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\$1.5 million in grants will help Michigan seniors age in place

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Presbyterian Villages of Michigan Foundation

Presbyterian Villages of Michigan Foundation hosts a painting class for seniors.

More than \$1.5 million in grants have gone to six Michigan housing programs that help seniors age in place.

The two-year grants are [part of a \\$19 million initiative](#) by the affordable housing nonprofit Enterprise Community Partners that seeks to reduce older adults' isolation and improve their at-home services.

The six recipients were among 27 total applicants for the funds, including 11 in Michigan. The grants, which also went to 10 Maryland housing providers, are intended to provide relief for residents, but also to show that programs are scalable.

A second round, expected to be distributed early next year, will look for innovation in efforts to help people age in place, said Stephany De Scisciolo, the vice president of impact, evaluation and population health for Enterprise Community Partners. De Scisciolo said there would be four rounds of grants all together, with the money to be spent by the end of 2025.

The providers said the money would make a huge difference in the lives of people in the communities they serve.

"I'm excited about the possibilities," said Rev. Joan Ross with the North End Woodward Community Coalition.

Ross plans to use her \$250,000 to provide internet service to more than 600 seniors in Highland Park, as well as offer computer classes to residents.

She said reducing the digital divide is imperative for seniors, who can use internet access for everything from telehealth appointments on snowy days to better access to family members. Access can allow them to attend church services or go shopping online. The health impacts, she said, can be tremendous.

"You're opening up a whole new thing," she said. "Once you teach them Zoom, a whole world opens up."

At the Presbyterian Villages of Michigan Foundation, Avni Thomas, the director of grants management, said \$275,000 would go to bringing free wellness classes like chair yoga and meditation to more than 700 residents at some of the organization's 31 different villages. The plans also include the creation of telehealth suites, where residents can go to have virtual doctor's appointments and know they can get help navigating online systems.

Thomas said the funds will make a big difference to the organization. So will the reduced-cost internet the money will help them provide to some residents. And she said she's excited for opportunities to meet other grant-winners; De Scisciolo said the cohort will have the opportunity to engage multiple times, as well as be introduced to potential future funders.

The \$240,000 Heidi Raubenolt received at Samaritas will pay for more supportive services for residents of group homes who have disabilities, she said. Raubenolt, the executive director of community services, said the creation of outdoor gathering spaces will make it easier to do group activities and cooking classes or other programs, like gardening and square dancing, will be enriching to residents.

"It will help people stay healthier longer," she said. "We can really get creative. We can really include the wants and needs of the residents."

New fitness equipment and training for people to identify and work with older adults with dementia will help increase the physical and mental wellbeing of residents at the United Methodist Retirement Centers, said Lisa French, a spokesperson for the UMRC Porter Hills Foundation. She said the \$200,000 that group received will help "bring joy and purpose" to about 500 residents.

"It's amazing to have the funds," she said. "We're excited to be able to support residents' overall wellness."

And at Avalon Housing, \$300,000 will go to hiring two full-time older adult specialists who will help with cooking, cleaning, coordinating appointments and other needs for the residents in permanent supportive housing, said Molly Smith, the director of services there.

Smith said the money will also help fund enhanced nutrition support for a population that often needs high-touch support. She said she hopes the grant is able to help build the case for the need for such services in the community, so help procure future funding.

"It's a pretty big deal," she said. "There's not really a service like this being offered in our community."

The last recipient is the Detroit Catholic Pastoral Alliance. No one from that organization returned a phone call seeking comment about their plans for the funds.

The money is available through the Thome Aging Well program, funded by the Edward N. and Della L. Thome Memorial Foundation. The Thomes had deep ties to Michigan, De Scisciolo said.

Inline Play

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