

August 27, 2020 Advocacy Alert



Ask Your Lawmakers to Support Bicameral Bill to Address Social Isolation Among Older Americans!

August 27, 2020

Members of Congress are not due back to DC until after Labor Day, but lawmakers, staff and advocates are still negotiating priorities for another round of coronavirus relief as soon as the current stalemate breaks. In addition to bipartisan calls from both the [Senate](#) and [House](#) over the last two weeks to include, at a minimum, \$1.1 billion in the next round of COVID-19 relief legislation for OAA programs, **n4a has also [promoted funding for AAAs and the Aging Network to address widespread social isolation and loneliness among older Americans.](#)**

Earlier this month, Senators Tina Smith (D-MN) and Kirsten Gillibrand (D-NY) along with Representative David Trone (D-MD) introduced—and [n4a endorsed](#)—a bicameral proposal, the Strengthening Social Connections Act of 2020, [S. 4477/H.R. 8026](#), to address the rapidly growing issue of community disconnect amid the coronavirus pandemic. n4a worked closely with both Senate and House sponsors to develop legislation that would provide:

- **\$80 million for OAA Title III B Supportive Services** for older adults, with a focus on activities to prevent and mitigate the negative health effects of social isolation, including the purchase of technology.
- **\$18 million to enhance outreach to older adults and provide technical assistance** to help Area Agencies on Aging, service providers and others to reduce the negative health effects of social isolation and loneliness among older adults.
- **\$6 million to develop targeted and innovative outreach to minority aging populations** to address the specific negative health effects of social isolation on those populations.

Our ultimate goal is to ensure that these funding priorities are included in the next round of coronavirus response legislation, which we believe could happen when lawmakers return to DC after September 8. But, in order to promote funding for these important activities to identify and alleviate social isolation and loneliness among older Americans, **we need your help to educate your lawmakers about the problem and ask them to co-sponsor the bill that promotes solutions!**

[Action Requested:](#)

→ **Call and/or email your Senator and Representative(s) to tell them about the Strengthening Social Connections Act of 2020, S. 4477/H.R. 8026. Specifically, ask them to consider signing on as a co-sponsor!** This bill will have a better chance of gaining traction if it has bipartisan support, so your outreach to Republican lawmakers who have a record of supporting OAA programs is especially important.

STEP 1: Call the DC office and ask for the staff member who handles Older Americans Act and/or Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) funding issues. You can reach them through the U.S. Capitol Switchboard at 202.224.3121 or find the number on your Senator's or Representative's website.

STEP 2: Tell them about the bicameral bill, the Strengthening Social Connections Act of 2020, S. 4477/H.R. 8026, and offer to send a [link to the bill summary](#) if they have not already seen it.

STEP 3: Tell them why increasing your agency's and the Aging Network's ability to address social isolation is critical to their constituents! You can use some of the below talking points and/or [n4a's recent endorsement letter](#) to inform your outreach, but be sure to share stories from your agency and community.

Nationally, social isolation and loneliness are very real threats to the health and well-being of older Americans. The pandemic has only exacerbated this concern. Recent studies have shown that a prolonged lack of social connection is as harmful as smoking 15 cigarettes a day. Loneliness and social isolation are also a significant financial burden to our health care system, costing taxpayers an estimated \$7 billion in Medicare expenditures each year. Pandemic-related prolonged isolation will undoubtedly balloon these health consequences and costs.

Also, in a May survey of Area Agencies on Aging, 60 percent of respondents were already seeing, among their clients, the negative health effects of social isolation. While all AAAs are actively working to address this issue, much more needs to be done given the staggering size of the problem amid and beyond the pandemic. Therefore, we urge lawmakers to support the Strengthening Social Connections Act of 2020, S. 4477/H.R. 8026, which will make meaningful investments to address this very real problem.

If your Senator is interested in supporting the bill, have them contact Senator Smith's office at 202.224.5641. If your Representative wants to sign on as a co-sponsor, they should contact Congressman Trone's office at 202.225.2721.

→ **Ask other advocates to do the same!** Urge colleagues, advisory board members, volunteers and clients to make calls to their Senators and Representatives about this important priority. **Strong support in both chambers of Congress will be necessary to secure this funding!**

If your lawmakers need additional information about how the Aging Network and Area Agencies on Aging have been instrumental in supporting older Americans during this crisis—including addressing the growing problem of social isolation—please share n4a's recent report, [#AAAsAtWork for Older Adults: A Snapshot of Area Agency on Aging Responses to COVID-19](#).

If you have questions or concerns about this *Advocacy Alert* or n4a's policy positions, please contact Autumn Campbell at acampbell@n4a.org and Amy Gotwals at agotwals@n4a.org.