Guidance Group for Healthy Aging Members
Long Range Planning – Healthy Aging Initiative

September 2026 – January 2027

The Healthy Aging Guidance Group brings together diverse partners from across sectors to support the Minnesota Management and Budget (MMB) Long-Range Planning (LRP) as it develops recommendations for a statewide healthy aging implementation plan.

The Guidance Group will serve to help:

- Strengthen shared understanding of healthy aging in Minnesota
- Review and make meaning of emerging findings and research
- Explore governance and implementation considerations
- Surface opportunities, tensions, tradeoffs, and gaps
- Provide feedback on emerging recommendations and legislative report components

The Guidance Group is intended to support thoughtful dialogue, strategic reflection, and practical guidance as LRP advances this work. It is not a formal decision-making body. This work supports the broader legislative letter of agreement and appropriation to develop a healthy aging multi-sector plan focused on implementation and informed by the voices of Minnesotans, especially older adults and their families.



Jocelyn Ancheta. Since retiring in April of 2022, at the tail end of the COVID pandemic, Jocelyn has been practicing healthy aging: walking daily, eating healthy, connecting to community members as much as possible, and traveling as time and budget allows. She is a member of the Minnesota Filipino Senior Association. Most recently, she was on the board of the Stevens Square Foundation, helping review grants and visiting organizations working with the senior population. She is a past board member of the Philippine Community Center of Minnesota and treasurer of the Filipino American Women's Network, MN. She was a planning manager leading the team at St. Paul-Ramsey County Public Health Department for a community health assessment that helped guide the work of public health. She was a co-lead on the Healthy Aging team. She led an outreach team during COVID. She also took on an interim role as manager of the sexual violence prevention team. Other prior roles included eight years as senior program officer at Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Minnesota Foundation; a program officer at The McKnight Foundation for 11 years; a program manager at the Minnesota Department of Public Safety for four years and a project manager for Metro Deaf Seniors for two years.



Sheana Benitez. Boozhoo! My name is Sheana Benitez. I am a descendant of Leech Lake of Ojibwe and an enrolled band member of Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa Indians. I have 7+ years working in County sector like that of Anoka and Washington County. I currently hold a position as the Grandparents Raising Grandchildren Resource Coordinator at Division of Indian work. In this role I have been honored to Co-host one of the biggest Elder Picnics in the state of MN, Native American Elders Day is a state-wide event where we bring resources together from cross the state and we celebrate them. I sit on 3 guidance groups across the State of Minnesota: Urban Indian Elders meetings (Twin Cities

Metro area), MN Medicaid Health Equity Partnership, and Minnesota Management and Budget Long-Range Planning Healthy Aging guidance group. I mainly serve Native America populations that are 55+ who are raising their grandchildren under age 18. Many of the children have a disability. I am too a caregiver for a child with disabilities. That said, in 2023 I decided to start Rising Star Consulting to help individuals and organizations navigate the complex systems we face when needing to apply for direct services and getting those benefits paid for through Medicaid/Medicare benefits. I believe to have a voice we as Native people need to have a seat at the table.



Ann Bussey. Ann is retired from a 40-year career with Essentia Health. Since retirement, Ann was recruited as an adjunct faculty with the College of St. Scholastica's Rural Health MBA program (2014-2016), teaching a course in Healthcare Evaluation and Management. She served two terms as a governor appointed member of the Minnesota Rural Health Advisory Committee (2016-2024), serving as its Chair in 2022. During this time, she was also appointed to the Minnesota Board on Aging (2020-2021). During the COVID pandemic, Ann volunteered with the Mesabi YMCA to research, write and distribute a healthy aging message to over 600 senior Y members. In 2021, Ann was selected as a Fellow in the first cohort of Project Reach, a University of Minnesota yearlong policy collaborative created to improve Minnesota's rural health outcomes. Ann developed a policy proposal on digital inclusion and digital literacy for rural older adults, identifying Minnesota's expansive library system as the IT Department for Retirees. Ann's work contributed to Minnesota's Digital Equity Plan. Ann's current community advocacy work focuses on community opportunities to age well across the Iron Range. She has been an advocate for Hibbing's 65+ population since 2015, facilitating the ongoing sustainability of a beloved Silver Sneaker's program offering fun, friends, and fitness. She has also been a long-time community member with the Fairview Range Central Mesabi Medical Foundation Board, while also serving as a member with both the Fairview Range and Essentia Virginia Hospital Community Advancement Committees. Her community advocacy work has facilitated multiple requests to testify at the Minnesota Legislative Task Force on Aging (2023-2024). Ann also collaborates closely with the Arrowhead Area Agency on Aging, serving on multiple community committees including Age-Friendly Committees—Iron Range and Hibbing. Ann was invited to be Senator Amy Klobuchar's guest at the State of the Union Address in March of 2024. Ann was awarded the 2023 Minnesota Rural Health Hero Policy Award at the 2024 Minnesota Rural Health Conference in June of 2024. Ann completed a Master of Arts in Management at the College of St. Scholastica and her undergraduate degree at St. Catherine's University in St. Paul. She lives in Side Lake MN, a lakes community located on the Iron Range.

Christina Cauble is a practitioner-scholar and Ph.D. candidate in Organizational Leadership, Policy, and Development. She holds an M.B.A. from Augsburg University. As the Geriatric Education Specialist at the University of Minnesota Medical School, she works across the Health Science Programs to advance workforce development and interprofessional learning. Driven to create systemic impact, Christina also co-chairs public policy for the Minnesota Board on Aging.





Cathy Chavers is an enrolled member of the Bois Forte Band of Chippewa. She was Chairwoman and a District 1 Rep for the Bois Forte Tribal Government for 12 years. She was also the first woman President of the Mn. Chippewa Tribe. Cathy worked for Bois Forte for over 45 years mainly in healthcare. She retired in 2025 and is currently a consultant for Mesabi Metallics in Nashwauk, Mn. Cathy has two boys, Edward Tim, 8 grandchildren and 2 great grandchildren. Cathy is an avid sports fan, loves all animals, playing volleyball, following her grandchildren in their events and picking blueberries. She also has a family wild rice processing business that has been handed down by her father. She loves wild rice and educating about the rice. Cathy is still active in various state and local committees.



Joe Gaugler is the Robert L. Kane Endowed Chair in Long-Term Care & Aging in the School of Public Health and a Distinguished McKnight University Professor at the University of Minnesota. He is the Director of the Center for Healthy Aging and Innovation, Director of the CDC-funded BOLD Public Health Center of Excellence on Dementia Caregiving, Director of the National Institute on Aging-funded EMBRACE AD/ADRD Roybal and State Alzheimer's Research Support Centers, and Editor-in-Chief of The Gerontologist. His research focuses on dementia care innovation.



Rodolfo Gutierrez is the Executive Director of HACER, where he has led research and advocacy efforts since 2007. With a robust background in both quantitative and qualitative methodologies, Rodolfo brings over two decades of experience in evaluation, community engagement, and policy-relevant research. His work is grounded in a deep commitment to equity, particularly in shaping a Minnesota where disparities rooted in ethnicity or culture are no longer tolerated. Originally from Mexico, Rodolfo's binational research experience has been instrumental in building trust and collaboration across diverse communities—not only Latino, but also immigrant and underserved populations statewide. He studied for a PhD and BA in History, along with an MS in Demography, and has conducted extensive re-search on demographic change, immigration, education, healthcare access, and cultural integration. Rodolfo currently serves on the Governor's Committee on the Safety, Health, and Wellbeing of Agricultural and Food Processing Workers (AWWC), and was appointed in 2023 by the Minnesota Department of Health Commissioner to co-chair the HEAL Council. He also lends his expertise to other organizations as a board member, advancing collective efforts to promote health equity and community empowerment.



Debra Jones is a Community Health Worker and the Health Educator & Outreach Coordinator for Volunteers of America, serving in the Caregiver Support and Dementia Services department. Her passion for this work is deeply personal. After caring for a loved one with Alzheimer's, Debra now shares her experience to help families understand the importance of early detection, risk factors, and compassionate support. Before stepping into community health, Debra spent 30 years with the Minnesota Vikings, LLC. Her journey eventually led her to St. Catherine University, where she earned her certificate in community health work. Soon after, she joined Volunteers of America, the very organization that once walked alongside her and her mother during their Alzheimer's journey. Today, she brings that same guidance, empathy, and encouragement to others navigating similar paths. A proud Minneapolis native, Debra's life has been shaped by her church community, her family, and the neighborhoods that raised her. She is committed to educating, uplifting, and empowering caregivers and communities with both knowledge and hope.



Kathleen Kelso, MAPA, BSN, RN Kathy is a board member of Elder Voice Advocates. She describes herself as a citizen advocate for healthy aging in community, a statewide strategic plan and a built infrastructure for our aging demographic. Kathy has recently served as a Governor appointed member of the MN Board on Aging which recommended in 2021 that the Governor and Legislature determine the necessity for a strategic statewide plan and department of aging. Kathy was a Mayoral appointee and chair of the St. Paul Advisory Committee on Aging which recommended *aging in community* and *healthy communities* which are now two focus areas in the St. Paul 2040 Comprehensive Plan, and recommended innovative housing options for our aging demographic. Kathy has served as executive director for several nonprofit organizations including ElderCare Rights Alliance which housed the Metropolitan Area Ombudsman Program under contract with the state of MN. Further, her career has included public and private sector roles in analysis and advocacy of mental health and aging public policies.



Georgia Lane, LGSW is the Director of Aging Initiatives at Ecolibrium3 bringing more than 20 years of leadership across aging services, community development, and systems-level innovation. In this role, she guides and strengthens Duluth's Age-Friendly initiatives, advancing a vision of communities where people of all ages can live, work, and thrive. She is deeply passionate about reshaping how we think, talk, and act about aging—grounded in her belief that aging is a gift. Duluth Age-Friendly, jointly led by Duluth Aging Support and Ecolibrium3, aligns with the World Health Organization's Age-Friendly Communities framework. Previously, Georgia served as Senior Aging Services Planner at the Arrowhead Area Agency on Aging, where she led regional age- and dementia-friendly efforts, supported community coalitions, and advanced statewide aging priorities. Earlier, she held leadership roles with Presbyterian Homes & Services, focusing on community dementia initiatives and care coordination. Georgia provides training on reframing aging, age-friendly practices, and the longevity economy. She holds a BA in Sociology from the College of St. Benedict and an MSW from the University of Minnesota. Outside of work, she enjoys an active, community-centered life with her family.



Helen Jackson Lockett-El is an ordained minister, trauma center chaplain, and dedicated public health professional based in Minnesota. She previously served as a community engagement planner and grant manager for the Minnesota Department of Health's Center for Health Equity, where she led state initiatives to reduce racial disparities in infant mortality. She is retired and now part of the aging community in addition to being a caregiver and facilitates grief and loss support group to her community. With a background spanning a biology degree from the University of Minnesota and a master's degree from Luther Seminary, her career bridges spiritual care and systemic health equity, including a decade directing the *There is a Balm* community health initiative at the Stairstep Foundation and actively involved on several Boards.



Carolyn Perron served on the Minnesota Board on Aging for 8 years from 2011-2019. She reapplied and was appointed in 2023 and will serve until 2030. During her Board years she's been a member /chair of the following committees: Program Operations and DEIA (Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, Access). In her current term she is also MBA Co-Vice Chair and co-chair of the Governance committee. She serves as the liaison to the Assisted Living Report Card Advisory Group and the Governor's Council on Developmental Disabilities (also during her first term 2012 – 2019). Carolyn's professional career spanned 35 years working with older

Minnesotans while at Ecumen and with people with developmental and intellectual disabilities at Mains'l Services, Inc. On a personal level, she was honored to be an advocate and support for her mother who needed services to remain at home through the end of her life's journey. Carolyn returned to college as an adult learner and holds a bachelor's degree from Metro State University.



Tehout Selameab joined the McKnight Foundation in 2023 as senior program officer for learning, and in 2025 became the organization's second director of learning. In this role, she fosters strategic learning spaces for staff, partners, and the communities McKnight serves, while also helping programs monitor the impact and progress of strategies and share stories about their work with diverse audiences. Tehout is a strategic research, planning, and evaluation professional with 20 years of experience conceptualizing, managing, and evaluating community-based programs. Prior to McKnight, she was the founder and CEO of arcadia research & evaluation, where she led a team of women and women of color evaluators, facilitators, and community liaisons with a passion for community-based health equity efforts. She worked with clients across philanthropy, government, academia, and community organizations on project planning and evaluation, designing and delivering communities of practice, and co-creating conceptual frameworks and metrics. Before that she held research and planning positions with Education Development Center, Ramsey County, and Hennepin County. Tehout holds a PhD in evaluation studies, a Master of Public Policy, and a Bachelor of Science in applied economics from the University of Minnesota. In her free time, she likes to lay in her hammock in the summer and curl up with a book in the winter.



Dawn Simonson, MPA President and CEO Metropolitan Area Agency on Aging. Dawn Simonson is President and CEO of the Metropolitan Area Agency on Aging, where she provides strategic leadership to advance policies, services and systems that enable older adults to live healthy, secure lives at home. She is recognized as a collaborative leader and system-level innovator with deep experience building cross-sector partnerships and translating promising ideas into action. Dawn has led and helped shape several major innovations in aging. She played a pivotal role in ACT on Alzheimer's and its dementia-friendly communities work, which expanded nationally and helped catalyze Dementia Friendly America. She also led development of an early age-friendly community initiative that included a Learning and Action Collaborative, bringing communities together to learn from one another, test approaches and accelerate local action. More recently, Dawn developed the strategic vision for one of the nation's first Community Care Hubs, creating infrastructure to better integrate healthcare and social care with an emphasis on prevention and upstream services for older adults. Dawn serves in leadership roles with the Minnesota Association of Area Agencies on Aging and the Minnesota Leadership Council on Aging and is a member of the Milken Institute's Alliance to Improve Dementia Care. She is a past president of USAging and has been recognized for her leadership in healthcare, aging and community partnerships. Dawn holds a Master of Public Affairs from the Humphrey School of Public Affairs at the University of Minnesota.



Kevin Sitter, MSW MPH, has worked in the continuum of HIV prevention and care services for more than 40 years in various roles at agencies in Minnesota, and the last 18 years prior to retirement at California Department of Public Health, Office of AIDS. His career included HIV counseling and testing, counselor for newly diagnosed individuals, creating prevention programs for gay men, including men who are married and also attracted to men, for people living with HIV including support groups for heterosexuals, people living with HIV over the age of 50, and those dually diagnosed with HIV and HCV. He was an HIV case

manager, trainer for the Midwest AIDS Education and Training Center, and teaching assistant for courses on HIV at the University of Minnesota. His work at the Office of AIDS concluded with helping develop the Federal and State Ending the Epidemic plans. While enjoying retirement, he remains active, serving on the Hennepin County Ryan White Planning Council, and is a co-chair of the Minnesota HIV and Aging Coalition. He has been living with HIV since 2004, benefiting from the advancement in medications and support provided by so many. He and his partner of 42 years enjoy traveling and trying to balance life between traditions & routine with novelty & spontaneity.



Sandy Vargas is the Founder and Principal Consultant of Vargas Consulting and Coaching. Operating as an entrepreneur, executive coach, and consultant, she partners with public and non-profit organizations to build equitable futures and cultivate inclusive, highly productive work environments. She specializes in coaching senior executives—particularly indigenous leaders and leaders of color—helping them navigate complex challenges, achieve excellence, and reshape organizational cultures to embrace diversity and equity. *Past Leadership and Executive Roles:* Before establishing her consulting firm, Vargas served as the President and CEO of the Minneapolis Foundation from 2007 to 2016. In this role, she oversaw $700 million in assets and more than $45 million in annual grants, repositioning the organization from a traditional grant maker into a proactive community convener focused on social, economic, and racial equity. Prior to this, she served as the Hennepin County Administrator, managing a $2 billion budget and 12,000 employees while implementing a strategic vision centered on measurable results. Following her tenure at the foundation, she also served as a Senior Executive Leadership Fellow at the University of Minnesota's Hubert Humphrey School of Public Affairs. *Education, Board Service, and Recognition:* A native Minnesotan, Vargas holds a bachelor's in business administration from St. Catherine University and a master's in public administration from Harvard's John F. Kennedy School of Government. She is deeply active in the community, serving on boards such as Twin Cities Public Television, the Women's Foundation of Minnesota, and the Governor's Council on Age-Friendly Minnesotans. Throughout her career, her leadership has earned her numerous honors, including the Caux Round Table's "Outstanding Citizen" award and the Minneapolis/St. Paul Business Journal's "Women in Business Award."