



JB Pritzker, Governor
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October 21, 2020

Dear Aging Network:

Watching your distancing, wearing a mask, and washing your hands is not a light switch; it is more like a dial. I understand that pandemic fatigue is everywhere, however, a new wave could be upon us. Experts have predicted for months that we could see a resurgence of the virus as the temperatures became colder. It is important for you to understand that what you do in your community affects those around you, and above all sets an example. So please, do your part and help slow the spread.

Regrettably, out of the over 9,275 COVID-19 deaths in the State of Illinois, [over 85% of them](#) have been adults 60 years of age or older. Every region of the state has started to move in the wrong direction. Cases, positivity rates, hospitalizations, and deaths are rising statewide. The time is now to take action, follow public health recommendations, and bring our numbers down. IDoA continues to collaborate with Governor Pritzker's administration, the Department of Public Health, our federal partners, sister agencies, and stakeholders and will provide further evidence-based guidelines for how to turn the dial-up or down relative to the level of risk and degree of viral spread in a community. Please know that if we need to take action with further restrictions, they are necessary - and can only work if we go All in for Illinois!

While there are still many unknowns regarding COVID-19, we do know that [as you get older, your risk for severe](#) illness from COVID-19 increases; and equitable distribution of resources, like testing and medical equipment, can make a difference in fighting the virus. We also know that the greatest risk for severe illness from COVID-19 is among individuals 85 years of age or older, and those that have [underlying medical conditions](#). IDoA is here to make sure that you have everything you need to do your jobs, and to keep yourselves, your colleagues, and most importantly the older adults you serve healthy and safe.

As we brace for a dual outbreak of flu and COVID-19 this fall and winter, I would like to challenge everyone to roll their [#SleeveUp](#) and get a flu shot. Doing so will increase your chances of staying healthy and help reduce the strain on healthcare systems, keeping hospital beds and other medical resources available for COVID-19 patients.

The Aging Network is known for rising above challenges. As leaders, it is our obligation to take the additional step and make sure that we are doing everything we can to recognize and provide extra supports to those who need it. The enemy is the disease, not each other. [Click here](#) and see below for more information on emotional support services.

- The Warm Line is a team of Wellness Support Specialists who have experienced mental health and/or substance use recovery in their own lives. The Warm Line is a source of support - if you just need to talk. Call 1-866-359-7593 M-F 8am-5pm. Main menu; select option 2.
- Call4Calm - Mental Health Support Hotline. The Illinois Department of Human Services' Mental Health Division has launched a free-of-charge, emotional support text line, Call4Calm, for Illinois residents experiencing stress and mental health issues related to COVID-19.
- Individuals who would like to speak with a mental health professional can text "TALK" to 5-5-2-0-2-0, or for Spanish, "HABLAR" to the same number: 5-5-2-0-2-0. Once a resident sends a text to the hotline, they will receive a call from a counselor within 24 hours.
- IDoA has also published resources to help connect older and disabled Illinoisans with family and loved ones to prevent distress and feelings of social isolation. Those resources can be found on the [IDoA website here](#).

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www.illinois.gov/aging

The Illinois Department on Aging does not discriminate in admission to programs or treatment of employment in programs or activities in compliance with appropriate State and Federal statutes. If you feel you have been discriminated against, call the Senior HelpLine at 1-800-252-8966; 1-888-206-1327 (TTY)



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On Thursday, October 15, the department hosted its first-ever virtual symposium which focused on COVID-19, its impact on older adults, and the Aging Network. The one-day symposium, with over 600 attendees, included recognized leaders and panel discussions led by members of the Aging Network that provided an opportunity for those who administer and provide senior services with the most front-line information available so that they may better serve and advocate for our most vulnerable residents during this public health emergency. Topics presented included *Adaptability & Creativity during COVID-19*, *Grieving the Loss of Normal Life in the Face of Pandemic(s)*, and *Mindfulness: The Art & Science of Cultivating Resilience*. We also took some time to announce the 2020 Senior Illinoisans Hall of Fame Inductees and announce the 2020 Governor's Engaging Aging Awardees. If you missed the symposium, we will be sending you a link so that you can view it anytime within the next few days.

The symposium was definitely a little different in nature, and I know that you all look forward to networking and interacting with your friends from across the state. Trading best practice stories and ideas is a hallmark activity at normal IDoA events. Although we could not meet in person, it is my hope that the symposium re-energized your spirit, and provided you with the confidence to tackle problems, and address them head on with resilience - as you have been. It is too early to say what our Annual Conference in early 2021 will look like at this point - but I would like you all to note that we are planning to hold something.

Finally, I would like to bring your attention to the State Plan on Aging, a report required by the U.S. Administration for Community Living that outlines the goals, strategies, and objectives for IDoA over the next three years. We are now working on the FY 2021-2023 State Plan on Aging, and we invite any and all public participation during our virtual public stakeholder hearings. Registration is encouraged, but not required. For more information on registration, to review the draft plan and submit written comments, please [visit our website](#).

As always, thank you for setting the bar and inspiring others, so that together we may all **support today, and plan for tomorrow**. Please stay safe and be well.

Sincerely,

Paula Basta, M.Div.
Director, Illinois Department on Aging

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