



*Our mission is to deliver innovative support to lead aging agencies as we work together to promote, protect, and enhance the well-being of older people in Wisconsin.*

## **Advisory Council Meeting Minutes**

***Friday, July 18, 2025 / 10:00 a.m. – 11:30 a.m.***

Microsoft Teams Conference Call

### **Attendees**

***Members Present:*** Dave Denomie, Kathy Gauger, Dave Lowe, Valerie Freres, Doris Bakker, Robert Best, Sheila Check-Moe

***Members Not Present:*** Denise Sweet

***Others Present:*** Rob Wilkinson, Board Vice-Chair; Cookie Lough, Board Member; Nick Musson, Transportation & Aging Plan Specialist; Janet Zander, Advocacy and Public Policy Coordinator; Bryn Ceman, Caregiver Programs Specialist; Lucia Mennen, Communications Director; John Schnabl, Executive Director; Rosanna Mazzara, Operations Coordinator

### **Call to Order:**

*Dave Denomie, Chair*

### **Review and Approval of July 18, 2025 Agenda**

*Motion by Bob Best, seconded by Dave Lowe, to approve July 18, 2025 agenda. Motion unanimously carried.*

### **Review and Approval of February 21, 2025 Draft Meeting Minutes**

*Motion by Dave Lowe, seconded by Bob Best, to approve February 21, 2025 draft meeting minutes. Motion unanimously carried.*



### **Public Comment:**

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None

### **Comments from Chair**

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*Dave Denomie, Chair*

- I am very concerned obviously about budget cuts that are coming and how they are going to roll out and who they will affect. Cuts to Medicaid definitely concern me. I appreciate all those who work tirelessly in our current uncertain work environments. Advocacy is so important and will play a very important role in these uncertain times.

### **GWAAR AC New Member Welcome – Sheila Check-Moe**

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*Nick Musson, Transportation Program Specialist*

- The Advisory Council welcomed Sheila to the group. Sheila resides in the Stevens Point area and has 27 plus years in social work, a medical social worker with Compassus Home Care, and is also an adjunct professor with UMass Global University and Upper Iowa University.

### **Executive Director's Report**

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*John Schnabl, Executive Director*

- In the next week we will be putting out an RFP. It in essence will be redirecting a large chunk of funds, about \$280,000 of funds, to find a legal services provider in our area who will be ultimately providing one-on-one legal benefit assistance for older adults 60 and older. It's going to be a new program established in the state of Wisconsin. Dane county will be adding their funds to our effort, and Milwaukee will be doing their own. This is a result of the federal government mandating and telling the state that GWAAR cannot keep those funds internally at GWAAR, but need to be redirected to a external provider via a contract.
- GWAAR will continue to house the Guardian Support Center for five more years. This hotline provides information to individuals about guardianships, powers of attorney for health, powers of attorney for finance as well as doing outreach into the community.



- GWAAR had its annual ACE Meeting for aging unit directors in Stevens Point. It was a very successful meeting, and we plan on returning to the same venue next year.
- In an effort to make it more effective, Aging Advocacy Day will be done every other year going forward. The next one will be 2027. On off years we will be supporting aging units through technical assistance and training.
- GWAAR is looking to hire a 4<sup>th</sup> EBS Supporting Attorney.
- GWAAR is looking to hire an additional VA Consultant.
- GWAAR has recently hired a replacement for Lori Fernandez, Nutrition Program Specialist, who will be retiring in September. Her replacement is Kristi Cooley and she is from the Portage County ADRC.
- GWAAR has a few board members that will be terming out of their positions at the end of this year.
- Due to most employees working from home, GWAAR is downsizing office space to one suite effective this late fall.
- If you would like a short GWAAR PowerPoint orientation that goes into GWAAR in more detail, please contact Nick. John would be happy to present for a group of Advisory Council members.

### **Advocacy Update**

*Janet Zander, Advocacy and Public Policy Coordinator*

#### **Topics covered:**

- In an effort to be more efficient, Aging Advocacy Day will now be held at the Madison capitol, every other year. This allows aging units to refocus their energies back in their districts, either campaigning for themselves or helping other members of their party campaign.
- State budget process has wrapped up for the 2025-2027 budget. Long delays were expected in getting the state budget passed due to all the things going on at the federal level. But at the end of the day, it was the things happening at the federal level that prompted some almost immediate action by the state legislature. The

- Wisconsin hospital tax got things moving. Everybody realized that if we didn't do something to lift our hospital tax here in Wisconsin, the federal legislation would have capped that tax at one of the lowest levels in the nation. So right now, we don't use that here in Wisconsin at a very high level, but the reconciliation bill would have prohibited any changes to what it was set at now. So, the Wisconsin Hospital Association really spent a significant amount of time with our legislature trying to bring them to an agreement so we could get the rest of this budget through.
- Regarding our priorities in the Department of Health Services budget, we saw some increases to our Aging and Disability Resource Centers, but nowhere near what was needed to meet all of their needs, but it was an additional \$2,000,000 in state funds or 3.7 million total when they look at the federal funds they bring in. And at this point, every little bit helps. We have a lot of ADRC's who are really challenged to meet their full scope of services due to their funding levels. Unfortunately, the legislature chose to not allow any of that increase provided to go to the Tribal Aging and Disability Resource Specialists. I'm not sure what that's about, but it's pretty frustrating given that they also are struggling with meeting the financial obligations for their services. So, we'll have to spend some time on that. Our Independent Living Centers got some additional money annually in the budget of a little over \$200,000. We also put in more money to continue the Caregiver Careers Program; approximately \$1,000,000 which is used to help recruit and train and then retain more workers into the direct care workforce. That's critically needed both in residential care, but also home and community-based care. We also saw some funding increases to continue the 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline grants. Without that funding, we would have seen those rolled back and those have been tremendously successful in being available to people in need and in crisis. The legislature did put in \$7,000,000 over the biennium to continue that work. And last but certainly not least, the Medicaid rates for personal care, home care, private duty nursing were all elevated, recognizing that the wages of workers are driven by the Medicaid rates that those workers agencies receive, and the in order to be at even close to competitive and avoid a big loss of workers continually, we needed to be able to lift those rates and lift those wages to closer to a livable wage and begin to address benefits. In the transportation budget, which is where a lot of our other items were, we did not see an increase in transit funding or specialized transportation, but we did see an increase in paratransit aides and that is important to our network who live in an area where there is a mass transit system.
  - The biggest job we have now is to help people understand and be educated about what's happening but also understand that the advocacy work isn't done. Too often I'm hearing, well, the state budgets done. The Reconciliation bill is done. We don't

have anything more to do, and well we do have a lot more to do. Whether it's about other state legislation or the implementation of this work, we cannot stop. There are too many things at risk. And so, I my job is just going to be to keep cheerleading for people so that they understand.

- For more advocacy details, please see Janet's full written report.

### **GWAAR AC New Member Sub-Committee – Tony Omernik**

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*Nick Musson, OAA Consultant- Transportation Specialist*

- The subcommittee, which includes me, David and Bob, met with Tony Omernik and gave him a presentation about the committee and had a very good discussion. Tony is a wealth of knowledge and has actually over 40 years of not-for-profit organization experience. He served youth, older adults and retirees, low-income individuals, people with disabilities and those affected by disaster events. He has a number of specific skills that can be extremely useful to the committee. He's experienced in community engagement, public speaking, board development, strategic planning, volunteer management, resource development, budgeting and fiscal oversight. He has just a wealth of knowledge and we are very excited that he's interested in joining the council. Rosanna did send out Tony's application and the responses to the questions to everybody, so you should have had an opportunity to go over those. This is an opportunity to ask any questions and ask for a motion to add Tony to the Advisory Council. With Tony, GWAAR now has 9 council members.

*Motion by Sheila Check-Moe, seconded by Bob Best, to add Tony Omernick to the Advisory Council. Motion unanimously carried.*

### **GWAAR Communication / Social Media**

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*Bryn Ceman, Caregiver Programs Specialist*

*Lucia Mennen, Communications Director*

- Nick: I wanted to bring in a couple individuals from GWAAR's team to talk to you about GWAAR's current communication and social media efforts and give you an opportunity to ask questions and or give us your thoughts and suggestions. There is always room for improvement.
- Bryn Ceman gave a PowerPoint presentation about how, as GWAAR's Caregiver Programs Specialist, she uses social media and some of the benefits it gives and provides for our caregiver coordinators and the program statewide.

- [Bryn:](#) There has been turnover even before the change in the political landscape which caused confusion, and frustration in caregiver programs, so whatever we can do as caregiver program specialists to lift that training, promote, share, educate and bring public awareness at a local level is important. Social media is a piece of that puzzle, because it is a free, low-cost opportunity to do so. We use Facebook, and right now that's all our Wisconsin Family Caregiver Support Alliance promotes on. We do have a close partnership with an agency called the Respite Care Association of Wisconsin, and they do a lot of posting on LinkedIn, so that's a potential for the future. Live streaming on social media can also provide opportunities.
- We have found on other platforms that when you live stream events or maybe you have a Facebook video of an event that's happening live, you can get some really fabulous turn out as far as engagement, people making comments, and then viewership. We have not done that, but we can see that as being very valuable in advocacy efforts.
- Social media analytics are also very important to review. I have had the opportunity to get a little bit better with our analytics through spending time and clicking on the buttons and kind of going through things month by month.
- The GWAAR newsletter is also an integral part of our communication efforts to the aging network. November is National Family Caregiver Month, and an entire toolkit is made available. We've already approached the Governor's office for the proclamation. We typically publish that. We also offer a sample press release for posting in the local newspaper and what resources are available to give caregivers support, respite and socialization
- For more details, please see Bryn's entire PowerPoint presentation.
- [Lucia:](#) I'm going to touch on some of the communication channels that we currently use to reach our partners and the public. First, we have our weekly newsletter, so if you do not subscribe to that, let me know, we can get you signed up. We also have an external SharePoint site; it's essentially just a website that's available for people who register to use it. It's for our ADRC directors, anybody in the aging network basically that has a need for some of the aging plans, things like that. We also have a news feed with some of our announcements and events and then we have our website which will be transitioning to pretty much all public facing content and then we also have an opportunity to put news there.

- As far as social media goes, GWAAR does not have a huge presence, since I only work 20 hours a week. Social media can be demanding for the care and feeding, which would require more hours. Our programs are on Facebook and on LinkedIn. Our nutrition team has been providing some great recipes, so I've been posting those and sure enough, we have some really nice small organic growth. In the future, I'm also going to start following some other accounts. On LinkedIn you'll be seeing more there with our job postings and maybe just some again, real low-key news. Our external SharePoint site is going to be expanding some of the content that's already out there. If you see something that you really like or maybe somebody we should be following, commenting on, let me know. We'll see what we can do. Lastly, I will send out a survey to you all so you can let us know how you are using social media and asking for any comments and questions you may have.
- For more details, please see Lucia's PowerPoint presentation.

### **GWAAR Aging Plan Updates**

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*Nick Musson, Transportation & Aging Plan Specialist*

- The state finished creating their own aging plan and submitted their 2025-2027 aging plan to the Administration of Community and Living and is waiting for final approval and we anticipate it will be approved shortly.
- County/Tribal Aging Unit plans have been approved and have been implementing them. In addition, GWAAR program specialists conduct a meeting with the aging units to evaluate goal/success and make needed changes if necessary. Updates will be provided to the Advisory Council.
- Due to federal administration changes, GWAAR's aging plan may need some slight language changes. Updates on this will also be shared with the Advisory Council.

### **Future Meeting Topics**

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*Nick Musson, Transportation & Aging Plan Specialist*

Explore topics:

- Tech Connect
- Google Grant Update/ Technology Ambassadors
- New hires invitation to introduce themselves to AC:
  - Donna Rosner, Elder Abuse Program Manager



- Kristi Cooley, Nutrition Program Specialist

### **Member Sharing**

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*All*

- Sheila Check-Moe asked if we could invite a former state representative to come speak to the Advisory Council. Nick and Janet will work with Sheila on her idea.

**Adjournment Time: 11:47 a.m.**

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**Next Meeting Date: *October 3, 2025 In-person at Portage County ADRC***

**Future 2025 Meeting Dates:**

*November 14, 2025*

**Recorder: Rosanna Mazzara, Operations Coordinator**