



# Addressing Social Isolation for Older Adults During the COVID-19 Crisis

*Updated as of 5/11/2020*



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## About This Resource

ADvancing States took action during the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) crisis to assist state aging and disability agencies in responding to, and meeting the needs of, facility residents and an older adult population sheltering at home. This resource was created through one-on-one conversations with states and a call for ideas in the Friday Update, a weekly email reaching over 15,000 aging and disability professionals. This resource is intended to assist states and others with creative and thoughtful approaches to social isolation and loneliness in older adults, and to also facilitate sharing and learning across states. It is our hope this collection of ideas and actions across states and organizations will reduce social isolation for some of the country's most vulnerable older adults during the COVID-19 crisis.

# COVID-19 Background & Impact

The novel coronavirus (COVID-19) is an infectious respiratory illness that has spread to nearly every country in the world. COVID-19 symptoms include fever, fatigue, cough, and difficulty breathing. In the most severe cases, the virus can cause pneumonia and eventually, death. Older adults and people with underlying medical conditions and immunocompromised health systems are especially at risk of complications arising from COVID-19.

The extremely contagious nature of COVID-19 has resulted in strict stay-in-home or “shelter at home” and social distancing policies in countries across the world, including the United States. These policies require people to stay home as much as possible and, if outside or in the community, to keep a minimum of six feet away from others who do not live in the same home. This has had an incredible impact on day-to-day lives and activities. Older adults in the community are staying home, and where possible having food delivered instead of going to the grocery store. Nursing facilities are restricting visitors and redesigning activities to meet social distancing guidelines. Active older adults who were used to meeting up for congregated meals, attending adult day programs, or volunteering at a local non-profit are now spending most of their day in the home with little interaction with the outside world.

## **Social Impact to Older Adults**

Loneliness and social isolation for older adults have a deep emotional impact, sometimes leading to social disorders such as depression and anxiety. Maybe less well-known is the profound impact loneliness has on physical health. One study found loneliness had similar health effects on older adults as smoking 15 cigarettes a day.<sup>1</sup>

Many state aging and disability agencies and community-based organizations (CBOs) have turned their immediate attention to ensuring basic needs for older adults are met. This includes

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<sup>1</sup> <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/1745691614568352>

activities such as recruiting and mobilizing volunteers, meeting needs for sharp increases in home delivered meals and grocery and prescription delivery services. As agencies and CBOs have stabilized these processes, many are now attempting to address social and emotional needs, brainstorming creative ways to address and help mitigate the negative health impacts of loneliness and reduce social isolation in ways consistent with social distancing guidelines.

It is important to remember older adults served in home and community-based settings are not the only older adult group with loneliness concerns. Nursing facility and assisted living facility resident needs must also be addressed. With facility visitors now severely restricted, residents are becoming more at risk for depression and mental decline. States and facility staff are working tirelessly to come up with creative ways to keep residents engaged, connected, and hopeful.

This document is intended to be a living resource for state aging and disability agencies as well as providers, Area Agencies on Aging, and other CBOs. ADVancing States will continue to update this document as ideas and best practices are shared.

## How States Have Responded to Address Social Isolation in Older Adults

ADvancing States reached out to state aging and disability agencies and community-based organizations (CBOs) for ways they were responding to the COVID-19 crisis and addressing increased social isolation and loneliness. States and CBOs have shared the following. If you are interested in any of these responses for your state or organization and would like to be connected to these entities, please contact ADvancing States. Additionally, if you would like to edit your state's information, please email April Young at [ayoung@advancingstates.org](mailto:ayoung@advancingstates.org).

- California – Created a campaign called Neighbor-to-Neighbor that encourages neighbors to connect using the Nextdoor website or app. Volunteers will be able to use the site to share ways to safely connect and ensure neighbors have necessities during California's stay at home order. Information and ways to volunteer can be found on the [California Volunteers](#) website.
- Colorado – The State Unit on Aging provided an evidence-based class through video connection technologies (such as a Zoom meeting). Colorado is also utilizing their Americorp volunteers and transportation providers to deliver groceries and home delivered meals to older adults. AAAs are providing reassurance calls for many of their clients receiving in-home services.
- District of Columbia – DC's Department of Aging and Community Living (DACL) created a new "Call & Talk" program. Older adults can sign up to be paired with staff and volunteers for regular conversations, whether that is every day or weekly. The program has enjoyed celebrating birthdays and even hosted a double date so far. DAAC has also requested all of their grantees call their participants on a daily basis, Monday through Friday, to check in while grant-funded programs are limited to remote work.

- Florida – The Florida Department of Elder Affairs (DOEA) has implemented the following initiatives to mitigate the impact of COVID-19:
  - 1) Meals - Before the pandemic, over 45,000 meals a day were provided to older adults throughout Florida. While one third of these meals were delivered to the homes of those too frail to participate in community activities, the remaining two thirds received their meals in a congregate setting such as senior centers, community meal sites, and non-residential adult care facilities.

Many of these older adults receive their only meal for the day when attending programs that serve meals and face going without a meal when these sites are closed. It cannot be overemphasized how important a meal is to these individuals. In many situations, they are one meal away from a medical crisis.

Essentially all congregate meal sites were closed throughout the state to prevent the spread of COVID-19. To ensure that all older adults continued to receive meals, DOEA afforded service providers program flexibility. Providers now have the option of allowing them to come to a meal site and “drive-thru” affording them a meal while also complying with social distancing. For older people who do not have transportation, or where community regulations restrict travel, meals are delivered directly to their homes. There is not one older adult who received meals in a congregate setting prior to site closures that has not had a meal made available to them during site closures.

Not only that but the number of meals being provided has increased exponentially to almost 200,000 a day, most of which are home delivered.

To assist in that huge effort, DOEA partnered with the Florida Department of Business and Professional Regulation (DBPR) and the Florida Restaurant and Lodging Association (FRLA) to match the needs of these older adults and meal delivery services with the needs of the business community and those who work in the restaurant business. This partnership will utilize the hospitality talent pool to ensure older Floridians continue to receive nutritious meals and remain connected with their communities, make use of the unused operational capacity of restaurants to prepare meals in large quantities, meet the needs of those older Floridians, and provide much-needed income to restaurants and restaurant workers when they are paid to prepare and deliver meals to Florida seniors.

The responsibility for this initiative rests with the 11 Area Agencies on Aging (AAAs) throughout the state who will work with their local Aging Network providers to identify restaurants interested and able to assist in preparing and delivering meals to the vulnerable older adults in their community. They will independently:

- Communicate to restaurant partners the nutrition and feeding needs of older adults so the restaurants understand who they are feeding and what their nutrition requirements might be.
- Develop Memorandums of Understanding (MOU) as necessary to enable the flow of resources.
- Ensure restaurants have (and maintain through duration of MOU) an active license with DBPR and comply with Florida Administrative Code 64E-11 regarding food safety at all touch points of the process (preparation, packaging, delivery).

As of 05/08/20, 140,000 meals have been prepared and delivered by restaurants participating in the initiative.

2) Project VITAL - During the time when frail older adults must remain isolated, we must ensure they remain connected with their communities and their loved ones. There are approximately 700 nursing homes and 3,000 assisted living facilities in Florida, with currently 171,000 combined residents. Public entry into nursing homes and assisted living facilities is already severely restricted and visitation is suspended. In addition, because of health officials' cautions against gatherings of groups of 10 or more people, nursing home and assisted living facility residents likely are not dining together or congregating for group activities or social events, which essentially means they are left alone in their rooms which will lead to loneliness.

While isolation and loneliness have negative effects on people of all ages, research shows that those negative impacts, coupled with chronic health conditions, can lead to a high rate of morbidity among older adults. It is therefore a serious public health issue.

Although it is imperative for individuals to practice social distancing as we combat COVID-19, social distancing does not have to result in complete social isolation. To mitigate these circumstances, DOEA and the Alzheimer's Association have developed an initiative called Project: VITAL (Virtual Inclusive Technology for ALL).



This project will support the well-being of seniors, their families and caregivers by allowing them to remain virtually engaged and connected through specially designed tablets that can access resources like music, books, games and the ability to video chat and email with family outside. It will also facilitate educational and support opportunities for staff through a video-based learning platform and offer opportunities for virtual and online education and support for families/caregivers at home.

During the initial pilot phase, 150 care communities were identified and supplied two tablets per community, as well as virtual training on how to use the equipment and platform. The tablets are preloaded with software programming from iN2L, enabling residents to connect with their loved ones via video chat with a simple tap on the home screen. The tablet further fosters connection with family by creating individual profiles for every resident, with the added ability for family to add personal photos and videos to those profiles for residents to view whenever they like. Also included on the tablet is an expansive, easily personalized library of applications that supports cognitive, emotional, social, physical, and spiritual wellness for the ultimate person-centered engagement experience.

Considerations for expansion include increasing partners, such as the State Unit on Medicaid, health care associations, philanthropic foundations, age-friendly communities, health care companies, insurance companies, and communications companies for connectivity.

3) MP3 players - DOEA began delivering over 1,000 pre-loaded MP3 players to socially isolated seniors and adults living with Alzheimer's Disease and Related Dementia (ADRD). The gift of music is made possible through a donation from the Florida Alzheimer's Association. Each unit will be mailed to the caregivers and families of those living with ADRD.

Each device is pre-loaded with various musical genres ranging from patriotic and country to Broadway tunes and gospel. The distribution of music will be matched to the preference of the recipient, or with input provided by the caregiver whenever possible.

Because areas of the brain linked to memories of music are often left undamaged by dementia, listening to music becomes an important part of treating and interacting with persons living with ADRD.

Music can be powerful. Studies have shown music may reduce agitation and improve behavioral issues that are common in the middle-stages of the disease. Even in the late stages of Alzheimer's, a person may be able to tap a beat or sing lyrics to a song from childhood. Music provides a way to connect, even after verbal communication has become difficult.

4) Robotic pets -The department began delivering over 750 robotic pets to socially isolated seniors and adults living with ADRD. The interactive pets help combat social isolation and depression among these individuals by improving overall mood and quality of life. The pets are meant to be an alternative to traditional pet therapy and can help give a reprieve to caretakers who are stressed about caring for a loved one with Alzheimer's or another dementia during the COVID-19 crisis, according to the department. Researchers say robotic pets can be a good alternative for people with dementia who are scared of animals or live in a home or healthcare facility that does not accept animals for fear of infections or other issues, such as allergies, bites or scratches.

Robotic pets have been used in various countries since 2003 and have previously shown positive results similar to those of real animals, according to a 2016 study published in the "Journal of Alzheimer's Disease," which looked to assess the [effectiveness of robotic pet therapy](#) in treating dementia-related symptoms such as anxiety and depression. The study found that the robots helped decrease stress and anxiety and also caused a reduction in the use of psychoactive medications and pain medications for patients with dementia.

5) Scent Preservation Kits - DOEA is partnering with Scent Evidence K9 to distribute 2,000 Scent Preservation Kits® to caregivers of those living with ADRD. As Florida seniors stay at home to limit their risk of exposure to COVID-19, those older adults with ADRD may have an increased tendency to wander and become lost. If that happens, proactive family safety measures, such as the Scent Preservation Kit®, are providing effective response systems to locate missing persons and return them to safety. These kits

provide K9 responders with uncontaminated scent articles that significantly reduce the time it takes to locate someone.

6) Mental Health - Project VITAL is being implemented to address the impact of social isolation on older adults residing in long-term care (LTC) facilities. But what about those older adults and individuals with compromised health systems who are still living in their homes and communities? For their safety and protection, we have asked this population to isolate at home. But how do we protect this population, already at high risk for loneliness, from the health risks that come with isolation? Additionally, the stress caused by an economic downturn will most likely add to these health risks.

During times of crisis, mental health cannot be overlooked. Loneliness and social isolation for older adults have a deep, emotional impact, sometimes leading to social disorders such as depression and anxiety. Social isolation has also been linked to increases in emergency department visits, hospitalizations, and nursing home placements.

During the pandemic, proactive information sharing can help older adults cope with social isolation and the accompanying sense of grief, anxiety and stress. Outreach and links to helpful resources can reduce feelings of loneliness and replace them with a sense of inclusion. Accordingly, the department is developing an initiative to address the mental health needs of older adults during this time of the pandemic and economic uncertainty using available technology as a force multiplier. This initiative will address at a minimum the following:

- Increased outreach
- Providing timely, relevant information
- Teletherapy
- Telephone reassurance
- Reinforce crisis response services
- Dedicated helpline for mental health
- Expand availability of evidence-based programs
- Strengthen community self-help and social supports

- Iowa – Area Agencies on Aging (AAAs) are reaching out with phone safety checks every 2-4 days to all Older Americans Act program recipients. Iowa AAAs also put together a one-pager detailing three social resources accessible by phone that are available nationwide (see below for details).
- Kentucky – The Long-Term Care Ombudsmen are conducting well-check calls and also have access to civil monetary penalty funds to purchase technology equipment so residents can communicate with family. Nursing facilities report playing hallway bingo, where each person participates from their door. AAA partnerships have included food trucks, Head Start programs, and county jails to help increase home delivered meal output.
- Massachusetts – The Commonwealth has taken the following actions to combat social isolation and loneliness for older adults:
  - The Baker-Polito Administration created a Nursing Home Family Resource Line, a dedicated telephone line that connects family members of nursing home residents with the information and resources they need. This resource was created so that family and community members have one central contact that they can reach out to if they have questions or concerns about the care their loved one is receiving during the COVID-19 outbreak. The line is staffed from 9 AM – 5 PM, seven days a week. Staff coordinate across state agencies to help callers find answers to their questions.
  - The Massachusetts Executive Office of Elder Affairs has shifted community-based aging services, including home care, family caregiver support, and behavioral health, to be conducted telephonically where possible. This includes many services including companion visits, consultations, and counseling.
  - Several aging services programs, including Adult Protective Services and Elder Mental Health Outreach Teams, are maintaining in-person visits conducted outside with safe physical distancing practices. This has particularly been helpful for individuals living with behavioral health conditions.
  - The aging services network, including ASAPs/AAAs and Councils on Aging, are conducting telephonic wellness checks with older adults and family caregivers. They are also deploying volunteers to provide home delivered meals, grocery delivery and care packages. Many are working with local partners, such as

libraries, to reach out to individuals who have not historically engaged with the aging services network.

- The Massachusetts Executive Office of Elder Affairs and Joint Committee on Elder Affairs created a short script for state legislators and staff to conduct wellness calls with constituents and provide basic information about local aging services providers.
  - The Massachusetts Executive Office of Elder Affairs created a [resource](#) with links to online tools and resources for family caregivers to engage older adults at home. The resource includes virtual tours, sing alongs, musicals and other online forms of engagement. The resource was created as a form of respite for family caregivers.
  - The aging services network is offering more telephonic or video conference support groups for older adults (e.g., “Be Safe, Feel Safe” weekly group call) and family caregivers and transitioning memory cafés to a virtual mode of delivery.
  - The Massachusetts Executive Office of Elder Affairs, Department of Mental Health and Department of Public Health participate in a biweekly roundtable discussion focused on social isolation and loneliness with stakeholders facilitated by AARP Massachusetts. The discussion is a forum to share emerging practices and ongoing challenges.
  - The Massachusetts Executive Office of Elder Affairs and its partners is in the process of pivoting the state’s Age-Friendly Action Plan to prioritize strategies related to COVID response and recovery. The plan will be updated with a specific lens on diversity, equity, access and justice and the goal of reaching all older adults in the Commonwealth.
- Michigan – The state of Michigan shares the following aging coronavirus initiatives:
    - Information and Assistance
      - The State of Michigan launched a COVID-19 hotline that runs seven days per week from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. The hotline is staffed by State of Michigan employees. The hotline’s older adult menu option routes older adults to staff from the Aging & Adult Services Agency who are volunteering their time to support the hotline.

- A statewide [landing page](#) has been established for older adults to request services. These requests are forwarded on to the Area Agencies on Aging.
    - Launched a media campaign including social media posts to reduce social isolation and tips for adults. Video series:
      1. [MI Resilience: Reach Out to Older Michiganders](#)
      2. [MI Resilience: Avoid COVID-19 Scams](#)
      3. [MI Resilience: Tips for Seniors](#)
    - Working with economic stability administration on a person-centered approach to accessing food assistance for older adults. Materials highlight aging friendly regional navigators. This work also includes an information line and “hands-on assistance” for Federal Assistance Programs for over-the-phone application.
  - Direct Support
    - Quarantine Box (Q Box) project partnership with Michigan Food Bank Council to provide box of non-perishable food items to seniors at home. Michigan is partnering with the Council on a virtual statewide food drive to expand the [Q Box program](#).
    - MI is repurposing \$500,000 of state allocated funds for senior center wellness programs to provide programming specific to coronavirus, including virtual delivery of evidence-based programs (EBPs), virtual support groups, and friendly reassurance. Grants will be made in the amount of \$5,000 in accordance with boilerplate requirements.
    - MI established a [portal](#) where volunteers can sign up to support senior services (delivering meals, packages, or friendly reassurance).
    - MI continues to secure and distribute donated personal protection equipment (PPE – gloves and masks) to AAAs and service providers across the state.
  - Policy Flexibility
    - Working with policy office, Michigan assisted living association, and waiver agents to redirect surplus medical volunteers (CNAs, LPN, and RNs) to assist with direct care.

- Policy waiver on Personal Emergency Response Systems (PERS) - to permit AAAs who didn't include PERS in Annual Implementation Plan (AIP) to add it to increase use.
  - Nearly 40 policy waivers for local AAAs and aging network agencies to respond to increased demand for programs, including remote provision of services and provision of community-based services in virtual settings. Examples include:
    - In-home community health workers/direct care workers connecting health departments utilizing Zoom video conferencing software to assist with COVID-19 testing.
    - Utilizing senior transportation services to support medical appointments, grocery shopping/pick up and prescription pick up or delivery.
    - Expanding the Respite Care service unit definition to include weekly wellness checks with family caregivers and clients, weekly support group phone calls with family caregivers, and when appropriate, using respite staff to deliver food, medications, and essential items to caregivers and clients.
  - Coordinated with Medicaid office to develop statewide guidance to direct care workers and home care agencies on the provision of in-home services during the COVID-19 emergency.
- Minnesota –
  - Minnesota's Legal Assistance Developer is working with project partners to monitor current legal trends, analyze efficacies of legal delivery tools for isolated communities and develop community legal responses for post-crisis implementation.
  - Minnesota's information and referral service, the Senior LinkAge Line, is utilizing specialists to reach out to older adults and their caregivers. They have adjusted their service delivery models so staff who had been providing in-person support are also on the phones. This helps reduce wait times and increases the number of people that can be reached.

- Homeless older adults who were in shelters and displaced have been transitioned to hotels/motels. The state is currently working to bridge delivery of meals & other services to older adults experiencing homelessness.
  - Majority of the Title III providers are shifting to Telephone Reassurance and conducting frequent check-ins with clients served. In addition, non-nutrition providers are shifting services to meal and prescription delivery services
  - Statewide wiki of older adult services developed for availability of services during pandemic. Content is updated daily to assist older adults and caregivers.
  - Title III providers are offering quite a few virtual options, ranging from health promotion classes to support groups and caregiver consultation. There is an increase in telephone check-ins and follow up from Senior LinkAge Line Information & Referral calls.
  - The MN Long-Term Care Ombudsmen staff work daily to assure facility staff are directly assisting residents and families to utilize alternative forms of communication such as creating video greetings, using video conferencing (Skype, FaceTime) and sending and receiving handwritten letters and cards. A number of family members and loved ones are visiting with their family member from the outside through a window or glass door.
- Nevada – Developed an aging network rapid response plan with goals, objectives, and major activities, including the creation of a Social Support Action Team (SSAT). The SSAT will offer one-to-one check-in calls and small-group peer support via Zoom and teleconference. Key partners and more details can be accessed on the ADvancing States COVID-19 webpage.
  - New Jersey - To mitigate social isolation, the 21 county area agencies on aging in New Jersey and their providers and partners have instituted a number of measures, including:
    - Telephone Reassurance
      - Offering wellness check calls to their telephone reassurance consumers, senior center participants, care management clients, transportation riders, nutrition program participants, caregivers, and many more. The NJ Division of Aging Services shared a telephone reassurance template for its partners that includes the importance of connecting with friends



and family via phone and internet, providing do-it-yourself mask options, and focusing on positive topics rather than on the coronavirus.

- Identified an emergency contact for clients and have advised the emergency contact to be in close contact with the vulnerable senior.
- In partnership with local Centers for Independent Living, contacting registered clients for wellness checks utilizing *Register Ready*, a statewide database of individuals with access and functional needs used for emergency management planning.
- Connecting with hospital discharge social workers to refer all COVID-19 discharge patients who are at risk of isolation when they return home to the area agencies on aging to be assessed for additional services including crisis contact numbers, local volunteer organizations, home delivered meals, and wellness checks.

○ Nutrition Programs

- Sending out games, information sheets and other activities with home delivered meals. These materials include coloring pages, word searches, crossword puzzles, jigsaw puzzles, activity books, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention information sheets, nutritional and health information booklets and resource directories.
- Will be sending out Mother's Day goodie bags, birthday cards and/or thinking-of-you cards to participants as well as their caregivers.

○ Social Distancing Visits

- Several senior centers, although closed for in-person visits, are providing curbside visits with participants and drive-by parades to remind older adults that their community is still there for them.
- Some senior buildings have begun to offer "Doorway Coffee and Cake," which includes coffee urns brewing in the hallway to spread smell of coffee while residents sit in doorways that are more than six feet apart and have coffee, tea, and cake served to them. Other senior buildings have begun a slight variation called "Doorway Bingo" where a staff person in the hall calls numbers to people in the apartment doorways. CB radios are placed in the hallway as makeshift speakers. Still other sites have organized musical performances on the balconies of apartment buildings where residents can sit out on their individual balconies and either listen or take part in the collaborative musical experience.

- Remote Programming
  - Many providers are offering classes, exercise programs, and group meetings via video conference. Activities such as learning beginning guitar, Italian, Zumba, Qi Gong, and low impact aerobics have proved to be quite popular.
  - Our partners at Rutgers University's Comprehensive Services on Aging (COPSA) Institute for Alzheimer's Disease and Related Disorders are hosting virtual caregiver support groups.
  - One Adult Day Center has sent out to its participants a web link to a YouTube tutorial in which a staff member from the Center, along with her child, demonstrate how to make simple crafts. Craft supplies have been delivered to participants (along with their hot meal for that day) so that they and their caregiver do the craft along with the video.
  - Some seniors have started phone, text, and email chains to share what they have been up to, including funny photos.
  - The Asian Women's Christian Association has text distribution groups in three different languages (Korean, Japanese, and Chinese).
- Donations
  - One county area agency on aging was getting many inquiries from residents asking how they could help during this time. The area agency on aging found that the most helpful way to help is to contribute gift cards from stores such as Rite Aid, Walmart, etc. that the agency can then distribute to consumers in need.
- New York – Established top 5 priority services in the state, including home delivered meals, groceries and supplies, medication delivery, transportation to critical services, and combatting social isolation. New York is also responding in the following ways:
  - All congregate settings (senior centers, Social Adult Day Services, etc.) closed down – any staff that could be reprogrammed to address the top 5 services were directed to do so
    - Many older workers and volunteers are under a stay at home order and have been directed to focus on combatting social isolation – making phone calls, skype, etc.
  - Most counties have both non-essential state staff and county staff that have been told to stay home and many are making social isolation calls

- The Governor set up a general volunteer portal for people who want to volunteer in any capacity – many are making check in calls
- Twice a week calls with the county Office for the Aging and advocates – NY continues to push out resources and guidance with an emphasis and focus on combating social isolation
  - Friendship line – 800-971-0016
  - Mental health line (for depression, anxiety, isolation) almost 7,000 mental health professionals volunteered – 844-863-9314
  - Grief groups [Grief.com](https://www.grief.com)
  - AARP Foundation [connect2affect](https://www.aarp.org/health/mental-health/articles/2020/03/26/connect2affect/)
  - [AARP Community Connections](https://www.aarp.org/health/mental-health/articles/2020/03/26/aarp-community-connections/)
- NY conducted a successful 12 county pilot to test the efficacy of animatronic pets and their impact on social isolation of community-dwelling older adults. Results of the pilot showed 70% of older adults who were isolated and adopted a pet had a reduction/significant reduction in social isolation after 1 year.
  - NY State Office for the Aging is sending 1,100 animatronic pets statewide to combat isolation
- Tennessee – Tennessee is feeding more seniors with supplemental funds and is using some of those funds to obtain meals from small, independent restaurants across the state. Small restaurants were one of the many groups hit dramatically hard by the COVID crisis. The state needed the meals and the restaurants needed the business. Existing providers are also stepping up their food production. Tennessee recognizes feelings of social isolation and loneliness may persist throughout the older adult population during the COVID-19 outbreak. The state is engaging with the community and showing [Care Through Conversation](#). The purpose of the Tennessee Commission on Aging and Disability Care Through Conversation program is to provide support to all older adults and caregivers across the state during the COVID-19 crisis. Telephone reassurance will engage older adults in conversation and assess their needs, including access to meals, groceries or essentials, and medications. *(Note: Tennessee graciously shared their program guides for the Care Through Conversation program, in addition to a volunteer training guide. Please email ADvancing States at [ayoung@advancingstates.org](mailto:ayoung@advancingstates.org) if you would like these materials sent to you.)*

- Texas – Created a COVID-19 Mental Health Support Line available 24/7 for individuals to speak with a mental health professional to help with anxiety, depression, stress, grief or worry. The state also created a list of resources for individuals seeking behavioral health services.
- Virginia – Virginia has a number of Area Agencies on Aging (AAAs) and community-based organizations taking action to address social isolation. These activities can be found in this [social connectedness resource](#) made available through the Virginia Department for Aging and Rehabilitative Services. Creative ideas to address older adult social isolation were collected through interviews, conversations, and a statewide survey (with a 100% response rate from AAAs!) In addition, Fairfax County launched a [Virtual Senior Center](#) through partnerships with several county agencies. Their “Lunch Bunch”, facilitated by ServiceSource, enables the participants to virtually eat together. Two of their Caregiver Specialists also facilitate a Caregiver Lunch Bunch twice a week with discussion topics of interest to caregivers.
- Washington - The state of Washington hired an outside entity who assigned a case manager to each nursing facility with COVID-19 residents. The case manager’s primary responsibility is to aid communication from the resident to the resident’s family members. Case managers carry an iPad with them to help facilitate connection.
- West Virginia – Using restaurants to help with meal delivery

# List of Activities and Ideas to Address Social Isolation in Older Adults

The following activities and resources to support socialization have been collected through various webinars, news articles, community resources, and also as part of a call for ideas in the ADvancing States Friday Update. Please note this is simply a collection of resources, ideas and activities. ADvancing States does not endorse any of the following and strongly encourages states and other entities to use their best judgment in participation. We will continue to update this list as activities are shared:

## Activities-Based Ideas and Resources

- Writing letters or sending children’s art to nursing facility residents
- List of technology-based and technology-free activities at the [Texas Aging and Longevity Center](#). Examples include recording family histories, making gratitude journals, and virtual happy hours.
- [Google Earth National Park Tours](#) – “Visit” national parks across the country and talk about which ones older adults have been to. What did they see? Who were they with?
- Listen to free audio books on [Audible](#).
- [Volunteer to sew masks for nurses and front-line medical staff](#).
- [Journey Meditation](#) – A meditation app; offering free services for the rest of the year
- [United Nations Volunteers](#) – Online volunteering with the United Nations allows organizations and volunteers to connect from anywhere in the world on any device.
- [Translators Without Borders](#) – For those who are fluent in more than one language. Volunteer to translate information
- [LibriVox](#) – Read and record chapters of books in the public domain and make them available for free on the internet.

## Resources Primarily Focused on Social Engagement and Connection

- Facility staff: Contact another facility and start a pen pal program between residents
- [Memory Well](#) – Offering free interactive digital timelines to help promote connection between family members through videos, pictures, audio, letters, and notes.
- Information from the University of California, San Francisco on [Maintaining Wellness for Older Adults and Caregivers](#).
- Assigning a nursing facility staff member as a primary contact for families to facilitate inbound communications as well as outbound
- Fostering partnerships with new entities, such as local police, mail carriers, high school students and school bus drivers to pick up and deliver prescriptions, groceries, and home delivered meals for older adults
- [Lifetime Connections Without Walls](#) by Family Eldercare - Telephone activities program providing opportunities for older adults to connect with others in their community and across the country using a telephone conference call system.
  - Referral:  
(888) 500-6472  
[lcww@familyeldercare.org](mailto:lcww@familyeldercare.org)
- [Find or start a mutual aid group through AARP](#)
- [SAGEConnect](#) - SAGEConnect links LGBT elders with their broader community, reducing isolation and promoting well-being. Interested individuals can register at the link provided or call the registration line at 929-484-4160.

### **Virtual Classes and Technology Tips/Assistance**

- [Well Connected](#) by Covia – Connects individuals to virtual classes, conversations, and activities by phone. Programs available in English and Spanish
  - Referral:  
(877) 797-7299 (English)  
(877) 400-5867 (Spanish)
- This tip sheet from NCOA describes different [Tools for Reaching a Remote Audience](#). Many different tools are included, including Facebook Live, GoToMeeting, Google Hangouts, Microsoft Teams, etc.
- [Techboomers.com](#) is a free educational website that teaches older adults basic computer skills about websites that can help improve their quality of life. Over 100 free courses are available. Topics include online entertainment, shopping online, and social websites and apps. Includes tips and videos on how to stay connected using [Skype](#) and [Facetime](#).

**Helplines, mental and emotional support:**

- [Friendship Line](#) by Institute on Aging - The Friendship Line is both a crisis intervention hotline and a warmline for non-emergency emotional support calls. It is a 24-hour toll-free line and the only accredited crisis line in the country for people aged 60 years and older, and adults living with disabilities. Toll-Free Line: (800) 971-0016
- [Happy](#) – A free app that provides emotional support 24/7. Recommended by the American Heart Association, Mental Health America, and others.
- National Alliance on Mental Illness Helpline: 800-950-6264
- Disaster Distress Helpline through the American Red Cross: 1-800-985-5990
- National Domestic Violence Hotline: 1-800-799-7233
- Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration National Helpline: 1-800-662-4357
- National Suicide Prevention Lifeline: 1-800-273-8255



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