



Logo designed by Adam Goforth

Goals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Increase access to comprehensive, high-quality health care services.</li> <li>○ Foster a neighborhood environment that promotes healthy and fulfilling aging.</li> <li>○ Increase the health and technical literacy of older adults.</li> </ul>
-------	--

Overview: West Willow Neighborhood Healthy Together Coalition (2019-2023)  
(Updated February 2024)

By 2040, the number of Washtenaw County seniors in poverty will more than double to approximately 9,000. Life for everyone will be shaped by our response now toward aging. The county must prepare to fully and justly support all seniors to have healthy and fulfilling lives as older adults.

A Pilot Program was developed for some of the most vulnerable residents in Washtenaw County (50 years and older) to address health inequities and improve social and physical environments. Most common barriers to healthy and fulfilling aging: housing, transportation, social connections, technology and access to information/services. (2020 Ann Arbor Area Community Foundation of Washtenaw County Healthy & Fulfilling Aging Systems Research Report.)

Our target population = 330 senior households out of 1,108 total households in the West Willow neighborhood. Most of those residents prior to the COVID-19 pandemic were already hit hard by existing inequities in health outcomes, and limited access to healthcare resources and services.

The West Willow neighborhood is located in Ypsilanti Township near the eastern border of Washtenaw County. 28% of the population is over 65 years of age and 31% of those older adults are renters. Similarly, the poverty rates among seniors are higher for West Willow (13.7%) than Washtenaw County (7.1%) and the state overall (10.6%).

The neighborhood lacks shopping and retail amenities. There are no pharmacies or full-service grocery stores in close proximity to the neighborhood. Prior to 2023, there was no medical clinic or health center. Public transportation was available, but there was only one bus route with reduced hours of operation and inadequate personal transportation which makes getting access to health care services difficult.

In general, the Ypsilanti area has a higher percentage of residents with chronic diseases compared to other populations in Washtenaw County, especially among BIPOC. There is a lack of communication about available services which makes it challenging for people to know what services exist and how to access them. Additionally, residents were more likely to report their health status as “fair or poor” compared to the county overall.

Currently, the Healthy Together West Willow Program has provided services to 22% of the older adults living in the neighborhood.

Partners:

Local Organizations	Churches	Educational Institutions	State/Federal Government	Funders
Growing Hope	Journey of Faith Christian Church	EMU School of Social Work	Area Agency 1-B	Ann Arbor Area Community Foundation
Habitat for Humanity	New Covenant Missionary Baptist Church	U-M School of Nursing	Washtenaw County Health Dept.	Michigan Health Endowment Fund
New West Willow Neighborhood Association (NWWNA)	Whitehead Memorial Christian Church	U-M School of Public Health		National Benevolent Association
Packard Health West Willow		U-M School of Social Work		United Way of Washtenaw County
		*EMU School of Education		Ypsilanti Area Community Foundation

Note: \*Exploring a potential partnership

### By the Numbers:

- Funding: \$232,090 in total funding has been secured for this initiative. U-M School of Nursing was awarded a Michigan Health Endowment Fund Grant (\$99,562) and A Servant's Heart has obtained financial support from various foundations (\$132,528).
- Client Info: 72 West Willow residents have participated in the Health Together West Willow Program. Volunteers have made 251 contacts with residents in Ypsilanti.
- Referrals: Nursing, Social Work student interns, and two older adult volunteers have referred 110 residents to other Washtenaw County services.

### Actions:

1. A free, community-based health and wellness pilot program initiated by residents and supported by Journey of Faith and A Servant's Heart was implemented in 2019. A focus group of residents provided feedback on the types of services desired by the community. The planning team was led by a local community leader. 10 residents participated in the pilot program operated by nursing and social work student interns, as well as volunteers to address health inequities and improve access to healthcare services. There was also interest in improving the social and physical environments that impact the health of older adults.

### Past Highlights:

1. In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, Journey of Faith and A Servant's Heart secured funding to provide \$44,000 in financial assistance to pay bills to cover West Willow residents' living expenses (i.e., utility, mortgage/rent, tax arrears payments, etc.). Additional support was provided to meet immediate, emergent and unanticipated needs resulting from the pandemic by connecting residents to other Washtenaw County services. Student interns and volunteers delivered food and supplies; provided information on COVID-19, face masks and cleaning supplies to keep residents safe.
2. Nursing students have offered blood pressure screenings; workshops on managing diabetes, chair exercises every quarter to help increase older adults' physical activity. Nursing students also participated at pop-up vaccination clinics in the neighborhood.
3. Social Work students connected with residents to provide information about the Healthy Together program and conducted needs assessments to identify other social determinants that impact a resident's health. The students use a modified version of the Arizona Self-Sufficiency Matrix to measure an individual's level of independence and quality of life across, a variety of domains. This enabled student interns to provide a more holistic view of resident needs through their case management services.
4. Too many residents in the greater Ypsilanti community go without preventative health care because services are either inaccessible or unaffordable. A new partnership initiated by the West Willow Healthy Together program between Packard Health, University of Michigan School of Nursing, and New Covenant Missionary Baptist Church planned to change that.

U-M School of Nursing was awarded a Michigan Health Endowment Grant (\$99,562) in the Fall of 2022, to [establish a clinic and health center](#) with our partner New Covenant Missionary Baptist Church in the West Willow neighborhood. The clinic, in partnership with Packard Health, provided health screenings and increased access to primary care services for older adults and adolescents in the neighborhood. Collaboration with Packard Health, a federally qualified health center in Washtenaw County, will allow for referrals of residents that need health insurance and primary health care services until the West Willow clinic is ready to provide primary care services.

5. In 2022, an application for the Bruce & Diane Halle Foundation Social Justice scholarship (Eastern Michigan University) was submitted by our team for student social worker, Bridget Brown. The Halle Scholarship is intended to advance social justice efforts in the community. Bridget was awarded the top prize of a \$4,000 scholarship. Bridget presented her project at EMU's Undergraduate Research Symposium, "Why Providing Snow Removal Service is an Effective Deterrent for Falls and Injuries Among Seniors in the West Willow Neighborhood."
6. In 2023, A Servant's Heart applied for the HUD Home Modification Grant as part of the "Healthy Together West Willow Coalition. We were not approved to submit a final application, but plan to submit a pre-application again for funding in 2024. The proposal is unique in terms of an interest in addressing financial insecurity among both urban and rural senior populations. Many older adults are burdened by the cost of paying for their housing, wherever they live. However, rural seniors who cannot stay in their own homes for physical or financial reasons have fewer housing and rental options than seniors who live in urban areas.

NWWNA's goal is to enable low-income older adults in Ypsilanti and selected rural areas to remain in their homes through low-cost, low barrier high impact home modifications to reduce the risk of falling, improve general safety, increase accessibility and to enhance seniors' functional abilities in their own home. This is a need for older adults no matter where they live in Michigan.

Partners for this project include the Home Modification Occupational Therapy Alliance (HMOTA), Habitat for Humanity (H4H) of Huron Valley and its network of local H4H offices across the state; Michigan Faith in Action (MFIA), Handyman Connection of Ann Arbor (HCAA), and Journey of Faith as Fiscal Agent.

Project timeline: A Servant's Heart and HMOTA are proposing to complete 12 units per quarter for a total of 144 total units in order to meet the goals of this program and deliverables during the grant period. Total funding request: \$1,250,000.00.

#### Next Steps (2024):

1. Our intent is to still have a close relationship between the health center/clinic and the Healthy Together West Willow program. The clinic has the potential to provide opportunities to pilot environmental interventions targeting diet and lifestyle-related chronic health conditions'
2. Implement the Caregiver Support Pilot Program in Summer 2024 to address "aging-in-community" issues and reduce social isolation with U-M's School of Public Health student interns and peer support from residents.
3. Continue the Digital Literacy Training workshops for older adults in the neighborhood. The team has offered four workshops and provided tablets to 38 residents (12% of West Willow older adult-headed households) participating in the sessions. We have 24 participants currently on the waitlist for the next session that will take place in Spring/Summer of 2024. Among older adults in Washtenaw County, a combination of increased social isolation and lack of digital access was exacerbated by COVID-19. Currently, there isn't a county-wide infrastructure focused on digital connection and literacy for older adults. However, digital access, understanding, and connection are critical to the health and wellness of older adults who live in Washtenaw County.
4. We're exploring a potential partnership with EMU's School of Education for their support to help residents develop a Community Health Worker program which would also include older adult and youth health ambassadors in promoting health literacy in their neighborhood. We have the goal of identifying an older adult and youth health ambassadors on five streets in the neighborhood for our pilot later this year.

Learn more about Healthy Together West Willow at: [www.westwillowhealth.org](http://www.westwillowhealth.org)

You can connect with us at: [westwillowhealth@gmail.com](mailto:westwillowhealth@gmail.com)

We would welcome your support. If you want to consider supporting the Healthy Together West Willow Partnership, you can donate at: [westwillowhealth.org/donate](http://westwillowhealth.org/donate) or volunteer at [www.westwillow.org/volunteer](http://www.westwillow.org/volunteer). Thank you for your interest!

*"Beloved, I pray that all may go well with you and that you may be in good health, as it goes well with your soul". – 3 John 1:2*