



Area Agency on Aging of Dane County

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DATE: 9 August 2019
TO: Dane County Delegation
FROM: Carole Kretschman, Chair
Area Agency on Aging of Dane County Board of Directors
SUBJECT: Wisconsin Poverty Report Summary: 2017

On behalf of the Dane County Area Agency on Aging Board of Directors, we are writing to share a Summary of the 11th Annual Wisconsin Poverty Report and to alert you to a troubling trend among older adults over the past two years: *poverty rates for older adults are continuing to rise*. As a result, we urge you to dispel the misguided and often harmful thinking that older folks are doing well because the economy is doing well.

The fact is, one in ten older adults in Wisconsin do not have enough income to eat, pay for medical expenses, or afford medications. This means 86,988 older adults are living with “heat or eat” and “prescriptions or rent” decisions being made each day. The increase in poverty faced by our older residents can be attributed to the growing costs of living, out-of-pocket medical costs, increased prescription costs, voluntary 401K contributions in lieu of employer retirement plans, and savings unable to fund increased years of life expectancy with multiple chronic conditions.

At the same time, income earned through the most successful programs to raise older adults out of poverty, Social Security (SSI), and the State supplement to the Federal SSI program for the poorest of older adults, are not keeping pace with growing expenses. In the case of the State supplemented SSI, the small, flat amount allocated per person has not increased in nearly 30 years. Federal and state funding for services such as benefit specialists, group and home delivered meal programs, isolation reducing activities, and services that support healthy aging at home have seen small adjustments or have remained flat. As a result, the funding is actually reduced when factoring in inflation, and frankly, remains grossly inadequate given the exploding growth in the senior population.

The assumed causes of increasing poverty in older adults are not going away and the lack of resources allocated will only drive more of Wisconsin’s elders into poverty over the next several years.

We recommend the state legislature hold a public hearing on the issue of elder poverty to garner more information to help combat this alarming trend. The Area Agency on Aging of Dane County looks forward to working with officials at all levels to thoughtfully consider all solutions for reversing the trend of elderly poverty in Wisconsin.

Attachment: Summary of the 11th Annual Wisconsin Poverty Report

cc: The Honorable Tony Evers, Governor, State of Wisconsin
State Elected Officials (representing Dane County)
Members, Dane County Board of Supervisors
The Honorable Joe Parisi, Dane County Executive
Ms. Shawn Tessmann, Director, Dane County Department of Human Services