

Award: Illinois Disciples Foundation Movement Building Award – 2016
Recipient: AgeOptions
Presenter: Jen Tayabji

The Champaign County Health Care Consumers' Board and staff are recognizing AgeOptions with the Illinois Disciples Foundation Movement Building Award. This Award honors organizations and individuals that dedicate themselves to working to build social justice movements. AgeOptions has helped to build a statewide movement for health care justice for older people. They provide incredibly useful and user friendly resources for organizations that work with seniors and Medicare beneficiaries. They are great advocates who work respectfully with grassroots and community-based organizations like ours. I am personally very honored to present this award having served as the Executive Director of the Illinois Disciples Foundation for the last fourteen years.

Since many of you may not be familiar with Erin or AgeOptions, I would like to tell you about their organization. AgeOptions is an Area Agency on Aging that helps older adults in suburban Cook County live their lives to the fullest by empowering them with information and resources. Erin Weir is the Manager of Health Care Access at AgeOptions and is here to accept the award on behalf of AgeOptions.

AgeOptions partners with a network of other nonprofit community-based organizations that serve older adults and their caregivers. Because of that, they connect older adults to programs and services in their community, such as: in-home care, adult day services, telephone assistance to connect people to the resources they need, meals, senior fraud, abuse and neglect services, older adult advocacy, and much more. AgeOptions is also one of the three leading partners of the Make Medicare Work coalition, which provides very valuable resources to advocates like us across the state.

In early December, I sent Erin a frantic email. At Health Care Consumers, we were seeing so many clients come in who had a WellCare Advantage plan. They had just found out that their medical home, Christie Clinic, would no longer be in network for them after January. It was bad enough that our clients may have to switch their medical home, but we could not find any doctors in WellCare's network that were taking new patients within a 45-minute drive of Champaign Urbana. Some of our clients had received this letter over

Thanksgiving and we were able to get them switched to a different Advantage plan before the Open Enrollment Period ended December 7.

However, most did not have have enough, if any, notice to do this during Open Enrollment. After reaching out to Erin to see if we had recourse to help our clients, she immediately contacted the regional Medicare office. Working together, we were able to get clients a Special Enrollment Period, on a case by case basis, so that they could switch plans. We also were able to demonstrate to Medicare that WellCare no longer met new network adequacy rules, and were able to get hundreds of Medicare beneficiaries in our area a Special Enrollment Period to switch plans if they wanted to. They have through the end of April to switch. This groundbreaking work was recently covered by NPR and Kaiser Health News and featured our Medicare Task Force member Eliza Catchings.

Because of your leadership and movement building, you successfully helped us advocate for Medicare beneficiaries in our area. Erin, you were personally very instrumental in these efforts. Together, we empowered local Medicare beneficiaries to be able to keep their doctors and have access to quality and affordable health care.

AgeOptions has truly built a movement across the state of Illinois that advocates and empowers older adults. Whether it is helping to educate organizations like ours with resources, or fighting for a state budget that protects our seniors, or working with us to navigate Medicare network adequacy rules, AgeOptions has fought for the rights and justice of older adults and Medicare beneficiaries in Illinois.

On behalf of the Champaign County Health Care Consumers staff and Board, I am extremely honored to present you and AgeOptions with the Illinois Disciples Foundation Movement Building Award.