

2024

Annual Report



Central Minnesota Council on Aging
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Executive Director's Perspective

Dear Friends and Partners,

As I reflect on the past year, I am filled with gratitude for the dedication of our staff, board of directors, advisory committee, volunteers, and Older Americans Act provider partners. Together, we have expanded services, fostered new partnerships, and navigated challenges with creativity and collaboration. Each of us should take pride in the meaningful impact we've made in the lives of older adults and caregivers in Central Minnesota.



Lori Vrolson
Executive Director

The year 2024 marked a significant milestone, our 40th anniversary of service to the community. Since 1984, Central Minnesota Council on Aging has been committed to fulfilling its mission: to support older adults in maintaining the highest level of independence by developing and coordinating community care, reducing isolation, and improving access to essential services. This landmark anniversary serves as a testament to the impact we've made and the countless lives we've touched over the past four decades.

Guided by our core values and vision, we launched new initiatives and expanded services in the fiscal year 2024. Highlights include:

- Supported over 24,105 individuals across our 14-county region, with Older Americans Act services reaching one in seven older adults.
- Enhanced the Together Well Toolkit to address social isolation among older adults and caregivers.
- Provided Age-Friendly Minnesota technical assistance, offering one-on-one support and educational events for community leaders and stakeholders.
- Joined the Reframe Aging Minnesota Initiative to combat ageism and participated in a statewide leadership presentation.

- Strengthened workforce education efforts by delivering 30+ presentations to over 1,500 participants.
- Partnered on the Aging in Rural Minnesota report, sharing findings in a statewide webinar to guide community planning.
- Senior LinkAge staff helped save Minnesota beneficiaries over \$2.3 million in prescription costs, including \$788,000 in the CMCOA region.
- Took on the role of Center of Excellence for Preadmission Screening (PAS), ensuring a seamless transition to statewide processing in collaboration with Minnesota River Area Agency on Aging (MNRAAA).

These initiatives, along with our ongoing services and strategic partnerships, ensure that older adults and caregivers have the resources and support to live as independently as possible in their chosen settings. The collective work of our organization and our partners continues to make Central Minnesota a place where individuals of all ages can live with dignity and independence, inspiring other communities to do the same.

This annual report celebrates our 40-year journey and the achievements of the past year. We could not have accomplished this without your support and collaboration. Thank you for your commitment. Together we can make a lasting difference in Central Minnesota.



CMCOA staff meeting, June 2024

2024 BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Beth Schlangen, Benton County Commissioner
Jeff Peterson, Cass County Commissioner
Rick Greene, Chisago County Commissioner
Jon Lubke, Crow Wing County Commissioner
Kristie LaRowe, Isanti County Commissioner
Peter Ripka, Kanabec County Commissioner
Genny Reynolds, Mille Lacs County Commissioner*
Bobby Kasper, Morrison County Commissioner
Steve Hallan, Pine County Commissioner*
Lisa Fobbe, Sherburne County Commissioner
Tarryl Clark, Stearns County Commissioner
Leigh Lenzmeier, Stearns County Commissioner*
Randy Neumann, Todd County Commissioner
Jon Kangas, Wadena County Commissioner
Jeanne Holland, Wright County Commissioner*
* Executive Committee

2024 ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Spencer Buerkle, Benton County Representative
Ruth Hunstiger, Benton County Representative
Mary Anderson, Cass County Representative
Kathy Blomquist, Chisago County Representative
Karl Samp, Crow Wing County Representative
Peggy Carpenter, Isanti County Representative
Alan Roseberry, Kanabec County Representative
Martha Ahlschlager, Mille Lacs County Representative
Desiree Bednar, Morrison County Representative
Patrick Meacham, Pine County Representative
Dennis Eichinger, Sherburne County Representative
Mary Bauer, Stearns County Representative
Angel Hight, Stearns County Representative
Lauren Hebert, Todd County Representative
Cindy Pederson, Wadena County Representative
LeeAnn Thimell, Wright County Representative
Dawn Achtelik, At Large Representative
Denise Sargent, At Large Representative
Dan Tupy, At Large Representative



Community Development staff, Melissa L. (left) and Natalie M. at Dementia Friends Changemaker Summit in December 2024



"Team work", at the staff holiday party. L to R: Leah P., Liz P., Natalie M.

Service Awards 2024

CMCOA acknowledges the importance of long-term employees. Their extensive knowledge and years of experience play a crucial role in the agency's success. These awards are presented annually in December.



Linda Gansen, Finance Manager (left) presented Lori Vrolson, Executive Director the 30 year award.

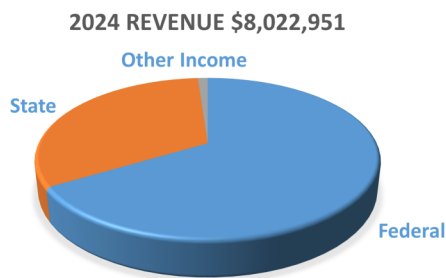


Lori Vrolson, Executive Director, (right) presented the 25 year award to Peggy Rieland, SLL Contact Center Manager.



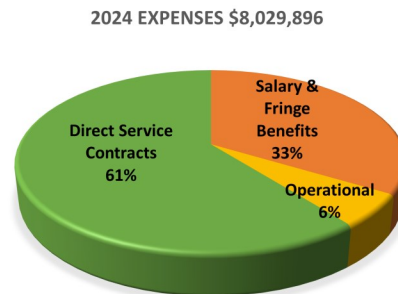
L to R Row 1: Leslie M. 2 years, Brenda E. 10 years, Lori V. 30 years, Mary H. 10 years Row 2: Laura S. 5 years, Wendy G. 10 years, Nadine M. 2 years, Natalie M. 10 years, Peggy R. 25 years Not pictured: Roger G. 10 years

Financial Summary 2024



Support and Revenue	
Federal	\$ 5,328,226
State	\$ 2,605,496
Other Income	\$ 89,229
Total Revenue	\$ 8,022,951

(based on unaudited figures)



Expenses	
Salary & Fringe Benefits	\$ 2,700,354
Operational	\$ 459,161
Direct Service Contracts	\$ 4,870,381
	\$ 8,029,896
Revenue over Expenses	\$ (6,945)

2024 Older Americans Act Funding

Total Dollars Utilized: \$4.6 Million

Over 24,105 Older Adults and Caregivers Supported

24 Contracted Title III Federal Older Americans Act Service Providers

Health Assessment	
\$56,869	
Older Adults	145
Hours	955

Home-Delivered Meals	
\$2,582,579	
Older Adults	3,717
Meals	367,746

Chore	
\$44,799	
Older Adults	208
Hours	1,447

Assisted Transportation	
\$394,144	
Older Adults	750
One-way trips	18,877

Evidence-Based Programs	
\$84,200	
Older Adults	483
Sessions	1,115

Senior LinkAge Line Contacts	
Clients	18,907
Contacts/Calls	12,344

Congregate Meals	
\$586,378	
Older Adults	2,442
Meals	86,931

Homemaker	
\$309,422	
Older Adults/ Caregivers	602
Hours	10,973

Friendly Visiting / Telephone Reassurance	
\$14,438	
Caregivers/ Older Adults	213
Contacts	816

Legal Assistance	
\$172,853	
Older Adults	1,157
Hours	3,578

Legal Education	
\$309	
Older Adults	10
Sessions	1

Caregiver Consulting	
\$170,134	
Caregivers	364
Hours	2,053

Support Groups	
\$38,263	
Caregivers	665
Sessions	163

Caregiver Information	
\$20,011	
Caregivers	543
Sessions	28

Caregiver Education	
\$9,435	
Caregivers	74
Hours	211

Caregiver Information and Assistance	
\$20,587	
Caregivers	799
Sessions	835

Respite	
\$106,783	
Caregivers	55
Hours	5,084

Title III Provider Partners

Organization	Amount Utilized
A Home for the Day	\$46,330
Benedictine Faith in Action	\$120,875
CARE-Community Action Respecting Elders	\$41,165
Catholic Charities Senior Nutrition	\$2,510,436
Center for African Immigrants and Refugees Organization (CAIRO)	\$64,650
Central Minnesota Dementia Community Action Network	\$67,026
Chisago Age Well Coalition	\$2,004
Faith in Action for Cass County	\$82,078
Family Pathways	\$204,678
Growing Connections LLC	\$3,383
Helping Hands Outreach	\$39,970
Horizon Health	\$175,947

Organization	Amount Utilized
Kanabec County Public Health	\$61,395
Lutheran Social Service Senior Nutrition	\$803,308
Mid-Minnesota Legal Aid	\$173,177
Minnesota Elder Justice Center	\$3,093
Northwoods Caregivers	\$31,744
Parmly on the Lake, LLC (South Chisago Meals on Wheels)	\$37,424
Paynesville ROSE Center	\$67,915
Paynesville Senior Center	\$631
Senior Community Services	\$67,744
Sherburne County	\$4,668
Whitney Senior Center	\$45,000
Wright County Community Action	\$136,442

CMCOA Honors Retirees



Eleanor Burkett, Steve Hoover, and Kathy Kruger

During the June staff meeting, three staff were recognized, celebrated, and honored as they moved on to their next life adventure. Eleanor

Burkett, Community Development Specialist, worked in the northern region. Steve Hoover, Healthy Aging Coordinator, retired but continued to work through 2024 on special projects. Kathy Kruger, Resource Specialist, did outreach and gave Senior LinkAge Line presentations in the northern region. The celebration continued with a “Dip into Summer” potluck where favorite summer dips and hors d’oeuvres were shared.



SENIOR LINKAGE LINE

The impact

“Thank you Senior LinkAge Line! You have been the best support I have ever received!”

“Senior LinkAge Line is very special. I can’t thank them enough for all of their help. I would not have known what to do without the Senior LinkAge Line.”

“I didn’t know where to start or what to do. Senior LinkAge Line helped me figure it out.”

Beginning in March 2024, callers were offered a phone survey at the end of most calls, to ensure that Senior LinkAge Line is continuing to provide quality service. A total of 273 surveys were completed by those who agreed to take the survey and answer three questions regarding this service.

- ⇒ 97% said they received the information they needed
 - ⇒ 99% felt the person they spoke to was knowledgeable and helpful
 - ⇒ 98% would recommend Senior LinkAge Line to others
-

Senior LinkAge Line was able to provide both education on Medicare and address language barriers while assisting a caregiver of an older adult. The outreach resource specialist met with a client and her spouse, who will be new to Medicare in 2025. During a one-on-one consultation, the client received an overview of Medicare basics and a deeper understanding of Medicare and COBRA coordination of benefits.

During the conversation, the client shared that she is a caregiver for her mother-in-law, who resides in an assisted living home. The care receiver experiences significant social isolation due to language barriers. Although the client visits weekly, the care receiver has limited opportunities for meaningful interaction between visits. Together, the resource specialist and the client brainstormed ways to address these challenges.

- A free social program, *Well Connected*, offering opportunities for older adults to engage in phone conversations. This is available in both English and Spanish.
- Student volunteer programs encouraging local high school or college Spanish club students opportunities for mutual learning and social interaction.
- Utilizing Spanish resources such as audiobooks from the library or subscribing to a Spanish newspaper.

The client was enthusiastic about the ideas and grateful for the resources provided. In addition to gaining an understanding of Medicare, she found the tools to improve her mother-in-law’s quality of life.

Central Minnesota Council on Aging provides Senior LinkAge Line services in the 14-county central planning and service area in partnership with the Minnesota Board on Aging.

2024

Comments | Notes | Stats

47
Health Fairs
Senior Expos

8
New to
Medicare

34
Presentations

Resource Specialists

Working within the Senior LinkAge Line Contact Center they locate services or research options to determine what kind of services might be helpful. In addition, they do an in-depth assessment and help navigate individuals to the appropriate community services.

**Assisted 12,344 individuals through
18,907 points of contact.**

**522 people served from
various minority groups.**

Resource Coordinators

Assist nursing home residents who have complicated needs to return home and individuals who are living in their home to remain there as long as possible.

**714 Individuals returned to
community or remained in
community.**

471 Support Plans

Preadmission Screening Specialists (PAS)

Partner with qualified health care professionals at hospitals, nursing facilities, hospice agencies, and clinics to ensure that the preadmission screenings process is completed for individuals admitting to Medical Assistance certified skilled nursing facilities.

CMCOA, along with MN River Area Agency on Aging, served as the Preadmission Screening Center of Excellence. In 2024, **61,469** nursing home preadmission screens were completed statewide with **7,995** from the central region. Of the statewide screenings, **73%** had an expected length of stay under 30 days.

As a result of the preadmission screening, Senior LinkAge Line may refer people to the county who have a mental illness or a developmental disability for an in-person Obra Level II screening. This screening will determine the best placement for the client or determine if there are any specialized services the client may benefit from. In 2024, **3%** of the preadmission screenings were referred to the county for an Obra Level II screening.

Medicare Open Enrollment Period

Medicare open enrollment runs from October 15 - December 7 each year. Senior LinkAge Line staff assist beneficiaries to compare and enroll into health and drug plans being offered for the following year. During the 2024 open enrollment period, Senior LinkAge Line helped beneficiaries in Minnesota save over \$2.3 million on prescription medications costs statewide with \$788,000 in the CMCOA region.

Community Development

The Central Minnesota Council on Aging's Community Development team collaborates with service providers, local governments, and other partners to explore and create innovative programs. They pilot system changes, leverage technology, and utilize informal resources to address the evolving needs of the long-term care system.

Gathering the data and input to better serve our community members.

Central Minnesota Older Adults Needs Assessment Report 2024

CMCOA contracted with St. Cloud State University to conduct a needs assessment, surveying older adults, caregivers, and senior service providers throughout the region. To deepen the insights from the survey, we collaborated with various organizations and individuals to host listening sessions with diverse and underserved community members, including Somali, Latinx, and LGBTQ+ older adults. Based on the findings, CMCOA is committed to developing programs to enhance social connectivity, support systems (including respite services and educational resources), reduce barriers, raise awareness, and strengthen community infrastructure for older adults. The report can be found on CMCOA website at: https://cmcoa.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/08/CMCOA_2024_Needs_Assessment_Report-ONLINE.pdf

Aging in Rural Minnesota

Minnesota area agencies on aging: Arrowhead Area Agency on Aging, Central Minnesota Council on Aging, Dancing Sky Area Agency on Aging, SE MN Area Agency on Aging, and MN River Area Agency on Aging, partnered with The National Rural Health Resource Center, Rural Health Innovations, and University of Minnesota Rural Health to develop and present the report on Aging in Rural Minnesota. The findings were shared during a statewide webinar in December 2024. The findings from this report provide a vital foundation to assist community leaders in planning and implementing initiatives and services that support older adults in their communities. The webinar presentation and report can be found at: <https://mn4a.org/aging-in-rural-minnesota-webinar/>

Cultivating community partnerships & facilitating learning opportunities.

Workforce Education

To improve outreach strategies for workforce education and engagement, the Community Development team updated their program of presentations in 2024. Each presentation is customized to meet the specific interests and needs of the audience. Through their targeted outreach in 2024, the team facilitated or co-led over 30 presentations, reaching more than 1,500 participants.



Powered By Connections event, May 2024, in Sartell, MN.

Building bridges to support, engage, & promote social connections.

In 2024 the Community Development team saw continued momentum and increased awareness of their work with social isolation and loneliness (SIL).

- They were interviewed by staff from Senator Tina Smith’s office regarding the bipartisan bill led by Senators Tina Smith, Marco Rubio, and Rick Scott to address loneliness among seniors. This discussion resulted in an interview with WCCO.
- The Together Well Toolkit (TWT) is a dedicated initiative aimed at addressing SIL among older adults and caregivers. TWT provides a framework for service providers to integrate tools into their existing programs, helping individuals assess their level of social connectedness and encouraging positive change. In 2024, the pilot phase concluded with 23 community professionals receiving training.
- The team was invited to present their SIL initiatives at the statewide Dementia Friends Changemaker Summit celebrating the Dementia Friends 10-year anniversary in Minnesota. Over 200 participated in the event from across the state.
- In partnership with Central Lakes Community College Brainerd and Staples, Essentia Health, and Crow Wing County the team hosted presentations at the colleges and at several community venues. The follow-up sessions reached over 1,100 participants, with 75% of attendees aged 55 and older.

Minnesota Reframe Aging

The National Center to Reframe Aging® is committed to combating ageism by promoting a more inclusive and accurate narrative about aging in America. Minnesota has joined this movement through the Reframe Aging Minnesota Initiative. In 2024, the Community Development staff joined the steering committee. CMCOA staff participated in a group presentation at the December 2024 MN Leadership Council on Aging conference.

Dementia Awareness and Education

- **Dementia Friendly Workforce Dental/Healthcare Practice Training**
Community Development staff facilitated sessions at Cuyuna Regional Medical Center, Pine Technical & Community College (pre-nursing program), and Central Minnesota Senior Living in Brainerd and Little Falls. In total over 60 staff and students were trained.
- Community Development staff led a **Dementia Education** overview to 60 first responders with the Sherburne County Sheriff's Office.
- **Dementia Friends Champions**
In 2024, through outreach and engagement the Community Development team trained 22 new Dementia Friends Champions to increase awareness, education, and support for those impacted by a dementia-related disease. New Champions represent Dementia Friendly community leadership teams, senior service agencies, realtors, YMCA, and volunteer-based Faith in Action programs.

Shaping the future of Age-Friendly communities.

Age-Friendly

As an Age-Friendly Minnesota technical assistance provider, the Community Development team offered one-on-one support along with a variety of events aimed to educate community leaders, service providers, and stakeholders on Age-Friendly strategies and initiative.

- Hosted a virtual session, "Regional and State Progress Towards an Age-Friendly Minnesota". It focused on sharing the results of the Regional Exchange, the status of the Blueprint for an Age-Friendly Minnesota, and regional highlights. There were 26 participants.
- Conducted two virtual presentations of "Age-Friendly: Strategies for Thriving Together" in collaboration with AARP. The presentation also included data from "Profile of Older Adults in Central Minnesota". Combined, the two events reached 40 participants.
- Hosted an in-person "Powered by Connections" event in collaboration with AARP. The focus was on AARP Age-Friendly Communities Network resources and discussions with an emphasis addressing SIL. The event was attended by 58 people from across the CMCOA region.

Age-Friendly Minnesota Multisector Blueprint for Aging

In 2022, Minnesota joined the AARP Network of Age-Friendly States, launching a collaborative statewide initiative called Age-Friendly Minnesota. The Age-Friendly Minnesota Council includes representatives from state agencies, Greater Minnesota, faith and age-friendly communities, and Tribal Nations. Minnesota's plan, Multisector Blueprint for Aging, is the guide to build an age-friendly state for all Minnesotans. In 2024, CMCOA staff participated in Blueprint Action Teams convenings. As a result, Age-Friendly Action Teams were established.