



Connecting Older Adults with Community-based Resources and Options

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AgeOptions Receives National Award For the Make Medicare Work Coalition

AgeOptions received one of three top awards from the National Association of Area Agencies on Aging (n4a) for the Make Medicare Work Coalition, an initiative that serves older adults and people with disabilities by identifying the information and support they need to obtain health care coverage and remain independent in their own homes and communities.

The Innovations in Aging Award was presented to Jonathan Lavin, president and CEO of AgeOptions, in an award ceremony on July 18 in Washington, D.C. AgeOptions was honored as one of the three top-ranking programs among 13 receiving Aging Innovation Awards.

AgeOptions, the Area Agency on Aging of suburban Cook County, was recognized for its innovative spirit and leadership in the Make Medicare Work Coalition (MMW), a statewide partnership started in 2005 to provide older adults and people with disabilities with education and decision-making support on health care plans, the Medicare Part D prescription drug program, state prescription plans and managed care.

The coalition is co-led by AgeOptions, Progress Center for Independent Living and Health & Disability Advocates. Members include Illinois' 13 Area Agencies on Aging and more than 700 people from 260 organizations, including local, state and federal agencies, social service and health care providers, advocates and a variety of community-based organizations.

MMW provides service to consumers, trains and supports professionals and volunteers, and advocates on behalf of seniors and people with disabilities throughout Illinois, bringing members' experience and interests to health care policy-makers and elected officials.

Last year, MMW coalition partners in suburban Cook County alone provided 69,348 counseling sessions, public education events for 26,393 consumers and assisted with 21,024 applications for federal and state health benefit programs. These programs saved consumers an estimated \$35 million. Coalition members provided MMW-created informational materials to an additional 21,700 service providers and consumers.

“The strong partnership among the three agencies in the MMW leadership team and the participation and support of the coalition members, are key to the program’s success,” Lavin said. “Through this collaborative effort, MMW bolsters the ability of local agencies to provide services to groups that are often underserved, including those in low-income communities, people who are deaf or hard-of hearing and residents whose first language is not English.”

Lavin expressed his appreciation to Terri Gendel, AgeOptions director of benefits and advocacy, for her leadership of the program. MMW is funded with generous support from The Chicago Community Trust, Michael Reese Health Trust and The Retirement Research Foundation.

Lavin also expressed gratitude to n4a for recognizing the value of the MMW coalition to the community. He noted that the \$1,500 award will be doubled, thanks to a matching grant to AgeOptions for MMW.

The n4a awards are sponsored by CST *your* Link to Life (CST-LTL), a provider of personal emergency response systems, medication management systems and TeleHealth solutions.

AgeOptions and its network of community agencies are the principal source of information regarding senior services in suburban Cook County, Ill. A nonprofit organization located in Oak Park, AgeOptions has served the older adults of suburban Cook County and their caregivers as an Area Agency on Aging since 1974. For more information, please visit the Agency website at www.ageoptions.org.

AgeOptions connects adults age 60 and over with resources and service options so they can live their lives to the fullest and remain in their homes as long as possible. In 2010 we met the needs of more than 198,500 individuals in 130 communities within 30 townships that have a diverse population of 460,000 older adults. AgeOptions advocates, plans, develops and funds programs and coordinates a network of community-based senior service agencies to ensure an effective and efficient system of service delivery. Support is provided through the Older Americans Act, Illinois General Revenue Funds, local funds and individual contributions.