

Jason Swanson, Director of Minnesota River Area Agency on Aging, asks you to provide your comments during the Minnesota Board on Aging's (MBA) public comment period.

“Over the past four years, MNRAAA has expanded our programming in our twenty-seven-county area. Prior to the pandemic, MNRAAA worked with eleven organizations to provide services such as transportation, assisted transportation, congregate dining, home delivered meals, and caregiver supports. In 2019, we provided Chore services in three counties, Assisted Transportation and Transportation in three counties and Homemaker in one county. MNRAAA began to expand the programming, and then the pandemic hit. During the COVID-19 pandemic, MNRAAA was able to utilize the Federal Stimulus dollars to provide additional programming and expand into other counties.

We were able to use these funds to target key communities and areas where gaps existed. This was timely as areas which did not have services were doubly affected. MNRAAA was able to focus on diverse populations as well. We worked with the Horn of Africa Aid and Rehabilitation Action Network (HAARAN) in St. Peter to provide culturally specific meals. MNRAAA formed partnerships with the Lower Sioux Indian Community and the Upper Sioux Community, providing over 1,000 meals to the former. Another population is that of the deep rural. Many of our older adults live in small communities that do not feature a pharmacy, grocery store, or even a gas station. Families have moved away leaving these individuals isolated with limited services.

Our programming and services greatly expanded. In 2023, MNRAAA awarded more than \$5 million dollars to provide 27 programs for older adults and caregivers. From 2019 through 2023, we have expanded Chore to nine counties and Homemaker Services to eleven counties. Our transportation programs have expanded from one provider in 2019 (three counties) to four providers in 2023 (16 counties).

The Federal stimulus dollars did assist in growing these programs. However, our main source of funding has been the Older Americans Act.

We knew that the Intrastate Funding Formula (IFF) was going to be updated. We knew that we had a population decline. However, we were not expecting to have such a drastic cut as we feel that the Minnesota Board on Aging is not fully accounting for the rural populations.

As it stands, MNRAAA expects to lose roughly 20% of our funding. This funding will directly impact our providers ability to continue to expand or even maintain these programs.

What does this mean in our communities.

Allow me to show two examples:

Assisted transportation has been a need for our area for years. We were able to add organizations to provide this essential service where regular public transit does not exist. In 2022, MNRAAA's partners provided 156 older adults over 3,400 one-way assisted transportation rides. If we were to cut that by 20%, that is 31 older adults who would not receive a ride to a medical appointment, pharmacy, or to a grocery store.

Chore services were expanded to provide additional assistance for older adults living in their homes. MNRAAA's providers were able to serve 197 older adults with chore services in 2022. Looking at the cut of funding, we would not be able to serve 39 older adults.

These numbers, 31 or 39, may not sound like many. But to their loved ones, neighbors, friends; these are people that have received a service to assist them to thrive. These services have assisted them to remain as independent as possible in their homes.

These are just high-level reviews of the potential ramifications that the MNRAAA area will see in 2025. Without your voice we can expect to see this reality.

Please share your voice about the importance of rural aging.

Thank you for your time and consideration."