



Vital Aging Network

2024 IMPACT REPORT



“Aging is not lost youth, but a new stage of opportunity and strength”

– BETTY FRIEDAN

In 2024, the **Vital Aging Network (VAN)** continued to advance its mission of promoting self-determination, civic engagement, and well-being among older adults across Minnesota. Rooted in a peer-led approach, VAN empowers individuals to take an active role in shaping their health, community life, and aging experience.

Through its signature programs-**Wellness 50+** and **Aging with Gusto**, VAN reached hundreds of older adults and fostered deeper community connections, stronger civic partnerships.

Our Mission

Promote self-determination, civic engagement and personal growth for people as they age.

We empower people to live their best lives through education, leadership development and opportunities to connect.

Our Values

Promote a positive perspective on aging

Focus on older adults as change agents for themselves and others

Encourage older adults to contribute to their communities

Address societal and systemic barriers that interfere with positive aging

Work as an older adult led organization

Dear Friends and Supporters,

As we close the chapter on 2024, I want to take a moment to reflect with deep gratitude on the incredible work the Vital Aging Network community has accomplished over the past year. It has been a year of both transition and impact—a time when VAN’s mission of supporting self-determination, civic engagement, and personal growth for people as they age remained more vital than ever.

Thanks to the passion and dedication of our volunteers, partners, and supporters, VAN continued to empower individuals to take charge of their aging journeys. In 2024,

Supported **Wellness 50+** teams in communities like Oakdale and the Twin Cities, promoting peer-led programs focused on physical, social, and emotional well-being.

Offered **community workshops and virtual learning sessions** that brought older adults together to explore purpose, connection, and resilience.

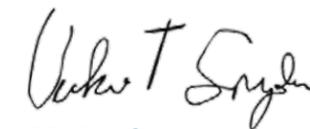
Engaged in **important conversations about the future of VAN**, exploring sustainable partnerships to carry the mission forward with strength and clarity.

Continued to **amplify the voices of older adults** by creating spaces where their lived experiences and leadership shaped our work from the ground up.

None of this would have been possible without you. Whether you attended an event, led a local team, facilitated a discussion, or simply cheered us on—thank you. Your commitment fuels VAN’s vision of aging as a time of possibility, connection, and contribution.

As we look to the future, the Board remains committed to building on VAN’s strong foundation while preparing for what’s next. We invite you to stay engaged, offer your insight, and help shape the evolving story of this vibrant network.

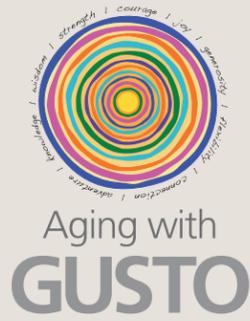
With appreciation,



Vickie Snyder

*Board Chair
Vital Aging Network*



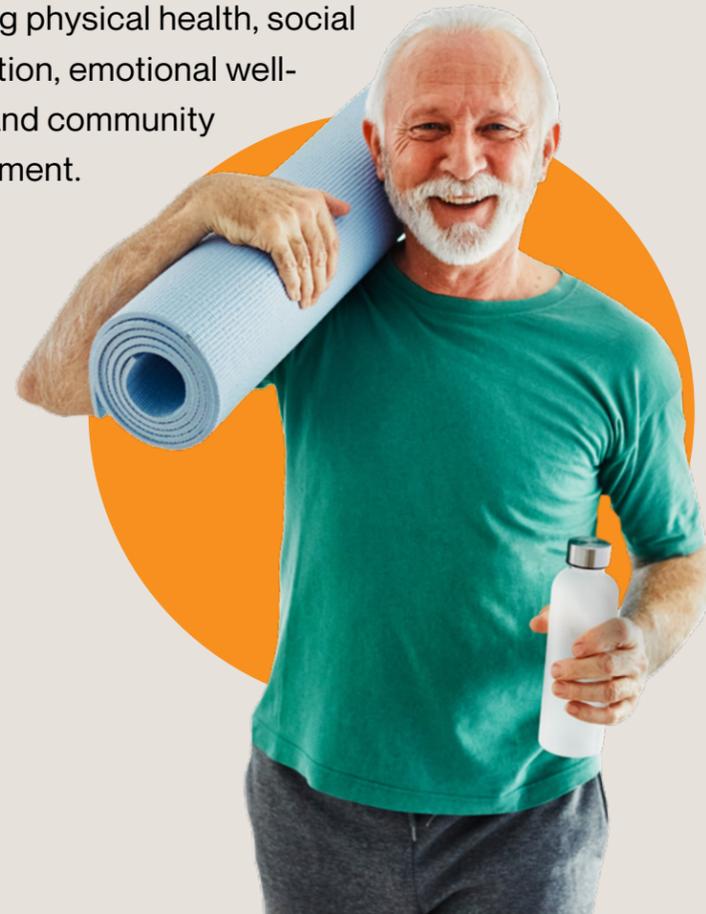


Aging with Gusto is a community-driven program that promotes positive views on aging, supports self-determination, and invites people of all ages to explore how perceptions of aging shape our lives and communities—while increasing awareness of ageism and its impact on beliefs, behaviors, and experiences as we grow older.



Wellness 50+

Wellness 50+ is a community-driven initiative that empowers older adults to lead local programs fostering physical health, social connection, emotional well-being, and community engagement.



In 2024, through the Wellness 50+ and Aging with Gusto program offerings, VAN served over **2,155 participants** and held over **150 program sessions and events**.

These programs covered a wide range of areas including physical activity, mental health, healthy behaviors and nutrition, education and knowledge acquisition, socialization, discussions about aging, training about ageism, resource sharing, and outreach.

Program Outcomes

- In collaboration with the City of Oakdale, county staff, and community members, Oakdale Wellness 50+ contributed to Age-Friendly Oakdale, an initiative that began in 2021 when Oakdale joined the AARP Network of Age-Friendly Communities by **helping develop a three-year Age-Friendly Action Plan that focused on three key domains: transportation, social participation and inclusion, and home community safety**.
- Aging with Gusto **expanded facilitation team by 33%**—from 6 to 8 facilitators.
- Oakdale Wellness 50+ communications network **expanded to 400+ subscribers (30% increase from 2023)**
- Twin Cities Wellness 50+ participants reported high satisfaction. **On average, 79% of participants gave positive ratings** across all categories, highlighting the program's success in delivering meaningful and well-executed experiences for older adults.
- With the use of Meetup, the Twin Cities Wellness 50+ group grew from **618 members in 2023 to 956 members in 2024—a 54.7% increase**—serving as a key tool for outreach and engagement. many events—particularly evening offerings—had waiting lists, reflecting strong demand and community enthusiasm.



Our network is saying good things.

“ My experience with Aging with Gusto has been nothing short of transformative. It has not only encouraged me to adopt a more positive and empowered perspective on aging but has also heightened my awareness of ageism and its pervasive influence on societal attitudes, behaviors, and experiences related to growing older. It’s a crucial conversation that we all need to engage in. Moreover, the workshop has provided invaluable insights on how to maintain our overall well-being as we age, and it offers practical strategies for navigating the challenges that inevitably come our way. In essence, the Aging with Gusto workshops have been inspirational, guiding me towards a future where I can embrace each stage of life with purpose. I am immensely grateful for the wisdom I gained and I wholeheartedly recommend this workshop to anyone seeking to approach aging with gusto.”

DEB TAYLOR, (RETIRED) DIRECTOR SENIOR COMMUNITY SERVICES

“ Hiking in the county parks—many of which we might have visited other wise—opened our eyes to the beauty and uniqueness of each one.”

TWIN CITIES WELLNESS 50+ PARTICIPANT

“ The blood drive at Oakdale Discovery Center was the best experience I’ve had as a donor—so organized and welcoming!”

OAKDALE WELLNESS 50+ PARTICIPANT

“ I appreciated the specific ideas on how to respond to ageism in everyday situations.”

AGING WITH GUSTO PARTICIPANT

“ After most of our active events—whether it’s hiking, biking, or kayaking—we gather at a restaurant for lunch. It’s a natural way to extend the connection.”

TWIN CITIES WELLNESS 50+ PARTICIPANT

“ Mahjong has become part of my routine—mentally engaging and socially enriching.”

OAKDALE WELLNESS 50+ PARTICIPANT

“ Hiking in the county parks—many of which we might not have visited other wise—opened our eyes to the beauty and uniqueness of each one.”

TWIN CITIES WELLNESS 50+ PARTICIPANT

“ We offer ways to stay active and then socialize afterward. That combination keeps people coming back.”

TWIN CITIES WELLNESS 50+ PARTICIPANT

“ I’ve expanded my social network and made new friends thanks to Oakdale Wellness and VAN.”

OAKDALE WELLNESS 50+ PARTICIPANT

“ I appreciated the specific ideas on how to respond to ageism in everyday situations.”

AGING WITH GUSTO PARTICIPANT

“ It is helpful to share with others experiences and different perspectives of aging.”

AGING WITH GUSTO PARTICIPANT

“ It was so fun getting together with this group. It’s a social event, so you get to visit with other people, but it also exercises the mind because you’re learning a new game—or even playing a familiar one.”

TWIN CITIES WELLNESS 50+ PARTICIPANT

“ Game Night? Always fully booked. The time flies by.”

TWIN CITIES WELLNESS 50+ PARTICIPANT

“ Kayaking was peaceful and beautiful. Seeing fish and birds and feeling the calming water—sharing that with new friends made it even better.”

TWIN CITIES WELLNESS 50+ PARTICIPANT

“ Positive views of aging are important, and this program helped reinforce that.”

AGING WITH GUSTO PARTICIPANT

“ I appreciated the opportunity to connect with others on how aging is going for them—sharing challenges, resources, and opportunities.”

AGING WITH GUSTO PARTICIPANT

“ We’ve enjoyed the fellowship and laughter with all the activities.”

TWIN CITIES WELLNESS 50+ PARTICIPANT

“ Thanks for the Wednesday Walks and Essentrics... so good to have people around to talk with.”

OAKDALE WELLNESS 50+ PARTICIPANT



We need you to keep this going.

This year, the Vital Aging Network helped hundreds of older adults take steps—sometimes literal ones—toward health, connection, and purpose.

We saw it in Oakdale, where older adults gathered weekly to walk and talk, building relationships that stretched far beyond the trails. We saw it in Aging with Gusto sessions, where people opened up about ageism—sometimes for the first time—and found strength in being heard. We saw it in Twin Cities activities, where kayaking trips, game nights, and hikes regularly filled to capacity, often with waiting lists. Older adults weren't just showing up—they were leading the way.

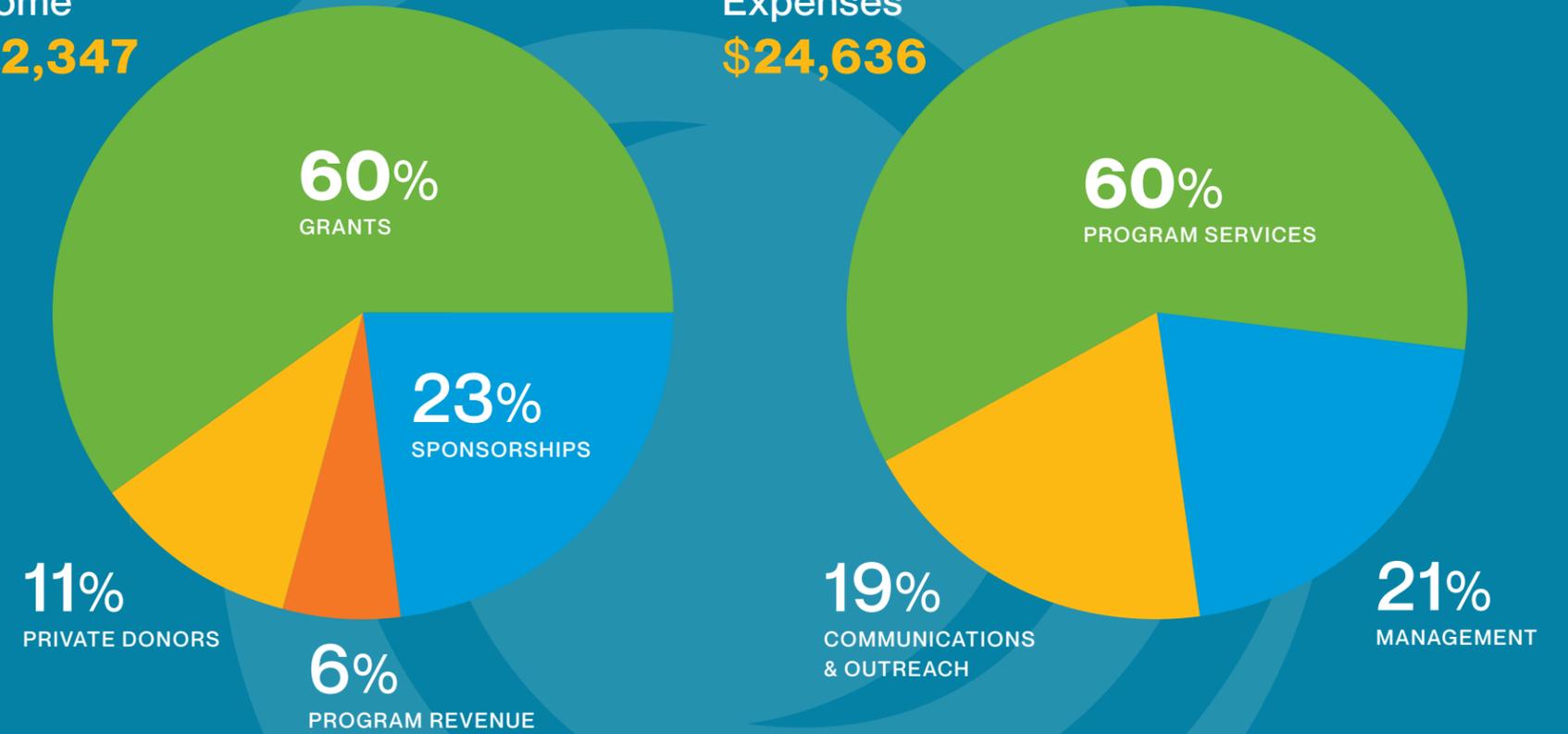
We're proud of what we've accomplished. But we're also clear-eyed: We can't continue—or grow—without your help.



2024 Financials

Income
\$32,347

Expenses
\$24,636



2024 FUNDERS

- 3M FOUNDATION
- HUGH J ANDERSEN FOUNDATION
- M HEALTH FAIRVIEW
- AGE FRIENDLY GRANT
- PRIVATE DONORS

We need your support now.

VAN runs on an incredibly lean structure. We have no full-time staff. We don't spend on office space. Nearly everything we do is led by volunteers. And yet, our reach is wide, and our impact is real.

But we're at a turning point. Program costs have gone up. Demand for what we offer continues to grow. And new opportunities—to reach more people, build stronger partnerships, and offer consistent, high-quality programming—require resources we simply don't have.

That's why your donation matters now more than ever.

Your donation matters now more than ever. When you donate to VAN, you're not just giving money. You're investing in belonging. In mobility. In mental health. In joy. In purpose. You're helping someone walk into a room, feel welcomed, and leave stronger—maybe even transformed.

Please consider a gift today.

You can donate online at vital-aging-network.org/donate or click the link below:

Every dollar helps us:

Offer free or low-cost programs

Train and support peer leaders

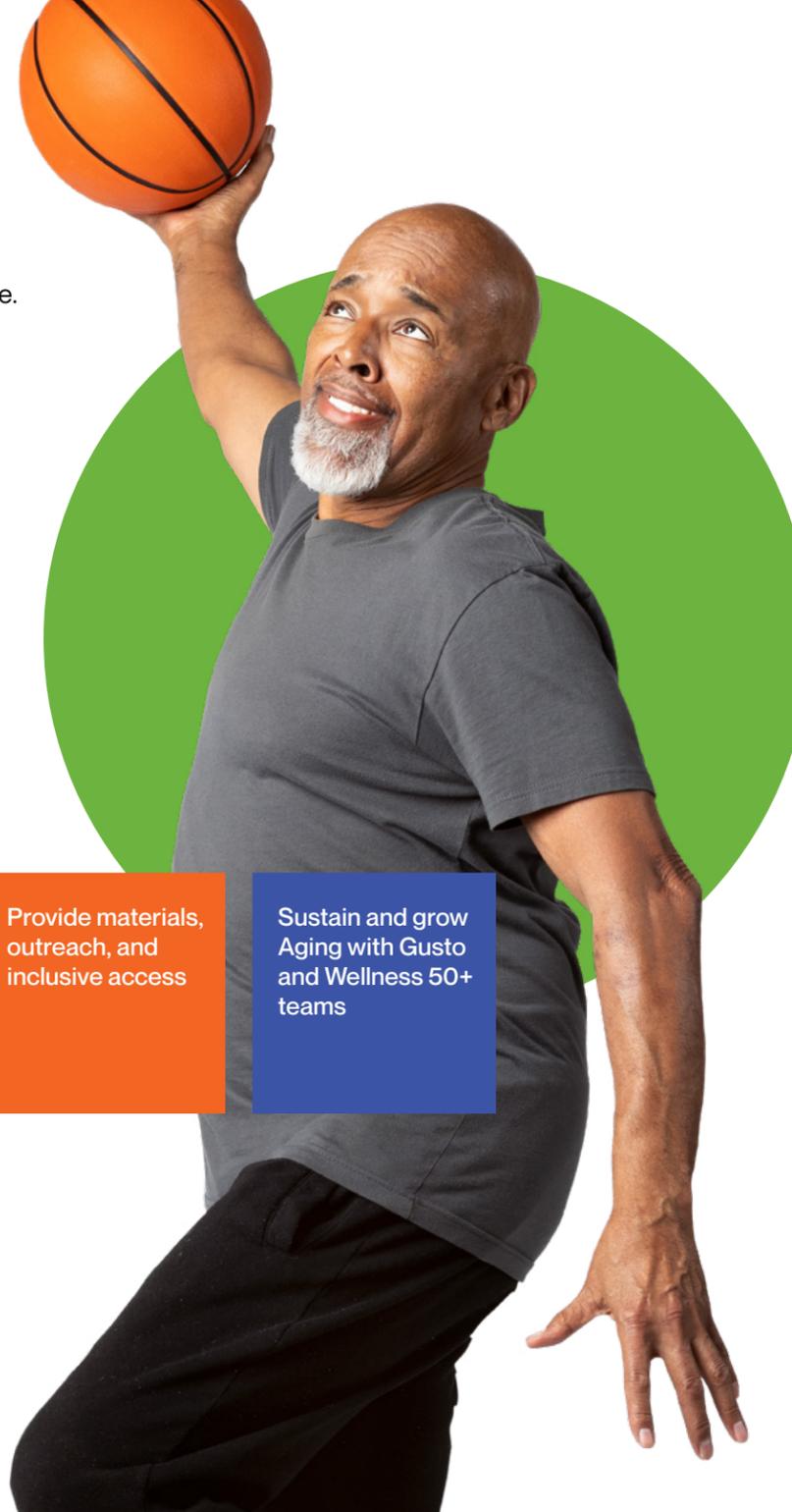
Reserve space for community gatherings

Provide materials, outreach, and inclusive access

Sustain and grow Aging with Gusto and Wellness 50+ teams

<https://givebutter.com/UjTduS>

No amount is too small. Every gift helps someone feel seen, valued, and supported.



Volunteer with us.

Our work is possible because people step up.

We need:

- Walk leaders, event helpers, and facilitators
- Communications volunteers to support newsletters, storytelling, and outreach
- People with finance or grant experience to assist with budgeting and reporting
- Leaders who've run organizations to help guide VAN's strategic future

Whether you want to lead an activity once a month or contribute your skills behind the scenes, there's a place for you here. We're peer-led and people-powered—and we'd love to welcome you to the team.

Partner with us.

We believe collaboration makes us stronger. In 2024, we worked with libraries, city departments, community health groups, and others to help more older adults live well and stay connected.

Now, we're seeking more mission-aligned partners who can help us expand and sustain our work.

We're especially looking for:

- Facility partners to host classes, workshops, and wellness activities
- Program partners to co-create or co-host events that serve older adults
- Funding partners—grantmakers, sponsors, or donors—who can support continued impact

If your organization values aging with purpose, inclusion, and community-led solutions, let's talk. Together, we can reach more people and build something truly meaningful.

Staff

AWG Task Force

Sally Brown, Donna Comer, Barb Rose, Susan Maples, Joann Ellis

AWG Facilitators & Community of Learning Members

Sally Brown, Donna Comer, Barb Rose, Joann Ellis, Mary Page, Carol Bowman, Bob Held, Sarah Snapp, Marion McCarthy, Susan Maples

Twin Cities Wellness 50+

Debra Kuehne, Jan Cunningham, and Warren Samuelson

Oakdale Wellness 50+

Bonnie Wilson, Jackie Chlebeck, Janet Skeie, Jan Cunningham, Susan Weum, Joan Grzywinski, Kathy Sibbel, Mark Skeie, Polly Carlson, Colleen Herrmann, Deb Kuehne. Lolita Cox, Donna Hemenway, Cheryl Hermann, Betsy Hoekstra, Kate Rivard

Communications

Mary Nosek

Accountant

Terry Nielsen

Partners

Minnesota Leadership Council on Aging (MNLCOA)

YMCA Forever Well Programs

Episcopal Homes—St. Paul

Ramsey County Healthy Aging Initiative

Oakdale Park and Rec-Discovery Center, Fire Department, and Police Department

Washington County Parks, Library and Public Health

Library—Oakdale

Wahoo Adventures

M Health

Board Roster

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Board Chair

Mark Skeie
Treasurer/Executive Director

Mary Quirk
Ex officio

Donna Comer
Board Member

Mary Nosek
Board Member

Kris Orluck
Board Member-Secretary

Chris Farris
Board Member

Sally Brown
Ex officio

Jan Cunningham
Board Member

Joleen Kroelkucki
Board Member



Vital Aging Network

Lake Elmo, MN 55042

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<https://vital-aging-network.org/>

<https://vital-aging-network.org/volunteer-opportunities/>

<https://givebutter.com/UjTduS>



Why It matters.

This isn't about charity—it's about dignity. It's about recognizing that older adults deserve more than services; they deserve leadership roles, meaningful connections, and opportunities to shape their communities.

At VAN, we don't just serve older adults—we believe in them. We listen to them. We build programs that let them step forward and thrive.

And we've seen what happens when they do. The smiles, the energy, the transformation—it's real. And it's worth investing in.

Let's keep this going. Together.

If you believe aging is a time for purpose and connection, not emptiness and isolation —

If you believe thriving—not just surviving—is for everyone —

If you believe older adults are leaders and contributors, not overlooked or underestimated —”

Then we invite you to stand with us.

Give what you can. Share your time or talents. Partner with us in this mission.

Let's continue building a Minnesota where older adults lead the way—

Because they already are.