



Colorado Association of
Area Agencies on Aging

advocacy | action | answers on aging

Colorado Area Agencies on Aging At Work for Older Adults

A Snapshot of Colorado's Area Agencies on Aging Responses to COVID-19

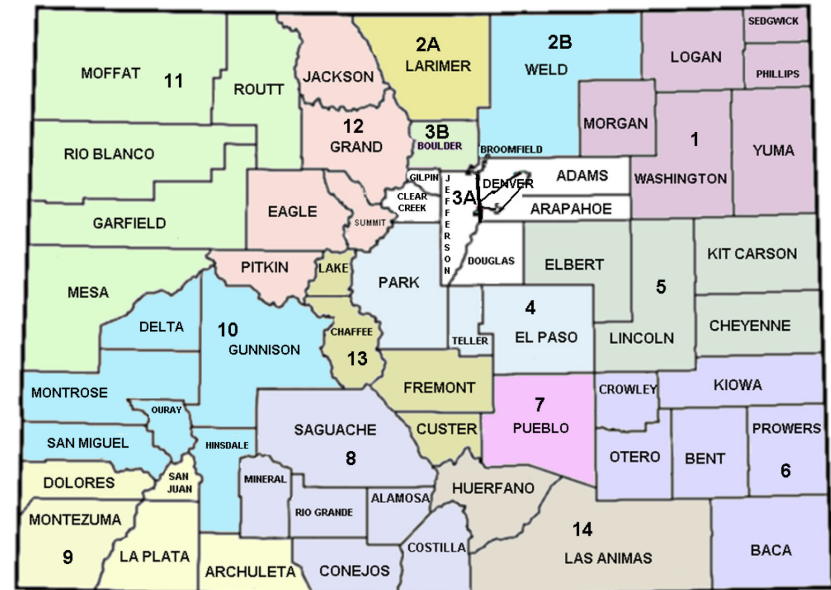
www.c4a-colorado.org



A Snapshot of Colorado's Area Agencies on Aging on Aging's Response to COVID-19

According to the National Association of Area Agencies on Aging (n4a), “the COVID-19 pandemic put older adults and those with chronic conditions at particular risk of poor outcomes, and ‘staying safer at home’ measures left many older adults without the ability to secure meals, groceries, or essential supplies; with less caregiver support than before; and at risk of becoming dangerously socially isolated with its attendant negative health outcomes.”

C4a, the Colorado network of Area Agencies on Aging, quickly mobilized and rallied together to work closely with their community partners across the state to assure that those most impacted by the crisis received essential services to remain safely in their homes and communities.



16 Area Agencies on Aging (AAA) in the State of Colorado



The Colorado Area Agencies on Aging Network

The sixteen (16) Colorado Area Agencies on Aging (AAA) are part of a nationwide network of over 600 on-the-ground organizations in each state, mandated by the Older Americans Act, to carry out the mission of maximizing the health, safety, and independence of older adults, so they can live with independence and dignity in their homes and communities as they age. Funding for the AAAs come from state and federal dollars.

To that end, the AAAs across Colorado provide a range of supportive services that include, but are not limited to, the services listed to the right.

Colorado AAAs partners with many local providers to assure the delivery of these services to older adults living in all regions of the state, **from our most populated urban centers to our outlying rural and frontier communities.** The AAAs are intricately linked with the communities they serve, and this connectivity and knowledge of the older adults, caregivers, and service providers in their regions, allowed them to move quickly when the COVID-19 pandemic struck. AAAs are located within county government, Councils of Governments, and as non-profits.

The Colorado Association of Area Agencies on Aging (c4a) conducted a survey of its 16 member agencies in November, 2020 to understand their response

to the pandemic. At the time of the survey, all the AAAs had received emergency relief funds provided by Congress through the Families First Coronavirus Response Act and the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act.

Supportive Services That Colorado AAAs Provide:

- Information and assistance/referral
- Nutrition through congregate and home-delivered meals, education, and counseling
- Transportation
- Caregiver supports
- Title VI Native American aging programs
- Support to residents in long-term care communities through the Ombudsman program
- In-Home services like chore, homemaker, and personal care
- Health and wellness promotion through evidence-based classes and support groups
- Case Management and Options Counseling
- ADRC Services (Aging and Disability Resources for Colorado)
- Dental and Vision Services
- Legal Assistance
- Elder Abuse Prevention
- Medicare counseling
- Home modifications
- Person-Centered Voucher Programs



The AAA's Response

As stay-at-home orders went into place across the state, thousands of older adults were faced with the inability to access food, medication, critical supplies, and the support and companionship of key family and friends.

AAAs across Colorado quickly revamped how business was conducted in their own agencies and worked closely with their community partners to provide needed services to new and existing older adults.

All 16 AAAs reported an increase in the demand for home-delivered meals as well as increases in requests for most other services. (See figure 1). The survey highlights the many actions taken by AAA directors, their staff, and partners as they responded to the pandemic and its impact on their citizens. (See figure 2).



**AAA
Directors
Say**

Figure 1

Services with Increased Demand

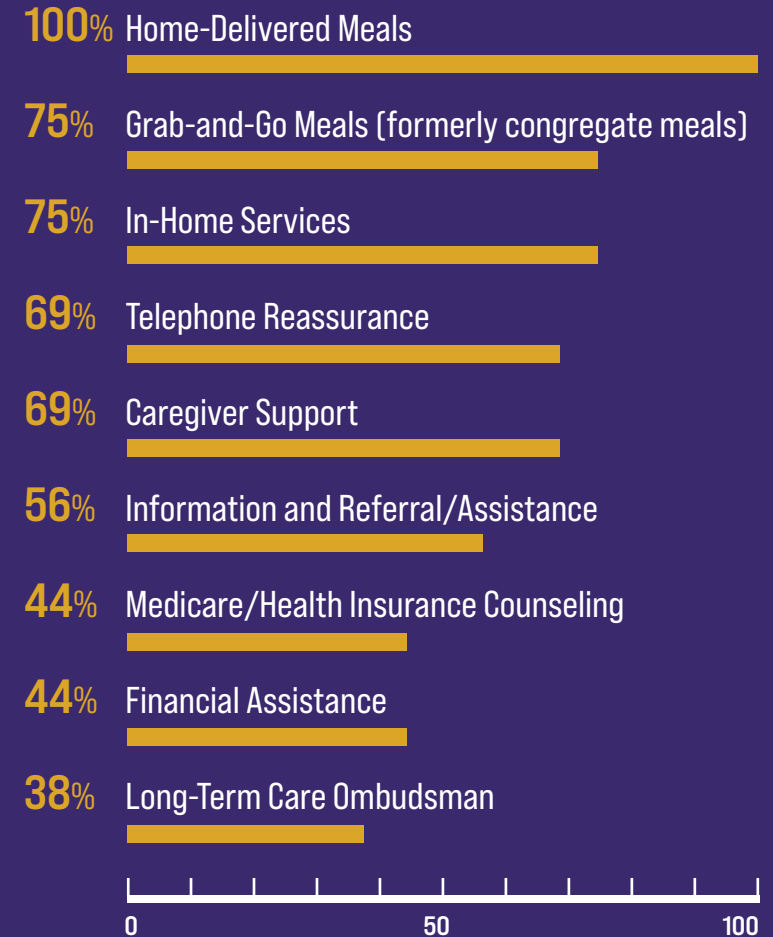
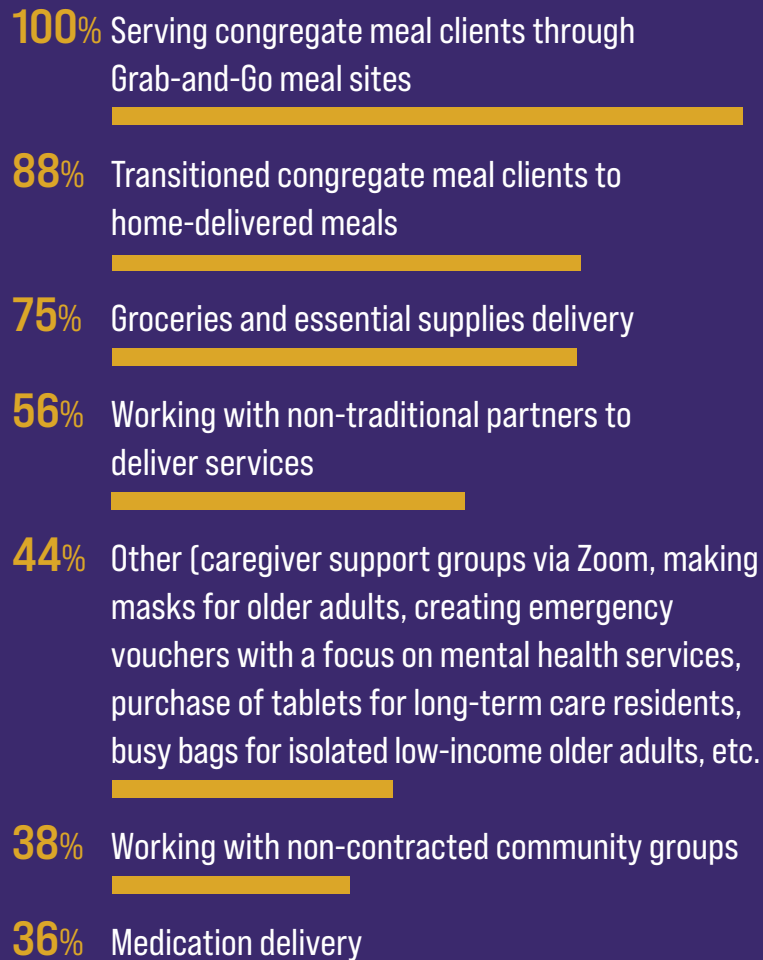


Figure 2

Actions Taken by AAAs in Response to COVID-19



63%
served NEW clients and have seen an increased need for services among existing clients



38%
served more clients since the COVID-19 pandemic began



Adaptable, Flexible, Creative, and Nimble

The AAA network is no stranger to adversity and challenges. For the last forty-seven years, the AAA network has been a dynamic and vital presence in communities across Colorado. When the pandemic made its presence known and shutdowns occurred, the AAAs moved quickly to determine and meet the needs of older adults in their communities.

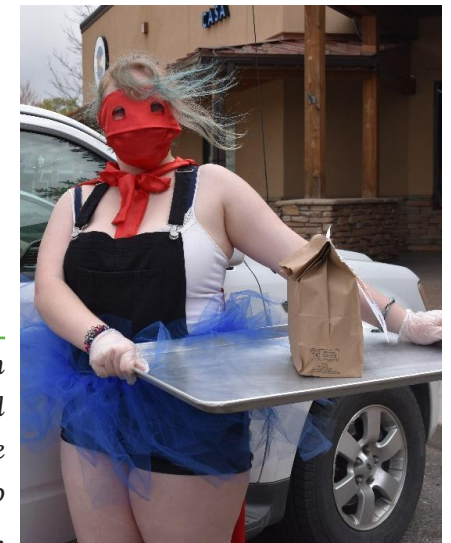
The speed at which AAAs and their partners converted their services is matched only by the ingenuity and innovation they tapped to respond to the threat of COVID-19, while continuing to meet the nutritional, personal care, and social needs of older adults they serve.

Recognizing the importance of getting food to older adults, AAAs worked with their providers and had just a few hours or days to figure out how to take two of their largest programs (home-delivered meals and congregate meals) and adapt them to meet new safety protocols and reach those most in need.

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AAAs across Colorado quickly revamped how business was conducted in their own agencies and worked closely with their community partners to provide needed services to new and existing older adults.



Volunteers at the McArthur Senior Center in Burlington, CO, pack and hand out grab-and-go meals.



Christy Dull, 17, delivers meals to older adults through a new program created by CASA (Court Appointed Special Advocates for Children) and Region 10 AAA in Montrose, CO. Teams of young people, including some who have been in the foster system, deliver meals to older residents who do not want to go out during the Coronavirus pandemic.



Thousands of meals were moved from the traditional congregate sites to “Grab-and-Go” meals. For those who could not access Grab-and-Go sites, home-delivered meals were provided. Many AAAs began grocery delivery programs and utilized their transportation providers to deliver meals and emergency food boxes. Several AAAs worked with their local farmer’s market and developed food vouchers for older adults to gain access to fresh fruits and vegetables, and other AAAs were able to provide additional funding for purchases of freezers, hand trucks, and shelving to meet the increased need for food delivery and storage. In rural areas, vouchers for local restaurants were distributed to assist with the needs of their residents. Pueblo created a new program called 'Nutrition on Wheels', which was launched to deliver food boxes to older adults, and the Louisville Senior Center started a virtual “eat with your neighbor” activity for those picking up a Grab-and-Go lunch.

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In Weld County, older adults cruised into the Senior Center parking lot for Drive-In Dinner and Concerts during the summer evening meal program. They were served excellent food and listened to great music in a safe manner. All cars were socially distanced, and meals were delivered to each car. The evening was finished with a tasty ice cream sandwich.



The AAAs were at the table to work collaboratively with providers across their regions to assure that needed services were in place for those most impacted by the pandemic. In several regions, partnerships were formed with the local school districts to deliver meals to seniors and grandparents raising grandchildren to assure food security across the generations. As one AAA director indicated, there has been “forward thinking” and a “solution-driven approach to serving clients” throughout the response to the pandemic.

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The Denver Council of Governments Area Agency on Aging (DRCOG), with their community partners, provided home-delivered and grab-and-go-meals, along with emergency supplies.



The Trinidad kitchen team continues to be amazing and dedicated during the pandemic. They are dedicated and have adapted to many changes including adding delivery routes and preparing pick up meals.



AAAs Are There When Needed Most

Due to the stay-at-home orders, AAA staff quickly made the transition from office to home with remote access to their information and assistance helplines and other support services. While most AAA offices remain closed to the public and staff are working remotely, they have been able to maintain a high level of responsiveness and have provided easy access to information and services to older adults and their caregivers. Many AAAs report that they experienced an increase in calls for information and assistance. For several AAAs, there was the additional crisis of wildfires in their regions, further increasing the call volume and requests for help. Several AAAs invested in new technology so staff could work from home, and volunteers were trained remotely to assure ongoing information helplines remained available.

While most older adults followed the stay-at-home orders, there continued to be necessary trips for medical appointments and other important services. The network's many transportation providers stepped up and implemented new safety protocols, as well as modified programming to help deliver meals, groceries, and other necessities to older adults in need.



DRCOG AAA connecting with older adults on the road with vital information and assistance.



Silver Key's Reserve & Ride Transportation program, a grantee of Pikes Peak Area Agency on Aging in the Colorado Springs region, has continually operated throughout the pandemic, utilizing strict safety and sanitation protocols, and providing rides for medical appointments. Transportation drivers have been redeployed throughout the organization as needed, including delivering food commodities to homebound seniors since March.



Colorado Area Agencies on Aging At Work for Older Adults **AAAs Are There When Needed Most**

It was apparent from the beginning that those served by the AAA network were increasingly more isolated from family and friends. Many in the network adapted their helplines to include reassurance calls. In some communities, county employees, students, and bus drivers were recruited to help call those most isolated by the pandemic and to check in with them. In the beginning of the pandemic, the reassurance calls focused on determining the critical needs of older adults, establishing their support networks (or lack thereof), and assuring timely referrals to community partners. The calls continue to help maintain connection and provide needed support.

In the survey, 75% of Colorado AAAs report they are seeing the negative health effects of social isolation, and are either addressing this issue through new and updated programs or exploring how they can create programs and services to address isolation now and into the future. Projects in Larimer and Boulder Counties are exploring ways to increasingly utilize tools that connect older adults with the outside world through distribution of electronic tablets and training on how to best use them. In Region 12, Vintage Area Agency on Aging, staff are preparing to introduce a voucher for mental health services as a direct response to the COVID-19 pandemic, and at the Area Agency on Aging Northwest Colorado, tablets were purchased for distribution to residents of low-income housing.



Weld County AAA Isolation Project provided this companion cat for Gladys after she moved in with her family and was no longer able to have her beloved kitty. Susi let the AAA know about Gladys' sad situation, and the agency was able to purchase a companion cat for her to enjoy.

The Catholic Charities' Kinship Caregiver Program in the Denver Metro area has been delivering groceries and family craft activities to clients during the pandemic. Here is a photo of a kinship caregiver receiving her delivery in October.





**AAA
Directors
Say**

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75% of Colorado AAAs report they are seeing the negative health effects of social isolation, and are either addressing this issue through new and updated programs or exploring how they can create programs and services to address isolation now and into the future.

50%

of AAAs are seeing the negative health effects of social isolation and are addressing this issue through new and updated programs and services.

38%

of AAAs are either not seeing the negative impacts currently, or they do not have the data to validate their concerns.

25%

of AAAs are seeing the negative effects of social isolation and are exploring how they can update programs and services to address these needs.



Colorado Area Agencies on Aging At Work for Older Adults **AAAs Are There When Needed Most**

The longer older adults remain at home—and without interventions in the form of programs and services provided by AAAs—the greater the risk they will experience the negative health effects of being isolated. The AAA network is aware of and committed to looking at long-term strategies to address isolation and loneliness among the population they serve.

One of the most devastating impacts of the pandemic has been felt by older adults and their families in long-term care facilities. For most of the pandemic, family members, friends, and other loved ones have not been able to have in-person access to residents. The Long-Term Care Ombudsmen—advocates for long-term care residents—were not able to visit facilities to advocate for residents in person for many months. Often, residents do not have easy access to private phones or email, and to enhance communication and alleviate isolation, many AAAs worked with community partners to distribute electronic tablets in their regional facilities. The hope is to keep residents engaged with the community, their support networks, their medical providers, and their Ombudsman during the pandemic.



The Larimer County AAA, with generous support from Wish of a Lifetime and Visible, donated 165 tablets to the long-term care facilities in the county.

Silver Key, a grantee of Pikes Peak Area Agency on Aging works with over 550 volunteers in various capacities throughout the year to help the organization meet its mission. These nutrition volunteers are assisting with packaging Connection Café meals for weekly pick-up by dining clients who are unable to enjoy a socially engaging meal at any of Silver Key's 14 café sites—all closed due to COVID-19.





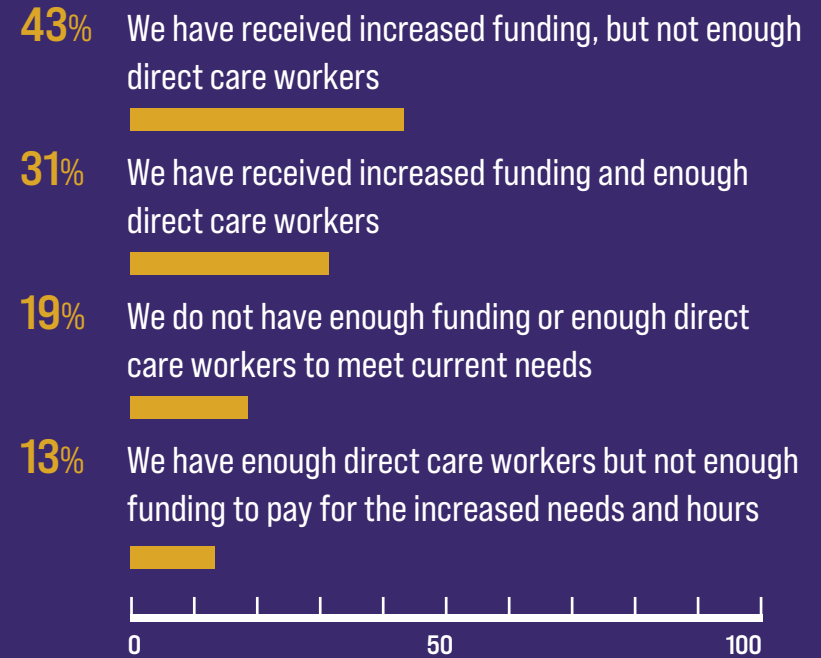
Workforce

Staff and volunteers are a critical part of the success of the AAAs and their community partners. The AAA directors applaud their staff’s “willingness to do whatever it takes to serve people in need” and their community partners’ willingness to find creative ways to serve clients. AAA directors expressed their gratitude for the many non-profits and their staff across the state and how they were able to quickly adapt to a “new normal”.

Some AAAs experienced a marked decline in their volunteer force due to the age of many of their volunteers, while other AAAs saw the community come together to make sure services were delivered by recruiting new volunteers to fill the gaps. Many AAAs have reorganized staff duties and rearranged volunteer jobs to assure safety for both older adults and staff. Overall, teams have been able to adapt and come together, both volunteer and staff, to get the job done. As one director states “we never went away, and we are in it to stay”.



Figure 3
Status of AAAs' Direct Care Workforce



The AAA directors applaud their staff’s “willingness to do whatever it takes to serve people in need” and their community partners’ willingness to find creative ways to serve clients.



Innovation and Technology

While many AAAs have been exploring and, in some cases, implementing a variety of services and programs online, the pandemic propelled the network to move quickly into the virtual world. In many regions, the AAA quickly made wellness classes and support groups available online. In Pikes Peak Area Agency on Aging, there was an increased participation in their retirement series, as well as caregiver support groups, as citizens embraced technology and the use of remote learning.

AAAs and their providers found it necessary to upgrade and purchase new software and hardware to accommodate the need to conduct services remotely. Other AAAs are working in the community to distribute tablets to older adults so that they can stay connected with family and friends, and participate in new and dynamic online programs and services. The pandemic has highlighted the critical need for accessible and affordable internet services especially in rural areas of the state as more and more health care and other services move to an online platform.



The pandemic propelled the network to move quickly into the virtual world.



Figure 4

AAAs Need Technological Solutions to:

- 69% Innovate with new programs that will help reduce social isolation
- 63% Support clients who have limited or no access to technology
- 63% Support clients who need help using the technology they have
- 38% Support expansion of telehealth support services to clients
- 100% AAAs concerned that the internet access, either due to cost of the service or the availability of internet service, will be a challenge for their agency and their community partners





Moving Forward

The pandemic has highlighted the important work of the AAAs and their ability to adapt quickly and to be nimble and flexible. The AAAs were the “boots on the ground” to organize and collaborate with their many community partners to meet the needs of older adults across the state during this unprecedented crisis.

While there is hope for the day when the pandemic is in the past, there will continue to be a growing need for the critical services offered by the AAA network. Colorado is currently home to almost 1.1 million people over the age of 60, and that number is rapidly growing. It is estimated that by the year 2050, more than a quarter of the population will be 60 or older. More information about Colorado's demographic and current State Plan on Aging may be found: <https://tinyurl.com/CoStatePlanonAging>. During the pandemic, many regions saw an increase in the number of older adults needing services. It is anticipated that many, if not most of these new clients, will continue to need services and support long after the pandemic has passed. It will be critical to adequately fund the AAA network now and in the coming years so that these important services will remain viable and able to meet the growing need. (For an in-depth analysis and report on funding needs please refer to DRCOG's report: <https://tinyurl.com/AAAFundingIssues>)

The AAA network in Colorado will need additional resources, support and flexibility into the future. Supporting the escalating and increasingly complex needs of older adults enables them to live with maximum health, safety, and independence in the setting of their choice, and this is the hallmark of AAAs' long-standing work in Colorado and nationally. The COVID-19 crisis has highlighted the vital role AAAs play in their communities as they swiftly and efficiently adapt to changing circumstances and needs of the populations they serve, to ensure that older adults are not forgotten during the pandemic and into the future.



Senior Veterans sharing training and orientation materials in preparation of engaging in safe “porch visits” with senior Veteran clients to help ease social isolation during the pandemic. Calls of Reassurance, Zoom chats, and tele-visits have all been essential life lines connecting people to people throughout the pandemic.



Weld County AAA and 60+ Rides delivering groceries and supplies to seniors in need and providing needed transportation.



A Little Help, a community provider agency helping seniors VOTE!

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For questions regarding legislative
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