AGING TOGETHER MINNESOTA: AN EXPLORATION OF HEALTH EQUITY

For many, Minnesota is a great place to age. The state is consistently ranked the healthiest and most senior friendly in national polls. However, this is not true for all groups. Minnesota ranks as one of the highest in health disparities between communities of color and the LGBT community and their white and heterosexual peers. Further, organizations that specialize in supporting diverse communities are often understaffed and small, focused on direct service, and unable to participate in broader systems change initiatives designed to eliminate health disparities.

The Minnesota Leadership Council on Aging (MNLCOA) is partnering with Community Dialogues with Multicultural Elders to create an action oriented, community based participatory project called, “Aging Together Minnesota.” The goal is to explore aging within diverse communities using a cultural humility lens by engaging both diverse older adults and aging program staff who serve diverse populations to amplify the voice and needs of diverse older adults. Through our goal, we intend to advance a greater sense of health equity, community connectedness, participation, inclusion and civic involvement for underserved older adults including the economically disadvantaged & frail elderly to reduce isolation and improve quality of life. Although we are fortunate to have pre-existing relationships with various multicultural providers and nonprofits throughout the state, we see this project as a wonderful opportunity to build on existing relationships, as well as, build new partnerships with diverse providers & nonprofits and individual elders. The ability to both strengthen and establish new relationships with diverse organizations and older adults, will ensure that the issues raised, recommendations & strategic direction developed, and next steps are as relevant and credible, as possible.

Specifically, the work will include:

1. Convening minority service organizations to form a Statewide Diverse Elders Coalition to explore what it means to age and serve elders in diverse communities.
2. Gathering elders from diverse communities to share their experiences of aging in Minnesota, their strengths/assets as well as their fears/needs. Review previously developed Community Dialogues with Multicultural Elders Report and begin prioritizing and addressing issues raised.
3. Bring together leaders and elders from diverse communities to review information gathered and make recommendations on a blueprint for action. Develop recommendations regarding diverse older adults for the Minnesota Leadership Council on Aging, Minnesota Board on Aging and other state policymakers.

Additional Project Details:

Community Dialogues with Multicultural Elders was started in early January 2018 and will be partnering with MNLCOA on the Aging Together Minnesota project. Through more than 50 conversations since its inception with elders & program staff from multicultural communities, there was a strong consensus that a new powerful voice of elders to speak & advocate on key issues is needed. During the last 2 months, they have conducted 23 community dialogues with elders from the following communities: Cambodian, Hmong, Karen, Vietnamese, African American, Latinx, Russian, Somali, LGBTQ, Homeless, Labor, Chinese and Jewish in both the Twin Cities and Greater Minnesota. These dialogues met with over 340 elders and resulted in nearly 100 pages of notes from these conversations. During these conversations, they asked questions about what it is like to become an elder, what are the key challenges in life and how elders are and want to be engaged in the community. They recently submitted a report on the key findings and themes from the dialogues that will be part of the
Minnesota Board on Aging’s MN 2030 Plan. Critical to this project is the dissemination of the report and the follow-up discussions with multicultural elders and organizations about the findings.

The Community Dialogues portion of the project will take place through community convenings of elders, establishment of a multicultural elder Leadership Team and collaboration with the developed Statewide Diverse Elders Coalition and local policymakers.

In addition, a Statewide Diverse Elders Coalition will be developed by assessing and convening culturally specific service organizations with aging programming. A national Diverse Elders Coalition currently exists that advocates for policies and programs that improve aging in communities as racially and ethnically diverse people; American Indians and Alaskan Natives; and lesbian, gay, bisexual and/or transgender people. We would like to establish a statewide coalition to make equity-based aging recommendations to the MNLCOA, Minnesota Board on Aging and other state policymakers. In addition, we see the established Statewide Diverse Elders Coalition being able to benefit from the shared learnings of the 32 aging member organizations of the MNLCOA. We intend to gather information on what the program staff view as: strengths/assets and fear/needs of their diverse communities; what they need to be more successful in their aging programming and what learnings we can provide from majority culture aging organizations (MNLCOA members) to improve the programming at their culturally specific organizations. Likewise, the MNLCOA members will learn from these diverse organizations on how to better serve traditionally underserved, aging populations.

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