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Area Agency on Aging recognized with awards at national conference

CHICAGO, Ill. — Region IV Area Agency on Aging (AAA) was recognized this week with two national awards at the USAgeing 50th Annual Conference and Tradeshow in Chicago, Illinois.

AAA won the 2025 Aging Innovations Award from USAgeing in the Healthy Aging category and placed first overall in the nation in all categories garnering a \$2,500 cash prize.

The award was given in recognition of its in-home behavioral health counseling program, which addresses the critical shortage of accessible mental health services for older adults and caregivers.

“This program breaks barriers to mental health care in Southwest Michigan,” AAA Chief Executive Officer Christine Vanlandingham said. “The program has served over 78 older adults and caregivers, delivering measurable improvements in mental health and emotional well-being.”

Licensed clinical social workers provide in-home counseling for depression, anxiety, grief and substance use disorders. Clients report improved mood and sleep quality; reduced anxiety, depression and loneliness; increased socialization and problem-solving skills; and reduced stress and enhanced ability to manage responsibilities for caregivers.

The program, launched in 2022, is part of AAA’s growing Integrated Care at Home program, which provides primary care, nutritional counseling and chronic care management to folks who have difficulty getting to their health care appointments.

“We are honored to receive this award and want to thank our program partners and funders, the Michigan Health Endowment Fund, United Way of Southwest Michigan and the Frederick S. Upton Foundation, who we could not do this work without,” Vanlandingham said.

Also, during the conference, AAA won the 2025 Aging Achievement Award from USAgeing in the Healthy Aging category for a policy project that looked at disparate health outcomes among older adults living in Southwest Michigan. Through community conversations, AAA heard firsthand about barriers to access services and developed an action plan. Targeted outreach, improved follow-up and streamlined service authorization resulted in increased service delivery to and improved clients’ trust in Aging Network providers.

Vanlandingham, AAA Chief Operations Officer Theresa Uhrich, Integrated Care at Home Manager Michelle Barnes, and several other AAA staff were present at the USAging Conference to accept the awards.

“At USAging, we are proud to celebrate the exceptional accomplishments of the 2025 Aging Innovations & Achievement Awards recipients—especially as we mark the 50th anniversary of USAging and our Annual Conference and Tradeshow,” said USAging CEO Sandy Markwood. “These award-winning programs exemplify the creativity, dedication and impact that define our Aging Network. They are not only improving the lives of older adults and caregivers today, but also shaping a stronger, more supportive future for aging in every community across the country.”

USAging is the national association representing and supporting the network of Area Agencies on Aging.

USAging presented 26 Aging Achievement Awards and 15 Aging Innovations Awards to programs in a variety of areas, including advocacy; agency operations; caregiving; community planning and livable communities; diversity, equity and inclusion; economic security; elder abuse prevention; health–social care integration; healthy aging; home and community-based services; housing and homelessness; kinship and grandfamily support; nutrition; technology; social engagement; transportation and mobility; and workforce development and volunteerism. You can read about all winners here:

https://www.usaging.org/Files/AIA%20Awards_2025_Final.pdf

Learn more about USAging at: <https://www.usaging.org/>

For more information on Area Agency on Aging’s Integrated Care at Home program visit www.AreaAgencyonAging.org or call 800-654-2810.

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Region IV Area Agency on Aging has been serving Southwest Michigan with aging and disability services for over 50 years. RIV AAA is a private, not-for-profit corporation. Established in 1974 for the business of developing age supportive commerce and services, it plays a major role in planning, funding, and delivery of a host of services. Empowerment and independence of community members are driving themes behind its efforts. Designated by the State of Michigan to receive federal Older Americans Act funds for planning and development, the agency manages an array of government contracts for service delivery in Southwest Michigan. Its primary service area includes Berrien, Cass, and Van Buren counties. For more information about the RIVAAA, visit www.areaagencyonaging.org.