



JB Pritzker, Governor
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September 15, 2020

Dear Aging Network:

September is National Senior Center Month. Senior centers deliver vital connections to support older adults aging well. Preventing social isolation is a core senior center mission. While the delivery methods have changed during the pandemic, our senior centers have succeeded in continuing to provide knowledge, programming, and resources to our older Illinoisans in innovative ways. Parking lot bingo games, wellness classes in online forums, remote Memory Cafes, and virtual adult literacy, art and physical fitness classes are the new normal. Our senior centers are finding new and creative ways that were otherwise absent. During senior center month, showcase your center and its vital role in your community, promote a positive image of aging, and create interest among prospective new participants in the virtual world.

Additionally, last month when I wrote to you, our Adult Day Service providers began to re-open. Cautiously, 23% of our providers began operating - safely - adhering to guidance from the Illinois Department of Public Health and the Illinois Department of Healthcare and Family Services. Today, I am happy to report that close to 50% of our Adult Day Service providers have now re-opened! This couldn't have come at a more critical time. I am extremely proud of our providers who have resumed services for our older Illinoisans. Please remember that if you still have not received your PPE, it is available for you at our offices.

September is National Suicide Prevention Month, and as human service advocates, we are the first to respond to heal, to comfort, serve, support, and protect. That is why it is important to remember that we all have a role to play in suicide prevention. As we have highlighted before, social isolation and loneliness are serious health risks that affect a large portion of our older adults, and research tells us that being connected is an important protective factor against suicide. We need to stay focused and be able to identify individuals who may need our help. Reach out and #BeThere for our older adults. As Governor Pritzker continues to say, we are all safer and stronger when we look out for one another and go all in, for Illinois. I encourage you to take a look at the resources from the [National Action Alliance for Suicide Prevention](#) which includes identifying ways on how to save lives.

One last national recognition this month of note is National Preparedness Month. National Preparedness Month is meant to be an annual reminder for our older adults, their families and caregivers to take a few simple steps to prepare for an emergency. Being prepared can help reduce fear, anxiety and losses associated with any kind of a disaster that we may encounter. I encourage everyone to have a discussion with their older friend or a relative's caregiver about the safeguards in place in case a disaster strikes. If they don't have a plan, consider assisting them in implementing one with [some of these tips on our website](#).

Finally, I would like to invite you all to IDoA's Virtual Annual Conference. The one-day conference will take place on **October 15, 2020**, and focus on COVID-19, its impact on older adults, and the Aging Network. Our first-ever virtual conference will provide an opportunity for those who administer and provide senior services to discuss challenges and successes during this public health emergency. In addition, the Annual Senior Illinoisans Hall of Fame Awards and the Governor's Engaging Aging Awards will be presented. More details will be forthcoming, but please save the date!

On a personal note, I hope that every one of you were able to take some time to unwind over the summer months and enjoy some personal time with your families. I know how much energy and effort you all have put in over these past 6 months and realize how much life has changed. It is my hope that you all found some time to have a short break. At times, it has been relentless and grueling, and I am truly grateful for all the work you are doing. Thank you for your dedication to **supporting today and planning for tomorrow**. Please stay safe and be well.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink that reads 'Paula Basta'.

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

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