

Advocacy for Evidence-Based Wellness Programs

Emily Petersen, Advocacy & Policy
Manager, Aging Unit



Advocacy in the Older Americans Act

- The Area Agency on Aging is the “public advocate” for aging programs and services and shall:
 - Monitor, evaluate, and comment on all policies, legislation, programs, hearings, and community actions with impact older adults and family caregivers
 - Solicit comments from the public on the needs of older adults and family caregivers
 - Represent older adults and family caregivers to legislators and executives
 - Coordinate with public and private sector to promote new or expanded benefits and opportunities for older adults and family caregivers



How do we carry out these responsibilities?

- Agency position dedicated to advocacy
- Advocacy Committee
- Partnership with state and national aging advocacy groups
- Events in Milwaukee and Madison
- Comments and letters on local, state, and national issues
- Senior Leadership Program



What is Advocacy?

- Advocacy is the pursuit of influencing outcomes that directly affect people's lives
- Advocates are citizens with passion and experience
 - They can prove the intended action is good public policy
- Advocates work with their own legislators



Evidence-Based Wellness Advocacy

- Status of State-level issues (*as of 5/19/25*)
- Governor included funding for healthy aging grants in his 2025-2027 Biennial Budget Proposal
 - \$450,000 in 2026 and \$450,000 in 2027 (\$900,000 total)
 - Funding goes to Wisconsin Institute on Healthy Aging to distribute to local governments and non-profits for falls prevention initiatives



Evidence-Based Wellness Advocacy

- Legislature's Joint Committee on Finance removed this funding from the Budget on 5/8/25
 - A legislator will need to sponsor a motion to put it back in the budget
 - A legislator can also introduce standalone legislation at any point throughout the session to bring this item back



Evidence-Based Wellness Advocacy

- Status of Federal-level issues (*as of 5/19/25*)
- President's 2026 Budget proposal for the Department of Health and Human Services eliminated funding for Older Americans Act Title 3D (Evidence-Based Prevention Programs) programs
- Budget also recommends elimination of the Administration for Community Living and moving OAA programs to either Administration for Children and Families and/or Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services
 - Title 3D will move to CMS



Evidence-Based Wellness Advocacy

- President's full Budget proposal to come after Memorial Day
- Congress will need to approve a final budget, which requires support of 60 Senators to pass
- 2026 Federal Fiscal Year runs from October 1, 2025 – September 30, 2026



Advocacy Opportunities- state level

- Call, email, or write your **state legislators**
 - State Senator and State Representative
 - Explain why these programs are impactful to you/your facilitators/your attendees
- Attend WAAN Aging Advocacy Day
 - Opportunity to meet with your legislators to discuss this topic
- Attend a local advocacy event
 - Milwaukee County in-district event
 - Your legislator's events



Advocacy Opportunities- federal level

- Call, email, or write your **federal representatives**
 - Senators Tammy Baldwin and Ron Johnson, plus your House Representative (Gwen Moore, Bryan Steil or Scott Fitzgerald)
 - Explain why these programs are impactful to you/your facilitators/your attendees
- Request a meeting with the local office
 - Opportunity to meet with office staff to discuss this topic
- Attend an in-person or telephone townhall
 - Sign up for their newsletter/follow their FB page to learn when they will host these opportunities



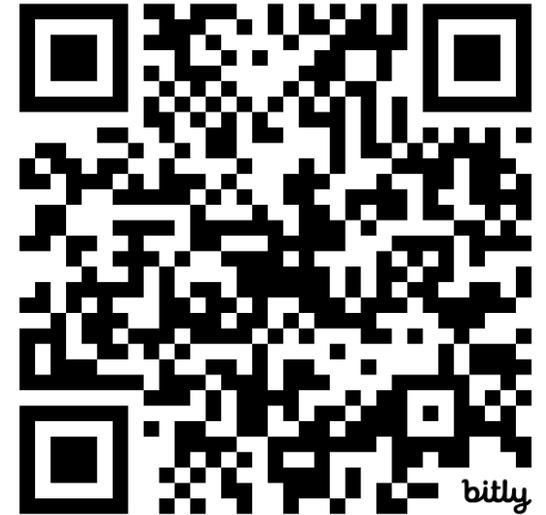
Advice for Advocacy

- Advocacy is not a one-off action—we don't reach out only when we are at a critical point
- Advocacy is about developing a relationship; you want your state and federal representatives to know you!
- Reach out early and reach out often
 - It is more impactful
 - It gets easier the more you do it



To Stay Engaged

- Sign up for our Advocacy Alerts e-newsletter
 - <https://bit.ly/MKECoAdvocacy>



Questions?

