Minnesota Gubernatorial Candidates were sent questions from the Minnesota Leadership Council on Aging.

Attached are the responses from DFL Gubernatorial Candidate Tim Walz and Lieutenant Governor Candidate Peggy Flanagan.

This document can be downloaded at [www.mnlcoa.org/elections](http://www.mnlcoa.org/elections)
1. Aging in place
As noted by Face Aging MN, when given options, nearly 80% of older Minnesotans plan to stay their homes and many may need services to do so. Today, Minnesota is challenged in ensuring access to services as there are significant gaps in availability throughout the state.

What would you propose to ensure that Minnesotans have access to home and community-based services to age in place?

Like most Minnesotans, Tim and Peggy have personal experience with caring for aging loved ones and ensuring that they have the ability to age in place. Home and community-based services (HCBS) are a critical tool to ensuring that older Minnesotans with health or mobility challenges can stay in their homes. Minnesota has lead the way in many ways in ensuring seniors and those who have disabilities age in place, but more can and will be done in a Walz-Flanagan administration.

The first step is to listen. In a Walz-Flanagan Administration, Tim will always start by reaching out and listening to the communities their government is seeking to serve. Tim believes in bringing people together to solve the complex challenges faced in our communities - and that includes access to senior services. These challenges are not simple; they are multifaceted and must be addressed with a holistic approach. For example, seniors living in greater Minnesota and tribal communities face challenges in accessing home and community-based services caused by workforce shortages, transportation challenges, limited access to broadband and long distances to health care. The Walz-Flanagan administration will work to advance policies to address all of these barriers so more Minnesotans can age with the dignity and respect they deserve. Policies and programs like autonomous vehicles, ride sharing models, as well as investments in public transit and increased broadband for the provision of HCBS services through in-home technologies that increase safety and reduce the need for in-person staffing can help empower seniors and people with disabilities and ensure they receive the highest quality of care at home.

Access to Medicare and Medicaid (Medical Assistance in Minnesota) is also critical to Minnesotans accessing needed home and community-based services. Congressional attacks on the Medicaid and Medicare health care coverage threaten the security of these programs. This includes the low reimbursement rates under programs that inhibit competitive wages for HCBS staff and make access to services more challenging. Tim and Peggy will fight to make sure Medical Assistance is protected and funded.
2. Family and friend caregiving
As noted in our caregiving fact sheet, today nearly 20% of workers say they are providing unpaid care to a relative or friend and nine out of 10 people 65 and older provide care for an aging relative. This care in Minnesota alone is valued at $7.1 billion -- more than 2.5 times the Medicaid investments in nursing homes and 4.5 times in home and community-based services.

What would you propose to support family caregivers who will be called upon to provide more physically and financially difficult supports for their loved ones?

Family caregivers are at the front lines of keeping their loved ones in their homes for as long as possible. It's a big job that can often be exhausting and difficult. Tim and Peggy believe communities must work together to secure resources for caregiver support so they can continue caring for their loved ones at home for as long as possible. As Governor, Tim would look for ways to support these caregivers with in- and out-of- home respite options so they can get needed sleep, spend time with friends, or just relax and recharge. Caregivers, especially in Greater Minnesota, also need access to the Internet and technologies that allow them to reach their families and stay connected. Support groups, workshops and trainings are also valuable for caregivers so they can add skills that help them care for their loved one at home. Mental health care options are crucial for caregivers so they can take care of themselves while caring for others. Caregivers should also have workplace protections so that they can take care of their family AND make a living. As governor, Tim hopes to work with the MN Leadership Council on Aging and participating groups to help advance policies that make these supports a reality for more Minnesotans.

3. Health, economic and social disparities
While Minnesota is a great place to age for most it is not true for all. Significant health, economic and social disparities prevent many older Minnesotans from racial, ethnic, and LGBT communities from aging well.

In what ways would you address the issues of disparities and equity among older adults and family caregivers?

As Minnesotans, one of our core values is fairness. Unfortunately, we haven’t yet been able to live up to that value when it comes to racial equity. Tim and Peggy are the only Governor and Lieutenant Governor candidates with a comprehensive racial equity platform and strategy. Read more about this plan here: https://walzflanagan.org/our-agenda/racial-equity/.

Tim and Peggy believe that we have to stop viewing disparities of race or sexual orientation as a problem that only impacts people of color, indigenous people, or our LGBT community and start making it clear in policies that this is an issue that affects all Minnesotans. We know people of color are more likely to live in poverty, suffer from chronic illness, and are less likely to own their own homes. Racism, discrimination and the social conditions of prolonged adversity contribute to poor health. We need to address these disparities so individuals, particularly people of color, can live long and healthy lives.

Working with you and others, the Walz-Flanagan Administration will look forward to working with you to address health, racial and socioeconomic disparities in Minnesota through expanding
health care coverage and access, funding education, and ensuring an equity focus is applied throughout our government.

4. Workforce

As noted in our workforce fact sheet, there is a steady decline in Minnesota’s labor force until 2019 when the participation rate will reach 0. At the same time, care centers across the state have made the difficult but necessary choice to decline admissions due to shortages in essential staff. Rural areas already experience workforce drains as younger people leave for college and do not return.

What would you propose to address the labor force shortage in Minnesota? How will you ensure senior service workers earn competitive wages and benefits?

Our senior service workforce is one of the key components to empowering seniors to stay in the comfort of their home. The workforce shortage our state is currently experiencing is especially apparent in home and community based services, the very resources designed to keep people living well at home longer. We must provide rate reimbursements to providers that reflect the challenging and important work they do to keep older Minnesotans comfortable in their homes.

Nursing homes are often one of the largest employers in rural communities. We must do what we can to support these employers in paying wages commiserate to the difficult work their employees do to take care of our loved ones. We’ve made some progress in recent years through investments in ongoing rate increases, but these investments need to go further.

We also know that recruitment in the workforce doesn’t tell the whole story. Retention is key to keeping employees in these jobs. Tim and Peggy will work with the MN Leadership Council on Aging to look for ways to invest in incentives that encourage people to enter the healthcare workforce and remain in the field. Such incentives could include school loan forgiveness, credentialing for home care and nursing home workers, career ladders for advancement, and enhanced training. We need to be creative as a state to develop opportunities for workers who may fill these critical roles.

5. Long term services and supports financing

According to The SCAN Foundation, 52% of Americans who reach age 65 will someday need a high level of help with everyday activities. Many underestimate costs or are unaware that health insurance and Medicare do not cover long-term services. Current policy underserves people who need care, burdens family caregivers and places strains on the state budget. This challenge is only anticipated to grow as the state’s 65+ will double in the next 10 years.

How would you finance long term services and supports for a growing population?

Our state budget is a moral document, just as much as it is a fiscal one. We have a commitment to take care of our elders and aging neighbors, and this commitment should be reflected in the state’s budget, supports for state programs, and through partnerships the state forges with community organizations. We must look for innovative models to do this. Minnesota is leading the nation in developing new financing options for paying for long-term services and supports. The state is examining models for supplemental Medicare insurance plans to cover the types of
services that help people stay in their homes and other insurance options to cover needed services for aging Minnesotans. Congress also recently passed legislation that would allow Medicare Advantage plans to cover non-medical health-related benefits that help people with chronic conditions to stay in their homes (e.g., home modifications to accommodate walkers or wheelchairs, home delivered meals, and more coordinated care for dual eligibles who are covered by both Medicare and Medicaid). Tim and Peggy will work in partnership with the federal government, insurance companies, seniors, and advocacy organizations to create progress and best serve our communities.

6. Elder abuse
   A 2005 study by the National Center on Elder Abuse predicts that 1 in 10 older Americans will experience maltreatment in their lifetime including a loss of over $3 billion to financial exploitation. Regulators and advocates do not have the resources to prevent or address the maltreatment that occurs in communities and in senior care facilities.

   **How would you propose to prevent elder maltreatment in senior care facilities and the community?**

   Any abuse of a vulnerable adult is unacceptable. Elder abuse is a public health crisis that should be treated with prevention research and public outreach as well as education to all corners of the state. The Walz-Flanagan Administration will look at directing state funding to the county-based Adult Protection System (APS). This program currently operates with broad discrepancy, resulting in calls going ignored or un-investigated, leading to tragic results for our loved ones. The Walz-Flanagan Administration will also look at directing Multi-Disciplinary Teams as a way to increase the capacity of APS officials, especially in greater Minnesota, communities of color, and indigenous communities and substitute decision making as alternatives to guardianship so seniors are able to maintain their own autonomy as much as possible.

   Tim and Flanagan will look to the 2018 bipartisan task force and recommendations to increase training for mandated and voluntary reporters, support of assisted living licensing with strong consumer protections, including protections against unfair discharge and the right to appeal, and an enhanced bill of rights for our elders in order to immediately begin the work of preventing elder abuse.

7. Alzheimer’s disease and dementia
   As noted in our [dementia fact sheet](#), every 66 seconds someone in the US develops Alzheimer’s disease with Minnesota having one of the highest growth rates (30% increase by 2025). In 2017, this cost the nation $259 billion.

   **In what ways would you support funding for research on treatment and a cure for dementia and support those living with the disease and their caregivers?**

   Minnesota is home to some of the most cutting edge research and health care institutions of the world. We need to be proud of the resources we have at home and invest in, support, and champion these programs. For example, we must continue to support our world renown colleges and universities. The University of Minnesota is one of the top research institutions in the world, and state support is vital in ensuring that it remains a world-leader in cutting edge medical
research. The Walz-Flanagan Administration looks forward to working with the MN Leadership Council on Aging and others to learn more about specific research needs and models that should be prioritized.

Access to high-quality, comprehensive health care, including adult day care programs and support for caregivers, is central to ensuring that Minnesotans with dementia receive the supports they need. These services are rooted in strong public health care programs like Medical Assistance, MinnesotaCare, and Medicare. Protections for pre-existing conditions are also critical to ensuring our aging community as well as others have access to needed care. The Walz-Flanagan Administration will oppose any efforts to scale back access to health care so that individuals and families that are coping with dementia can receive the services they need.

8. Social isolation and mental health
   Social isolation is a growing public health concern, especially for older adults. The AARP Public Policy Institute reports that Medicare spends $6.7 billion annually to treat the effects of elder social isolation.

   **How will you help communities address social isolation?**

   Social isolation is a serious threat to our seniors’ mental and physical health. This is true in all of our communities in Minnesota, and especially in our greater Minnesota communities where access to community resources and social supports may be more limited. Investment in community services that decrease social isolation recognize the contributions and value of our elders. This includes partnerships with philanthropy, government, private organizations, and our communities themselves. We should work together to re-imagine recreation centers in our communities, home-delivered meals, activities at senior centers, transportation services, adult day care, and volunteer match programs that connect seniors with a peer volunteer to help with socialization. Each of these efforts can go a long way to alleviate loneliness and the detrimental effects of social isolation.

   Further, these kinds of community-based services are smart investments for all of us as they reduce the costs and the need for hospitalization and other more intensive services. Reducing social isolation will help keep our seniors healthier longer, in their own homes where they want to be, and where they can continue to be valuable contributors to society.

9. Availability of affordable housing
   Minnesota Housing Finance Agency notes that there is a significant shortage of affordable housing in Minnesota. This shortage is expected to increase with the burgeoning aging population. Further, the Wilder Foundation’s study of homelessness shows a 60% increase in homeless older adults from 2009 to 2015.

   **What is your role in addressing housing affordability issues and what would you do to encourage more affordable housing for older adults?**

   Half of Minnesota seniors are paying more than they can afford for housing. In the 2018 bonding bill, senior housing became an allowable use of Housing Infrastructure Bonds, opening the door
to nonprofit affordable housing developers statewide to receive help from the state to build units specifically for those over the age of 55. Affordable housing for all types of people and families is a critical need in our state, and with a growing aging population, seniors will continue to be one of the fastest growing groups of people without a home and forced to live on the streets. We need to grow our investments in all types of affordable housing. It’s good for workers, the economy, greater Minnesota and tribal communities, and our seniors.

10. Palliative and hospice care
Research shows that nearly half of adults ages 65 and older are living with two or more chronic conditions. Studies also show that the vast majority of Americans prefer to die at home.

How do you plan to support palliative care and hospice services for Minnesotans with serious illnesses?

End of life care is one of the most emotionally difficult challenges an individual and family can face. Tim experienced this firsthand when as a teenager, he made end-of-life decisions about his father with his family. We need to ensure that resources to support Minnesotans and their families during this hard time are accessible to everyone. Just like so many issues facing aging Minnesotans, this includes ensuring access to affordable, comprehensive, and high quality health care that includes palliative care and hospice services. Tim and Peggy look forward to working with the MN Leadership Council on Aging to ensure that we working in partnership with communities to support the needs of our aging population, including palliative and hospice care services.