



- I would pass a law to make every building totally accessible, and have unlimited funding for home modifications for the disabled.
- I would urge everyone to pay attention to the disparity seniors of color receive as the level of services to people of color are abysmal; and I would require equitable distribution of resources to people of all races.

## **PROGRAM**

Introduction of VAN and presenters by Tom Hyder.

Heidi Holste of AARP presented on “How to be an effective advocate.” Heidi stated that, on behalf of more than 700,000 older Minnesotans and their families, AARP’s 2008 legislative priorities are to improve health care for Minnesotans, support long-term caregivers, and protect wireless telephone consumers. AARP would welcome citizen advocates, and Heidi gave some suggestions on how to be an effective advocate or lobbyist:

- You should know a few important details about your elected officials, such as their committee’s and their voting records or position statements that support or oppose your issues (check the legislative references known as the “Green” or “Red” books);
- You can contact your Senator or Representative via email, letter writing; phone calls; or by requesting a meeting.
- Always be polite to officials and staff, tell them who you are and who you are affiliated with, be prepared, tell them why you hold your position, and how the issue affects you.
- Make your request, ask for their vote or position on the issue; bring materials to leave behind and know the opposition’s concerns.
- Don’t be intimidated or afraid to ask questions.
- Always remember to thank them for their time.

Leni Wilcox, Wilder Foundation and co-chair of the MN Leadership Council on Aging (MNLCoA), opened with a brief description on the work of the Wilder Foundation, noting that it is a non-profit services foundation focusing on long-term care services for over 2000 seniors. She then gave a brief history of MNLCoA which came into existence due to a meeting between Dawn Simonson and Pete Wycoff. They thought about the number of the agencies working in the aging field and how a coalition of those agencies would be a powerful force in dealing with the changing demographics of the older population, which would be able to provide more articulate advocacy for seniors. MNLCoA started in 2004, developed a mission statement whose scope would include being a key advocacy organization and a vehicle for communication regarding aging issues and legislative agendas. The MNLCoA membership is a great group with common goals. The MNLCoA held an Aging Policy Summit in January, 2008 to create a vision and framework that aligns and integrates various long-term care policies, systems reform and legislative initiatives.

Dawn Simonson, Metropolitan Area Agency on Aging (MAAA), spoke about MAAA’s relationship with the Vital Aging Network (VAN), noting that she is a partner in their Leadership Group. Recognizing that there would be a short legislative session which is expected to focus on the budget, it was still necessary to communicate aging issues going forward. There are other partner organizations also working on aging issues among which are: the Dept. of Human Services, MN Board on Aging, the MN Memory Care Project, the MN Falls Prevention Project, Long-Term Care Redesign, the Culture

Change Coalition and Communities for a Lifetime. The MN Board on Aging's Transform 2010 Project has been established to redefine work and retirement, support caregivers of all ages, foster the Communities for a Lifetime initiative, improve health and long-term care services and maximize the use of technology. Transform 2010 is an opportunity for all sectors of the community to plan for an aging society. The goal of the Communities for a Lifetime initiative is to provide tools to manage chronic disease and create a strong workforce; and to offer caregiver support which would save money and provide an emotional connection to the care receiver. The goal of VAN, in the area of systems change, is to promote consumer choice, direction and information; provide tools for chronic disease management and prevention; establish proven and effective service models; integrate health and community long-term care models; and promote the use of technology. There is a need for a "medical home" navigator; tools to find affordable and accessible services; and find caregiver support which technology would support. VAN is also interested in preparing for the age wave and cost containment. The 2008 legislative priorities established by the Board on Aging include adequate consumer protection and advocacy; long-term care imperatives such as cost of living adjustments, property tax inequities and rebasing nursing facility rates; and expanding access to public transportation.

Strategies to accomplish these goals include developing a stronger array of home and community-based services; improving access to existing services; and providing support to family caregivers.

Finally, Dawn summarized actions needed going forward: to reframe the discussion on long-term care; encourage more advocacy and efforts to promote aging initiatives; build a regime of mutual gain, provide innovative, cost effective, quality senior service products; and encourage community involvement in senior issues.