



JB Pritzker, Governor
Paula A. Basta, M.Div., Director

Respect for Yesterday
Support for Today
Plan for Tomorrow

**Find A Vaccine
Location**



IDoA COVID-19 Resources



March 18, 2021

Dear Aging Network:

Every March since 1980, the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics focuses attention on healthful eating through [National Nutrition Month®](#). Proper nutrition and hydration are vital. People who eat a well-balanced diet tend to be healthier with stronger immune systems and lower risk of chronic illnesses and infectious diseases. This year's theme, *Personalize Your Plate*, promotes creating nutritious meals to meet individuals' cultural and personal food preferences. Developing a healthful eating pattern is not a one-size-fits all endeavor. The key is tailoring our favorite foods to meet our individual nutrient needs. As part of National Nutrition Month®, the [Academy's website has resources](#) to spread the message of good nutrition and the importance of an overall healthy lifestyle for all. To assist in this effort, IDoA's nutritionist provides nutrition resources in compliance with federal guidelines to benefit older Illinoisans. Have you noticed a change in your loved one's appetite or weight? Now more than ever, we all need to look out for one another and make sure we have proper nutrition. Find out more about [IDoA's nutrition programs here](#).

Over the course of the past year, we know that while COVID-19 spared no group, it has impacted certain populations more than others. Throughout the pandemic, older adults and people of color have consistently been disproportionately [sickened and killed](#) by the virus. However, this week we marked another milestone with COVID-19 vaccination efforts across the state, averaging 100,000 plus vaccinations a day. Under the bold and compassionate leadership of Governor Pritzker, over 4.1 million people have been vaccinated in Illinois - and I am proud to know that about 45.5% of Chicago's older adults have been vaccinated! It continues to be a hopeful time as Illinois deploys vaccinations across the state and vaccine supplies ramp up. As you may know, IDoA has tried to play a part in supplementing and supporting vaccination efforts in Illinois - which includes a \$1.2 million grant to our Area Agencies on Aging to provide direct assistance with the vaccination registration process. In this regard, I wanted to share with you the details of my recent visit to one of our AAAs, AgeOptions, who stepped up in dramatic ways to be a partner to us and so many others.

On a cold Sunday morning in February, I was greeted by Diane Slezak from [AgeOptions](#), and Debra Verschelde from [Aging Care Connections](#) in the parking lot. Behind our masks were huge smiles as we had not seen each other in person for almost a year; we bumped elbows as we made our way into the building. They came out to meet me for my

visit to their pop-up vaccine distribution location in North Riverside. Now, there were other players that made this happen including [Oak Park River Forest Senior Services](#), [Solutions for Care](#), and [UCP Seguin of Greater Chicago](#), but I was humbled to witness Aging Network partnerships in action. Older adults from the area would approach the building, greeted by administrators, and ensured that their paperwork was in order. Once this was completed, they were escorted to a huge gymnasium where they waited for their shots. Some nursing assistants were drawing vaccine from the vials into the syringes on the main floor, and others were administering them in the different side meeting rooms. Once the shots were completed, residents were seated for 15 minutes, and then exited the side door to ensure that there was no unnecessary interaction with other people. At the end of the very long day, over 450 vaccinations were administered to older adults!

I can't do justice in words what I was able to witness. My heart was bursting with pride and joy to see the generosity of the human spirit; and I am extremely proud to tell you that this isn't the only pop-up clinic that the Aging Network has been able to put together. From [Elder Care Services](#) and their vaccine clinic held in DeKalb County, to the [Shawnee Alliance](#) and their vaccination efforts in Cairo and Cobden, the Aging Network continues to be strong and resilient. Partnership is a word too easily used, and in these instances, we see the gold standard for this word. Make no mistake, the older Illinoisans who received the COVID-19 vaccines at these locations would not have received their shot if it were not for every organization who contributed their part. Furthermore, we saw good and tenacious government in action through the leadership of our Aging Network. Your relentlessness and ingenuity in pursuit of a solution is a shining example of why the Aging Network matters. You can see some of our older Illinoisans [as they #VaxUp here](#).

With three COVID-19 vaccines on the market, availability is likely to increase and I am hopeful that older adults will soon be able to resume activities and gather safely. The end of the pandemic will be halting and gradual, but in the meantime, we must remain vigilant in our compliance with face coverings, social distancing, and limits to in-person gatherings as we **support today and plan for tomorrow**. Please continue to stay safe and be well.

Sincerely,



Paula Basta, M.Div.
Director, Illinois Department on 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 (800) 252-8966; (888) 206-1327 (TTY)

