



Lutheran
Services
in America

August 16, 2019

The Honorable Cheri Bustos
U.S. House of Representatives
1233 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representative Bustos:

As President and CEO of [Lutheran Services in America](#), I am writing to thank you and your co-sponsors for introducing the Social Determinants Accelerator Act (H.R. 4404), and to enthusiastically offer our support for this critically important legislation.

Lutheran Services in America leads one of the largest health and human services networks in the U.S. We consist of a national network of over 300 Lutheran social ministry organizations that operate with over \$22 billion in annual revenue. Guided by God's call to love and serve our neighbors, our members touch the lives of 1 in 50 Americans each year, providing services to seniors, children and people with disabilities, along with veterans, refugees and homeless people in 1,400 rural and urban communities throughout the United States. To learn more about the scope of our services, see our member map here: http://bit.ly/LSA_member_map

Given your legislation, its focus on social determinants of health and its importance for our nation's aging seniors in rural areas, I'd like to take this opportunity to share with you concrete details of an initiative we have underway which is very much tied to social determinants of health for lower-income seniors in rural areas. As you may know, Lutheran Services in America has long focused on supporting the healthy, independent aging of America's seniors, particularly those struggling with limited resources in rural, isolated settings. We and our national network believe a tremendous opportunity exists to factor the impact social determinants make to seniors' health via innovative programs tailored for rural communities.

One such example that is translating into real results for lower-income seniors is through our **Great Plains Senior Services Collaborative**. With \$2.5 million in grant support from a large philanthropic partner, our Collaborative is developing and implementing sustainable solutions that enable older rural



adults to maintain their autonomy, improve their health and well-being, and achieve a higher quality of life. Collaborative services ran the gamut from aiding with transportation to medical appointments and helping coordinate visits to friends and families, to assisting those struggling with dementia, visiting as a needed companion, and even helping with challenging household tasks. What these have in common is they all link to social determinants that so directly affect rural seniors' well-being. These include isolation, transportation challenges, loneliness, and limited resources, which so directly affect people's quality of life, physical and mental health, and sense of connection to their community and the people in it.

The Collaborative, already showing remarkable progress in Minnesota and North Dakota, benefits from independent academic evaluation and validation of program results from professionals at North Dakota State University. It is quite original, in that it leverages the unique assets and resources of rural communities, and develops person-centered approaches to help seniors remain in their homes and communities, living with purpose and meaning.

In tandem with Lutheran Social Service of Minnesota and Lutheran Social Services of North Dakota, we launched in 2015 our Collaborative's three-year Phase I, which led to some of the highest-need older adults receiving services that contributed to improved quality of life. Over 1,500 older adults and their families were supported with the engagement of more than 130 partners and stakeholders via various programs. Results indicated successfully improving the health and quality of life of vulnerable older adults in more than 70 communities throughout rural Minnesota and North Dakota, with the most successful program implementations resulting from partnerships with organizations and churches that had an established community presence.

Successes and lessons learned from Phase I of the Great Plains Senior Services Collaborative have earned additional funding (\$3.4 million) for Phase II of the Collaborative, designed to strengthen the program's most scalable models and approaches that promote healthy aging, improve service coordination, and enhance social engagement in rural areas. Recognizing the importance of community collaboration and connection, Phase II places a particular emphasis on service coordination and community-based programs that promote social engagement. Encouragingly, the Collaborative's Phase II has added Montana as well as communities in Minnesota and North Dakota where need has been identified.



By learning from the Collaborative's Phase I, carrying forward the most promising service models, and investing in resources to scale services to reach more rural seniors, the Great Plains Senior Services Collaborative fully expects to expedite program delivery and improve program quality by skillfully leveraging a multi-state approach. We see this as a model that can scale nationally to include other states – including, of course, rural areas of Illinois. It is in these efforts where needed legislation such as yours could be of the utmost assistance, particularly when it comes to forming additional strategic public-private partnerships in rural communities.

Your important legislation has such potential to help better equip mission-driven efforts like expansion of our Great Plains Senior Services Collaborative, an initiative that can help so many more of America's most vulnerable. We applaud your foresight in recognizing both the need for greater awareness and support of the critical role social determinants of health play for rural seniors' wellbeing and independence, and also your legislation's focus on encouraging strategic partnerships between local and state agencies and partnering organizations to achieve this worthy goal.

If we can be of any service in efforts to help move the bill forward through additional support such as providing testimony or involvement in any future events, I hope you will not hesitate to let me know.

Once again, we want to thank you for your leadership on this issue and for your commitment to improve the health and well-being of all Americans.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Charlotte Haberaecker".

Charlotte Haberaecker
President and CEO