



WISCONSIN DEPARTMENT *of* HEALTH SERVICES

Healthy Aging ARPA Grants Social Isolation and Loneliness and Livable Communities

**Evaluation and Summary
June 1, 2024–March 31, 2025**

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LIVABLE KENOSHA



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Executive summary

Social connections are crucial for both individual and community well-being. They provide a support system and offer various health benefits, including reduced risk of chronic diseases and improved mental health. Strong social connections also contribute to a more resilient and thriving society. This is why the Wisconsin Department of Health Services (DHS) Division of Public Health invested American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funding to strengthen social connection and livable communities.

This report explores the outcomes and lessons learned from 37 grants distributed throughout Wisconsin that were designed to foster social connection and more livable communities. With a focus on grassroots initiatives, the report highlights how small-scale funding—when combined with local knowledge and community energy—can create outsized impact. It documents how time-limited and resource-light projects were able to generate meaningful social connections and improve well-being through creative, people-centered approaches.

A central takeaway is the power of collective action. Projects that engaged coalitions among government entities, nonprofits, informal groups, or cross-sector alliances demonstrated stronger, more sustained results. These collaborations not only expanded reach but also deepened trust and resilience within communities. The report illustrates how even modest financial support, when accompanied by shared goals and co-creation, can strengthen the social fabric in ways that ripple beyond the initial investment.

For funders, grantees, and community organizers seeking to replicate or scale these efforts, the findings offer both inspiration and guidance. Emphasizing flexibility, local leadership, and the value of working in partnership, the report outlines practical strategies for designing initiatives that prioritize connection and inclusion. Ultimately, it underscores that transformative change doesn't always require big budgets—just bold collaboration and the will to bring people together.

Introduction

While the research was well underway (starting as early as 1985, and gaining momentum between 2000 and 2018), the COVID-19 pandemic solidified our global understanding of the critical need for social connection and the serious physical, emotional, and psychological impacts of loneliness and isolation. It served as a tipping point in the context of health policy and planning and validates the Richard Bach quote, “There is no such thing as a problem without a gift for you in its hands.”

Social connection—the feeling that you belong to a group and generally feel close to other people—is the antidote to social isolation and loneliness. Social isolation is defined as the lack of relationships with others and little to no social support or contact. Loneliness is feeling alone or disconnected from others. It is feeling that you do not have meaningful or close relationships or a sense of belonging. It reflects the difference between a person’s actual and desired level of connection. This means that even a person with a lot of friends can feel lonely. Currently, around a third of adults and half of young people report experiencing loneliness.¹ It is also important to note that social isolation is associated with risk, even if people don’t report feeling lonely.

In the Surgeon General’s advisory in 2023, “[Our Epidemic of Loneliness and Isolation](#),” the health and cultural impacts of social isolation and loneliness were officially recognized as having severe and under-appreciated impact on individual and population health, community safety, resilience, and prosperity, as well as creating barriers to effective, representative democracy.² There is substantial benefit to engaging in the work of building social connection and enhancing the infrastructure and built environment that supports connection, also known as livable communities.

The research reinforces this benefit for both individuals and society.

- Living in isolation reduces our chances of survival, and social isolation increases the risk for premature mortality by 29%.³
- Poor social relationships, social isolation, and loneliness can increase the risk of heart disease by 29% and risk of stroke by 32%.⁴
- Smaller social network size is associated with an increased risk of type 2 diabetes and of other diabetic complications, including heart attacks and kidney disease.^{5 6}
- Among older adults, chronic loneliness and social isolation can increase the risk of developing dementia by approximately 50%.⁷
- People with strong perceptions of community belonging are 2.6 times more likely to report good or excellent health than people with a low sense of belonging.⁸
- In communities where people know one another and are connected to community institutions—like service organizations, religious groups, or community-based organizations—they prepare for, respond to, and recover more quickly from natural hazards than those with lower levels of social connection.⁹

- Higher levels of connection within communities are also associated with less violence. Even one level of increase in social connectedness was associated with a 21% reduction in murders and a 20% reduction in motor vehicle thefts.¹⁰
- Loneliness costs the U.S. economy \$460 billion annually.¹¹ However, this estimate falls short of the true cost. The impact on productivity, workforce participation, and health care costs are certainly much bigger.

Growing awareness of these issues in Wisconsin has been demonstrated in several ways:

- In 2020, a group of aging and disability network partners came together to address social isolation. From this effort, the [Wisconsin Coalition for Social Connection](#) was born. The coalition has been working to raise awareness, create a research-driven knowledge base to support interventions, share methods for identifying loneliness and connecting people with local resources, and advocate for public policy solutions.
- In 2023, DHS released its [State Health Improvement Plan \(SHIP\)](#), which identifies Wisconsin's top health priorities. This plan was developed with input from thousands of community members, partners, and community organizations, including many aging and disability community members and partners. Social connectedness and belonging are identified as one of the state's health priorities for the next five years.
- DHS published "[Social and Emotional Support Data in Wisconsin Older Adults and People with Disabilities](#)" in April 2023. The key findings include:
 - In recent years, levels of perceived social support have been trending worse for adults with disabilities and remaining steady for older adults.
 - Adults ages 75 and older were the most likely to lack the social support they needed.
 - Regardless of age, adults with disabilities were more likely to lack the social support they needed compared to those without disabilities.
 - Among adults ages 18–64 with disabilities, those who were Black, had low income, and an adverse childhood experiences (ACE) score of 4 or more were the most likely to lack the social support they needed.
 - Among adults ages 65 and older, those who were LGBTQ, people of color, or had an ACE score of 4 or more were the most likely to lack the social support they needed.

In addition, the following heat maps show the population density in each Wisconsin county of residents over age 50. Figure 1 compares this population density to the counties' social isolation risk scores, and Figure 2 compares it to the percentage of adults 65+ who live alone.¹² These heat maps provide the kind of data that is useful for communities in assessing risk factors for social isolation and prioritizing resources. This data indicates a correlation between a higher density of the 50+ population with a greater incidence of living alone and a more significant level of social isolation.

Figure 1. Social Isolation Risk Scores by County

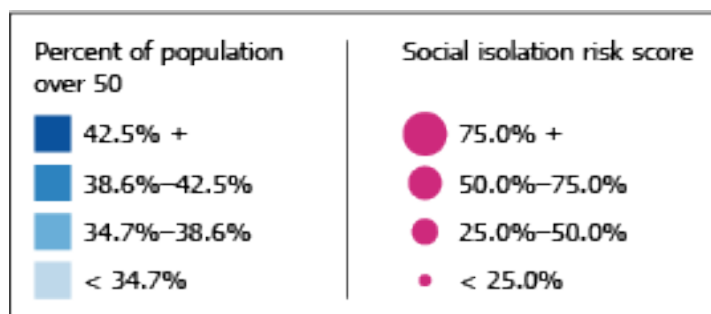
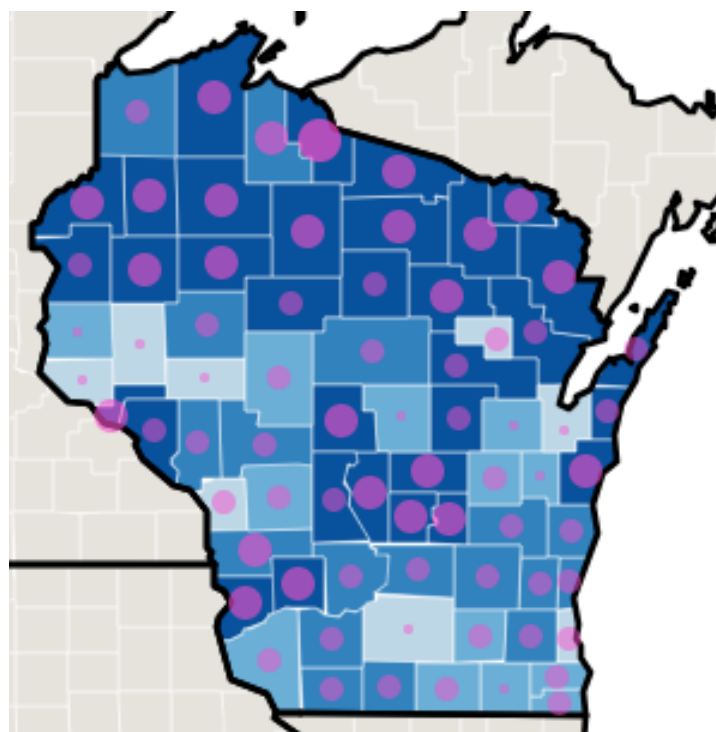
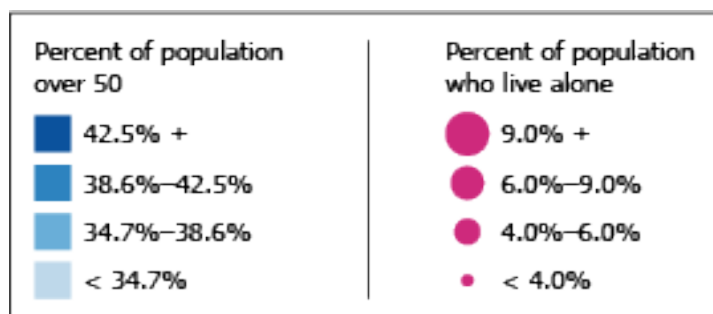
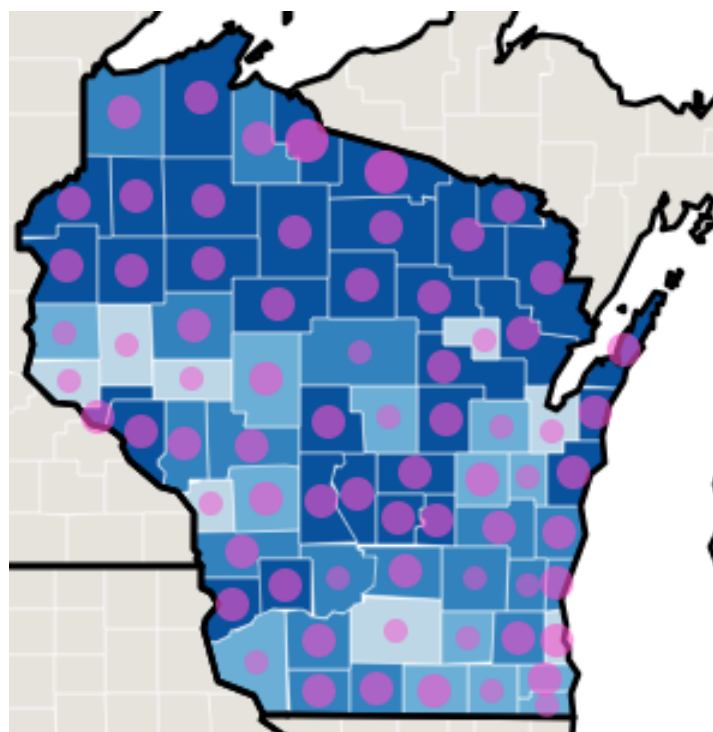


Figure 2. Percent of Population 65+ Living Alone



As the evidence continued to mount on the serious impact of social isolation, DHS was pleased to announce a grant opportunity for agencies interested in improving social connections within their communities. The American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) provided qualifying states with federal funding for Medicaid home and community-based services (HCBS) activities. Some of these federal funds were invested to implement a statewide grant program, referred to as “Healthy Aging Grants,” focused on addressing the epidemic of loneliness and isolation among older adults and people with disabilities. DHS used some of these Healthy Aging Grants to fund a competitive grant opportunity that was intended to provide communities with the resources to form or enhance a local coalition and develop innovative and relevant solutions that address the unique needs of their specific populations and communities. Awardees were expected to work collaboratively with a relevant and diverse base of local partners to assess current resources for supporting older adults and people with disabilities, develop prevention strategies, identify gaps and needs, and create local solutions.

Grant process, recipients, and people served

For a complete list of grantees, coalitions and projects, please see the [Appendix](#).

A total of 37 grants were awarded to 32 different organizations in 42 counties across Wisconsin (58% of counties) to reduce social isolation and loneliness or improve the infrastructure and built environments that create more livable communities. Grants were awarded to organizations within county government such as public health departments, ADRCs (aging and disability resource centers), area agencies on aging (AAAs); University of Wisconsin-Extension; nonprofit, community-based, and faith-based organizations; independent living centers; and a for-profit service provider.

DHS published the request for applications on March 18, 2024, and distributed it widely via email to ADRCs, county aging units, area agencies on aging, independent living centers, Tribal partner agencies, members of the Wisconsin Coalition for Social Connection, senior centers, adult day cares, nutrition directors, senior advocates, and agencies that represented other marginalized communities. On April 4, 2024, DHS held an information session for 128 interested parties in attendance.

By the due date of April 15, 2024, DHS received a total of 89 applications, 61 for social isolation and loneliness and 28 for livable communities. The grant manager went through all applications and deemed some ineligible because they either did not meet the requirement for a local coalition or would be unable to complete the project by March 31, 2025. After the ineligible applications were removed, two teams of DHS staff and external partners reviewed 40 social isolation and loneliness grant applications and 19 livable communities grant applications. The elements reviewed and scored included the following:

- Purpose and goals of the coalition (max score: 20 points)
- Optional community project (max score: 25 points)
- Sustainability (max score: 10 points)
- Community partners (max score: 15 points)
- Work plan (max score: 15 points)
- Budget (max score: 15 points)
- A determination regarding whether the applicant makes a case for impact with Medicaid HCBS populations (yes or no)

The review team members scored their assigned applications independently and then came together to discuss their scores and make any clarifications. Scores were tallied, but because the community projects were optional, scores were translated into percentages so those that did not submit a project were not penalized. Awardees were selected based on highest percentage scores and total funding available. Award letters were sent via email on May 10, 2024.

The performance period for the grant was 10 months starting June 1, 2024, through March 31, 2025 (in January 2025, the original deadline of February 28, 2025, was extended by one month). Contracts were completed between August 21, 2024, and September 11, 2024. Some awardees were unable to start spending their funds until an executed agreement had been completed. For those awardees the timeline shrank to seven months.

The amount of funding provided per grant ranged from \$10,413 to the cap of \$100,000. The total number of grants and allocation of funds is summarized in table 1.

Table 1. Healthy Aging Grant Award Distribution

Type of grant	Number of grants awarded	Total allocation	Range	Average allocation
Social isolation and loneliness	25	\$1,937,047	\$10,413–\$100,000	\$77,482
Livable communities	12	\$1,003,901	\$39,700–\$100,000	\$83,658
Total	37	\$2,940,948	\$10,413–\$100,000	\$79,485

Coalition work

Creating or participating in a local coalition was a requirement for receiving the Healthy Aging Grant because:

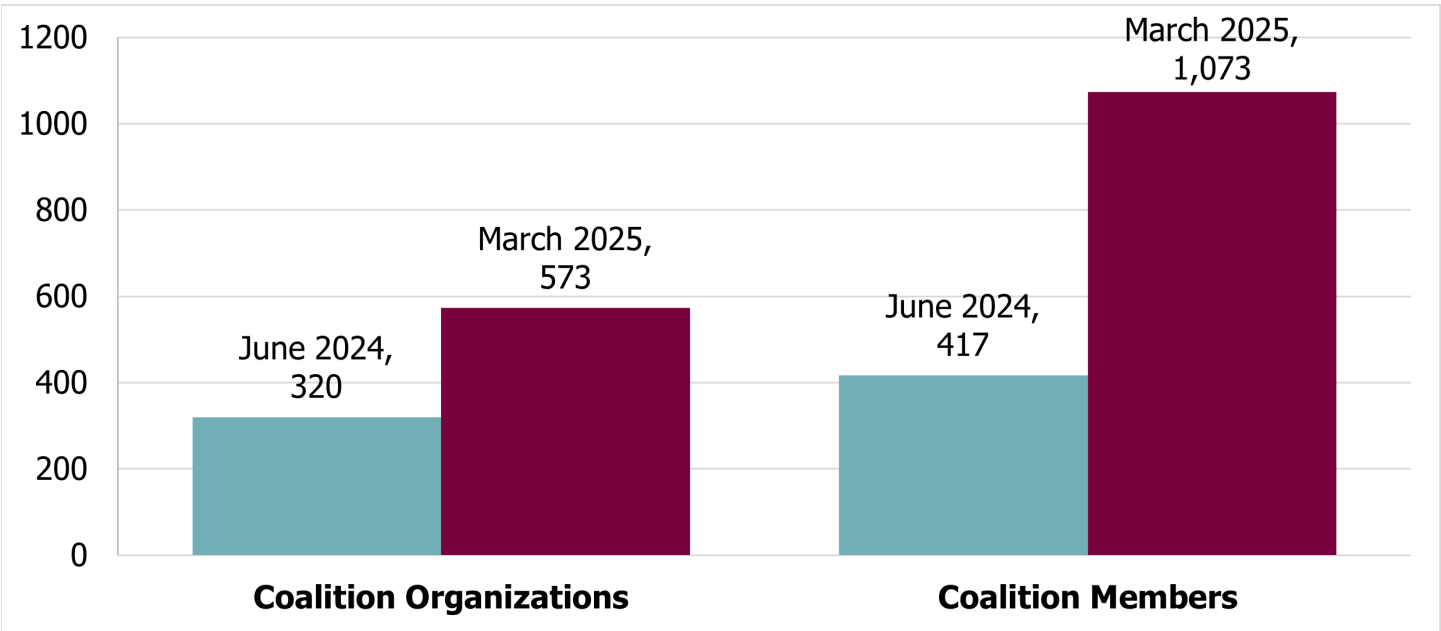
- There is strength in numbers.
- Collaborations create more resources, capacity, and expertise.
- A coalition brings diverse viewpoints and empowers marginalized groups.
- Coalitions increase visibility, credibility, and collective action.
- There is a greater chance for sustainability and ongoing impact.

“Ultimately, the coalition’s legacy is one of unity, action, and momentum, and enduring network of mission-aligned partners working together to reduce isolation, celebrate inclusion, and build stronger, more connected communities.”

Opportunity Development Centers, Inc.

From the first month of operation to the end of the grant cycle, local coalitions to promote social connection or livable communities grew from a total of 320 organizations (including 49 HCBS providers) and 417 people to a total of 573 organizations (including 84 HCBS providers) and 1,073 people. This represents an increase of 79% in organizations and 157% in people over the period of the grant cycle.

Figure 3. Growth of Coalitions During 10-Month Grant Cycle



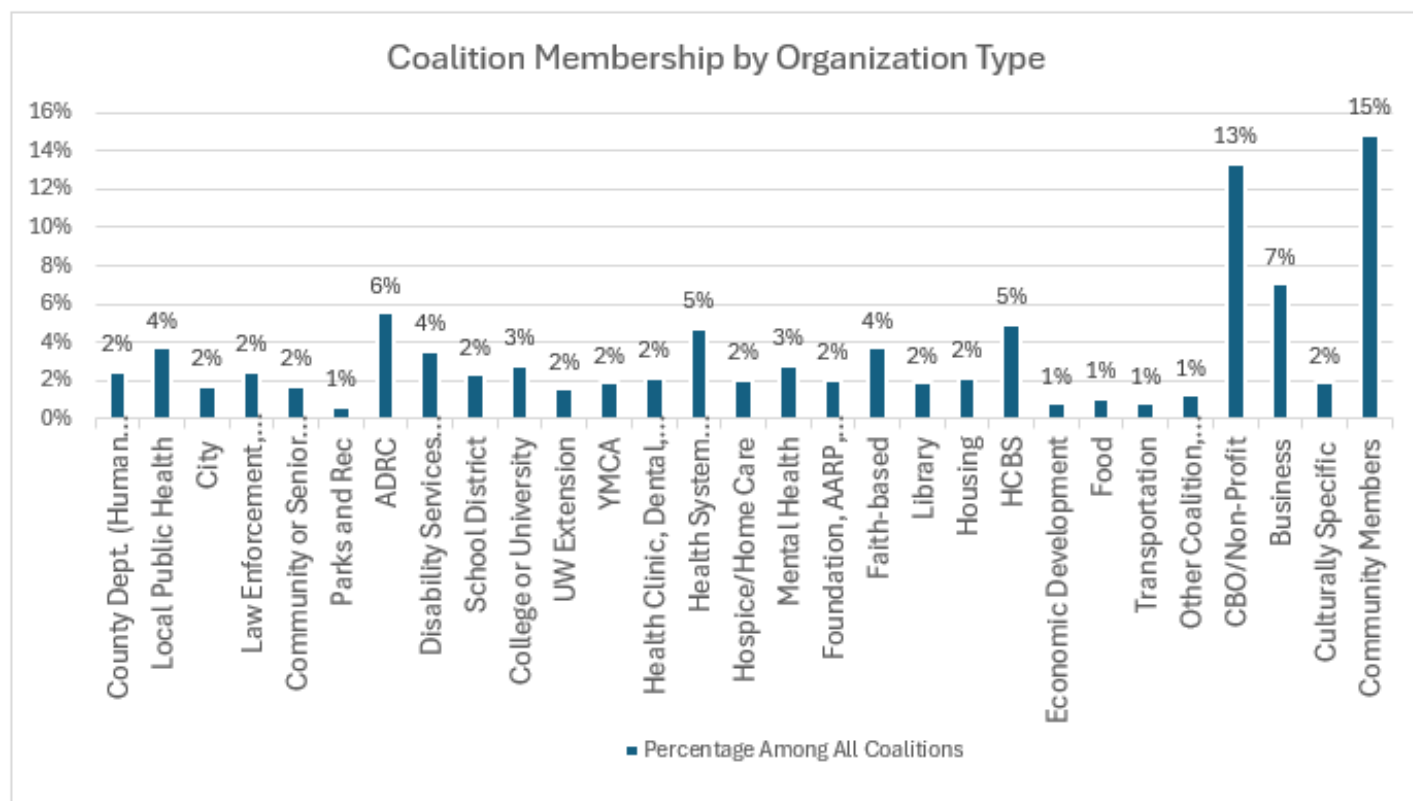
The types of organizations that were represented in coalitions included:

- County department (for example, human services).
- Local public health.
- City government.
- Law enforcement, first responder, or emergency management.
- Community or senior center.
- Parks and recreation.
- ADRC.
- Disability services or independent living center (ILCs).
- School district.
- College or university.
- UW-Extension.
- Health clinic, dental, pharmacy.
- Health system (hospital).
- Hospice.
- Home care.
- Mental health.
- YMCA.
- Funders: foundations, AARP, United Way.
- Faith-based organization.
- Library.
- Housing.
- Medicaid HCBS.
- Economic development.
- Food.
- Transportation.
- Other coalition, council, or professional association.
- Nonprofit community-based organization.
- Business.
- Culturally specific organization.
- Community member.

“There has been a cultural shift in Juneau County from working in silos to working together. Efforts are no longer just about individual programs but about creating shared spaces and opportunities that reconnect people and foster a stronger sense of belonging.”

ADRC of Eagle Country Juneau County Office

Figure 4. Coalition Membership by Organization Type



Less frequent membership types also included county board of supervisors, human services board, state legislator, veterans organization, public works, local service club, community actions agency, Wisconsin Institute for Healthy Aging (WIHA), and media organization.

What can't be measured easily when describing the impact of establishing or enhancing coalitions, are the intangibles of building relationships, cooperation, and trust; sharing resources, skills, and expertise; and amplifying influence. By leveraging the strengths of different organizations and individuals, coalitions are better able to address complex issues like social connection. When a coalition is functioning well, it is the gift that keeps on giving, often far into the future in unexpected ways.

"Effective collaboration takes time, understanding, and compromise to work. When the entire group met for the first time, I thought there was no way we would be able to agree on a way forward. The energy was very intense, and I had fear that there were too many different ideas and priorities for us to effectively work together. I was surprised that something that started off to a shaky start was really able to come together to culminate in a campaign that we can all be excited by and proud of."

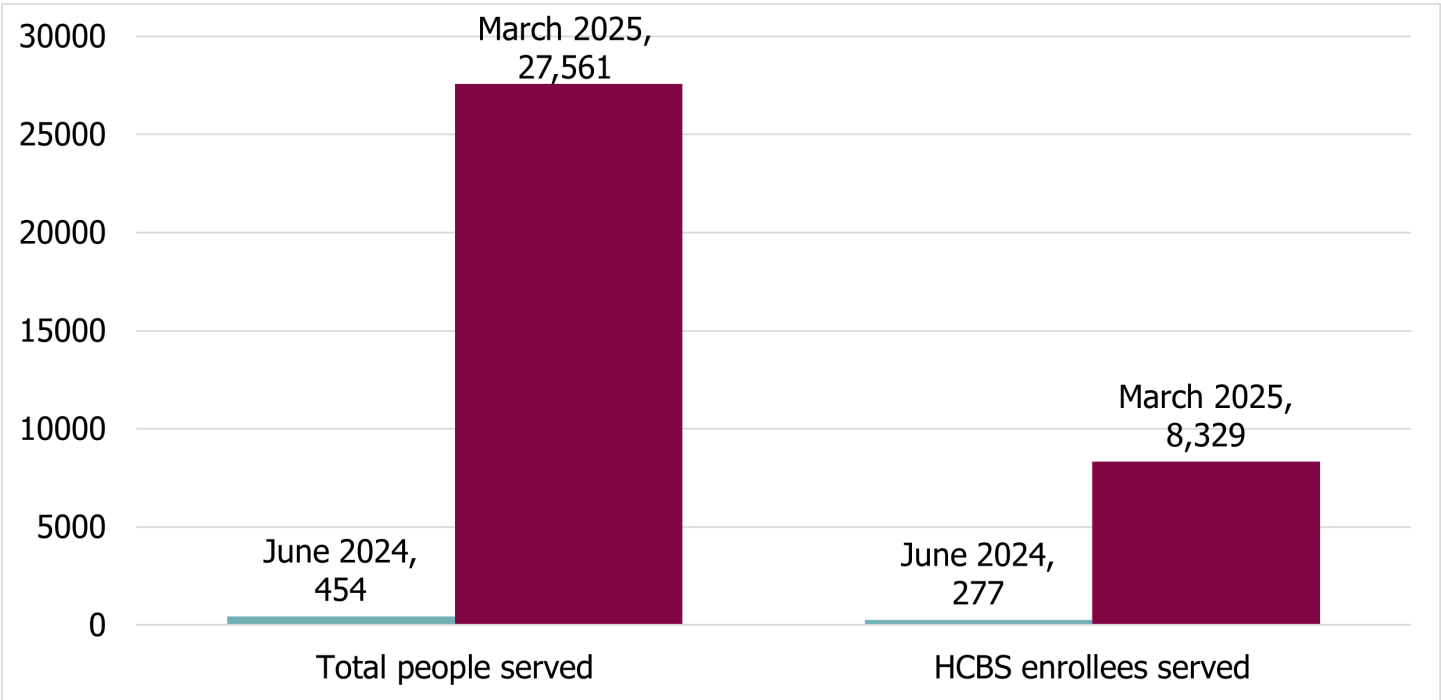
Wauwatosa Health Department

People served

Whether by attendance at an event or class, participation in an ongoing social opportunity like the Men’s Shed, one-on-one visiting, or a specific strategy such as Vitality in Aging or the Repair Café, a lot of people from all walks of life strengthened their social muscle because of the grantees’ work.

In the first month of reporting, grantees reported serving 454 people (277 of whom were enrolled in or could be eligible for Medicaid Home and Community-Based Services (HCBS) in the near future. By the end of the grant cycle, grantees reported serving 27,561 people (8,329 were enrolled in HCBS). This is an increase of 5,971% of total people served and 2,907% for HCBS enrollees.

Figure 5. Growth of People Served During 10-Month Grant Cycle



It is important to note that the projects that were designed to enhance gathering spaces are not well represented in the numbers of people served. Collaborating with the local coalition and the community before making final decisions, identifying vendors, and implementing the project brought many grantees right up to the grant deadline. For example, the Eau Claire County Health Department’s livable communities grant reported serving 1,300 people by the enhancements made during the grant period. However, the annual estimate for those who **will be** served is 36,750, an increase of 2,727%.

“Through ongoing dialogue, resource sharing, and collaborative planning, the coalition created a trusted space where partners could align efforts, amplify each other’s work, and co-create solutions tailored to community needs.”

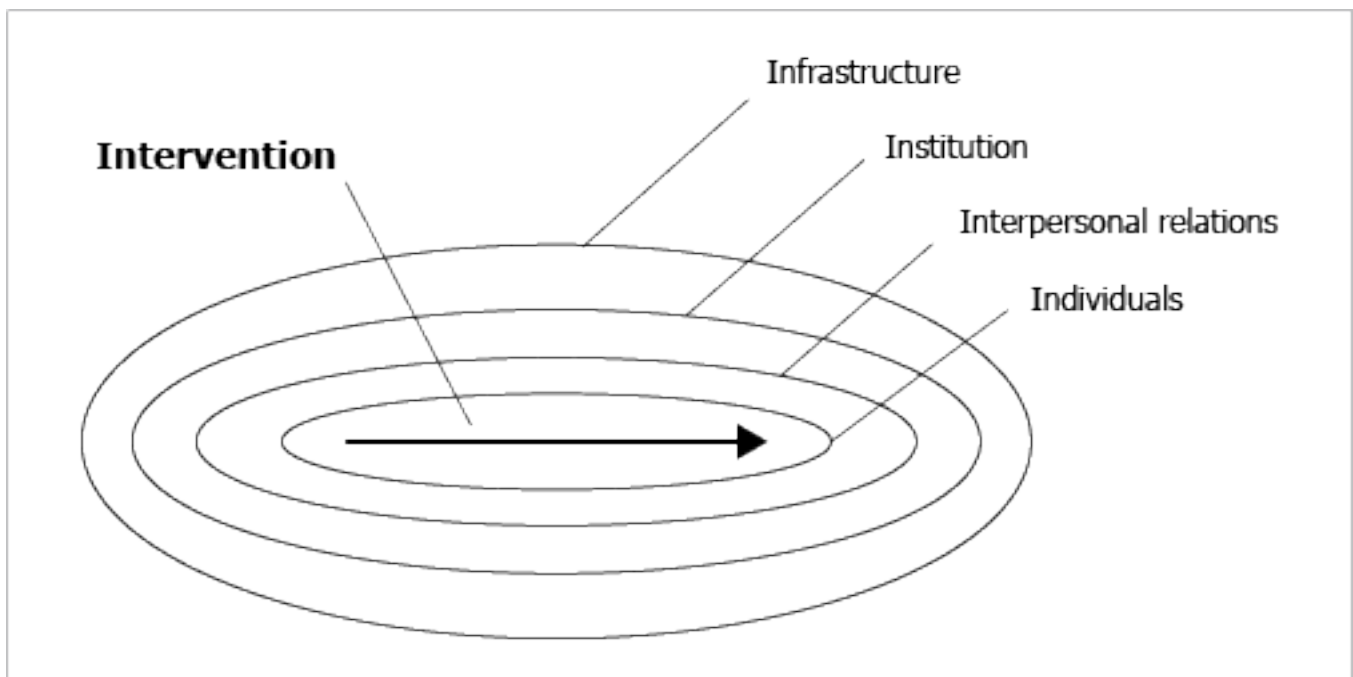
Opportunity Development Centers, Inc.

Also of note, because the grantees' focus was on creating social connection, they were not asked to determine whether an individual was enrolled in or could be eligible for Medicaid HCBS in the near future. Consequently, the summary reflects a population estimate for this group. If no local information was available to make an estimate, DHS calculated one by using 11.4% of the total 65+ population, which is based on US Census data.¹³

Considering conditions and context

DHS approached this grant opportunity with realism and optimism. As with most things in life, social connection is complex. The variety of organizational types and strategies involved to impact social connection expand that complexity. Consequently, we focused on evaluating outcomes both realistically—what works for whom under what conditions—and developmentally—what can we learn—to complement the data points. The question was not just how we replicate these efforts but what is needed to create the conditions for their success (or in some cases, what was missing). Grantees were asked to pay attention to the learning, conditions, patterns, and ripples that existed as they developed and implemented their coalitions and projects. Reflecting on the realist evaluation methodology, we also considered the contextual levels of individuals, interpersonal relations, institutions, and infrastructure to offer additional perspective.¹⁴

Figure 6. The Intervention as the Product of its Context



Individual context

Individual context explores and reflects on the individual capacities of the key actors and stakeholders. "Fit for function," meaning someone or something is suitable and effective for its intended purpose, is a critical aspect of the individual context. This attribute may include variables such as sufficient time or focus, specific skill sets, aligned passions or beliefs, and the capacity to learn and adapt. The following are the patterns that contributed to fit for function among the grantee leads:

- **Passion for the work** was a pattern closely tied to individual engagement, effort, and creativity.
- A **"can-do" attitude** provided fertile ground for creativity, flexibility, and persistence, even in the face of a significantly restricted timeline or other challenges.
- **Facilitation skills and dedicated focus** to develop their coalition were key ingredients to the ADRC of Waukesha County's success (and others'). They hired a facilitator for the coalition to ensure that both the project and the coalition "received the dedicated attention and expertise required for their success. This contractor's expertise, along with her familiarity with other related efforts within Waukesha County Health and Human Services, provided valuable insights that strengthened the coalition's development."
- **Support for coalitions** was made available to grantees through the newly formed UW-Extension Regional Community Health Team, an initiative of the Health & Well-Being Institute to provide training, technical assistance, and resources to strengthen community-based partners' ability to address health priorities. This and other supports could appropriately be cited in the institutional context. However, we included it here because of the observed correlation between the individuals who **accessed this help** with the outcome of a more robust coalition. Individuals who utilized the support of their peers and the grant manager also observed improved outcomes.
- Individuals' **personal experience** with engaging in the social connection work was also abundant. One coalition member stated, "It's allowed me to slow down and take time to get to connect with those I don't get to connect with often. It has also allowed me to educate my children along with my family on the importance of social connectiveness. Overall, it's just changed my perspective and outlook on life."
- **The general mindset** that individuals applied to this effort was another factor of note. If the individual's attitude was based on a strongly held conviction that livable communities and social connection would create healthier people and communities, the individual's investment and engagement was visible and contributed to more successful outcomes and potential for sustainability.
- **Leading by example** is yet another observable individual condition. There appeared to be a correlation between the projects where leads created connections for themselves with other grantees, the grant manager, or the complementary support and more successful outcomes, both in quantity and quality.

- The individuals who organize, coordinate, develop, and manage the programs that serve our communities are whole people with whole lives. The dedicated professionals who led these grants experienced promotions, retirements, their own personal health or family challenges, or as in the example of Kaisa Kerrigan from the Milwaukee County AAA, giving birth during the grant cycle. As newborn Nadia Kerrigan (right), born February 5, 2025, reminds us, **a healthy work-life balance and an ability to shift priorities and adapt to changing conditions** is central to our well-being and ability to contribute as professionals. Perhaps the best strategy is to expect the unexpected and be prepared to make space for it.



Interpersonal context

Interpersonal context considers the relationships required to support the intervention (coalition or project). Are lines of communication, management and administrative support, coalition agreements, and professional contracts supportive or constraining to the delivery of social connection and livable communities?

The grant requirement to establish a local coalition was a significant part of the success story. Not only is it counterintuitive to work toward social connection in isolation, but the coalitions also experienced unanticipated positive impacts during the short grant cycle, and it is anticipated that they will do so for years to come. In the words of Henry Ford, “Coming together is a beginning. Keeping together is progress. Working together is success.”

- **Deepening partnerships:** “Journey21 believes community creates opportunity. By expanding our reach, we are providing more opportunities to those we serve. Journey21 has partnered with the ADRC in the past, but more in the capacity of referral and education to consumers about what the ADRC’s role is in long-term care. The coalition has provided a platform for organizations to come together that would not typically partner. It has allowed my knowledge to grow on additional service providers. I feel joining the coalition has strengthened and deepened our partnership.”—Caty Bulgrin, Journey21
- **A culture of collaboration:** “The most significant change has been the sustained energy and commitment from a diverse group of 35 individuals, representing 25 organizations, as well as private citizens in our county, who have come together to collectively address the issue of social isolation. The significance lies in the recognition that social isolation is a community-wide challenge that cannot be solved in isolation. This collective approach is crucial for creating lasting, impactful solutions and fostering a culture of collaboration in addressing this critical issue.”—ADRC of Waukesha County
- **Things move at the speed of relationships:** “The social isolation grant served as a catalyst for bringing community partners together, creating valuable opportunities for collaboration around shared areas of need. By facilitating open communication and aligning efforts, it helped

break down silos that previously limited cross-sector coordination. As a result, strong relationships have been established, and we anticipate these partnerships will continue to grow, evolve, and drive meaningful impact beyond the grant period. As an example, the Mauston Police Department joined the coalition late Fall of 2024 and presented their ‘You are not alone’ or YANA program, which provides a daily check-in by the Mauston Police Department to vulnerable aging and disabled community members. The Sheriff’s Department also started promoting the prevention courses offered by the ADRC.”—ADRC of Eagle Country Juneau County Office

- **New and unusual connections:** “A coalition with our public sector partners was a new experience for Mother of Perpetual Help. We were inspired by the eagerness of coalition members to share successes and challenges in their daily work. Their input and feedback helped us finalize our first assessment.”—Mother of Perpetual Help Congregation
- **The difference that made the difference—a cultural focus:** Some of the projects and coalitions focused on the unique cultural needs of their community. DHS encouraged the inclusion of Tribal nation representatives in local coalitions from the start. Two coalitions were able to accomplish this goal by having Potawatomi, Oneida, Menominee, and Stockbridge Munsee Tribal representatives. Additionally, the grantees that were focused on Hmong, Black, and refugee populations were able to enrich the coalitions on which they participated or led by providing additional perspective and cultural learning.

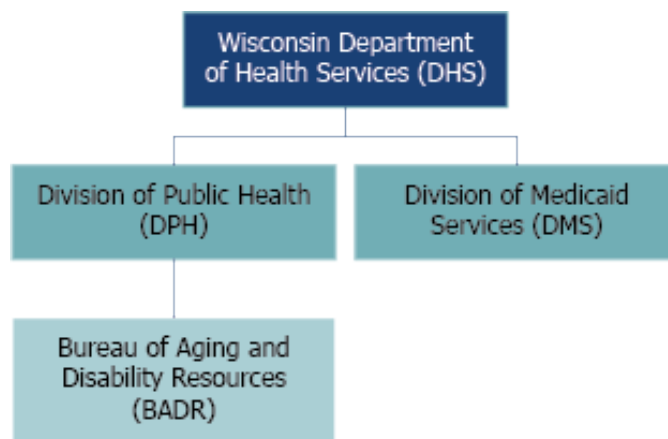
Institutional context

Institutional context considers the institutional setting. Do the culture, charter, and values of the organization or community support social connection and livable communities? Is there clear and supportive leadership from top management?

In this realm, it is important to evaluate the collaboration within and between DHS and the grantees. This grant opportunity was funded by the Division of Medicaid Services (DMS) but was implemented by the Bureau of Aging and Disability Resources (BADR) within the Division of Public Health. The grant manager and the budget and policy analyst assigned to these grants provided the face of the funder to the grantees, with the grant manager assuming the primary responsibility.

Coordination between BADR and DMS was important to ensure that all Healthy Aging Grants followed CMS’s (Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services) expectations. To foster clarity, advice-seeking, support, and effective communication, program staff and leadership from both DMS and DPH participated in monthly ARPA steering committee meetings and project budget meetings.

Figure 7. Organization of Participating Areas Within DHS



The timeline to put all the elements in place was quite challenging. Hiring a grant manager, developing and posting the request for applications, reviewing the large number of responses, and distributing awards was a five-month process (January–May 2024). DHS did not execute agreements for most grantees until August 2024. Although DHS assured the grantees that payments would be made as of any June 1 expenses, it remained up to the local organizations’ discretion whether to begin work and expend funds prior to having completed agreements. As one grantee stated, “The prolonged contracting process, paired with the limited duration of grant time, was quite difficult. I do however appreciate the one-month extension and frequent communication from [DHS staff].”

The grant manager’s interactions with the grantees were guided by several considerations:

- Maintaining maximum transparency
- Accessing supports and resources for success
- Making connections between grantees (for example, supporting collaboration on geographically aligned coalitions and projects)
- Providing consistent information about expectations, especially those that were evolving
- Collaborating with the grantees and creating conditions that supported greater collaboration between them
- Sharing the lessons learned throughout the process with all grantees

Examples of how the grant manager applied these considerations in their interactions include:

- Sending weekly “Happy Friday” emails, which shared information about grant requirements and timelines, additional resources, and highlights of grantee products and successes.
- Holding five in-person regional meetings in Stevens Point (two meetings), Appleton, Madison, and Milwaukee at the beginning of the grant cycle to foster greater connection among the grantees.
- Hosting monthly virtual meetings, which included idea generation, topics and presenters, grant logistics, and grantee sharing.
- Offering two trainings by the UW-Extension Regional Community Health Team to share their expertise on coalition building and community assessment. This is a free resource that will remain available to the grantees for technical assistance and capacity building on an ongoing basis.
- Leveraging the Wood County UW-Extension office, the Rennebohm Foundation, and other DHS staff to provide information and training on grant writing and options to consider for future funding.
- Providing training by the founding members of Redefine Connection in Amherst, Massachusetts, a grass roots community initiative started in 2022 to bring older women together around activities of shared interest. This training took place at the beginning of the grant cycle and served to energize and inspire the grantees as they were refining their unique approaches.

DHS also encouraged reciprocal communication from the grantees. The grant manager asked grantees to submit monthly updates, which included data points of coalition growth and functioning, people served by the projects, and successes and challenges of both. Grantees were asked to pay special attention to:

- **Patterns:** What dynamics are repeated (for example, needs, attendance, reactions, outcomes, barriers, or data)? What are the similarities, differences, and connections that have meaning?
- **Conditions:** When we explore the patterns, we identify conditions that cause those patterns and can speculate on how changing conditions can shift the patterns. What are the conditions that are surrounding your efforts and influencing the successes or challenges?
- **Learning:** Have you made a change? It's likely because you or your coalitions are learning. What are you learning?

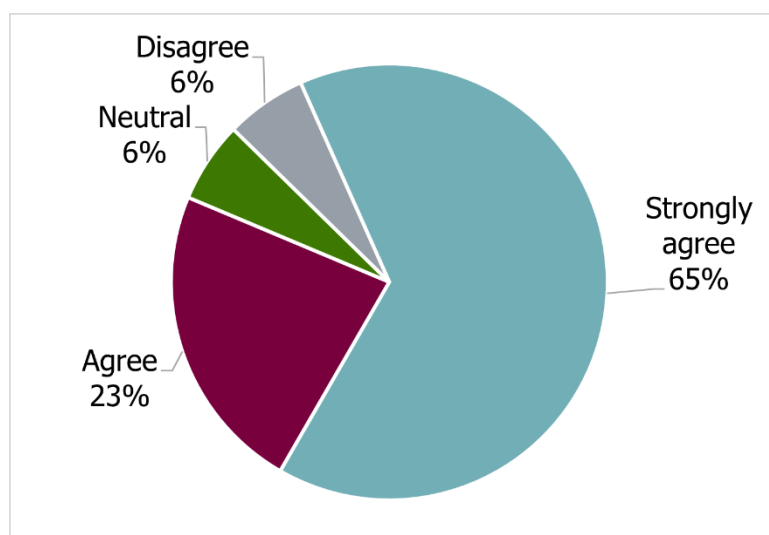
About half of the grantees found the request for this attention and reflection somewhat challenging, which was reflected in the lack of depth in their monthly summary reports. The capacity and ability to notice and reflect is not often nurtured with busy schedules and frequently intense work demands. It is, however, a valuable skill that allows health and social service providers tell a more complete and powerful story of need, paths toward solutions and impact.

In addition to monthly reports, the grant manager asked the grantees to evaluate the role of DHS in the implementation of their grants. Themes included an appreciation for flexibility, accessibility, alignment with purpose, communication, and relationship-building.

As part of their evaluations, grantees responded to the following prompts on a five-point scale ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree:

- DHS staff were accessible to me and/or my organization when needed. (100% of responses were strongly agree or agree.)
- The resources and support provided by DHS were useful. (82% of responses were strongly agree or agree.)
- The quantity and quality of communication from DHS was valuable. (80% of responses were strongly agree or agree.)
- DHS's expectations of the grantees were reasonable. (82% of responses were strongly agree or agree.)

**Figure 8. Grant Management Evaluation:
Average of Responses to All Questions**



Note: n = 22 (60% response rate)

- Given all you now know about the timelines and expectations, what you have been able to accomplish, and your grant's impact for your community, the decision to apply for and implement this grant was a good decision. (96% of responses were strongly agree or agree.)

In addition to the rating questions, grantees were also given the opportunity to leave open-ended feedback regarding the management of the grants. These are their comments:

- "[DHS staff] was not only available and responsive, but also deeply engaged and passionate about all aspects of our work."
- "[DHS staff] encouraged recipients to think creatively and push beyond conventional ideas, inspiring us all to explore innovative solutions. Her ability to engage with and motivate the group fostered an environment of collaboration and bold thinking."
- "[DHS staff] made the process seamless and focused on results with compassion."
- "[DHS staff] did a great job of staying connected to the grantees throughout the whole process."
- "[DHS staff] has been the most communicative, supportive, and responsive grant manager I have ever worked with."
- "[Resources] were excellent and useful. Even if they weren't used during the grant period. I have them saved for future reference."
- "[DHS staff] was very helpful in assisting grantees to connect with one another, so that we have the opportunity to learn from each other's projects and form future partnerships."
- "I admittedly fell behind in my review of the weekly email. This could have been every other week I felt."
- "Other grants I have participated in have been onerous and wasteful with the amount of rigorous reporting. There was accountability on this one without wasteful micromanagement."
- "This grant was perfect for getting the Men's Shed off the ground. We focused on one project and had sustainability in mind, so this grant provided the resources we needed to get going!"
- "The impact on our community will continue to be felt even after the grant period ends. These grants allowed us to accomplish goals that were going to otherwise be very difficult for us to achieve and have put us in a great position to successfully complete our Community Health Improvement Plan and Age-Friendly Community Action plan goals."
- "This grant was challenging for me professionally and in some cases personally. In the end as I survey the outcome, I cannot deny the impact it has had on our county and on the organizations who have come together. We have learned a lot."
- "We made great impact in our community with the work we were able to accomplish and built a lot of relationships/partnerships along the way."

Finally, the ARPA funding itself provided greater capacity to address social issues in a novel way and allowed for evolutionary grant design. In this case, an intentional balance between being prescriptive

and flexible allowed for reasonable accountability and new discovery. For example, while a coalition was required for each grant, the definition was left up to the grantee. This led to creative approaches (one grantee's coalition was made up of the older adults they were serving), variations in structure and formality, and greater learning. Grantees were also asked to describe the methods they used to evaluate the outcomes of the project. Each applicant approached this requirement differently, utilizing pre-post assessments, screenings, self-reporting, and surveys. One even subcontracted with a university for a third-party evaluation.

Infrastructural context

Infrastructural context considers the wider system. Are there political and funding resources to support the intervention? Are there influential individuals or organizations that will use their power to ensure the continued work of social connection and livable communities?

Transportation

The first issue that falls under infrastructure is transportation. The word "transportation" appeared 29 times in monthly updates under the topic of challenges. Almost all the efforts were immediately confronted with the lack of transportation options as a barrier to social connection. Without affordable, accessible transportation, there simply is no "there" there. Grantees met this barrier in several different ways. Some focused on going to people via home visiting programs. Some addressed transportation affordability by providing vouchers. One grantee applied their funding to purchase a van, which is now primarily used to transport individuals to the community senior center and other vital appointments and social opportunities.

"If you choose not to find joy in the snow, you will have less joy in your life but still the same amount of snow."

Unknown

Weather

The topic of weather may not fit perfectly in the dimension of infrastructure, but it is a real part of the Wisconsin context. Despite a "mild" December (by Wisconsin's standards), cold weather-related words showed up 37 times in the monthly updates regarding challenges. One grantee shared, "Due to a snow squall warning and icy conditions, attendance for our

event in Green Bay was significantly lower than expected." While we cannot control the weather, we can control how we navigate it. Wisconsin has one of the highest rates of falls among older adults in the United States. That is a data point that older adults and service providers do not ignore. However, weather also impacted those who were involved in built environment and infrastructure work. Some of these projects, including outdoor accessibility assessments, were slowed due to inclement weather.

Further, the impact of summer months cannot be ignored when moving an initiative forward. As one grantee shared, "Summer months result in lower attendance at meetings (though responses are high to email requests)."

Collaboration

Additional collaborative opportunities provided further support for both interpersonal and infrastructure realms.

- Several grantees from Milwaukee County and Dane County collaborated with Opportunity Development Centers (ODC) and the Hmong American Center on the coalition led by ODC.
- Training collaboration with UW-Extension Regional Community Health Resource Team proved a valuable and ongoing resource for grantees.
- Ongoing consultation with Tina Smith, consultant for the Georgia Health Policy Center and many other organizations, was incredibly useful in framing the complexity of evaluation for these grants. Her expertise includes strategy, program design, evaluation, research, and the creation of integrated frameworks and conceptual tools. She specializes in the design and study of community-based interventions as well as the technical and adaptive supports put in place to facilitate their implementation and sustainability. Tina also provided guidance and input on the October 8, 2024, grantee call and the overall approach to evaluation.
- Collaboration with the DPH Bureau of Community Health Promotion, SPAN (State Physical Activity and Nutrition Program) activities resulted in mapping and sharing of project overlay to stimulate local connections.

Administration priority changes

The leadership of the executive branch of the federal government changed toward the end of these grants. While there was no direct impact, grantees expressed concern and confusion about the potential for rescission and the implications of Executive Order 14151, titled "[Ending Radical And Wasteful Government DEI Programs And Preferencing](#)." As states and local entities' attention shifted to understanding this new landscape, some level of distraction for all organizations resulted.

Readiness

Finally, the infrastructure that most supported these projects is found in a fundamental mindset shift. As understanding of the implications of social isolation has grown, alignment toward social connection throughout health and human services systems has resulted. Momentum was already building through the State (and local) Health Improvement Plan, the Surgeon General's Advisory, and the shared experience of isolation via the COVID-19 pandemic. The World Health Organization declared an end to the COVID-19 public health emergency in May 2023. By March 2024, when the grants were posted, it is believed that sufficient time had passed to recover the confidence and sense of safety to prioritize connection. The convergence of these dynamics allowed the grantees to take advantage of the moment.

- Events: “The time from the announcement of the event to the event was short. We had capacity to serve more people at the event than were able to attend.”
- Relationship building: “(We) will need to spend more time to develop relationships with other counties that we do not have a contact with.”
- Priority setting: “With limited funds and limited time, we have to prioritize areas that are ‘must do’ versus ‘we’d love to do.’”
- Time and abundance: “Our only challenge currently is time management. Due to the positive feedback we’ve received, we are working hard to follow through with all of the positive leads we’ve received and interest from collaborative partners.”

Time perception is, however, a subjective experience, influenced by our attention, emotions, and memories. It's not a single, fixed sense, but rather a complex process involving multiple brain regions and cognitive functions. Objectively, seven to 10 months is a short period of time in which to impact the complex social goals of “livable communities” and “connectedness.” Direct observation suggests that even with insufficient time, significant impacts (for example, people served, coalitions developed or strengthened, or the environment improved) can be made.

Communication is key

Regular, timely, positive, and flexible communication among the grantees, grant manager, and partners, fostered relationships and supported shared work. One grantee noted, “Effective communication with external partners like the library staff can significantly enhance community projects.” Another grantee, when referring to a partner, wrote, “I still think we could've opened a line of communication with them earlier on. Just some things I will want to reflect on as we engage in future grant work that involve partnerships and collaborations!”

Furthermore, relationship building begins with talking, as another grantee commented on the work of their coalition, “Facilitating open communication and aligning efforts [...] helped break down silos that previously limited cross-sector coordination. As a result, strong relationships have been established, and we anticipate these partnerships will continue to grow, evolve, and drive meaningful impact beyond the grant period.”

Finally, grantees learned that communication requires its own effort and investment. One grantee noted, “A lot of communication/administrative support [is required] on our end with funded partners to make sure contracts, project status, and invoicing is completed on time.”

Data and analysis help to tell a credible story

There were no prescriptive expectations for measurement provided to the grantees. However, those that were able to identify and adopt a meaningful structure for evaluation and analysis are much better prepared to build a case for future endeavors.

Do Good Door County

For their grant project, Do Good Door County, in collaboration with the Aging Coalition of Door County, launched the Vitality in Aging program. This program used a combination of assessments, resources, daily habit-tracking logs, and a unique rewards system to attract and encourage participants to evaluate their own wellness and reinforce healthy habits and social connection. Seventy-four individuals engaged with the Vitality in Aging program. Of those, 59 completed at least one activity log. The analysis of the Vitality in Aging program indicates that it was beneficial to participants, as indicated by their own reports, as well as changes in loneliness, eating, and hydration habits. Participation and impact were strongest in the context of nutrition, followed by social and physical activities. Those who participated in the program were primarily white women who live in Sturgeon Bay or northern Door County. Ninety-eight percent of participants agreed or strongly agreed to the question: "Overall, I had a good experience participating in the Vitality in Aging program." Loneliness was reported on the UCLA Loneliness Assessment Tool, and there was a significant change in loneliness. Participants' loneliness was lower after the program. (Analysis provided by the St. Norbert College Strategic Research Institute.)

Surveys

Surveys were used widely throughout all the grantees efforts especially, for those who were engaged in creating events. Grantees used surveys to track features such as retention rates (likelihood of attending a future event), self-reported impact on loneliness or sense of connection, and how the events could be improved in the future. Oneida County Public Health wrote, "Another great impact is that we listened to what people noted on the surveys and tried to adapt events based on feedback received."

Go with the flow

The grantees were asked to make their most informed plan to impact social connection and livable communities. As one would expect, new information is always revealing itself. Grantees were indeed called to shift course due to resource availability, uptake barriers, or other unanticipated conditions or events.

NeighborWorks Green Bay originally planned to host the Neighbor Education Program in Denmark, Wisconsin, which connected local older adults with children by hosting two activities at Denmark Elementary School. The activities included teaching the children how to make a grilled cheese sandwich and making a keychain out of hardware. However, when NeighborWorks Green Bay encountered too many barriers in coordinating with the schools, they altered their intergenerational model to Denmark Teaching Denmark. In this model, 77 children and their parents or guardians attended the launch. At the event, adults (the majority of whom were over 60) taught subjects they love like crochet, clay arts, seed starting, yoga, martial arts, fishing lure making, and decorative arts.

The positive impacts of this event were numerous. This event was the first large-scale demonstration of what it will feel like for the community to have a community center with programming led by residents. It also demonstrated that families with children are looking for connections and value what older adults have to share. Julie Filapeck from NeighborWorks Green Bay wrote, “[I was] surprised by how quickly community members jumped in with their own ideas for projects beyond the ones we planned and communicated in the grant application. I attribute this to the remarkable energy and leadership of our two Community Connectors, who brought an ‘anything is possible, let’s just give it a try’ attitude.”

Coalitions are often impactful in part due to the strength of relationships built on only occasional contact (less than twice per week but more than once per year).¹⁵ While counterintuitive, these connections are likely to bring new information and ideas and reduce the urge to prioritize harmony and conformity over critical evaluation, which can be restrictive. When coalitions make space for people to be connected at varying levels of intensity, all members feel valued and supported and the quality of the resulting work is better.

“The coalition has been struggling to have members join meetings due to scheduling conflicts, so we pivoted to allow members to stay engaged by sending out minutes from the meeting and emailing back and forth to get input.”

Oneida County Health Department

Right-sizing is important

Several grantees whose services covered multi-county or regional geography expressed that they wished they had narrowed their scope.

- Newcap, Inc. wrote, “We would have chosen to focus on a smaller, one to two-county area rather than the entire ten-county service area. Narrowing our focus would have allowed us to be more intentional in planning and participating in community events, helping us to build deeper relationships, strengthen collaboration, and create a more lasting impact within those communities. By spreading our efforts across a larger region, we were only able to host a limited number of events in each area, which made it harder to fully saturate communities with information, services, and support.”
- IndiGo wrote, “We would not try to make an eight-county wide coalition. We think it would be better to start with smaller, county-specific coalitions and join them together. It was too large of a group to keep everybody engaged while we were talking about community-specific items, especially with it being a virtual group.”

It is in giving that we receive

The generative and reciprocal nature of social connection was evident in many ways throughout the experiences of grantees; coalition members; and all the older adults, people with disabilities, and caregivers who received the opportunity for connection. In their post-grant evaluation, the Mother of Perpetual Help congregation noted, “The most surprising thing was that the people we recruited to go and visit the isolated seniors were most often seniors themselves and further, seniors who had experienced significant recent loss such as loss of a spouse. This ministry gave purpose and meaning at a time when it was greatly needed and appreciated.”

Successes celebrated

This word cloud represents the grantees' answers to two evaluation questions reflecting on their successes:

- What do you see as the positive impacts (no matter how small) of your efforts?
- What is the most significant change so far and why is it significant?

Awareness matters

"If a tree falls in a forest and no one is around to hear it, does it make a sound?" Until everyone understands the critical nature of social connection and its relationship to the built environment, education and awareness will continue to be a central part of the mission.



- Midstate Independent Living Choices wrote, “Through our ongoing collaboration with community partners and local park agencies, we have made significant strides in raising awareness about accessibility within our parks. By sharing resources and offering guidance, we’ve helped community members understand where to seek support and how to identify impactful changes that enhance accessibility. What was once a barrier rooted in fear of non-compliance or lack of information has become an opportunity to build knowledge, connect with accessibility experts, and highlight the importance of creating inclusive and welcoming park spaces for everyone.”
- Milwaukee County Area Agency on Aging implemented the Social Isolation and Loneliness Reduction Pharmacy Project. Through expanded education among pharmacy students and professionals locally and throughout the state, the project resulted in better detection of the signs of social isolation and loneliness in the customers they served, which allowed for earlier positive interventions.

Faith-based communities

The integration of faith-based interventions, including those of Mother of Perpetual Help and Pointters Community Initiatives, offered perspective on the positive implications that can result from integrating a spiritual context into social connection. Several volunteers with Mother of Perpetual Help's Ministry of Care shared their experiences:

- “During one of my visits to a homebound individual, I was deeply moved when she inquired about a friend of hers, someone her age with whom she used to attend church activities. We assured her that we regularly visited her friend and spent time with her as well. She showed great interest in learning more about her friend's current life. Sensing her eagerness, we asked if she would like to say hello to her friend through a video message. Initially, she was hesitant, as it was a new experience for her, but eventually, she shared her greetings via video. When the video was shown to her friend, it brought immense joy and excitement. Her friend was thrilled to know that, even after so many years apart, she was still being thought of. The Ministers of Care had the privilege of witnessing the radiant expressions of happiness and blushing faces on both sides—an unforgettable moment of connection and love.”
- “Volunteering in the Ministry of Care has been a deeply enriching journey for me. Under the guidance of our seniors, I've learned countless valuable lessons about resilience, faith, and the power of community. Every person I've had the privilege to visit has their own unique story and set of challenges. Yet, they all share one thing in common: they are homebound, unable to attend Mass most Sundays. Some can no longer come because they lack family members who can assist them. Others have stopped driving and now rely on mobility aids, making it difficult to leave their homes. Regardless of their circumstances, there's a profound longing they all express—missing the joy of attending Mass, reconnecting with their cherished friends, and receiving the Eucharist.”
- “It's humbling to think that many of these individuals were once the active, vibrant parishioners who helped build and sustain our church community. Now, life has taken a different turn for them, but their faith remains steadfast. Through this ministry, I've come to see how much these simple visits mean to them. It's not only about bringing the Eucharist; it's about rekindling that sense of connection and belonging that they hold so dear.”

Space and place are the home of connection

The livable communities work focused on creating spaces that are accessible and attractive. Much like comfort and ambiance is a consideration when choosing a restaurant, the “right” space for social connection is an important central theme that was also a successful one.

Juneau County Men's Shed serves an average of 70 men each month, and they needed more space to invite more connection! The grant contributed to building a more suitable space next door. In the photo, the old Men's Shed is on the left and the new shed space is on the right.



"It's become more than just a building—it's a shared effort that reflects pride, purpose, and a growing sense of community."

Gina Laack, ADRC of Eagle Country
Juneau County Office

Greendale Health Department improved their gathering areas in their outdoor green spaces with a gazebo shelter, an information kiosk, a place for raised garden beds, and storage for their public garden materials.



Social connections create prospects for a win-win

Various projects were able to provide both social connection and exposure to other resources that were not necessarily directly connected to the projects or organizations leading them. For example:

- Oneida County Public Health co-located one of their events with a senior nutrition site that had been struggling with attendance since COVID. Between doing this and sharing event information through the home-delivered meals program, they saw an increase in attendance at the congregate dining site.
- Almost every intervention that included gatherings or connection of any kind found an opportunity to share resource information as well. Hyatt Pharmacy, who participated in the Milwaukee County Area Agency on Aging's Social Isolation and Loneliness Reduction Pharmacy Project, stated, "I was encouraged to see some seniors receive follow-up calls and attend new community events as a result of our outreach. One memorable moment was meeting a survey participant who was using her blanket (one of the incentive gifts offered by the project) at her grandchild's soccer game. She came over to thank us—not because she needed services herself, but because she had shared the information with friends who did. That moment underscored the value of our efforts, even in unexpected ways."

Impacting the lives of recipients

Capturing the individual experiences and testimonials regarding quality-of-life improvements is a core element of evaluation and pointedly evidenced in the results of these grants:

- Two of the participants of the Vitality in Aging program in Door County expressed how much they are enjoying it. One said she has so much fun filling out her log every day and seeing all of the things she has done. She feels like she is accomplishing things and doing good things for herself. The second talked about how she is now alone (recently lost her spouse) and how the program helps encourage her to be more social, eat meals, and take care of herself better.
- The retiree coalition, founded by the Marshfield Area United Way, is comprised of both men and women, but it is predominantly female. At a cookie decorating event in the winter of 2024, a member who had been attending since fall brought a neighbor. This neighbor had lost her husband the previous April and, knowing that her newly widowed neighbor was struggling with the loss, the member invited her to decorate cookies with the coalition. This new coalition member was so thankful to be there, meet new friends, and partake in this joyful event. Before leaving, she made sure to share contact information with staff, excited to do more with the group. This story has been repeated in many variations since the coalition was founded—neighbors watching out for neighbors. The coalition has given them a new place to go out, meet new people, be active and engaged, and give back to their community.
- Members of the Senior Ministry Team from the Mother of Perpetual Help Congregation went out to visit a parishioner who could no longer drive and had not been to church since before COVID. They noticed that she had a kind neighbor who would take out her garbage and recycling, mow the grass, and do other chores as needed. It turned out that the helper was not simply a neighbor, but a fellow parishioner at Mother of Perpetual Help. Furthermore, he was an usher at church. Sister Lincy told him of the woman's desire to return to attending mass if possible. He was not aware and gladly agreed to drive her to mass. Now, every Sunday evening the two are present for the 7 p.m. mass.
- The ADRC of Barron and Rusk Counties shared that the true magic of the Men's Shed lies in its remarkable diversity—men of all ages, abilities, and political and religious affiliations gather without judgment or distinction. What stands out most is how naturally inclusive the environment feels. If someone is sitting alone, inevitably another member will make his way over for conversation. The shed's warmth is especially evident in how they embrace members

"Time and time again we hear a similar story: coalition members lost their connection and sense of purpose during the pandemic. Then, as the world opened up again, they were uncertain how to get involved again and many simply did not."

Sarah Chy, Marshfield Area United Way

with cognitive challenges. Without making assumptions, the guys will casually invite someone who might be experiencing memory loss to “come sit over here.” Most touching is how the members have truly claimed ownership of the space, taking personal responsibility for ensuring everyone feels welcome and connected.

- A member of Newcap, Inc. explained that spending time at the Crandon Food Pantry has been incredibly insightful. Through activities and conversations with clients, they not only gather valuable information from assessments, but also learn firsthand from the lived experiences of those they serve. The knowledge and perspectives shared by older adults and individuals with disabilities have been especially invaluable—highlighting both their needs and the unique talents they bring to their community. One inspiring example is a woman who visits the pantry and has mastered the art of canning, preserving everything she receives, including milk. Recognizing the value of her skills, they have discussed creating canning cheat sheets with her so she can share her expertise with others. With food assistance benefits fluctuating, she has found a way to ensure food security for herself, and her insights could help many others do the same. This kind of resourcefulness and community-driven knowledge exchange is exactly what strengthens outreach and impact.
- Finally, the parent of a participant at Journey21 in Oconomowoc wrote, “Thank you Journey21! There are not many social opportunities for our kiddos once they have “fallen off that cliff” after high school. I was so excited to learn of your organization this past year. Our son is so excited to look at the monthly calendar and see the activities and outings that he has scheduled for the month. When I asked him what his favorite one was this past quarter, he said that it was a really hard question for him to answer because he loved all of them. What more needs to be said!!”

Can you hear me now?

The work and resulting outcomes of the Social Isolation and Loneliness and Livable Communities grants were multiplied and amplified through a variety of approaches. It would be impossible to capture all the ways in which the message of and opportunity for connection was shared. This is only a small sample.

- The grantees themselves were very active in sharing their stories and amplifying their efforts via numerous social media posts and newspaper articles. The ADRC of Portage County even provided an [interview on Wisconsin Public Radio’s “Wisconsin Today.”](#) Grantees also amplified their work with yard signs posted throughout their communities reinforcing a positive messaging for anyone passing by.
- The [Wisconsin Coalition for Social Connection](#) has also been an active and meaningful partner in supporting and promoting these grants. The staff have provided technical assistance for projects and coalition efforts, especially in the realm of outcome measurements. The coalition has welcomed grantees to join, providing them the opportunity to continue to collaborate and learn valuable information. One presenter from their 2024 awareness week event, Jeff Rennie from

[Friends of the Apostle Islands](#), was enthusiastic to learn about the Repair Café in Bayfield County and immediately offered a pop-up repair café for accessible recreation equipment through their Access for All campaign.

- The grant manager collaborated with colleagues at DHS to identify areas of overlap and amplify the efforts of the State Health Improvement Plan. The grant manager also participates on the State Health Improvement Plan Implementation: Social Connectedness and Belonging Priority Area workgroup.
- The 1,000+ coalition members supporting work throughout Wisconsin has also significantly amplified the need, message, and creative solutions available to everyone. Many coalitions included participants, older adults, and people with disabilities. There are, after all, no better ambassadors than those who are directly affected by isolation or inadequate age- and disability-friendly community resources.

Sustainability and the potential for spread

Twenty-three coalitions were established across Wisconsin for the purpose of project guidance and collaboratively reducing social isolation and loneliness. Of those coalitions, 15 indicated the intention to continue their work together beyond the grant cycle. Seven indicated that their coalition will continue in part, and only one coalition will be ending.

Of the 35 projects that were launched in this grant period, 18 will continue and 17 will partially continue. All of the projects will continue to some degree. Engaging in social connection work through livable communities or creating opportunities for relationship building is not easily stopped once started. Once you know the value of this effort, its impact is immediate, palpable, and essential.

It is our greatest hope that funders will see the value of this work in building stronger communities and additional funding will be available in the future to expand current efforts and welcome new communities into the work of social connection and age and disability-friendly livable communities. While current grantees will continue to pursue other funding opportunities, they also anticipate that the communities will take ownership of some of the projects. Two specific examples of this are the Denmark Connects effort (funded through NeighborWorks Green Bay) and the Repair Café (now a project of the Cable community). Partnerships and community investment of time and enthusiasm create sustainable structures and make the opportunities ahead limitless. Unlike other more stubborn problems, social connection can be enlivened and grow exponentially with a very reasonable investment.

This summary document will be available to:

- Grantees and funders, for the purpose of informing future funding.
- The aging, disability, and independent living network and the public, to inform and inspire additional efforts in more communities.

- Policymakers, to provide guidance for policies affecting social connection and livable communities.
- Everyone who wants to make a difference in the lives of others.

Because it is limiting to tell the story immediately at the end of a funding cycle, grantees have been asked to remain aware of the ongoing ripple effects of their coalitions and projects and document them to the best of their ability. DHS will gather and add those insights in May of 2026, to offer a greater depth of learning and inspiration to what has already been documented.

This work has taught all those involved that great impact can be accomplished with relatively little time and money. It has also taught participants that challenges become future successes and problems become lessons from which we all benefit as we move forward as a state toward greater connection and thriving communities.

"Right now, the world you are inheriting is locked in a struggle between love and fear. Fear manifests as anger, insecurity, and loneliness. Fear eats away at our society, leaving all of us less whole, so we teach you that every healthy relationship inspires love, not fear. Love shows up as kindness, generosity, and compassion. It is healing. It makes us more whole. The greatest gift to ever receive will come through these relationships. The most meaningful connections may last for a few moments, or for a lifetime, but each will be a reminder that we were meant to be a part of one another's lives, to lift one another up, to reach heights together, greater than any of us could reach on our own. Our hope is that you will always have friends in your lives who love and remind you of your innate beauty, strength, and compassion. Equally as important, we hope you will do the same for others. It pains us that we won't always be there for you when you feel lonely and sad, but we offer this simple prescription to remind you, you are loved. When those moments of loneliness and suffering arise, take both your hands and place them on your heart and close your eyes. Think about the friends and family who have been there for you throughout your life, in moments of joy, and also in the depths of disappointment, the people who have listened to you when you were sad, the people who believed in you, even when you lost faith in yourself, the people who have held you up, lifted you, and seeing you for who you really are. Feel their warmth and their kindness washing over you, filling you with happiness. Now, open your eyes."¹⁶

Vivek H. Murthy, former Surgeon General

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The team at the Bureau of Aging and Disability Resources (BADR) provided the vision for these grants. First and foremost, Carrie Molke, Director, as a founding force in creating the Wisconsin Coalition for Social Connection, seized the opportunity to take that work further through the ARPA grants. As in all things, it takes a village (and good timing doesn't hurt either). The following staff in BADR also guided the Healthy Aging ARPA grants from conception through completion, cheerleading all the way: Cindy Ofstead, Neal Minogue, Tim Wellens, KC Cullinan, Monica Vick, Sara O'Donnell, Jessica Kline, Laura Langer, Eric Grosso, Ana Hovde, John Grothjan, Phoebe Hefko, Rachel Kaehny-Frank, Josh Bachert, and Helen Sampson, who arrived just in time.

The Division of Medicaid Services (DMS) staff met this unusual opportunity with common sense, open minds, and a willingness to be flexible in the face of powerful stories of connection. We are grateful to Bill Hannah for his leadership and for all the support provided by Taylor Prebel, Janet McKnight, Nicole Snyder, Alicia Boehme, Kevin Coughlin, Patricia Wagner, and Brandon Watson, who just can't resist a good story.

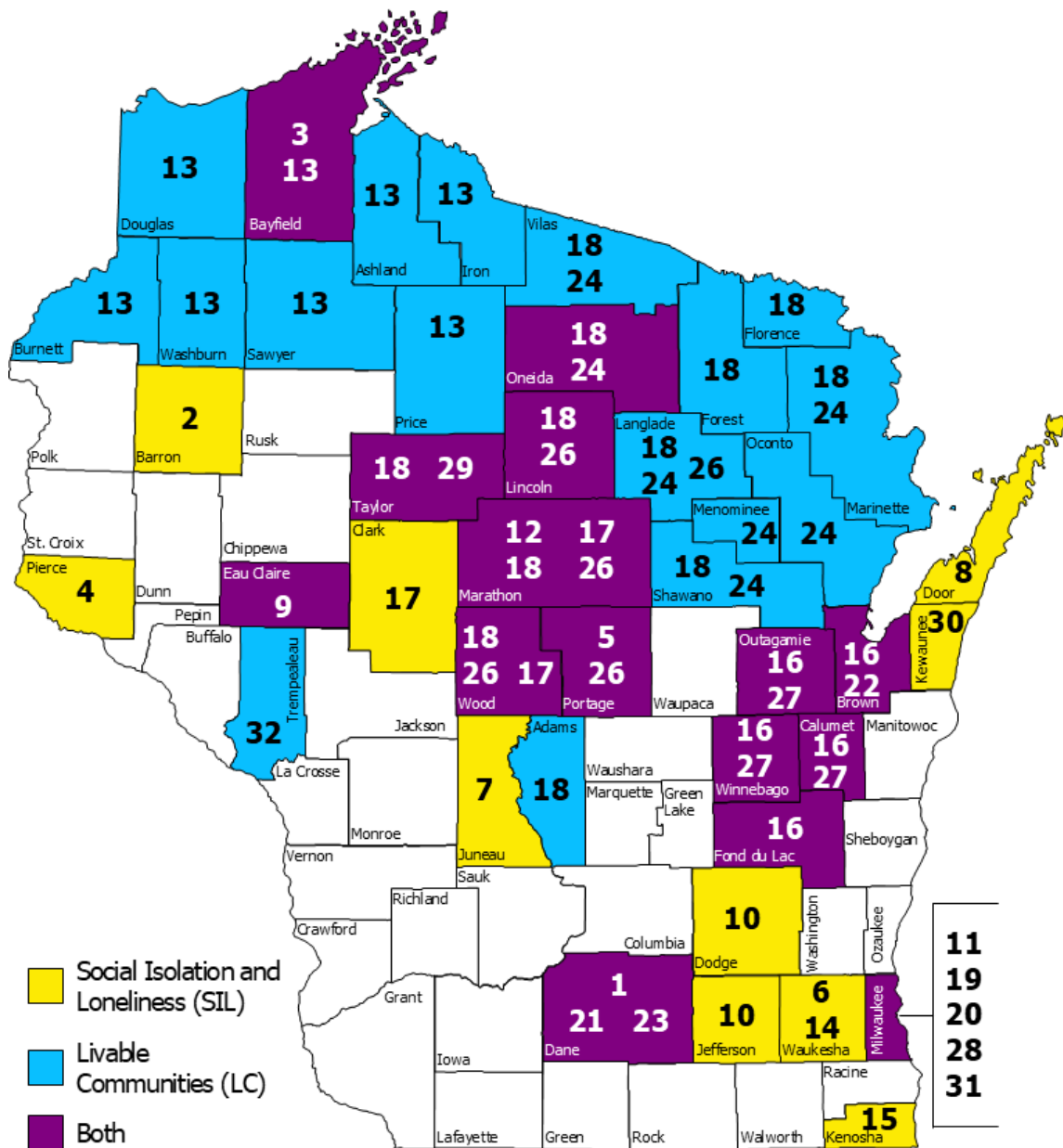
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Above all else, thank you to all the grantees who were brave enough and optimistic enough to take on this opportunity to work toward healthier, more livable communities through social connection! You have our gratitude, respect and admiration for a job well done!

Appendix: overview of grantees

Figure 9. Map of Wisconsin Counties Served by Healthy Aging Grants



This map shows the counties that were served by the Social Isolation and Loneliness and Livable Communities grants. Yellow counties (Barron, Clark, Dodge, Door, Jefferson, Juneau, Kewaunee, Pierce, and Waukesha) were served by one or more projects funded by the Social Isolation and Loneliness grant. Blue counties (Adams, Ashland, Burnett, Douglas, Florence, Forest, Iron, Kenosha, Langlade, Marinette, Menominee, Oconto, Price, Sawyer, Shawano, Trempealeau, Vilas, and Washburn) were served by one or more projects funded by the Livable Communities grant. Purple counties (Bayfield, Brown, Calumet, Dane, Eau Claire, Fond du Lac, Lincoln, Marathon, Milwaukee, Oneida, Outagamie, Portage, Taylor, Winnebago, and Wood) were served by projects funded by both grants. The numbers on the map correspond with the grantee organizations listed in Table 2.

Table 2. Summary of Grantees and Projects

Legend (grant type):

- SIL: Social isolation and loneliness
- LC: Livable communities

Map key	Type	Organization, grant amount and contact	Coalition	Project
1	LC	Access to Independence \$80,429 Jason Beloungy jasonb@accesstoind.org	Description: <i>New (project focused)</i> —The coalition members were focused on accessibility projects in downtown Madison. Is coalition continuing? Yes	Description: Access to Independence provided accessibility assessments and recommendations for two organizations serving Madison. Service area (counties): Dane Is project continuing? Yes
2	SIL	ADRC of Barron and Rusk Counties, Barron County Office \$16,815 Trisha Witham Trisha.witham@co.barron.wi.us	Description: <i>New (project focused)</i> —The coalition was set up specifically for establishing the Barron County Men's Shed. They began with a core group of organizational representatives who were aligned when the grant was initially developed and expanded throughout the project with additional organizational representatives joining the initial core group. They also directly recruited four older adult men from the community to ensure that the voices and experiences of the target population were integral to the initiative's design and implementation. Is coalition continuing? Yes	Description: The coalition established the Barron County Men's Shed based on the U.S. Men's Shed model. This model is based on the concept that, "Men don't talk face to face. We talk shoulder to shoulder." Men's Shed is a club, mainly for older guys, that gives men the opportunity to improve their health and well-being through participation as a means of connecting with others and increasing self-esteem. New members are always welcome and there is something of interest for everyone. In the end, the goal is to make friends and enjoy life. Service area (counties): Barron Is project continuing? Yes

Map key	Type	Organization, grant amount and contact	Coalition	Project
3	SIL	ADRC of Bayfield County \$94,757 Elizabeth Skulan Elizabeth.Skulan@bayfieldcounty.wi.gov	Description: New —The People to People (P2P) Bayfield Coalition began as a direct effort of this grant. The P2P Coalition centered their actions on its newly created mission statement, “People to People Coalition reduces social isolation and loneliness by connecting people for healthier communities in Bayfield County.” Is coalition continuing? Yes	Description: The coalition established a repair café in Cable, WI. Older adult volunteers with a variety of skill sets fix broken items (for example, electrical, sewing, furniture, and small appliances) at no cost to community members who enjoy a cup of coffee and conversation while they wait. • Cable Area Social Connections Facebook page • Cable Area Social Connections website The Corner in Iron River, WI also offers weekly events. Service area (counties): Bayfield Is project continuing? Yes

Map key	Type	Organization, grant amount and contact	Coalition	Project
4	SIL	ADRC of Pierce County \$100,000 Morgan Tamminga morgan.tamminga@co.pierce.wi.us	Description: Existing—The grant coalition was built off of a coalition that was already in existence prior to the grant, The St. Croix Valley Dementia Friendly Coalition. This coalition will continue on as it did prior to the grant, but with a new focus on targeting social isolation and loneliness in not only adults with Dementia but all community members in the St. Croix valley. Is coalition continuing? Yes	Description: - The coalition hosted several community events (with transportation provided as needed): - Kick-off event with food, live music, a vendor fair, and a door raffle - Four community dinners in the more rural areas of the county (these were a huge hit and attendance grew each meal) - Five viewings of the documentary “Wine, Women, & Dementia,” including a social hour before the documentary and a facilitated discussion following - Library events: including book clubs, field trips, cooking events, game nights, craft projects, educational speakers, a local author presentation, holiday parties, and more - Historical society intergenerational event: hosted a social meal prior to their Old Settlers annual meeting with a guest speaker - Among Friends was able to increase their Social Respite program from one to two days per week. - The coalition was able to introduce Live 2 B Healthy, a fitness program, to an area of the county that did not offer something similar. - The coalition also worked with a local fitness and art studio to offer free FitArt classes to a variety of people. These classes consisted of 30 minutes of physical activity and 30 minutes of art. Service area (counties): Pierce Is project continuing? Partially

Map key	Type	Organization, grant amount and contact	Coalition	Project
5	SIL	ADRC of Portage County Senior Center \$58,779 Kathleen Giblin giblink@co.portage.wi.gov	Description: New —The Rural Community Task Force is a group of home and community-based services providers nonprofits, helping organizations, government agencies, volunteer organizations, community funders, and stakeholders who recognize that social isolation is a thread that weaves through many parts of the community. They work toward a multifaceted and multipronged approach to reducing isolation, especially in rural areas of the community. The group meets to discuss specific areas of concern and to find ways to join forces to tackle complex issues and build community connections. Is coalition continuing? Yes	Description: The coalition hosted community events featuring public spaces, local groups, volunteer opportunities, clubs, and more in rural communities including: • Plover. • Amherst. • Rosholt. • Almond. • Junction City. Service area (counties): Portage Is project continuing? Partially
6	SIL	ADRC of Waukesha County \$100,000 Lisa Bittman lbittman@waukeshacounty.gov	Description: New —The ADRC used the grant period to lay a solid foundation for the coalition, emphasizing collaboration and collective impact. In April and May of 2025, focus shifted to developing action plans that address top strategic priorities. Currently, 26 out of 36 registered members are actively participating across three dedicated action teams. Is coalition continuing? Yes	Description: The goal of the project was to create a web-based repository of social connection opportunities aimed at adults with disabilities and adults 60+. Waukesha and Milwaukee Counties Community Calendar Service area (counties): Waukesha Is project continuing? Yes

Map key	Type	Organization, grant amount and contact	Coalition	Project
7	SIL	ADRC of Eagle Country Juneau County Office \$100,000 Gina Laack glaack@juneaucountywi.gov	Description: New —The Juneau County Social Isolation and Loneliness Committee is a collaborative effort of local community partners with a shared commitment to supporting individuals who are most vulnerable to social isolation in their rural communities. Is coalition continuing? Yes	Description: The Juneau County Men’s Shed Program has seen remarkable success in bringing older men together and connecting them to the community. The Men’s Shed Program is dedicated to reducing social isolation and loneliness, and it has played a key role in fostering stronger community connections among participants. Due to the volume of participants and interest in the program, the Men’s Shed Program has utilized the funds from the grant to help build a new community space and education center on the Outdoors Forever property to meet the growing demand of the Men’s Shed Program and many other intergenerational programs through Outdoors Forever. Service area (counties): Juneau Is project continuing? Yes
8	SIL	Do Good Door County \$99,987 Cynthia Germain dogooddoorcounty@gmail.com	Description: Existing —The Aging Coalition of Door County (ACDC) was formed to address the needs of older adults across the county. It includes diverse stakeholders—nonprofits, health care entities, civic groups, and individuals—focused on supporting aging in place, enhancing social connections, and creating livable communities. Monthly meetings, project subcommittees, and outreach initiatives have shaped its evolution. Aging Coalition of Door County Facebook page Is coalition continuing? Yes	Description: The coalition piloted the Vitality in Aging program, which used a unique rewards system modeled after S&H Green Stamps to motivate participants to evaluate their own health and wellness and encourage social connection. The result showed that small, everyday actions, when supported by a strong community network, can improve the well-being of older adults. Service area (counties): Door Is project continuing? Partially

Map key	Type	Organization, grant amount and contact	Coalition	Project
9	LC	Eau Claire City-County Health Department \$94,654 Janessa VandenBerge janessa.vandenberge@eauclairecounty.gov	Description: Existing —The Eau Claire Health Alliance (ECHA) is a coalition working to promote the health and well-being of individuals, families, and communities of Eau Claire County. The ECHA is the result of a merger of two long-standing coalitions in Eau Claire County: Eau Claire Healthy Communities and the Alliance for Substance Misuse Prevention. Over 250 partners from across the county convene to advance data-driven goals that address health priorities identified by Eau Claire County residents. The ECHA priority areas relating to these grants are Mental health and community connectedness and nutrition and physical activity. Is coalition continuing? Yes	Description: Grant funds were used for several diverse projects including transit benches and shelters, pedestrian cross walk and intersection safety improvement, bus fares to train people on bus routes, weights for the Strong Bodies class, bathroom partitions for park space, beach mobility mat, and ADA openers on fine arts center. Service area (counties): Eau Claire Is project continuing? Partially
9	SIL	Eau Claire City-County Health Department \$93,178 Janessa VandenBerge janessa.vandenberge@eauclairecounty.gov	Description: Existing —Eau Claire Health Alliance (ECHA) Is coalition continuing? Yes	Description: Grant funds were used for diverse projects with community partners including two ADA camping sites; tables, chairs, and art therapy supplies for two senior centers; improvements to streetlights for public places; installation of ADA door openers at the community arts center; group memberships to the YMCA; and ADA park equipment. Service area (counties): Eau Claire Is project continuing? Partially

Map key	Type	Organization, grant amount and contact	Coalition	Project
10	SIL	Greater Watertown Community Health Foundation \$99,958 Susan Olson solson@watertownhealthfoundation.com	Description: New—The members of the Coalition for Older Adults are all part of the coordinated care meeting, and they will hold space on the agenda for social connection, as it is core to the work that all individuals who serve older adults do. All members of the Coalition for Those Living with Disabilities would like to continue meeting on a quarterly basis. This group finds great value in coming together to discuss how to best serve their clients. Before this grant there had not been any sort of group or gathering for those serving individuals living with disabilities in Dodge and Jefferson counties, and they have enjoyed collaborating. Connected Communities webpage Is coalition continuing? Yes	Description: The coalition led projects to engage individuals and organizations to sign the connected communities pledge and hosted community conversations and focus groups about social isolation and loneliness. Service area (counties): Dodge, Jefferson
11	LC	Greendale Public Health Department \$39,700 Megan Mermal mmermal@greendale.org	Description: New (project focused)—The Livable Communities Coalition is anticipated to evolve by transitioning into a steering committee, connected to the Health Department community health improvement plan (CHIP). This shift will provide oversight, coordination, and alignment with AARP's 8 Domains of Livability while serving as a central hub for documentation and collaboration. Is coalition continuing? Yes	Description: The coalition provided opportunities for engagement and belonging at eight events and through articles and social media posts. They also used funds to make improvements to Daffodil Park, including raised garden beds, accessible water, a shed for storage, accessible picnic tables, an outdoor information kiosk, and a gazebo. Greendale Livable Communities webpage Service area (counties): Milwaukee Is project continuing? Partially

Map key	Type	Organization, grant amount and contact	Coalition	Project
12	SIL	Hmong American Center, Inc. (HAC) \$90,000 Bee Lor beelor@hmongamericancenter.org	Description: New —To increase collaboration, HAC merged with the coalition started by Opportunity Development Centers operating in the same geographic area. Is coalition continuing? Partially	Description: HAC implemented F.U.N. (Feem Ua Neej—"A Way of Life"), a healthy lifestyle program that provides physical activities to improve mental health and empower older adults to be engaging members of the community. They also worked to promote senior dining centers as a great way to connect with others. The bonds and relationships you make by being part of the senior dining community go beyond meals. Service area (counties): Marathon Is project continuing? Yes
13	LC	indiGO \$68,301 Emma Duchrow emma@indigowi.org	Description: New —The coalition was based on creating livable communities with attention to public accessibility to promote inclusion of all abilities and ages. It spanned eight counties across rural northwestern Wisconsin and was comprised of service providers from each county. Organizations included ADRCs, the regional planning commission, and groups related to aging and disability as well as education and outdoor recreation. Is coalition continuing? Partially	Description: indiGO conducted eight community conversations to gather input on accessibility concerns directly from community members. Due to lower-than-expected turnout at these events, they supplemented their outreach by developing a survey, which they distributed to all active consumers in their service area. This helped capture additional feedback and ensure a broader range of voices were heard. Using the combined insights from both the community conversations and survey responses, they identified and selected 10 key locations for accessibility assessments. Service area (counties): Ashland, Bayfield, Burnett, Douglas, Iron, Price, Sawyer, Washburn Is project continuing? Partially

Map key	Type	Organization, grant amount and contact	Coalition	Project
14	SIL	Journey21, Inc. \$100,000 Caty Bulgrin cbulgrin@journey21.org	Description: Existing —Journey21 collaborates with their partners for job sites, community service projects, resource fairs, activities, educational and community events, and outings for their participants. They also joined the Social Connectedness Coalition of Waukesha County. Is coalition continuing? Yes	Description: Grant funds were used for a variety of programs and outings that offer safe, supportive, life-enriching experiences and education that foster independence, socialization, and overall well-being for young adults with disabilities. Topics included initiating and building friendships, real-world social skills, healthy living, basic meal preparation, recreational activities, and fitness. Service area (counties): Waukesha Is project continuing? Yes
15	LC	Kenosha Achievement Center (KAC) \$78,045 Chris Weyker cweyker@thekac.com	Description: New —Livable Kenosha is a coalition of members brought together around the issue of housing input for seniors and people with disabilities. The coalition members will stay active disseminating the housing information and will identify other areas to uplift the needs and voices of individuals with disabilities and elders. Livable Kenosha webpage Is coalition continuing? Yes	Description: Accessible cycling creates a multitude of new relationships among older adults, people with disabilities, pilots, passengers, and family members. Accessible cycling is about letting people with disabilities live and older adults age in a positive context—fully aware of the opportunities that lie ahead when interacting in their local community. • Accessible cycling rodeo Facebook post • Pilot training Facebook post Service area (counties): Kenosha Is project continuing? Yes

Map key	Type	Organization, grant amount and contact	Coalition	Project
16	SIL	Long Cheng Senior Center, LLC \$85,334 Maiyoua Thao info@longchengsc.com	Description: New —The Northeast Wisconsin Senior Connections Coalition is a collaborative initiative focused on enhancing social connections, reducing isolation, and promoting livable communities for seniors, especially seniors of color. By uniting community organizations, senior service providers, and advocates, the coalition addresses the unique cultural and social needs of aging populations in the region. Northeast Wisconsin Senior Connections Coalition webpage Is coalition continuing? Yes	Description: The coalition developed and distributed a cultural assessment survey. They also participated at the Hmong Senior Resource Expo in February 2025. Three workshops and 20 organizations provided resources, which resulted in increased participation and engagement for 120 older Hmong adults who were able to actively connect with one another, helping reduce isolation. Service area (counties): Brown, Calumet, Fond du Lac, Outagamie, Winnebago Is project continuing? Yes
16	LC	Long Cheng Senior Center, LLC \$94,207 Maiyoua Thao info@longchengsc.com	Description: New —Northeast Wisconsin Senior Connections Coalition Is coalition continuing? Yes	Description: The coalition purchased an ADA-accessible van to support Hmong seniors in accessing vital resources such as grocery shopping and medical appointments. They also fostered social connections by providing transportation to the Hmong adult day center. Service area (counties): Brown, Calumet, Fond du Lac, Outagamie, Winnebago Is project continuing? Yes

Map key	Type	Organization, grant amount and contact	Coalition	Project
17	SIL	Marshfield Area United Way \$49,801 Sarah Chy sarah@marshfieldareaunitedway.org	Description: New —Marshfield Area United Way’s Retiree Coalition helps community members aged 55+ build heartfelt, meaningful connections with peers through volunteer opportunities that provide a sense of purpose and help those in need in the community. This model built a coalition of older adults who were seeking social connection. Is coalition continuing? Yes	Description: All projects were community service oriented—a mix of existing projects for which the Retiree Coalition took part and new projects developed by the coalition. The projects included an intergenerational community garden, monthly NOW packings, Cookies for Kids, adopted family and Christmas food box prep, and spring food box prep and hygiene products project. Service area (counties): Clark, Marathon, Wood Is project continuing? Partially
18	LC	Midstate Independent Living Choices, Inc. (MILC) \$100,000 Don Wigington dwigington@milc-inc.org	Description: New (project focused) —MILC’s goal was to enhance existing coalitions and share the knowledge of their project by having a core group of experts join existing coalitions to talk about the project, promote awareness of the resources available, and if appropriate, become a permanent member of coalitions to ensure sustainability of their work. Is coalition continuing? Partially	Description: The Park Accessibility Improvement Initiative had a goal of improving accessibility of parks in 28 counties by providing accessibility assessments, reports, technical assistance, and direct impact funds to encourage immediate improvements. Service area (counties): Florence, Forest, Langlade, Lincoln, Marathon, Marinette, Oneida, Shawano, Taylor, Vilas, Wood Is project continuing? Partially

Map key	Type	Organization, grant amount and contact	Coalition	Project
19	SIL	Milwaukee County Area Agency on Aging (AAA) \$97,503 Kaisa Kerrigan Kaisa.Kerrigan@milwaukeecountywi.gov	Description: <i>New (project focused)</i> —Members of this coalition were directly involved in the implementation of the Social Isolation and Loneliness Reduction Pharmacy Project. Several project partners have expressed interest in continuing to address social isolation and loneliness and provide resources to the community. As such, an informal coalition of interested organizations will remain in communication to explore ways to continue providing resources and support to the community. Is coalition continuing? Partially	Description: The Social Isolation and Loneliness Reduction Pharmacy Project trained local pharmacies to implement a social isolation and loneliness screening (UCLA three-question screen) when patients came into the pharmacy to pick up their prescriptions. If they scored “lonely,” they were offered a referral to Vital Voices, a local mental health provider who makes connections. The project also created a pharmacy learning module—Caring for Our Elders: Promoting Health Literacy, Social Connection, and Cultural Sensitivity in Pharmacy. This online continuing education course is available to Pharmacy Society of Wisconsin’s more than 4,500 members statewide. The module is worth 3.15 continuing education credits and is open to non-certified technicians, students, pharmacy technicians, and pharmacists. Service area (counties): Milwaukee Is project continuing? Partially
20	SIL	Mother of Perpetual Help Congregation, West Allis \$80,880 Fr. Matthew Perumpil frmatthew@mphwa.org	Description: <i>New (project focused)</i> —The coalition included parishes, senior centers, and health organizations in West Allis, Wauwatosa, and New Berlin. It focuses on the Mother of Perpetual Help's project, replication, and expansion to non-parishioners. Is coalition continuing? Yes	Description: Ministers of Care provided monthly home visits to aid in the connection of seniors to the parish and other people and periodic gatherings and special events. Service area (counties): Milwaukee Is project continuing? Yes

Map key	Type	Organization, grant amount and contact	Coalition	Project
21	SIL	Neighborhood House Community Center \$34,650 Laura Gundlach laura@neighborhoodhousemadison.org	Description: New—Neighborhood House created and led a new coalition of service providers focused on older adults and individuals with disabilities in Madison’s Greenbush and Triangle neighborhoods. The coalition’s goal was to improve coordination, reduce redundancy, and increase access to social and health supports through collective impact. It included community centers, housing partners, faith communities, and health service providers. Is coalition continuing? Partially	Description: The project offered a robust series of social, creative, and wellness-based programs designed to reduce isolation and promote healthy aging for older adults and individuals with disabilities. Weekly activities included a new 55+ fitness class focused on gentle movement, cardio, strength, and balance; Connections, a social program with games, newspapers, coffee, and socializing on Wednesdays and Thursdays; and a monthly memory café that provided a welcoming space for individuals living with dementia and their caregivers to connect through music, conversation, and activities. This was followed by a monthly healthy living luncheon with a nurse to answer health questions on a particular topic, like sleep or stress. Participants also enjoyed healthy community meals, fostering both nutrition and social engagement. Service area (counties): Dane Is project continuing? Yes
22	SIL	NeighborWorks Green Bay \$73,502 Julie Filapek julief@nwgreenbay.org	Description: Existing—The coalition existed before this grant period with a focus specifically on older adult technology learning. They expanded focus to social isolation for older adults and people with disabilities more broadly, though efforts ultimately served people across all demographics in the Village of Denmark. The coalition saw its role as a jump start to high visibility social connection activities, with an expectation that Denmark Connects would transition to a more locally-led organization. Is coalition continuing? Yes	Description: Projects designed to demonstrate intergenerational learning including tech teaching; two gatherings for caregivers; and conversations on Medicare, wills and trusts, time slips and asset discovery. Service area (counties): Brown Is project continuing? Partially

Map key	Type	Organization, grant amount and contact	Coalition	Project
23	SIL	New Bridge Madison \$100,000 Jim Krueger jimk@newbridgemadison.org	Description: New —This coalition is a collaborative initiative led by NewBridge Madison, under the coordination of the social isolation project manager, that aims to build inclusive solutions through diverse partnerships. The coalition brings together government agencies, nonprofits, health care providers, and local leaders to share resources, align strategies, and promote sustainable change. Is coalition continuing? Yes	Description: The neighborhood-based Friendly Caller/Visitor Project is a health and wellness project that trains older adults in leadership skills that they then use in their neighborhoods to engage isolated older adults in health, wellness, and social activities. Older adult volunteers are matched with an isolated older adult and either call or visit them at home two to three times each month for friendly conversation. Service area (counties): Dane Is project continuing? Yes
24	LC	Newcap, Inc. \$92,348 Jessica DeGrave nicolemarchand@newcap.org	Description: New —Led by Newcap, this coalition was made up of multiple counties including county departments, ADRCs, public health, and Tribal nations. It also included a senior center and a managed care organization. Is coalition continuing? No Coalition members will join the transportation committees in their different areas to continue to advocate for the transportation needs of older adults and people with disabilities.	Description: The project was aimed at improving connectedness and services to older adults and people with disabilities using the Whole Family Approach. This approach prevents social isolation by hosting events, providing volunteer opportunities, and participating in the Family Advisory Board. Service area (counties): Langlade, Marinette, Menominee, Oconto, Oneida, Shawano, Vilas Is project continuing? Yes

Map key	Type	Organization, grant amount and contact	Coalition	Project
25	SIL	Oneida County Health Department \$88,894 Cami Buchmann cbuchmann@oneidacountywi.gov	Description: New—The Social Connections Coalition is dedicated to reducing social isolation and loneliness by fostering connected communities, empowering individuals to build meaningful relationships, and promoting integration for emotional well-being for all. Is coalition continuing? Yes	Description: Each project was designed to engage the participants and communities with events that would lead to connection. The health department used different events to draw a diverse group of individuals to interact with others in the community. These events included: • Pen Pal Program. • Connection Care Kits (CCK). • Monthly coalition-sponsored events including: ○ Grateful Connections (November). ○ Joyful Gatherings (December). ○ Souper Bowl (January). ○ Cold Days Warm Hearts Valentine Social (February). ○ Lights, Camera, Connection (March). Service area (counties): Oneida Is project continuing? Partially
26	LC	Opportunity Development Centers \$81,250 Josiah Groth jgroth@odcinc.com	Description: Existing—The Digital Equity Solutions Team (DEST) Coalition was formed to tackle social isolation and digital equity through access to technology and training in their four-county region. It included diverse members from education, business, nonprofit, and health sectors. As a subset of DEST, this coalition focused on creating a template where corporate technology could be repurposed and reused for social isolation goals. This template is available for other regions within the state. Is coalition continuing? Partially	Description: Grant funds were used to acquire, refurbish, and distribute digital devices and provide training. Service area (counties): Langlade, Lincoln, Marathon, Portage, Wood Is project continuing? Partially

Map key	Type	Organization, grant amount and contact	Coalition	Project
26	SIL	Opportunity Development Centers \$100,000 Kate Norby knorby@odcinc.com	Description: <i>New</i> —Opportunity Development Centers established a robust, cross-sector coalition composed of representatives from health care, senior centers, advocacy groups, faith-based organizations, local government agencies, and other community stakeholders. Together, the coalition assessed community strengths, needs, and priorities through a combination of collaborative dialogue, data analysis, and community input. This process informed the creation of a shared vision and actionable plans designed to address identified gaps while building upon existing assets and resources. Is coalition continuing? Yes	Description: The coalition implemented four key community-based interventions guided by the principles of Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD). This approach focuses on recognizing and leveraging the strengths, talents, and assets already present within individuals and communities to foster meaningful connections and sustainable change. Interventions included launching a Men’s Shed and expanding Community Connections by incorporating adaptive recreation, Better Together (fosters one-to-one friendships between adults with disabilities and a volunteer mentor), Community Friends (monthly social group for people with disabilities). Service area (counties): Langlade, Lincoln, Marathon, Portage, Wood Is project continuing? Yes
27	SIL	Pointtters Community Initiatives \$92,000 Olademji Tomori tomori@pointtters.org	Description: <i>New</i> —The Social Connection Coalition was created to build a community where individuals are connected, valued, and empowered through support, engagement, and holistic care. It consists of nonprofits, public agencies, and memory and aging-focused organizations collaborating on social isolation and community-building interventions across the Fox Valley and surrounding counties. Is coalition continuing? Yes	Description: The project was focused on establishing community hubs, facilitating caregiver training and support, hosting social connection events, and building a digital tool for outreach. Special initiatives included a Christmas gathering and faith-based outreach to address isolation among older adults. Service area (counties): Calumet, Outagamie, Winnebago Is project continuing? Yes

Map key	Type	Organization, grant amount and contact	Coalition	Project
28	SIL	Southwest Suburban Health Department \$45,896 Becca Marszalkowski rmarszalkowski@swshdwi.gov	Description: Existing —Mental and Behavioral Health County Health Improvement Plant (CHIP) Action Team Is coalition continuing? Yes	Description: The health department used grant funds to provide UCLA loneliness screenings and host cooking classes, a winter formal event, and Lifebrary (a podcast dedicated to connecting people through their personal stories) listening sessions. Service area (counties): Milwaukee Is project continuing? Partially
29	LC	Taylor County Health Department \$99,967 Melissa Moore melissa.moore@co.taylor.wi.us	Description: Existing —The Supporting Healthy Aging Coalition was born out of the “getting to know your community” series in May 2023. They first pulled together organizations working with seniors for a supporting aging meeting in June 2023. Over the course of a year, this group continued to grow, adopted a mission and vision, and established a brand identity with official logo in spring 2024. Is coalition continuing? Yes	Description: Grant funds were used to: • Provide transportation. • Add a day to the senior nutrition congregate site. • Publish a senior resource guide. • Remodel the multi-purpose center, which also included an automatic door opener, seven wheelchairs, handheld translators to better serve non-English-speaking residents, and emergency preparedness devices. Service area (counties): Taylor Is project continuing? Partially
29	SIL	Taylor County Health Department \$100,000 Melissa Moore melissa.moore@co.taylor.wi.us	Description: Existing —Supporting Healthy Aging Coalition Is coalition continuing? Yes	Description: The health department hosted 11 educational and social events throughout Taylor County. They also remodeled and purchased assisted listening devices for the Medford Senior Center. Service area (counties): Taylor Is project continuing? Partially

Map key	Type	Organization, grant amount and contact	Coalition	Project
30	SIL	UW-Extension Kewaunee County \$10,413 Renee Koenig renee.koenig@wisc.edu	Description: Existing —The Kewaunee County Aging Friendly Coalition was formed in 2022 to focus on aging-related issues, including social isolation, in Kewaunee County with membership from individuals and organizations that serve the county. Is coalition continuing? Yes	Description: The Mastery Makers Project of the Aging Friendly Coalition was developed to spotlight older adults who are actively volunteering in the county to improve the quality of life for all. Mastery Makers Project webpage Service area (counties): Kewaunee Is project continuing? Partially
31	LC	Wauwatosa Health Department \$75,000 Carmen Pangilinan cpangilinan@wauwatosa.net	Description: Existing —This coalition consists of members of the health department’s Age-Friendly and Community Health Improvement Plan (CHIP) Housing Action Team and the members of the city’s Joint Housing Coalition. These groups came together to work collaboratively on shared interests and goals. Is coalition continuing? Yes	Description: The coalition launched a communications awareness campaign to draw attention to the link between health and housing and the community health benefits of including more accessible and affordable housing. Service area (counties): Milwaukee Is project continuing? Yes
31	SIL	Wauwatosa Health Department \$24,700 Carmen Pangilinan cpangilinan@wauwatosa.net	Description: Existing —This coalition is made up of community members and city staff who are interested in expanding opportunities for social connection in Wauwatosa. They formed before the grant as part of Wauwatosa’s five-year Community Health Improvement Plan (CHIP). As a result of the grant, the group has gained new members and new energy. The CHIP goes through 2027, so the group will continue through 2027 and hopefully beyond. Is coalition continuing? Yes	Description: Grant project activities included: • Five facilitated community conversations and a film screening with talk back session. • Purchase of iPads to be used in Senior Planet coursework. • Refurbishment of 10 laptops to be used to teach older adults computer skills to stay safe and connected to family, health care, and community events. Ten residents are currently enrolled in the five-week Computer Essentials course. Service area (counties): Milwaukee Is project continuing? Partially

Map key	Type	Organization, grant amount and contact	Coalition	Project
32	LC	Western Dairyland Economic Opportunity Council (WDEOC), Retired and Senior Volunteer Program \$100,000 Kristin Walukas kristin.walukas@wdeoc.org	Description: <i>New (project focused)</i> —This coalition consists of four organizations: WDEOC, ADRC of Trempealeau County, Whitehall School District, and Inclusa. The relationship built provide an opportunity to work and serve the community together in the future. Is coalition continuing? Partially	Description: WOW, Whitehall Optimal Wellness, is a free community fitness center housed in the Whitehall School District. It includes accessible strength and cardio fitness equipment, light weights, mats, and a functional training system. The coalition offered an open house with an instructor to demonstrate the equipment. Service area (counties): Trempealeau Is project continuing? Yes

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¹ [National Center for Health Statistics. U.S. Census Bureau, Household Pulse Survey, 2024. Lack of Social Connection](https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/COVID19/pulse/lack-socialconnection.htm). Generated interactively from <https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/COVID19/pulse/lack-socialconnection.htm>

² The U.S. Surgeon General’s Advisory on the Healing Effects of Social Connection and Community, 2023, [Our Epidemic of Loneliness and Isolation](https://www.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/surgeon-general-social-connection-advisory.pdf), <https://www.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/surgeon-general-social-connection-advisory.pdf>

³ Holt-Lunstad et al, 2015, Loneliness and [Social Isolation as Risk Factors for Mortality: A Meta-Analytic Review](https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/1745691614568352), Sage Journals Volume 10, Issue 2, <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/1745691614568352>

⁴ Valtorta et al, 2016, [Loneliness and social isolation as risk factors for coronary heart disease and stroke: systematic review and meta-analysis of longitudinal observational studies](https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC4941172/), <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC4941172/>

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| 2023 male and female 65+ population: | 483,798 + 551,225 = 1,035,023 |
| 2023 male and female 65+ population with public coverage: | 49,589 + 68,065 = 117,654 |
| Percent of 65+ population with public coverage: | (117,654 / 1,035,023) * 100 = 11.4% |
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