



**Vermont
Association of
Area Agencies
on Aging**

P.O. Box 321
Jericho, VT 05465
(802) 578-7094
www.Vermont4A.org

Member Agencies:

Age Well
Central Vermont Council on Aging
Northeast Kingdom Council on Aging
Southwestern Vermont Council on Aging
Senior Solutions

To: House Human Services Committee
From: Janet Hunt, Executive Director
Re: Testimony on Area Agencies on Aging Impact from COVID
Date: January 15, 2021

With the onset of COVID-19 in March of 2020, our five Area Agencies of Aging worked expediently and seamlessly to maintain all services to our older adults while all staff began to work remotely. Regardless, there continue to be areas of concern to meet the usual needs and increased demands due to the pandemic.

Nutrition and Meals Services

- All congregate meal sites closed to the public and shifted to Home Delivered Meals/Take Out Meals.
- Meal providers are generally seeing an increase in expenses due to the pandemic. The increases are affecting both food purchases and well as supplies. AAAs are continuing to work with providers individually to see how we can help with their needs. Support to the meal providers has been provided through an increase in their meal reimbursement rate or additional monthly funding to offset the increase cost in supplies.
- There has been an increased demand for home delivered meals throughout the state. Not only are we seeing an increase in the number of clients, but an increase in the number of meals per week to each client due to lack of other in-home services.
- In addition to regular expenses for meals, funds have been needed for emergency meals, hand sanitizer, food carriers, to replace equipment, and to help other necessary expenses with our contractors. Some contractors needed to close when experiencing possible COVID exposure.
- We have continued to see significant cost in terms of what we had contracted with providers for versus the amount of meals being served. We have continued to focus on the need and have readjusted our budget to make sure there is adequate allowances to meet the higher demand. We are in the first quarter and significantly off budget. We had reserved some of the cares act funding received thru the Older Americans Act as we are able to expend thru 9/30/2021 but it will not fill the need given the demands.

Family Caregiver Supports

- There are not enough respite options for caregivers, leading to increased caregiver burnout. We have seen higher numbers of caregiver fatigue and burnout which can lead to abuse and neglect, as well as contributing to nursing home admissions.
- Closure of Adult Daycare Centers has placed additional stress on families/caregivers in the home.

Mental Health Care

- We recognize an increased need in mental health care. We believe the longer the physical distancing is in order the greater the need will become. We anticipate that our contracted service providers may reach capacity if the current trend continues. Meeting the expected need will require increased partnerships and increased funding.
- The eldercare clinician programs continue to see challenges in meeting the needs. There has been turnover and referrals are not processed in a timely manner.

Information and Assistance, Care & Service Coordination, Case Management/ and Options Counseling

- AAAs shifted to working remotely with limited in-person outdoor visits in warmer weather on a case by case basis.
- We have seen an increased need for homemaker services/caregiver support, assisted devices and technology.
- Individuals are experiencing reduced availability of in-home services from local home health agencies due to staff/worker shortages.
- Some service plans for Choice for Care clients are not being filled due to worker shortages. Choices for Care regulations that only allow services from Bayada or Home Health have led to an inability to staff care plans. Clients are unable to switch to flexible choices because of waitlists for some and an inability to self-direct for others.
- The reduced availability of in-home services has led to an increase in nursing home admissions and unsafe home situations for clients requiring nursing home level of care.
- With fewer providers entering client's homes, this is leading to unchecked worsening of home environments, health, and safety for some clients. There is a significant increase in self-neglect referrals leading to the need to hire an additional Specialized Care and Service Coordinator.
- There is significant shortage of cleaning providers – both for deep cleaning and ongoing homemaking. Again, this leads to unsafe or unsanitary conditions for clients and increased loneliness and social isolation for those who previously had regular contact with a provider. Hoarding symptoms are expected to increase, leading to increased falls and worsening health conditions for individuals with hoarding disorder.

If you are interested in more detail, by agency and location, I can provide a deeper impact report for you upon request.