delivery by providing essential medical and behavioral health services, as well as care management, to individuals in the comfort of their homes. This innovative approach integrates home and community-based services with medical and behavioral care to address the social determinants of health, enhance health outcomes, and elevate the quality of life for participants. At the heart of this program are person-centered principles and an interdisciplinary team approach, which involves collaboration among medical, behavioral, and social care professionals, alongside the patient and/or their caregivers. The overarching goal is to achieve tangible outcomes like reducing emergency room visits, minimizing hospitalizations, and prolonging participants' ability to live independently within their communities.

Some foreseeable challenges in FY25 include the continued need for direct care workers and increased pay to maintain and grow the industry. Unit rate increases were given to contracted partners in FY23 to assist in maintaining and expanding their workforce but additional support for legislation to increase the DCW wage is crucial.

We will continue to strategically allocate funding for the Older Americans Act and monitor spending to ensure sustainability of funds over the next couple years to avoid a funding cliff with ARPA dollars ending at the end of FY24. We continue to see the need for the expanded service definitions that were developed during the pandemic allowing for services to be delivered in a variety of ways.

AAAWM is proactively devising strategies to address the increasing demand for services amid limited resources and static funding, which are inadequate to meet the growing needs. In response to these challenges, we are pursuing innovative solutions to enhance resource allocation, improve service delivery, and boost efficiency, all while maintaining the high quality of care our clients expect and deserve.