

PA Council on Aging Releases Findings from Survey of Older Adults During Pandemic

Harrisburg, PA – The Pennsylvania Department of Aging and the Pennsylvania Council on Aging (PCoA) today released the findings of a statewide survey conducted by PCoA to assess the status, needs and interests of older adults during the COVID-19 outbreak. The survey inquired about food access, public risk factors, and social connection.

The brief online survey, conducted during the first week of April in both English and Spanish, drew more than 3,700 responses from older adults across Pennsylvania. The survey included questions on how often the older adult communicates with people outside their home, technologies they are using to connect, how often they are leaving their home during this pandemic and their primary reasons for doing so.

COVID-19 is a virus that vastly and disproportionately affects older adults. According to the CDC, older adults are much more at risk of fatality. Eight out of 10 deaths reported in the U.S. have been in adults aged 65 and older. In Pennsylvania, the majority of COVID-19-related hospitalizations are of people aged 65 and older.

“The PCoA determined that there was an immediate need to better understand the landscape that older adults in Pennsylvania are navigating during this crisis,” said PCoA Executive Director Faith Haeussler. “The overwhelming response we received to the survey provides a wealth of insights into their living situations, how they’re getting their needs met, what types of risks they’re taking, what types of activities matter most to them, how connected or isolated they feel, and where they could use some extra help.”

Those aged 60-80 made up 81% of the survey respondents. Those who are over the age of 80 made up 17%. This mirrors the Pennsylvania population of older adults, according to the US Census.

Some of the major findings are:

- Older adults, on average, are going out almost twice weekly to get groceries.
- Older adults are also going to the pharmacy at high numbers, even though almost all pharmacies have offered delivery and drive-through options for shopping and prescription-filling.
- Adults aged 85 and older reported that senior centers were the third source they relied on for their community connection. The first two were family and religious institutions.
- Almost 6% of the “oldest” older adults (91 years and older) reported that they still attended religious events.
- Fewer than 20% of the “oldest” older adults have access to smartphones, but more than 20% stated that they were interested in virtual connections.

The survey revealed differences among age groups and rural and urban settings in how older adults connect with their communities, how they access food, and what technologies they use to stay connected. Several themes emerged highlighting areas where older adults can be supported during this pandemic and in the future. Some of these themes and related recommendations include:

- Evaluating how older adults can access food more safely
- Implementing services and support to maintain communication with older adults and minimize social isolation
- Increasing access to virtual connectivity across the commonwealth for older adults

“We’re very excited about this survey and its potential applications,” said PCoA Board Chair Mickey Flynn. “In addition to providing practical recommendations for helping older adults meet their needs during the COVID-19 emergency, the PCoA views the data collected as a rich resource for continued planning for services for older adults now and after the COVID-19 pandemic.”

“The Wolf Administration and the Department of Aging are keenly aware that food access, community connections and social isolation have and will continue to be issues affecting older adults’ well-being and quality of life,” said Aging Secretary Robert Torres. “The responses drawn by this survey, in real time during this pandemic, present an opportunity for us to deepen our collective understanding of these major issues and engage with partners to develop thoughtful, creative and effective solutions.”

The Pennsylvania Council on Aging serves as an advocate for older individuals and advises the Governor and the Department of Aging on planning, coordination, and delivery of services to older individuals. The Council’s 21 volunteer members, the majority of whom are required to be age 60 or older, are nominated by the Governor and approved by the Senate. Members of the Council also serve as chairpersons for five regional councils totaling 65 volunteers, which meet quarterly. These regional councils gather information and insights on local needs and service delivery and report their findings to the Council. They also serve as resources for research and community outreach efforts.

The full report can be accessed [here](#).

Visit the PA Department of Health’s dedicated coronavirus webpage [here](#) for the most up-to-date information regarding COVID-19.

The Pennsylvania Department of Aging’s mission is to promote independence, purpose and wellbeing in the lives of older adults through advocacy, service and protection while creating a commonwealth where older adults are embraced and empowered to live and age with dignity and respect. The Department represents Pennsylvania’s rapidly growing older population, currently more than 3 million people age 60 and over, and oversees an array of services and support programs that are administered through its network of 52 local Area Agencies on Aging.