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National Association of Area Agencies on Aging

Roles of Area Agencies on Aging in the Vaccination of Older Adults

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To meet the nation’s admirable goals of vaccinating the highest-risk populations, who are also often among the most difficult to reach, the National Association of Area Agencies on Aging (n4a) urges policymakers and decisionmakers to rely on and support the national network of Area Agencies on Aging (AAAs), which already serves these older adults, supports their caregivers and are trusted resources at the community level. Additionally, because AAAs are the local leadership entity within the Aging Network and they are required under existing federal law to prioritize and target outreach and services to those most in need—specifically racial minorities and other populations with greatest social and economic need—the nationwide network of AAAs is best positioned to support efforts to focus on and connect with the older adults most affected by racial and/or socioeconomic health disparities in this pandemic and beyond.

AAAs can tap their existing systems to educate their communities on the importance of vaccination, can help older adults navigate often complicated and non-age-friendly vaccine sign-up systems most of which are online, and can provide the direct, supportive services that enable these older adults to keep their vaccination appointment (e.g., transportation, personal assistance, case management). These efforts essentially enhance existing and future massive vaccine deployment efforts by state and local public health agencies *but require additional funding*. (See the [latest n4a policy and funding requests](#) on this issue.)

To dig deeper into how AAAs are already doing this support work, n4a has compiled a list of examples from the field, many in the form of media story to expedite this document. Given the

speed at which this issue is evolving, the following list is a snapshot in time; updates will be made as more information is available. (n4a members with examples to share should send them to membership@n4a.org.) The following list should also not be considered a comprehensive description of all the ways AAAs are supporting or could support older adults in getting vaccinated against COVID-19.

Examples by Type of Service

Outreach and Education

(Broad and individual)

All AAAs conduct outreach and education to older adults, particularly those most in need of assistance, making them uniquely qualified to help with public education and targeted outreach to hard-to-reach populations of older adults, including those living alone, with cognitive impairments or in rural areas, as well as those who are members of racial minority populations.

- Ohio: AAAs have been designated by the state as key partner to provide information and education around vaccines. They are offering vaccine hotlines and resources online.
 - [Agency on aging provides COVID-19 vaccine hotline \(Marion Star\)](#)
 - [AAA7 Can Help With COVID Questions \(Ironton Tribune\)](#)
 - [Central Ohio agency assisting elderly find vaccine locations \(WSYX ABC6\)](#)
- Maine: Southern Maine Agency on Aging is providing [information and outreach, especially to older adults without internet access \(WMTW ABC8\)](#).
- Michigan: 3-C Area Agency on Aging and Region 2 Area Agency on Aging are [helping notify those over 65 that they are eligible for the vaccine \(WTVB\)](#).
- Illinois: [AgeOptions](#) is working with Cook County to help family caregivers understand how they can be vaccinated under Phase

1a and assisting those caregivers in obtaining a certification letter to qualify for that designation.

- Indiana: The Indiana AAAs are focused on pro-active outreach calls to their clients. They are also serving as secondary call centers for the general public.

Securing Appointments

(Information and Referral/Assistance, Case Management)

All AAAs provide information and referral/assistance services, so they already know how to triage calls and provide age-friendly customer service to older adults and to family caregivers. They also bring case management expertise to the table, providing additional layers of support for the highest-need clients and coordinating care across health care providers and systems.

- New York: AAAs are providing direct help to older adults pre-register and secure vaccination appointments.
 - The New York City Department for the Aging has [290 participant organizations making 60,000 calls per week to inform older adults about the vaccine and to help schedule visits \(New York Times\)](#)
 - Chautauqua County Office for the Aging [Director Urges Seniors Seeking COVID-19 Vaccination Appointments to Please be Patient](#)
- Pennsylvania: Pike County AAA [helped register older adults without internet access for a local drive-thru vaccine clinic \(WNEP ABC16\)](#).
- Texas: Harris County Area Agency on Aging is [scheduling older adults for vaccines](#) and [coordinating assistance such as transportation \(KHOU 11\)](#) when needed.
- Michigan: [Valley AAA is helping older adults pre-register for the vaccine by phone \(MLive Michigan\)](#).
- [Indiana AAAs](#) are [providing assistance with vaccine registration \(Local News Digital\)](#).

- Michigan AAAs [are helping older adults register for the vaccine waiting list \(Michigan Radio\)](#).
- Massachusetts AAAs have been named by the state as a resource for individuals age 75 or older with questions or [needing assistance scheduling a COVID19 vaccine appointment](#).

Facilitating the Appointment

(Support Services, Transportation)

Once a vaccine appointment is made, AAAs often support many of their clients in getting to and from the appointment—and often provide personal assistance during the appointment. AAAs already coordinate in-home services and can deploy direct care workers to assist clients, including those who are totally or mostly homebound and will need hands-on help to safely manage a vaccine appointment. AAAs already fund or operate transportation programs that are designed to address the needs of older adults and people with disabilities, which positions them to offer this type of needed assistance that support local vaccination campaigns.

- Massachusetts: Complementing the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) federal pharmacy partnership program, AAAs are playing a role in [supporting the vaccination of older adults living in HUD congregate housing sites \(Boston Herald\)](#). MA AAAs have contacted residents and helped them complete vaccination forms, have provided translation services beforehand and at the clinic, and have supported residents during the clinics. For the general population, some MA AAAs are also offering free transportation to COVID vaccine clinics.
- Idaho: Area V Agency on Aging's expanded its long-standing partnership with the local transit authority to [provide older adults door-to-door transportation to vaccine appointments \(Idaho Falls Magazine\)](#).
- Ohio: The Ohio AAAs are taking the lead with the Ohio National Guard to organize and implement vaccine clinics at affordable housing for those age 65+. As people are waiting after the vaccine injection to detect any reactions, AAAs will be using their expertise to provide information and assistance for those who

- are facing harmful social isolation, food insecurity, and/or other social health determinants. Additional resources are needed to meet the increased demand for services.
- [Western Reserve Area Agency on Aging hosting COVID-19 vaccination clinics this week \(FOX 8 Cleveland\)](#)
 - Michigan: AAAs are providing transportation to vaccine sites:
 - Mid-Michigan District Health Department is [partnering with AAAs on transportation to vaccination appointments \(The Daily News\)](#).
 - Tri-County Office on Aging in Lansing [partnered with the local transit agency and public health department to ensure eligible older adults have transportation to receive the vaccine \(WILX 10\)](#).
 - Texas: Harris County Area Agency on Aging is [coordinating assistance such as transportation \(KHOU 11\)](#) when needed.
 - Arizona: The Arizona Aging Network is particularly concerned about homebound older adults and are exploring what services they can use to transport homebound older adults to vaccine centers or ways that they can get vaccines into coolers to take them to homebound older adults themselves. However, given Arizona's vast size and topographical variation within Arizona, the second option is more challenging. Arizona's AAAs do not have the funding to stand up a call center or hire staff to give the vaccine (currently relying on volunteers). To do so would require [additional federal funds](#).
 - New York: Since the Aging Network was not included in the priority vaccination plan, AAA staff, including home-delivered meals drivers, case managers and other staff/volunteers who could assist in the vaccine campaign are not eligible to receive the vaccine and therefore cannot help with local vaccine campaigns.

Hosting Clinics in Age-Friendly Locations

When there are vaccines that can more easily be stored and thus smaller, more targeted vaccine clinics can begin nationwide, public health should look to partner with the Aging Network to increase their

ability to reach high-need older adults. Because of the services they provide—and the central role they play in supporting older adults every day in their communities—AAAs have meals sites, senior centers, offices with meeting spaces and other community locations that are already designed to meet the needs of older adults. As a result of this role, AAAs can serve as a trusted entity and provide a variety of locations for vaccine clinics targeted toward those who need additional help or encouragement in obtaining the vaccine.

- Maine: Health systems are setting up clinics and while the AAAs have offered to stand up vaccine clinics in their education departments or senior centers—and have financial resources to do so—these locations are not currently being considered as a space to provide vaccines.
- Region VII AAA in Michigan has several staff trained in delivering COVID-19 vaccinations and has applied to be a provider of the COVID-19 vaccine in later phases. The AAA administered vaccines to approximately 50 of its staff in partnership with the local public health department but under the AAA's own supervision and delivery.

For more information, please contact:

Sandy Markwood, CEO, National Association of Area Agencies on Aging (n4a), smarkwood@n4a.org

Amy Gotwals, Chief, Public Policy and External Affairs, n4a, agotwals@n4a.org

n4a members interested in sharing their experiences with supporting the vaccination needs of older adults and caregivers are encouraged to contact us at membership@n4a.org.