

## **SUPPORT OUR SENIORS!**

### **WHY SUPPORTING MILWAUKEE COUNTY SENIORS MATTERS**

Seniors are a thriving economic and social force in Milwaukee County.

- There are more than 190,000 individuals over 60 living in Milwaukee County. That's one in every five people
- From 2010 to 2023, the population of older adults increased 25 percent. That is the fastest of any age cohort and that trend will continue until 2040

These are the individuals whose voices and needs are represented by the Milwaukee County Commission on Aging and served by the Milwaukee County Area Agency on Aging. We are the voice of the most vulnerable in Milwaukee County. We represent aging adults whose lives improve when they have access to exercise programs, healthy meals, transportation that gets them to doctor's appointments, grocery stores, and senior centers where there are programs that improve their lives. After decades of supporting Milwaukee County as taxpayers and workers, seniors need Milwaukee County to do the same for them.

### **WHAT AGING ADULTS IN MILWAUKEE COUNTY NEED**

**Prevention: We need the infrastructure and programs to improve senior health and mortality in Milwaukee County.** Milwaukee County cannot meet its goal of being the healthiest county in Wisconsin if we do not address the racial disparities impacting the fastest growing population in our community.

*In Milwaukee County, the average age of death for white residents is 74.7. The average age of death for African Americans is 62.0. That's a difference of 12.7 years.*

We can improve the health of older adults by growing the services and programs offered in our senior centers to provide critical health screenings, wellness promotion, social engagement, and community building through direct service and creative partnerships to stretch scarce Milwaukee County dollars further.

We are doing this now through the Senior Center Blood Pressure Hubs & Heart Health Initiative in partnership with the American Heart Association. In less than one year, there were more than 8,000 uses of the blood pressure kiosks in our senior centers. We now average 232 users every week in four senior centers. Ninety-five percent of seniors stated the blood pressure kiosks help them manage their blood pressure. Companion heart health programs, also supported by the AHA, increased heart health awareness in 86 percent of participants.

We can work to create more public/private partnerships, maximizing the use and impact of senior centers, and improving the lives of seniors while reducing the impact on taxpayers.

**Protection: The federal dollars provided through the Older Americans Act help Milwaukee County provide more services to protect aging adults without the use of local tax dollars.** More seniors can take part in important nutrition services that strengthen bodies and fight loneliness, two factors greatly influencing health.

*The poverty rate for those 60 and older is 16 percent, up from nine percent in 2010.*

*Social isolation is a real issue for aging adults in Wisconsin. Nearly 11 percent rarely or never get the social and emotional support they need. That number climbs to 27 percent for LGBTQ older, 19 percent of older adults who are people of color, and 15 percent of older adults with incomes of \$35,000 or less. People who are isolated are sicker and die sooner.*

Working together, we can increase participation in vital nutrition programs (need number here) including Meals on Wheels, 15 Senior Nutrition sites from Brown Deer, to Wauwatosa, and Oak Creek, and four Dine-Out options where seniors support local small and minority-owned restaurants by joining friends for a meal.

Our specialized transportation system provided over 65,000 rides to help older adults get to health care appointments, the grocery store, and other locations important to thriving as they age. This is important because 40 percent of older adults in Milwaukee County no longer drive.

OAA funding also provides programs that support caregivers and assist them as they provide safe and secure care for vulnerable seniors.

We also encourage Milwaukee County to seek federal funding and match dollars to partner with others to construct older adult housing, which can address housing insecurity and homelessness among older adults while building communities of care and support that enrich and lengthen the lives of seniors.

**Representation - Continued support of the Area Agency on Aging.** The Commission on Aging – which was created by a Milwaukee County ordinance – is the collective voice of aging adults. Working with the Area Agency on Aging, it plans for, selects, and evaluates the services older adults depend on to live full lives. Its advocacy role is especially important in standing in and up for the specific needs of those aging in Milwaukee County.

*Seniors want to be in Milwaukee County as they age. Seventy-seven percent describe Milwaukee County as an excellent to good place to live as they age.*

We often speak of aging as if it were something impacting only those 60 and older. We are all aging every day. We all individually save and plan for the time beyond our working lives.

Not only is everyone aging, but almost everyone has loved ones in their family, neighborhood, and community who are over 60 and want to live out their lives in places that value their health and well being.

Partnering together, we can find ways to improve the lives and longevity of Milwaukee County seniors. And that makes Milwaukee County stronger for every one of us.