

GREAT PLAINS SENIOR SERVICES COLLABORATIVE

Program Summary

Transforming Lives in America's Rural Communities

Overview

Older adults in rural areas can struggle to access aging-related services, transportation to medical appointments, and social opportunities. To support older adults living in Minnesota, Montana, and North Dakota, Lutheran Services in America created the Great Plains Senior Services Collaborative. The Collaborative develops and implements sustainable solutions for **rural, low-income older adults** that help improve their quality of life. The Collaborative leverages unique assets and resources from rural communities to help older adults in the Midwest remain in their homes, living independently with purpose and meaning. Its programs target seniors living alone, who often are battling multiple comorbidities, high levels of social isolation and depression. Importantly, the Collaborative refines and strengthens the most scalable approaches that promote healthy aging, improve service coordination, and enhance social engagement in rural communities.

Why is the Collaborative So Needed?

By 2030, one in five U.S. adults will be a senior citizen. Research indicates that older adults in rural communities experience poorer health, higher poverty rates and limited access to key community-based services and supports. In addition, rural populations tend to be older, presenting **isolated seniors** and their communities with additional challenges.

Our National Network's Programs Make a Vital Difference

By focusing on reaching the most vulnerable seniors first while taking into account the unique challenges rural seniors face, we are making a real difference when it comes to helping so many people in more isolated communities. Through our work, we have learned that successful **service coordination** connects older adults to social services and supports to reduce their isolation and meet their basic needs. By working with local partners, gaining trust in communities and adapting to the unique assets and resources in each rural area, we are able to connect isolated older adults with the services and supports that enable them to live independently in their homes and communities.

Given how loneliness and depression can be debilitating obstacles for many older adults, we also know that community-based programs that promote **social engagement** are paramount when it comes to offering people the opportunity to socialize and reduce their isolation, while also bridging cultural boundaries. For example, one successful program in the Collaborative has involved addressing food insecurity and social isolation by offering cooking classes to low-income, rural community residents. Of participating clients, 95 percent reported satisfaction with this innovative program that provides insights into healthy eating on a limited budget through a group cooking class format, as well as guidance on cooking with limited mobility.



Incorporating Social Determinants of Health to Achieve Results

The Collaborative's services directly relate to **social determinants of health**, a key, ongoing focus area for the Lutheran Services in America network. Social determinants of health include everything from aiding with transportation and housing, to assisting people with challenging household tasks or visiting as a needed companion.

More than 130 partners and stakeholders are actively engaged in the Collaborative's related programs. Already, we can report that through the Collaborative's efforts, we have helped improve the health and quality of life for more than 1,100 vulnerable older adults in 70 communities throughout rural Minnesota and North Dakota. Of this population, **88.4 percent** of participants reported their health and quality of life had improved; **90.2 percent** reported reduced stress, and **98.6 percent** said the program in which they participated was of high quality.

Expanding on Success

The Collaborative's initial \$2.5 million grant earned an additional funding round of \$3.4 million from a national philanthropic partner to promote **healthy aging**, improve service coordination, and enhance social engagement in rural areas. Vital work on these fronts continues today in Minnesota and North Dakota, with Montana added to the Collaborative as of 2019. We expect substantial additional progress to be made in the coming years.

To learn more about Lutheran Services in America's Great Plains Senior Services Collaborative, contact David Zauche at dzauche@lutheranservices.org.

Programs Improved Participant Quality of Life

