



# Southeastern Minnesota AREA AGENCY on AGING



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*Pictured above—SEMAAA Staff Chris Johnson at 125 Live’s Active Living Active Life Expo*

# LOOP

IN THE

*With Laurie*

The 2025 legislative session kicked into action on January 14<sup>th</sup> with uncertainty and a power sharing agreement pause. The House GOP leadership had plans to capture control of the House (including Speaker and Committee Chairs) while DFL leadership carried through with their threat not to show up for day one of the session if the power sharing agreement wasn't honored. Other activities include MN Supreme Court Rulings, Special Elections and the release of the Governor's Budget Recommendations that did not include any recommendations or cuts for aging services.

## Your Comments are Needed - The

Administration for Community Living (ACL) provides the MN Board on Aging (MBA) over \$20 million in federal Older Americans Act funding each year. For the first time since 1988, the OAA regulations have been updated, and ACL requires all states to come into compliance by October 1, 2025. In response to the OAA Final Rule, MBA and Area Agency on Aging (AAA) staff met several times throughout 2024 to review over 50 drafts of the policies recently published online.

The MBA has proposed policies and procedures to come into compliance with federal regulations. Some policies are integrated in federal and state statutes and cannot be changed. Some policies are additional requirements that the MBA has

developed or an interpretation of a federal regulation where the MBA may have discretion.

The public review and comment period is now open. The MBA is requesting the public review and comment on policies and procedures between Monday, Jan. 6, 2025 – Feb. 7, 2025, before submitting to the ACL for approval. For additional information on the final rule, visit the **State Plan on Aging Policies and Procedures webpage** ([www.mn.gov/board-on-aging/state-plan-on-aging/policies.jsp](http://www.mn.gov/board-on-aging/state-plan-on-aging/policies.jsp))

The proposed policies include updates that SEMAAA will be required to enforce through Title III funding awards. Some of the key areas reflected in the policies focus on increased administrative efforts related to client eligibility, changes to contract/award structure, and increased reporting/compliance requirements.

Please join us and submit your comments through the **Online Webform** via the website listed above under the "Process to submit comments" section to provide comments on any of the policies and procedures.

SEMAAA staff and Board members are looking forward to new collaborations in 2025 to support older adults and their caregivers navigate needed services to keep them living well in their communities.

*Laurie Brownell,*  
SEMAAA Executive Director





## 2025 Medicare Changes

January 1 brought several important changes to help Minnesotans manage their Medicare prescription drug costs more effectively.

- Medicare Prescription Payment Plan (MPPP) is a program that lets people pay their out-of-pocket drug costs in monthly payments, instead of all at once. People need to contact their Medicare drug plan to enroll in this option.
- Medicare will cap the yearly cost of Part D prescription drugs at \$2,000. After reaching this limit, people won't pay anything for covered drugs for the rest of the year. Only costs for covered drugs count toward the \$2,000 cap. Money spent on drugs that aren't covered won't help reach the limit.
- The same law that created the new \$2,000 out-of-pocket spending cap also eliminated the coverage gap (donut hole). Eliminating the donut hole will simplify coverage for people with Medicare.
- True Out-of-Pocket (TrOOP) costs includes the amount spent on covered Part D drugs. This is the maximum out-of-pocket amount you would need to spend in a year on medications covered by your prescription drug plan before you reach the catastrophic level of coverage.
- Medicare beneficiaries will see lowered insulin costs under their Part D plans. Manufacturers will also offer more discounts on insulin and other medications, and people will have better access to insulin pumps and related medical devices.

If you have questions or need help with your Medicare,  
**call Minnesota's Senior LinkAge Line at 800-333-2433.**

# St. John's Lutheran Community Receives Grant to Enhance Senior Wellbeing in Rural Communities



***The “Connected Communities” Grant Provides \$600,000 in funding from the LeadingAge Minnesota Foundation for senior care providers in rural areas.***

**ALBERT LEA, MN** – A recent \$600,000 grant from the LeadingAge Minnesota Foundation will enable the development of a “Connected Communities” project, an initiative designed to improve the lives of older adults in rural Minnesota. This transformative funding empowers St. John’s to further its mission to serve seniors by helping those outside of their communities age in place with enhanced well-being, connectivity, and support.

Aging in rural areas presents unique challenges, but the Connected Communities project seeks to transform this experience by creating cohesive community ecosystems that support older adults in every aspect of their lives—physically, emotionally, and socially. With this grant, St. John’s is poised to bridge gaps in healthcare, reduce social isolation, and streamline communication across rural care services.

St. John’s is proud to launch a project that will build a stronger, more supportive environment for seniors and their families, enabling them to enjoy a vibrant, fulfilling life surrounded by the community that values and appreciates them.

The goal of the “Innovations in Healthy Aging for

Seniors (IHAS)” project is to reshape the aging ecosystem in Freeborn County. They plan to develop a network of resources that are committed and equipped to help seniors stay independent in their homes and access the necessary services as they age utilizing a “Senior Living Without Walls” concept.

“This grant gives Freeborn County’s seniors, and those who support area seniors, the opportunity to align to best serve this dynamic demographic in the way they choose through innovation, engagement, and collaboration,” said Shanna Eckberg, CEO/Administrator at St. John’s Lutheran Community. “We’re excited to collaborate with Senior Resources of Freeborn County, Southeastern Minnesota Area Rural Transit (SMART), Freeborn County Chamber of Commerce, Zemplee Inc., Southeastern Minnesota Area Agency on Aging (SEMAAA), Freeborn County Public Health, Albert Lea Housing & Redevelopment Authority (HRA), local senior advocates, and Mayo Clinic Health System in Albert Lea and Austin.”

Kari Thurlow, President and CEO of LeadingAge Minnesota, expressed her enthusiasm for the project: “LeadingAge Minnesota Foundation is committed to honoring and supporting older adults, especially in rural communities where resources can be scarce... We’re particularly grateful for St. John’s leadership in collaborating with their community to create meaningful,

systemic improvements for older adults, their families, and the community as a whole.”

### **About St. John’s Lutheran Community**

St. John’s Lutheran Community is a non-profit and faith-based senior living community in the beautiful lake town of Albert Lea, Minnesota. It is home to many seniors who receive short-term care, skilled nursing care, independent living, assisted living, and memory care services. Each St. John’s community provides home options and care packages that fit any senior’s needs, with activities and amenities to engage and entertain residents, friends, and family members.

St. John’s strives to provide person-centered care and life and promote individual choice. Their mission is to provide physical, emotional, social, and Christian care for all people with dignity and respect in an environment of God’s grace.

### **About LeadingAge Minnesota Foundation**

The LeadingAge Minnesota Foundation is a nonprofit, intermediary grantmaking foundation. It is an affiliate of LeadingAge Minnesota, a Minnesota-based association of more than 1,100 member organizations and 65,000 caregivers providing quality care, services and support to more than 65,000 older adults in independent living, adult day, home care and skilled nursing settings. The LeadingAge Minnesota Foundation seeks to transform and enhance the experience of aging by incubating new ideas and concepts to support workforce initiatives, care redesign and research.

### **Learn more:**

[www.leadingagemn.org/about-us/foundation/](http://www.leadingagemn.org/about-us/foundation/)



# 2025 Board Updates

## **Thank you Outgoing Board Members:**

Jean Eaton (Freeborn County)  
Mike Hancock (Olmsted County)  
Karen Hanson (Winona County)  
Dwight Jennings (Member At-Large)  
Dave Vandergon (Goodhue County)

## **Welcome New Board Members:**

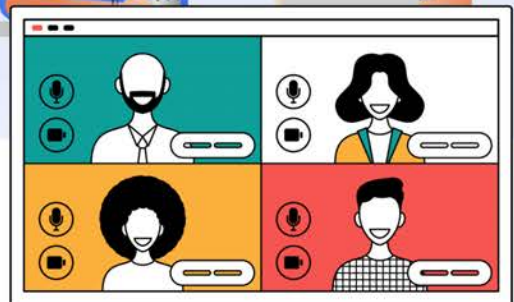
Linda Lares (Freeborn County)  
Brad Lohrbach (Dodge County)  
Peggy Schlinger (Olmsted County)

*See SEMAAA's full Board of Directors  
and 2025 Officers on page 8*



## **Current Open Board Positions:**

Mower County  
Steele County  
Member At-Large



To apply for SEMAAA's Board of Directors, visit [www.semaaa.org/volunteer](http://www.semaaa.org/volunteer)  
or contact Laurie Brownell at [laurie@semaaa.org](mailto:laurie@semaaa.org) or 507-288-6944

# Elder Network's

## Aging Mastery Program (AMP)

Elder Network's Aging Mastery Program (AMP) is a fun and engaging education and behavior change incentive program for aging well. The classroom experience helps Elder Network create a plan through a mix of didactic and interactive learning with an emphasis on peer-to-peer interaction. Aging Mastery aims to help baby boomers and others over 50 to take key steps to improve their well-being, add stability to their lives, and strengthen their ties to communities. When they participate and use the Aging Mastery Starter Kit, individuals create their own playbook for aging well via actionable goals, sustainable behaviors, social engagement, and gratitude.

With this program, we can prevent older adults from becoming overwhelmed by the burdens of aging, helping them to thrive and enjoy rewarding lives that are built to sustain them throughout the rest of their life-span.

The workshop lasts eight weeks, with an introductory session, six sessions on the six areas of retiring, and a final celebration of learning in the last session.

AMP participants filled out a survey on their last day of the workshop. Of those who responded, 100% experienced improved emotional/mental health as a result of this program, and 100% found the program has helped them to cope better.

Of the respondents, 71% reported improved quality of life, 47% reported increased community involvement, and 33% reported improved ability to manage their self-care needs—all as a result of this program.

Additionally, 90% of participants who responded said they will be moving forward with at least one step in planning for the future, improving their health, and/or sharing their plan for aging with others.

### **Participants shared:**

“Very important to older folks—many who may live alone and experience loneliness and/or depression.”

“The two sessions I went to were fabulous and gave me new knowledge and insights. They also gave me a boost to try new activities.”

“The information about memory and brain health was very helpful.”

“Aging Mastery class was a fun ‘community’ activity and it encouraged me to pursue crafts and music—to have something new in the works.”

“Overall, it was a very positive experience. Elder Network staff were knowledgeable and respectful.”

“The services help the elderly to be more active, and more importantly, less isolated.”

“Seniors get lost in the shuffle of life. These organized sessions help people think about the possibilities.”

## SEMAAA Board

**Marie Hlava**, *Chair* - Wabasha County  
**Maggie Cook**, *Vice-Chair* - Goodhue County  
**Brad Lohrbach**, *Treasurer* - Dodge County  
**Marge Fuller**, *Secretary* - Fillmore County  
**Linda Lares** - Freeborn County  
**Linda McPeak** - Houston County  
**Peggy Schlinger** - Olmsted County  
**David Beimers** - Rice County  
**Rachel Boyum** - Winona County  
**OPEN** - Mower County  
**OPEN** - Steele County

## SEMAAA Staff

**Laurie Brownell** - Executive Director  
**Anna Thomson** - Office Manager  
**Kim Voth** - Finance Director/Grants Manager  
**Patti Schad** - Finance Assistant  
**Laurie Marreel** - Grants Administrator  
**Dan Conway** - Lead Eldercare Developer  
**Chris Johnson** - Eldercare Developer  
**Annie Avery** - SLL Contact Center Manager  
**Nicole Cummings** - SLL Resource Specialist  
**Starla Inman** - SLL Resource Specialist  
**Tambi Lokken** - SLL Resource Specialist  
**Laurie Magnus** - SLL Resource Specialist  
**Jerry Roberts** - SLL Resource Specialist  
**Chad Wojchik** - SLL Resource Specialist  
**Amy White** - SLL Resource Specialist  
**Lori Wacek** - SLL Resource Coordination Supervisor  
**Jay Hall** - SLL Resource Coordinator  
**Sara Kohrs** - SLL Resource Coordinator  
**Emily Lorenz** - SLL Resource Coordinator  
**Jen McLaughlin** - SLL Resource Coordinator  
**Susanna Marjanovich** - APS Community Coordinator