
APPENDIX G

Issues Central to Multiple Areas: Supporting Detail for Findings

1. Discussion Paper on Funding
2. Discussion Paper on Advocacy

BLUEPRINT FOR AGING SERVICES PARTNERSHIP DISCUSSION PAPER ON FUNDING

The BASP Workgroups have identified an array of social, programmatic, and systemic reforms which will make Washtenaw County a more desirable place for residents to grow old and provide for the needs of the elderly. Perhaps the most significant barrier to achieving the desired changes will be the financial cost that is associated with many of the recommendations. While the workgroups did not attempt to develop dollar figures associated with implementation of the recommendations, there clearly will be additional costs. Washtenaw County's aging professionals are confident in their ability to implement the Blueprint's recommendations, but they must rely on the commitment of others to generate the revenue necessary to support this level of effort.

Generating additional revenue to support older adult services may not be the greatest threat to the operationalization of this Blueprint. A more serious and immediate issue is the erosion of existing resources to support social, nutrition, and health-related services for older residents, resulting in a weakened aging service delivery system infrastructure. Washtenaw County's senior population has increased annually at a pace of about two percent each year. In addition, the growth rate of the age 85+ population, those most in need of assistance to maintain their independence, has increased at almost double that rate. Yet funding from most state and federal sources since 1990 has been relatively stagnant, and has grown more slowly than the older adult population, let alone keep pace with inflation. If this erosion continues unabated, the Washtenaw County of tomorrow may have even less to offer vulnerable older persons in the way of supportive services.

Our history of relatively stagnant funding has put tremendous strain on provider organizations faced with increasing costs and greater demand from a growing older adult population. It remains unclear where additional growth in funding to maintain and move beyond the present level of service will come from. Currently, the primary sources of funding are:

- Federal (Older Americans Act, Action programs, Community Development Block Grant)
- State (Office of Services to the Aging, Medicaid, Tobacco Settlement)
- County (General funds, often used as match to leverage other dollars)
- Local (city, township)
- Local grants (United Way, foundations, corporate grants)
- Solicitations (Fundraising events, corporations)
- Client Contributions

The majority of provider organizations are solely dependent on one or more of these sources of revenue, and have not developed financial security through mechanisms such as permanent endowments or dedicated sources of revenue.

BLUEPRINT FOR AGING SERVICES PARTNERSHIP DISCUSSION PAPER ON FUNDING

Many residents consider Washtenaw County to be a very progressive community, particularly on social issues. The older adult population certainly is a significant community of interest, with eleven percent of the population age 60 and older, and countless other non-elderly households headed by individuals who are directly involved in the care of aging relatives. However, in many ways the county lags behind its six other southeast Michigan neighbors in the support of the elderly. Two counties (Monroe and St. Clair) have dedicated senior millages which generate over \$2 million each year to support older adult services. In fact, the majority of Michigan counties have adopted a dedicated senior millage. Other counties have an office or department of county government dedicated to providing a range of services exclusively for older residents (Wayne, Macomb). Oakland County has recently established a County Senior Citizens Coordinator position to coordinate services for older adults. This dedicated position raises the visibility of aging issues in the county, provides leadership on aging issues, and advocates for the county's elderly. Livingston County is the only other southeast Michigan county without a formal entity (Commission, agency, or individual) or millage to address older adult issues at the county level.

This Blueprint for a caring, progressive community response to the needs and concerns of older Washtenaw County residents and their family caregivers requires the development of a stronger fiscal infrastructure that will support and sustain enhancements to the aging services delivery system. Therefore, stakeholders in aging services and county government should begin a dialogue that considers the establishment of the following components of a strong service delivery system infrastructure:

- A dedicated senior millage that generates revenue for a wide range of older adult services and programs.
- A county level entity that is responsible for providing leadership on aging issues, and coordinating county services that respond to older adult needs.
- Development of ongoing revenue sources that can support and strengthen organizations which provide services to older persons, such as endowment funds.

BLUEPRINT FOR AGING SERVICES PARTNERSHIP DISCUSSION PAPER ON ADVOCACY

A common theme among many of the workgroup findings was that the most viable strategy to achieve the desired changes involved actions by decision makers who hold elective office, particularly legislative and policy makers at the state and federal levels. For example, needed assistance in affording medications among older Washtenaw County residents without prescription drug insurance coverage would best be met through access to Michigan's Elder Prescription Insurance Coverage (EPIC), or through the various congressional proposals to add prescription drug coverage as a benefit under Medicare. Comparable issues related to other state and federal responses to older adult needs have been identified in the areas of transportation, housing, health care, and social services. Enacting broader, long-term public policy solutions to certain problems in these areas would be much more effective than administering a county-specific response to address the some of the identified needs. Change of this nature will only be achieved by informing and educating elected officials and decision makers about the needs, concerns, and preferences of older persons through advocacy.

Washtenaw County has many older adults and other interested parties who are very articulate and active in promoting policy change, but there is no visible, structured mechanism that supports or encourages advocacy efforts on behalf of older adults. Organizations like AARP, Area Agency on Aging 1-B, and some labor organizations promote advocacy in limited ways. However, there has been no effort to formally recruit and engage those interested in advocating on senior issues into a forceful political voice that is capable of commanding the attention of elected officials. Older adults are in an ideal situation to advocate because of their personal experiences and power in numbers that is achieved with others in similar situations. The absence of an organized advocacy network serves to only fragment and suppress the voice of older persons who have a desire to become involved in raising the visibility of their needs and preferences. There should be a concerted, ongoing effort to provide senior advocates, which includes persons of any age who wish to advocate on older adult issues, with a means to become educated on public policy issues affecting older adults, and direction on how and when to deliver their messages in the most effective manner.

An advocacy group or coalition should be formed that encourages and supports persons interested in advocating on aging issues by:

- Offering advocates an opportunity to establish relationships and network with each other to exchange ideas about policy issues and strategies.
- Educating advocates on aging issues, programs, and services so that messages will be well reasoned and articulate.
- Training advocates on advocacy strategies, techniques, and skills to enable them to effectively communicate their needs and concerns.
- Facilitating opportunities for advocates to encourage policy change through direct interaction with decision makers.
- Linking advocates with other advocacy organizations at the local, state, and federal levels that are sources of information and support.
- Requesting advocates to take action, when necessary, in order to influence key decisions and effect change.