The opportunity presented by the HeART initiative is timely for Iowa County. Discussions were already underway for a possible joint venture for construction and operation of a skilled nursing and assisted living facility. Key stakeholders had recently convened, to explore ideas for senior gathering places, adult day care, hospice needs and other important services identified by senior residents and their caregivers. A task force working on transportation needs had been put in place. And, the Aging and Disability Resource Center (ADRC) of Southwest Wisconsin, Upland Hills Health, and the Iowa County Health Department had all planned a community needs assessment of the geriatric population in Iowa County in 2018. The HeART grant will allow these efforts to be formally coordinated through the Iowa County Senior Living Community Plan.

The challenges faced by Iowa County echo other rural counties. Supportive services essential to older adults aging in place are not available in small towns. Lack of public transportation is a barrier. The county has areas classified as “food deserts”, where there are no grocery stores, and nutrition is compromised. The HeART needs assessment will be crucial to identifying what is most needed by county residents and deciding how to allocate limited resources.