



Wellness Committee Meeting May 21, 2025

The Wellness Committee members convened hybrid on May 21, 2025. Members and attendees joined the hybrid meeting with video conference and conference call.

Members Present:

Jacqueline Smith- *Chair*
Maureen Conrad -*Vice Chair*
Jim Piontek
James Sampson
Tom Suchecki

Kaisa Kerrigan-DHHS
Jennifer Lefeber-DHHS
Vonda Nyang-DHHS
Carrie Koss-Vallejo-DHHS
Emily Petersen-DHHS

Members Excused:

Erika Villafuerte
Gloria Miller
Christy Sanhuber
Mark Behar
John Griffith

Attendees from the Public

Dr. Kathryn Ann Kobelinski
Patricia Wendt
Bill Waters
Judy Buhrns
Susan Larkin
Gerri Emmanuel

Staff Present:

MINUTES

I. CALL TO ORDER AND ROLL CALL

Chair Jacqueline Smith call to the meeting to order at 1:48 p.m. and took the roll call. A quorum was not present.

II. REVIEW AND APPROVAL OF THE MARCH 19, 2025, WELLNESS COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES

Due to a non-quorum the meeting minutes were tabled until the next Wellness Committee Meeting.

III. ACTION/ INFORMATIONAL/ DISCUSSION ITEMS

- A. Informational Item,** Heart Health Initiative-Blood Pressure Hubs (Jennifer Lefeber, AAA Evidence-Based Health Promotion Coordinator): An update was provided on the Heart Health Initiative at the five county-owned senior centers: Kelly, Wilson Park, Washington Park, McGovern Park, and Clinton Rose. Blood pressure hubs with tabletop monitors have been installed at all centers through a partnership with the American Heart Association and

additional county funding. You can also have your blood pressure checked at two community churches—Ebenezer Family Worship and Calvary Baptist Church—besides the Senior Centers.

These kiosks provide printed results and track usage but do not store personal data. Participants are encouraged to use blood pressure logs to monitor readings over time and consult healthcare providers if necessary.

Complementing the kiosks is a monthly **Heart Health Educational Series** featuring rotating topics such as diabetes, physical activity, mental health, and nutrition. Each session is 20–40 minutes, presented by professionals from across the county. A "passport" system is in place where participants earn raffle entries by attending sessions and checking their blood pressure.

The initiative includes kick-off events (with one remaining at Wilson Park on **July 11**) and will conclude with a celebratory finale. Plans are underway to continue the educational series quarterly in 2026. Flyers with session schedules from June through October are available.

B. Informational Item, Advocacy for Title IIID Funding (Emily Petersen, AAA Advocacy and Policy Manager): Emily Peterson explained the Older Americans Act (OAA), which provides services for older adults through Area Agencies on Aging (AAA), like Milwaukee County. Milwaukee County AAA is notable for having a dedicated advocacy manager and a monthly Advocacy Committee. They engage in policy evaluation, legislative events, and train older adults through a Senior Leadership Program. Advocacy focuses on influencing outcomes via education and legislative engagement, differing from lobbying by emphasizing personal stories rather than paid promotion.

Healthy Aging Grants are a vital funding source that support evidence-based wellness programs such as *Stepping On* and *Walk with Ease*, which aim to prevent falls and support healthy aging among older adults. Distributed by the Wisconsin Institute for Healthy Aging (WIHA), these grants are used by local governments and nonprofits—including Milwaukee County—to cover facilitator costs and program licensing fees, making them essential for ongoing service delivery.

In the proposed 2025–2027 state budget, the Governor included \$900,000 in funding for Healthy Aging Grants (\$450,000 per year). However, on May 8, the Legislature's Joint Finance Committee removed this funding during its initial budget review. The cut puts the future of these important programs at risk and may require advocacy efforts or the identification of alternative funding sources to ensure their continuation.

The federal government is preparing the 2026 budget, which may impact programs for older adults. The President's early proposal includes cuts to some wellness programs under the Older Americans Act and plans to eliminate the agency that manages many of these services, possibly moving them to other agencies with uncertain funding. The full budget will be released soon, with Congress deciding the final version before the new fiscal year starts on October 1, 2025. Additionally, the budget reconciliation process, which requires fewer Senate votes and is currently underway, includes discussions about Medicaid and is being used to help pass the budget more efficiently. Petersen encourages contacting state legislators by phone, email, or letter regarding healthy aging grants.

C. Informational Item, Wisconsin Institute for Healthy Aging (WIHA)'s *Healthy Aging Summit*-Takeaways, (Kaisa Kerrigan Community Health Coordinator and Jennifer Lefeber): Jennifer Lefeber and Kaisa Kerrigan presented key insights from WIHA's Healthy Aging Summit, focusing on reframing how society talks about aging. They emphasized that the language and metaphors used—such as avoiding catastrophic terms like "tidal wave" of an aging population—can shape public perception and policy. The presentation advocated for shifting focus from individual responsibility to broader social and environmental factors that influence how people age. Inclusive language like "older adults" was encouraged, and aging was reframed as a process of gaining momentum and abilities, rather than decline. Concrete examples, such as curb cuts benefiting all generations, were highlighted to demonstrate the value of age-friendly, inclusive policies. They concluded by noting the high healthcare costs of ageism and the benefits of fostering a more positive view of aging.

D. Action Item This item was skipped due to the committee not having a quorum.

IV. 2025 WELLNESS COMMITTEE MEETING DATES

September 17, 2025, at 1:30-3:00pm In-Person, Marcia P. Coggs Health & Human Services Center, 1230 W Cherry St, Milwaukee, WI 53205

November 19, 2025, at 1:30-3:00pm In-Person, LGBT Community Center, 315 W Court St, Milwaukee, WI 53212

V. WELLNESS COMMITTEE MEMBERS & GUEST UPDATES ON RESOURCES AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR OLDER ADULTS

Jennifer Lefeber provided an overview of recent changes to the Wellness Committee structure. The Wellness Committee, which was formally known as the Wellness Council, has new protocols that were introduced, including the requirement of a quorum to approve the meeting minutes, which is half of the

members plus one. Lefeber and Kerrigan will review the current member list and will contact them to confirm their continued participation.

During the meeting, Emily Petersen encouraged participants to sign up for the advocacy alerts using a QR code or link, ensuring they receive future newsletters directly in their inbox which are sent out every Friday. The newsletter includes updates on current developments, along with tips on how to effectively contact legislators. Petersen also provided a brief recap of the recent Advocacy Day, highlighting that the group had a successful meeting with legislators and made meaningful progress.

A candlelight rally for Bryan Steil is scheduled for May 22, 2025, at 8:30 PM at the police station near St. Francis. A Community Health Fair will take place on September 6 at Calvary Baptist Church, organized by Alzheimer's Institute and the ???Health Ministry. Registration is now open for Milwaukee Rec Department's body work classes, which offer physical and mental health benefits and are hosted at senior centers. Additionally, third-quarter evidence-based programs workshop flyers—covering July through September—will be released within the next month which includes programs on fall prevention, diabetes management, and more..

VI. ADJOURNMENT

Meeting adjourned at 3:10 pm

Respectfully submitted,

Ortrialla Paris
Administrative Assistant