

Building on the Strengths of Rural Communities

Lessons learned from the Rural Aging Action Network (RAAN)

OVERVIEW

Where you live plays a significant role in how you age.

Currently, one in four older Americans lives in a rural community and, over the next decade, 73 million more people in America will turn 65.

Aging in rural communities presents unique challenges that can limit access to healthcare, transportation and other services that are vital for older adults to maintain their autonomy and independence.

With the growing number of older adults aging in rural communities, now is the time for innovative and equitable solutions that meet their needs by connecting them to nutrition, transportation, safe housing, health resources, work or volunteer opportunities and social engagement.

For more than a century, Lutheran social ministries have been trusted community-centered leaders in America's rural communities and, as a nationwide network of service providers, Lutheran Services in America (LSA) continues the tradition of being a unique and enduring presence in rural communities across the country.

LSA is proud to continue our practice of sharing successful approaches to supporting rural older adults by offering this summary of the **Rural Aging Action Network (RAAN) Report**, a new resource that is based on an evaluation of the effectiveness, impact and value of this proven model conducted by LSA and The LeadingAge LTSS Center @UMass Boston.

The RAAN Report is built upon best practices from LSA's innovative RAAN Model—a proven, community-informed approach to expand services by leveraging assets and resources in rural communities as well as the strength and resilience of older adults. The Report enables leaders of organizations serving rural older adults to mobilize communities in support of rural aging.



“RAAN’s focus on empowerment, dignity and intentional connection has transformed the traditional deficit-based assessment process and nurtured a sense of community and self-respect among participants.”

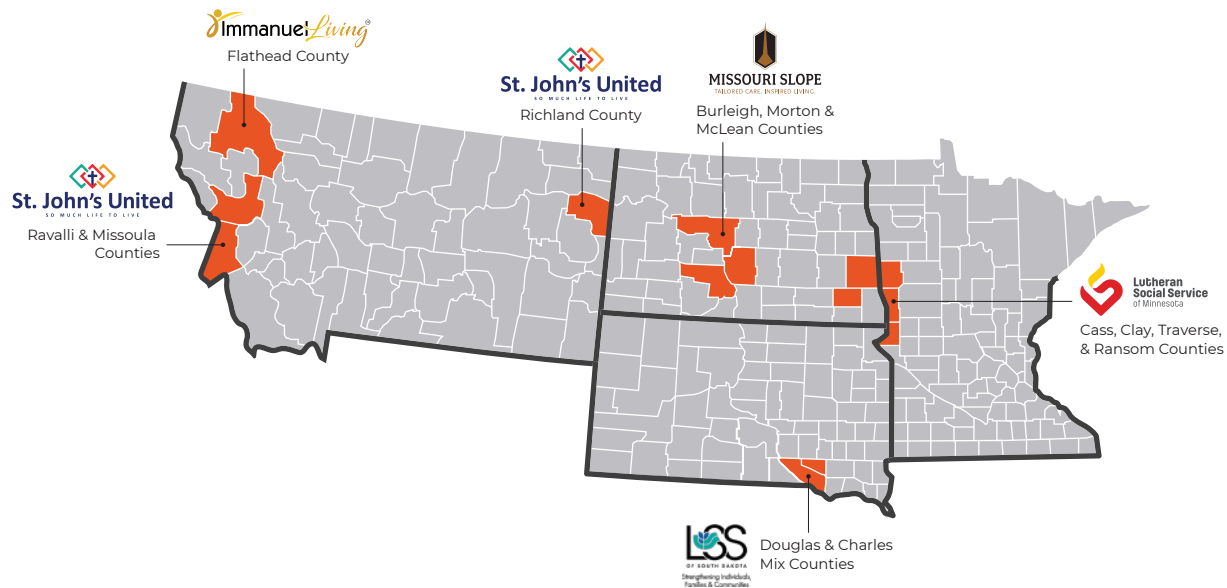
— Emily Dieppa Colo, VP of Workforce Innovations, PHI

“A few months ago, I didn’t know I needed [RAAN] or it existed—it wouldn’t have sunk in. Now I know how good [life] can be.”

— Bill Barton, New Holland, SD

A PROVEN MODEL THAT'S MAKING A DIFFERENCE IN THE LIVES OF RURAL OLDER ADULTS

As part of its commitment to evaluation, LSA partnered with LeadingAge LTSS Center @UMass Boston to understand the benefits and impact of the LSA RAAN Model through quantitative and qualitative data analysis.



The evaluation showed that in an 18-month period, working in five communities across Minnesota, Montana, North and South Dakota, application of the LSA RAAN Model had these promising results:

- **354 older adults** were referred to services related to food security, housing safety, transportation and social support.
- By mobilizing the whole community, RAAN identified **1,145 unique assets** and engaged over **360 community partners** to address gaps in care.



To download the entire Report, scan the QR code or visit <https://lutherservices.org/raan-program-summary-and-evaluation/>.

RAAN'S INNOVATIVE APPROACH

The LSA RAAN Model mobilizes **whole communities** to address the gaps in care for older adults and to empower **whole people** (older adults).

- ➔ **Community-Driven:** solutions are led by, for, in and with the community.
- ➔ **Asset-Based:** an asset scan includes both physical and non-physical assets—individuals, organizations, cultures and stories.
- ➔ **Nontraditional Partners:** the circle of support expands to the entire community, including Boy/Girl Scouts, farmers unions, grocery stores and restaurants and is supported by LSA national partners.
- ➔ **Lived Experience:** RAAN personnel are from and reflect the communities they serve.
- ➔ **Cultural Relevance:** outreach is based on knowledge of how and where people in the community communicate and gather.



- ➔ **Social Determinants of Health:** RAAN grounds health equity by taking into account the multiple factors that impact the health and wellbeing of older adults—from housing and transportation to community engagement.
- ➔ **Personal Conversations:** a one-on-one approach improves understanding of the unique goals and needs of older adults.
- ➔ **Trusted Relationships:** RAAN's success is rooted in its ability to establish and build trust and rapport with older adults.

- ➔ **Strengths and Challenges:** a strength-based approach focuses on older adults' strengths, talents and abilities rather than their weaknesses or deficits.
- ➔ **Invitation to Collaborate:** RAAN encourages older adults to contribute their talents, skills and wisdom to intergenerational opportunities in their communities.

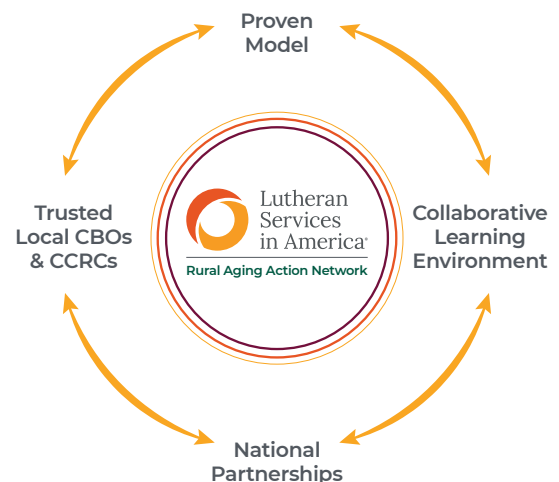


THE COLLABORATIVE MODEL AT THE ROOTS OF RAAN

The efficacy of the LSA RAAN stems from its roots in LSA's signature Collaborative Learning Model, a platform to advance innovation, equity and sustainable progress.

The model has proven adaptive to scale evidence-based programs and to create new innovations in social service delivery. It gains its effectiveness from four key components:

1. Proven Model
2. Collaborative Learning Environment that brings together multi-sector partners
3. Trusted local Community-Based Organizations and Continuing Care Retirement Communities
4. National Partnerships



About Lutheran Services in America

Lutheran Services in America (LSA) is one of the nation's largest national networks of health and human service providers with a mission to cultivate caring communities that advance health and opportunity for all. With 300 nonprofit organizations across 1,400 U.S. communities, the Lutheran Services in America network advances equitable outcomes for children, youth and families, improves independence and choice for older adults, champions meaningful services and support for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities, and strengthens stability and purpose for veterans, refugees, new Americans and other special populations. Formed in 1997, Lutheran Services in America brings together a network of leaders, partners and funders to catalyze innovation, strengthen organizational capacity and advance public policy.

Contact Info

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