

THE 50+ Connection

NEWS and EVENTS from the
Howard County Office on Aging and Independence

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Building Stronger Support for Older Adults

According to the U.S. 2010 Census, 11 million, or 28% of people aged 65 and older, lived alone at the time of the census. As people get older, their likelihood of living alone increases.

The AARP reports that number of adults with no children continues to increase. That means that there are fewer family members to be part of the support network for those individuals. While living alone does not inevitably lead to social isolation, it can certainly be a contributing factor.

Why does combating social isolation matter? According to the National Center on Elder Abuse, social isolation creates greater risk for older adults to experience elder abuse, neglect and exploitation. National Institute of Health research has linked social isolation and loneliness to higher risks for a variety of both physical and mental conditions such as high blood pressure, heart disease, obesity, anxiety, depression, cognitive decline, Alzheimer's disease, and as well as increased mortality rates.

At a time like this, due to COVID 19, we need each other more than ever, especially the older adults in our community. Social contacts tend to decrease as we age for reasons such as retirement, the death of friends and family, or lack of mobility. Additionally, perceived social isolation, the feeling that you are lonely, is a struggle for many older adults. Perceived loneliness contributes to cognitive decline and risk of dementia and Alzheimer's disease according to Dr. John Cacioppo, a neuroscientist and psychologist at the University of Chicago.

National Institute of Aging-supported research by Dr. Cole and others shows that having a sense of mission and purpose in life is linked to healthier immune cells. Helping others through caregiving and volunteering helps people feel less lonely.

What can you do to show you care and help build strong supports for older adults in our community? **Contact the Office on Aging and Independence to explore opportunities to advocate for older adults or volunteer in our community.**

Ways to Connect

Volunteer programs that deliver essential services to older adults:

- Social Call Program (formerly Friendly Connections)
- Long-Term-Care Ombudsman
- Neighbor Ride
- Meals on Wheels

Learn more about volunteering with older adults through the Office on Aging and Independence on the Maryland Access Point of Howard County (MAP) information and assistance at 410-313-1234 (voice/relay) or www.howardcountymd.gov/aging

For more information on Elder Abuse Awareness and prevention, visit www.howardcountymd.gov/eldersafety.



WORLD ELDER ABUSE AWARENESS DAY

Building Strong Support for Elders

A Message from
Howard County Executive

Calvin Ball



Amid the ongoing pandemic, our community has remained resilient and is working together to respond to the COVID-19 crisis in unprecedented ways. I am especially proud of our team at the **Office on Aging and Independence (OAI)**, who have been behind-the-scenes heroes ensuring access to services, resources, support and information during our COVID-19 response.

Our ombudsman and guardianship programs have continued to provide essential advocacy to our most vulnerable older adults; our **50+ CENTERS** have provided virtual programming to ensure social connectedness and decrease social isolation; a **GRAB & GO** meal distribution has been set up to ensure food access; and our **LOAN CLOSET** is providing equipment distribution to individuals who are experiencing acute needs.

This is just to name a few of the activities – every day our team is working incredibly hard, adapting to the changing situation, and innovating to provide services during this crisis. Throughout the response, OAI's **Maryland Access Point (MAP)** has been a trusted resource for information and assistance. MAP Information specialists are available weekdays to take your calls at 410-313-1234.

Even though many of us are still physically distancing, it is more important than ever to stay in touch with our loved ones, neighbors, and friends. **June is National Safety Month** and, with many of us spending more time at home, it is a good time to take the time and make sure our homes are safe to prevent falls.

To reduce the risk of falls at home, remove anything on your floor that is a trip hazard; arrange furniture so there is plenty of room to walk; and put essential items within easy reach.

Wishing you and your family a safe and healthy month ahead.

 Howard County Office on
Aging and Independence

Department of Community Resources and Services

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Neighbor Ride Shifts Gears to Help County Thrive

For years, Neighbor Ride's volunteer transportation service has met a critical need, driving older adults in Howard County who want to remain healthy, active, and engaged. Transportation is often a common barrier for older adults to access health care services and community activities that support their desire and ability to age in place.

During "normal" times Neighbor Ride's volunteer drivers provide up to 1,500 trips a month; this number dropped tremendously in response to the pandemic. "When the impact of the COVID-19 started to take shape, we saw that access to food would become a challenge for many in the county — not just older adults — and we knew we could help," said Bruce Fulton, executive director of Neighbor Ride. "Knowing our team of 400 volunteers was ready and willing to help, we reached out to the Howard County Food Bank and the Office on Aging and Independence (OAI) to offer meal delivery service for their clients with food access issues."

"With 50+ Centers closed, our members cannot take advantage of our congregate meal program, so we developed the Grab & Go meal distribution program to fill that void," said OAI Administrator Jenna Crawley. "With the support of Neighbor Ride and the county's Roving Radish — which provides onsite refrigeration for the meal kits and delivers them to several senior living facilities — this program helps to ensure that older adults have easy access to nutritious meals."

"The Roving Radish has always focused on healthy food access, and we feel very fortunate that we can assist with the Grab & Go program," said James Zoller, Roving Radish program manager. "In difficult times, we are all tested; we are proud to be part of this great team effort to meet our community's needs."

A Recent Survey Reflects Experiences From NR Drivers

- Driving for NR has always been important to me... volunteering during the crisis has made me more aware of how interdependent our community is and how easily our elderly can become isolated. I love working with a group of people who are willing to roll up their sleeves and ask, "How can we help?" — Andrea C.
- Although our clients always express thanks for the service we provide, our food delivery clients are truly grateful to receive much needed supplies. It not only brings food to their door; it also protects them from the coronavirus. — Paul S.



- If I lived alone and needed food, I would like to think someone would step up to help. Volunteering during this crisis has also made me feel less isolated. — Kathy H.

"Food delivery has truly been a win-win partnership for everyone involved," said Fulton. This partnership with the Office on Aging and Independence and others is a great example of how we can work together effectively and efficiently. That makes me smile the brightest – to see local organizations working together and members of our community supporting each other! For more information about Neighbor Ride, visit www.NeighborRide.org.

For eligibility guidelines or registration details for the Grab & Go program, contact Maryland Access Point of Howard County at 410-313-1234 (voice/relay) or email map@howardcountymd.gov.



FIRE SAFETY IN YOUR HOME!

- Smoke alarms should be installed on every level of the home, inside each bedroom and outside each sleeping area
- Test monthly by pushing the test button
- Replace every 10 years

FOR ASSISTANCE OR
ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

410-313-2016 • outreach@hcdfrs.org

50+ Centers Transition to Virtual Health Classes

Even — or perhaps especially — during a global health pandemic like COVID-19, it is important to stay active and take steps to maintain your health and wellbeing. The Howard County Office on Aging and Independence is here to help. While our Patuxent Woods offices, 50+ Centers and the Loan Closet of Howard County are closed to the public, our staff continues to find innovative ways to provide resources and services which meet the needs of older adults in Howard County during these uncertain times.

One new and exciting way we are connecting to the community is through virtual programming offered via WebEx. A full schedule of virtual programs is available on our website, offering a wide range of virtual programs to engage, inspire and motivate Howard County residents and 50+ Center members. There are exercise classes in various formats and levels, from Sittercise and Strength Training to Yoga and Mat Pilates; lifelong learning for history buffs; creative outlets like Sit, Stitch & Give and social opportunities like Coffee Chat.

All of our virtual exercise and classes are free, and accessible through WebEx. Visit www.howardcountymd.gov/aging and click on the **Virtual Program Guide** to access the current schedule. To register for a class, simply click on the links provided in the guide for each class, enter the meeting access code and you are ready to participate. When you "join" a class, be sure to mute your computer to background noise and maximize the class experience. While we hope you will give this new mode of activity a try, we also hope to see you again in person soon!

