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Anne Osmer Reporting

Local Agencies Receive Funds to Track Senior Population Trends

Two local agencies dedicated to helping older adults will share \$275,000 to conduct a two-year pilot program entitled Seniors Count! The project, the first of its kind for older adults, will collect data about senior demographics from a variety of sources, then organize and analyze it to create a comprehensive database about southeast Michigan's growing senior population.

Wayne State University's Institute of Gerontology will partner with Adult Well-Being Services, a local non-profit service agency, to conduct the first phase of the two-phase study.

"Our goal is to paint a complete and accurate picture of the social, economic and health status of seniors in the seven county area of southeast Michigan," said Thomas B. Jankowski, director of the project's data core and associate director of research at the Institute of Gerontology. "The senior population in southeast Michigan will double in the next 30 years, and we must be ready for the challenges and opportunities that will bring."

Sara Gleicher, advocacy director of Adult Well-Being Services, will share project responsibilities as community core director, seeking input from service providers and policy makers about the data they find most useful.

President and CEO of Adult Well-Being Services Karen Schrock said the project is modeled after the successful Kids Count! data collection, used for years by advocacy groups and policy makers because of its proven accuracy. "Ours is the first project of its kind for older adults," Schrock said. "Our long-term goal is to expand the model to all of Michigan and then other states where it is most needed."

Gleicher added that accurate information about persons age 50 and up is critical for the health of seniors and their communities, to plan services and fund programs to best serve older residents. "Including seniors with developmental disabilities," she said, "who risk being overlooked." A recent study by the National Association of Area Agencies on Aging found that only 46% of American communities are prepared to adequately address the needs of a growing elderly population.

Institute of Gerontology Director Peter Lichtenberg explained that although demographic information about older adults has been collected, it is scattered across numerous agencies with no centralized way to extract meaning from the data. "It is the linkage of data from multiple sources that will significantly increase our understanding of the impact of an aging community," Dr. Lichtenberg said.

Funding for the project came from the [Kresge Foundation](#), the [Community Foundation for Southeast Michigan](#), and the American House Foundation. "The Kresge Foundation applauds the project's commitment to promote the health, well-being and independence of older adults and their families," said Rip Rapson, president and CEO of the Kresge Foundation.

For more information or to learn about volunteer opportunities, contact WSU Institute of Gerontology Media Director, Cheryl Deep, at (313) 577-2297, ext. 285.

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