



advocacy | action | answers on aging

**National Association of  
Area Agencies on Aging**

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March 24, 2020

The Honorable Larry Hogan, Chair  
The Honorable Andrew Cuomo, Vice Chair  
National Governors Association  
444 North Capitol Street, Suite 267  
Washington, DC 20001

Dear Governors Hogan and Cuomo:

I write today on behalf of the National Association of Area Agencies on Aging (n4a), which represents the country's 622 Area Agencies on Aging (AAAs) and the more than 250 Title VI Native American aging programs that are on the front lines responding to the needs of older adults and caregivers who are especially vulnerable during the coronavirus pandemic.

Within their states and during normal circumstances, Area Agencies on Aging work closely with their State Units on Aging and other state offices such as Medicaid—this state-local coordination has exponentially increased in response to the current COVID-19 crisis.

Although n4a has not traditionally weighed in on state policy or decision-making, given the fact that the nation's Governors are taking the lead in responding to this nationwide public health threat, n4a believes it is important to elevate several key issues that directly impact the health and well-being of our nation's older adults from a local aging services perspective to states' executives and their national association.

**Specifically, there are a myriad of decisions in Governors' hands that affect how quickly and comprehensively Aging Network entities can respond to the needs of older adults in communities.**

We know Governors are working closely with state leaders on aging to adequately meet these needs during this health and economic crisis. To that end, and to ensure that older Americans—especially those who were vulnerable and in need of assistance in their daily lives *before* the coronavirus pandemic—maintain access to essential in-home, caregiver and nutrition services, **n4a recommends Governors take the following actions:**

**ESSENTIAL WORKFORCE DESIGNATION: Allow Area Agencies on Aging and the community providers they contract with to continue to operate as essential personnel in the event of a lock-down.** While AAAs' physical offices may be closed to the public with their staffs largely working remotely, they will need the ability to conduct personal care services in-person, specifically for their most at-risk clients, with adaptations for worker and client safety.

This would allow staff of these on-the-ground organizations to:

- reach vulnerable clients who cannot stay healthy or even survive without in-home supportive services;
- organize meal deliveries in a coordinated and safe fashion;
- provide services virtually such as case management, assessments, information and referral, personal advocacy and other important services to support older adults;
- staff their long-term care ombudsman programs;
- recruit new volunteers to fill in for the older adults who typically make up a large percentage of the AAA's volunteer workforce; and
- have the ability to do whatever else is most urgently needed by older adults and family caregivers in their communities during this crisis.

**ENSURE ACCESS TO PROTECTIVE SUPPLIES: Help Area Agencies on Aging and their community providers secure access to essential personal protective equipment and supplies, whether from the National Stockpile or other, state-sourced resources.**

Aging Network professionals are on the front lines, providing direct in-home and in-community services and supports to more than 11 million older adults and caregivers who are at an enhanced risk of contracting and experiencing especially adverse consequences from the coronavirus pandemic. The critical Aging Network workforce directly and frequently interacts with this vulnerable population. However, as personal protective equipment (PPE) shortfalls are pervasive across the country, we urge Governors to ensure that Aging Network entities obtain access to emergency stockpiles of PPE.

While we are not advocating that Aging Network stakeholders receive access to essential safety equipment—such as gloves, masks, personal sanitizers and cleaners—*before* essential health care workers, we urge policymakers to explore options to ensure that this Aging Network workforce is included on all state-level lists granting priority access to this important equipment to safeguard workers and, most importantly, the vulnerable older adults they serve.

As this crisis evolves, the need may shift to other supplies, such as food supplies or prepared meals provided by state or federal officials, assistance from the state's National Guard or other priority items support depending on the adaptive responses states and communities continue to take.

**PROVIDE MAXIMUM FLEXIBILITY TO THE AGING NETWORK: Consider relaxing state standards and adapting state rules for the provision of home and community-based services broadly to allow the Aging Network and others engaged in helping older adults to best triage and adapt their service offerings to meet this altered reality, while still protecting the needs and rights of older adults.**

Examples of temporarily enhanced flexibility may include relaxing rules on background checks for volunteers to enable AAAs and providers—which have lost large numbers of volunteers who are age 60 and older—to urgently recruit younger, healthy people to assist in the provision of vital services like meal and grocery delivery. Waiving any now-burdensome rules on nutrition standards for meals providers is another sensible, short-term approach to better enable the Aging Network to reach as many older adults in need as possible, with the supplies that are available to them.

[We have also encouraged Congress](#) to grant states flexibility and funding for Medicaid waivers for home and community-based services (HCBS), which would allow these providers to safely meet the needs of their clients, strengthen and support the HCBS direct-care workforce, and assist at-risk older adults living in institutions with transitioning back into the community if desired.

Thank you for your consideration of our top recommendations. Our members look forward to working with our nation’s Governors to ensure that we protect the most vulnerable among us during this public health crisis and afterwards.

In a time of great uncertainty and danger, we greatly appreciate your individual and collective leadership. Should you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at [smarkwood@n4a.org](mailto:smarkwood@n4a.org) or 202.872.0888.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Sandy Markwood". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Sandy Markwood  
Chief Executive Officer