

2020

WARREN COUNTY Elderly Services Program

ANNUAL REPORT Success Stories



Read below for the full success stories from the 2020 Warren County Elderly Services Program Annual Report, and for additional success stories of how the program and its partner network assisted older adults in the county to remain safe and independent in their homes.

Farmers' market program treats low-income older adults to fresh produce

In 2020, low-income older adults in southwestern Ohio were able to participate in the United States Department of Agriculture Senior Farmers' Market Nutrition Program. More than 1,100 older adults in Council on Aging's (COA) five-county service area participated in the program – 32 in Warren County – which provides fresh, nutritious, unprepared locally grown fruits, vegetables, herbs and honey through farmers' markets, roadside stands and community supported agriculture (CSA) farmers.

COA's Nutrition Business Relations Partner, Jennifer Lake, worked with community members, area farmers and the Ohio Department of Aging to secure a \$180,000 grant from Ohio's General Revenue fund to bring the program to the area. "We were absolutely thrilled to be able to support two very important communities here in southwestern Ohio with the program – older adults who might not otherwise be able to access nutritious, fresh produce – and our farmers," Lake said.



In June, seniors who applied and qualified began to receive \$50 worth of coupons to redeem through the end of October at participating farmers' markets in Hamilton, Butler, Clermont, Clinton and Warren counties.

The older adults using the coupons were thrilled to have access to the produce. "I greatly, greatly appreciate you for sending [the coupons] to me. They are going to be well-used and it will help my health even better because of the vegetables and the fruit," said Diana, a Senior Farmers' Market participant.

And, for older adults with limited financial means, this access to fresh produce is priceless. Pam is grateful to have "fresh food, and less money out-of-pocket, because vegetables cost a lot."

Lake plans to continue to build the program by serving even more older adults and bringing in more farmers markets in the future. “Despite the pandemic disrupting the operations of many area markets and keeping many older adults at home this year, I was very pleased that we established great relationships with local farmers and we were able to get so much fresh produce into the hands of those who really needed it. I’m looking forward to building on this great launch in coming growing seasons,” she said.

Program changes address special nutritional and dietary needs of older adults

In 2020, Elderly Services Program (ESP) and other Council on Aging (COA) clients who receive home-delivered meals had more choices available to them to help meet special nutritional and dietary needs. Council on Aging made changes to the specifications home-delivered meals producers must follow, requiring contracted meal providers to expand options for certain types of therapeutic meals to clients who have a medically-documented need. Therapeutic meals are special meals that meet the nutritional or dietary needs of clients with certain medical conditions.



When Council on Aging sought bids from qualified providers for the home-delivered meal service in the Elderly Services Program in 2019, Jennifer Lake, COA’s nutrition business partner and a registered dietitian, worked to make sure the special meals were part of the required service specifications.

“Nutrition is an important part of aging – and staying healthy,” Lake said. “With these changes, we can now provide meals that are appropriate for clients with a variety of medical issues ranging from diabetes to lactose intolerance.”

Clients can now receive the following types of meals: diabetic, cardiac, renal, lactose free, gluten free, dysphagia and mechanically-altered meals (most of these meals require a physician’s order). The meals are also available to children who receive a kinship meal.

In 2020, more than 290,000 meals were delivered to 1,343 older adults via the Warren County Elderly Services Program. More than 1.7 million meals were delivered to nearly 10,000 individuals across COA’s service area.

Critical homecare workforce deserves recognition

Home health aides provide critical and often life-saving care for older adults who want to remain in their homes as they age. They help with bathing, dressing and eating, as well as important everyday tasks like cleaning, cooking and running errands, and they get to know their care recipients intimately. Home health aides are often the first to notice critical changes in physical and behavioral health.

Most older adults – nine out of 10 – want to stay in their homes as they age. But most will also need some form of long-term care (seven out of 10). This means many will need the help of a caregiver.



As families work to find balance in their daily lives – raising children and managing a career while caring for an older loved one – they increasingly turn to home health aides to fill gaps in care and ensure a good quality of life for their loved one.

But the stability home health aides provide is in jeopardy. Low wages, thin benefits, unpredictable schedules and other job challenges and stresses have resulted in a shortage of qualified home health aides. As the economy has improved in recent years, many have left the industry for higher paying, more stable employment opportunities. The pandemic has made things worse.

The impact of this shortage can be felt nationwide, and our region is not immune. Home health care agencies that hire aides to provide care for their clients are struggling to recruit and retain staff. Council on Aging (COA) contracts with home health care agencies to deliver services to individuals enrolled in its programs, including Warren County ESP. As a result, older adults who rely on this critical care experience delays in starting their services, irregularities in their service schedule and inconsistencies in the aide who provides their care.

“Because of the shortage, clients that need help aren’t getting it,” said Samantha Williams, clinical director with Home Care by Blackstone, a COA contracted service provider. “We just don’t have the aides to work.”

“This workforce is absolutely critical to helping us fulfill our mission,” said Ken Wilson, vice president of Program Operations at COA. “Right now, the demand for qualified home health aides far exceeds the available supply. This impacts our ability to provide consistent, high-quality care to our clients. If this trend continues, older adults and families will be faced with difficult decision about how and where to get care.”

In recent years, COA has done a number of things to try to improve the situation locally.

Most recently, COA issued a Request for Proposals (RFP) for Home Care Assistance one year early to try to bring additional providers into the service network. Home Care Assistance includes services such as housekeeping, personal care and respite, which are typically provided by home health aides through a contracted home health care agency. The RFP resulted in the addition of four new home health care provider agencies in Warren County (the agencies will begin providing services to clients in 2021).

“We want to do everything we can to ensure clients receive the care they need, when they need it,” COA’s Wilson said. “Our hope is that the addition of these new home care assistance providers will improve the Elderly Services Program’s ability to serve older adults in need.”

There are other ways COA has sought to minimize the impact of the aide shortage locally:

- Conducted focus groups with area home health aides to learn more about their career choices. The results showed home health aides take pride in their work. “It’s a good day for me when I’m able to make someone’s day a little brighter,” an aide said. Feedback from the focus groups helped COA identify ways to minimize the impact of the aide shortage, including expansion of a program that gives families more choice in selecting a care provider.
- Worked with providers to adjust training requirements for aides who provide only housekeeping services and to create efficiencies to improve scheduling and travel time for aides.

- Piloted a rate increase for home health aides in Warren County. The results of the rate increase showed an increase in client satisfaction but not impact aide retention.
 - Created the Service Excellence Awards to recognize home health aides by showing appreciation for the important work they do. Since 2019, COA has recognized 121 home health aides who provide care through a COA contracted service provider. “Winning the award was very meaningful to me,” said one aide. “It showed me that all the hard work I’m putting into this passion is being recognized by my clients.”
 - Created the Home Health Aide Hero award to recognize three aides who go above and beyond to meet the needs of their clients. Three aides were recognized in April, 2021 and received cash prizes from COA.
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FastTrack Home supports older adults and caregivers during pandemic

With a full-time job, three grandchildren to look after and an elderly father to care for, Shelley’s plate was full. When her father, Wayne, 82, was admitted to the hospital and diagnosed with heart issues and COPD complications, it threw her for a loop.

While he was in the hospital, the family’s situation worsened. It was discovered that Wayne was COVID-positive and, without realizing it, had passed it to Shelley.



Shelley’s required quarantine period meant she would be unable to care for her father as he was being discharged home from the hospital. She worried about his meals, cleaning and personal care. “It was a very stressful and desperate time for me,” Shelley remembers.

Council on Aging’s (COA) FastTrack Home program, now available through Warren County’s Elderly Services Program, provided support to help Wayne recover safely at home.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, when nursing facilities have been hot spots for outbreaks and even deaths, COA secured federal funding to support FastTrack Home’s expansion into Warren County. The program has been used by hospitals to divert more than 1,800 older adults away from nursing and rehab facilities, to instead receive support in their homes where potential exposure to COVID-19 is greatly reduced. The program has been available in Clinton and Hamilton counties since 2017.

FastTrack Home sets up temporary in-home care services (such as transportation, meals, personal care and homemaking services) before an older adult goes home from the hospital. While other COA programs require an in-home assessment and focus on meeting long-term needs, FastTrack Home assessments are completed at the hospital bedside and are designed to meet short-term, acute needs. This distinction is key because older adults have an increased risk of illness and injury in the 30 days following discharge from a care facility. With a speedy assessment and enrollment process, FastTrack Home services can be in place when the patient is discharged home.

In Wayne’s case, Savannah, one of COA’s FastTrack Home hospital coaches, worked with the hospital to make sure Wayne was not discharged over a weekend – when services are more difficult to arrange. She also arranged for an emergency food delivery the day Wayne arrived home and had regular home-delivered meals started the very next day. Within five days of Wayne’s return home, a home health aide began visiting to help with personal care and housekeeping issues.

Wayne's FastTrack Home services are provided by COA through Warren County's Elderly Services Program. His services are temporary and designed to support a safe recovery at home. Before Wayne's FastTrack Home services end (a maximum of 60 days), he will receive a full evaluation for the Elderly Services Program or other Council on Aging programs. This ensures continuity of care for older adults who need assistance beyond FastTrack Home's 60-day window.

Shelley is very grateful for FastTrack Home – the support it offered her father and the peace of mind it brought to her. "Without FastTrack Home," she says, "I don't know what would have happened."

Mason's Quatman Café partners with COA on comfort meal program

During the pandemic, Council on Aging (COA) has partnered with many area restaurants, including minority and family-owned businesses, to provide special meals to area low-income older adults. Quatman Café, with a location in Mason, is a partner in COA's award-winning Comfort Meal Program.

When Ohio Governor Mike DeWine issued stay-at-home orders in March 2020, COA began hearing from older adults who were afraid to go out for groceries and other necessities. Others found themselves without their regular support network. Many who contacted COA had never before needed help.



"We learned from past emergency situations that food quickly becomes an urgent need for older adults," said Council on Aging CEO, Suzanne Burke. "We didn't want supply chain or staffing issues to interfere with our ability to provide meals to older adults, and we knew they might be asked to shelter-in-place for quite a while."

After receiving additional federal funding via the Ohio Department of Aging and the CARES Act to expand meal service to older adults during the pandemic, COA began looking for ways to adapt traditional meal programs to address not only food insecurity among older adults, but also the quality of life older adults were experiencing during the pandemic.

As the pandemic continued, older adults felt increasingly isolated and forgotten. To help ease the monotony felt by many older adults, COA sought out partnerships with local restaurants to bring comfort meals to older adults – particularly low-income older adults who were isolated in senior apartment buildings across COA's service area.

With the delivery of a few hundred LaRosa's meals to older adults impacted by a power outage in April, 2020, COA's award-winning comfort meal program was born.

Quatman Café, owned by Matt and Angie Imm, joined the program in November 2020 and has provided more than 5,000 meals to date (through April 2021) – all to Warren County older adults.

Being part of the comfort meal program deeply touches the Imms, whose parents and grandparents benefitted from home delivered meals. "It hits home," Imm said, "because we all have parents. It's nice to know that as we're aging, someone is thinking about the older population."

Quatman Café's COVID-19 comfort meal includes a deli sandwich, cookie and a side of homemade potato or macaroni salad.

In 1966, Imm's father, Albert opened Quatman Café in Norwood with the help of a high school friend. Over the next 41 years, Quatman Café became a Cincinnati icon, known for being a friendly, family-oriented restaurant serving quality, fresh food.

Imm bought the business from his father in 2007 and opened a second location in Mason in 2009.

Today, Quatman Café is still a family-owned and operated business – from cooking to scheduling to administration. The Imm's children, Grace and Ethan, also help in the restaurant when they can.

Partnering with local restaurants had the added benefit of helping businesses weather the economic challenges created by the pandemic. "We lost a significant amount of indoor seating," Imm said. "We saw our numbers drop pretty drastically."

Imm acknowledged that a lot of people are going through tough times as a result of the pandemic – especially older adults. "I think we'll all get through it as a community and I think things like this – like providing a comfort meal for somebody – will actually let people know that we're thinking about them."

COA's comfort meal program is a community partnership. The meals are paid for by COA via funding from a variety of sources, including the Ohio Department of Aging, CARES Act funds, grants, sponsorships and donations. In addition to Quatman Café, the following restaurants have prepared meals for the program: LaRosa's Pizzeria, Frisch's, Taste of Belgium, C&M BBQ Grille, Chef Anthony Jordan, La Soupe, Neal's Famous BBQ and Beaugard's Southern Bar B Que. COA service providers, including Warren County Community Services, collect meals from each restaurant and deliver them to senior apartment buildings across COA's service area. Service coordinators, staff and volunteers at each building then distribute the meals to residents. From April–December 2020, more than 58,000 comfort meals were delivered to the doors of older adults in need.

"It's rewarding to see the impact these meals are having on older adults in our community," said Burke. "I have been impressed with the level of teamwork, flexibility and commitment demonstrated by everyone involved in this effort – from the restaurants doing the cooking, and our providers delivering the meals, all the way down to the coordinators at each building where meals are delivered. This is work that makes you feel good. We all need that right now."

[Click here](#) to read more about the Comfort Meal Program in COA's 2020 Impact Report.

Council on Aging partners with Taste of Belgium to deliver comfort meals in Warren County

As part of Council on Aging's (COA) Comfort Meal Program, residents in Warren County's senior apartment buildings received meals prepared by local restaurants, including Taste of Belgium.

On a spring day in June 2020, several senior apartment buildings operated by Warren County Community Services received meals prepared by Taste of Belgium. The meals provided a much needed change of pace for the buildings' residents.

When the meals were delivered to Station Hill Apartments in Lebanon, Jessica, the building's manager, distributed them to residents in the building.

Michelle, a 64-year-old Station Hill resident, decided to save her meal of country fried steak with gravy, scrambled eggs and Belgian waffle, for dinner that night. When she was ready to eat, she heated the steak in a skillet, the waffle in the toaster, and the eggs and gravy in the microwave. "It was wonderful to eat something else besides my groceries that I get online," she said.

Another Station Hill resident, Gail, 75, ate her meal right then and there. "I had already made breakfast earlier," she said, "so I went ahead and ate [the Taste of Belgium meal] for lunch. I've heard many people say they like the meals – especially the waffles. They're delicious."

Meals were also delivered to Lebanon's Bentley Woods Apartments. Because of COVID-19 restrictions, Bob, the building's manager, met the delivery team outside and then hand-delivered the meals to each resident himself.

"They have all been troopers," Bob remarked of the residents during the COVID-19 pandemic. "They understood why we had to close the common areas, and why we stressed social distancing."

"Of course, we're all stressed [because of COVID-19] but it is wonderful that Council on Aging thinks of us and delivers the meals," said Bentley Woods resident, Charlotte, 79.

When meals were delivered to Union Village Apartments in South Lebanon, Jan, the property manager, put them on a cart and delivered them door to door. "Oh, getting meals from a restaurant is so special," she said. "It's sort of like a birthday or Christmas – it makes everyone happy!"

Mary, a 76-year-old Union Village resident agreed. "The meals were wonderful! We're country – we're used to gravy and carbs and comfort food," Mary said, referring to the country-fried steak and gravy she received from Taste of Belgium. "We shouldn't have it all the time, but we like it."



Provider network adapts to serve during the pandemic

As the Area Agency on Aging for southwestern Ohio, Council on Aging (COA) contracts with nearly 300 area businesses and organizations to deliver critical in-home care services to more than 27,000 older adults and people with disabilities in COA's service area – including nearly 3,000 in Warren County.

During the pandemic, COA and its provider network adapted programs and services to protect staff, providers and clients. While adult day care centers, senior centers and congregate meals sites were closed in accordance with state orders, other services, including home-delivered meals, transportation and homecare assistance, continued without interruption.



Demand for certain services, like housekeeping and personal care, fluctuated based on spikes and declines in COVID-19 infection rates. But other services, such as home-delivered meals, saw an increase in demand. For example, COA service providers delivered nearly 1.8 million home-delivered meals in FY 2020 – a 32 percent increase over the previous year.

In fact, food security has been a focus of COA and its providers during the pandemic. Calls for food assistance increased when older adults were urged to stay at home to protect their health. COA's provider network adapted operations to meet this need, converting congregate meal sites to drive-thru operations and distributing more than 21,000 emergency food boxes and nearly 60,000 restaurant comfort meals to older adults across COA's service area from April-December. Some of this work continues today.

At Meals on Wheels of Southwestern OH & Northern KY (MOW), CEO Jennifer Steele said her team began overproducing meals and ordering shelf stable food right away. This kept them ahead of the supply chain crunch.

Even with this preparation, Steele and her team were shocked by the demand for services. "Demand tripled overnight," she said. "In one week in March, we delivered as many meals – 50,000 – as we would have in a typical month, pre-COVID." MOW is a service provider for Council on Aging but also serves private pay customers in southwest Ohio and northern Kentucky.

During the pandemic, COA distributed tens of thousands of personal protective equipment (PPE) items to service providers and senior apartment buildings, including masks, hand sanitizer, face shields, gloves, booties, gowns and more. COA received PPE supplies from county emergency management agencies and the Ohio Department of Aging and used CARES Act funds to purchase PPE from other sources.

The PPE items were critical in protecting provider employees, and the older adults they serve, from COVID-19. "Quite frankly, I don't know what we would have done without this program and [COA's] assistance," said Beverly Ellis, director of nursing at Helping Hands Healthcare, a COA contracted provider.

Teresa Winters, owner of Katy's Home Care, said she got to work right away making masks for her staff and their clients but soon needed help. "...As we started getting down to no supplies and things got harder to find, I took the supplies from COA. It was a great help."

Like many other businesses, COA's providers had to find ways to adapt to new realities during the pandemic.

At Katy's Home Care, Winters' biggest challenge was ensuring staff followed safety protocols. She provided training and showed a video about the 1918 flu pandemic. "That put the fear in everyone and they understood how serious this is," she said.

Winters stayed in contact with clients to let them know what she was doing to keep everyone safe. Staff had clear guidelines to follow and clients knew who to contact if they ever felt concerned for their safety, Winters said. "We worked together through all this – our staff, our clients, everyone," she said.

At Helping Hands, services were adapted to be "contactless." Clients' laundry and to-do lists were left on the doorstep and Helping Hands' staff took it from there. While this ensured clients' basic needs were met, Ellis said the emotional toll soon became apparent.

"What was sad though, was the increased amount of loneliness and fear we saw in each client," Ellis said. "I would have to say the distancing of care and lack of closeness during delivery of care [was our biggest challenge]. It took a lot for us not to hold someone's hand or give them that much needed hug."

At Maple Knoll Communities, Director of Outreach Services and Affordable Housing, Joshua Howard, said, "It didn't take long for the conversation about providing services during a pandemic to also include discussions about seniors' mental health and how the isolation and lockdown was taking a different toll on our community."

To help, Maple Knoll engaged volunteers to make regular calls and provide lessons on how to conduct Zoom calls with friends and family.

Operationally, Helping Hands had to adapt to the impact of school and daycare closures. Ellis said 90 percent of Helping Hands' staff have school-aged children. To help employees and ensure they were still able to meet clients' needs, Helping Hands developed a program called Daycare Share where employees took turns watching children and assisting with schoolwork while other employees focused on work. As a result, Ellis said, "We saw our staff relationships transform and it became a win-win for many."

Maple Knoll's Howard said even though the pandemic impacted his organization's operations, it never affected the mission. "Whereas the 'how' dramatically changed, the 'why' and 'what' were never in doubt," he said. "Our clients never saw an interruption in service."

While some clients did contact Maple Knoll at the start of the pandemic to cancel appointments, Howard said many more called worried about how they would get to dialysis, therapy and other important appointments. For grocery shopping and other errands, Maple Knoll adjusted trip times to align with special "senior only" hours at area shopping destinations.

"I'm extremely proud of the work our provider network has done throughout this pandemic," said Suzanne Burke, COA's CEO. "Despite this challenging environment, they have continued to provide services to our clients in a caring and safe manner – often responding to calls for help on short notice. Because of this teamwork, we've been able to help our clients weather the storm."

[Click here](#) to read the full version of this story in COA's 2020 Impact Report.

COA works to get personal care items into the hands of clients

Question: What do 30,000 rolls of toilet paper, 22,500 tubes of toothpaste and 7,600 bottles of hand sanitizer have in common?

Answer: These – and thousands more personal care and cleaning items – were included in more than 7,600 boxes recently assembled and distributed to Council on Aging (COA) clients, including those in Warren County. More than 120 volunteers from COA, COA's network of service providers and members of the community contributed to the effort.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, many older adults, including COA clients, have been stuck at home, afraid to venture out to shop for groceries, which includes not just food, but personal care and cleaning items. And at times, items such as toilet paper, antibacterial wipes and hand sanitizer were not even available to purchase because manufacturers and supply chains couldn't keep up with demand.

Through various efforts – including its award-winning Comfort Meal program – COA made it a priority during the pandemic to ensure vulnerable older adults in the region have access to food. But also important is the ability for older adults to keep themselves and their environments clean and safe.

Early pandemic partnerships between COA, local churches and Frame USA's Fill the Truck charity yielded hundreds of care packages of personal care and cleaning items distributed to those who contacted COA for help. At the time however, these products were in such high demand that it became difficult to procure enough for all the older adults in our area who needed supplies.

CARES Act funding received by COA months later – along with leveled off demand for the items among the general public – made it possible for COA to source the box contents and move ahead with the project in August 2020. After hundreds of volunteer hours and several months, the last of the boxes shipped to clients during the first weeks of 2021.

In addition to the toilet paper, toothpaste and hand sanitizer, each box also contained disinfectant, dish detergent, laundry detergent, paper towels, soap, facial tissues and disinfectant wipes. Receiving a box full of these items is a big deal when you have limited financial resources – and when you're following public health guidelines to stay at home.

"These items mean the world to so many of our clients," said COA's CEO Suzanne Burke. "Sometimes they have to make the choice between these items and a meal." The project was a major undertaking that required a large physical space at the Butler County Fairgrounds, and 84 industrial-size rolls of bubble wrap.

The items in the boxes served a practical purpose, but they also provided a big psychological boost to older adults who were disproportionately impacted by the pandemic. One client, upon receiving COA's letter alerting her the box would arrive soon, said, "You get to the age of 80 years old, and all your family's gone, and not many friends left, it's just good to know that somebody's got your back, and it gives you hope, and it lifts your spirit."



COA-led effort aims to prevent spread of COVID-19 in area senior apartment buildings

Recognized as the regional expert on helping older adults remain independent in the community, Council on Aging (COA) staff members have participated in local, state and even national efforts to help protect and serve vulnerable older adults during the pandemic.

One such group was the regional COVID-19 Multi-Agency Coalition (MAC). Created by Ohio Governor Mike DeWine, MACs include regional organizations and experts that work together to respond to COVID-19 on a local level. Smaller subcommittees in the MAC tackle specific issues related to COVID-19.

COA's Vice President of Program Operations, Ken Wilson, served as a co-chair for the MAC's Congregate Care Steering Committee and led COVID-19 response efforts in settings such as assisted living facilities and senior apartment buildings. Other members of the committee include The Health Collaborative, University of Cincinnati Medical Center, emergency management agencies and local health departments.

The committee's goal was to reduce the number of COVID-19 cases that spread in settings such as senior apartment buildings and assisted living communities through uniform education, prevention and vaccination strategies.

"Focusing on congregate living settings was a priority for the state and our region because most COVID-19 cases that were going to the hospital were coming from congregate living settings, such as nursing homes," Wilson said. "COA is the local expert in serving older adults so it was natural that we were tasked with working with senior apartment buildings to protect residents and prevent the spread of the virus."

COA developed a database of approximately 175 senior apartment buildings in its service area of Butler, Clermont, Clinton, Hamilton and Warren counties. The database helped COA understand how many people lived in each facility and provided a way to track COVID-19 cases among residents and staff.

Wilson and the committee developed protocols and education materials to reduce infection rates in senior apartment buildings, including: ramping up testing and contact tracing; standards for how and when to quarantine; basic guidelines for distribution and use of personal protective equipment (PPE); and education on handwashing, masks, sanitizing and social distancing.

COA then compiled and sent education kits to each building. In addition to specific information and tools for building management, kits included enough education materials and reusable face masks for each resident in every building – more than 8,700 residents in all.

The kits were well-received, according to Judy Eschmann, COA's Vice President of Community and Business Operations and the architect behind the database. "This was the first time anyone had reached out to many of these buildings with specific information and guidance about COVID-19," Eschmann said. "We've received lots of feedback from building managers who were happy to have information and masks to share with their residents and to know that someone was concerned about their health and safety."



COA created a resource page on its website where building managers could access electronic copies of all the materials included in the education kits, as well as additional resources. And, as the pandemic continued, COA began to host virtual Town Hall meetings with staff at senior buildings, pulling in local experts to share the latest news, information and guidance. Later Town Halls focused on COVID-19 vaccination.

“We’ve learned that education is a big piece of the puzzle,” Wilson said. “Early in the pandemic, we heard that older adults were afraid to report COVID-19 symptoms. Now, we’re hearing that some older adults are reluctant to get vaccinated. If we provide consistent information and connect people to trustworthy resources, we can help stop the spread of this virus in these vulnerable communities,” Wilson added.

COA’s work in senior apartment buildings during the pandemic extended beyond education. Beginning in April 2020, COA partnered with local restaurants to deliver COVID-19 “comfort meals” to residents at low-income senior apartment buildings across COA’s service area. COA provided more than 58,000 comfort meals to residents of these buildings in 2020, and more than 75,000 since the start of the pandemic.

We’re out here in Rural America and COA’s presence has made such an impact on our residents,” said a service coordinator at an area senior apartment building. “We are so grateful and appreciative that COA stepped up during this difficult time.”

Note: Beginning in February 2021, COA worked with the Ohio National Guard, local health departments, the Ohio Department of Aging and management staff at area senior apartment buildings to prepare buildings for COVID-19 vaccination clinics. Read more about this effort [here](#).

Council on Aging distributes 10,000 wellness kits to older adults in southwestern Ohio

In an ongoing effort to help protect and support vulnerable adults during the COVID-19 pandemic, Council on Aging (COA) partnered with the Ohio Department of Aging (ODA) and Pro Seniors to distribute 10,000 wellness kits to older adults in the region.

The kits were paid for by funding from the CARES Act and were distributed via the United States Postal Service to households in Butler, Clermont, Clinton, Hamilton and Warren counties that met certain age and income criteria.

The kits included reusable cloth masks, hand sanitizer, and education materials regarding the virus, resources, and frauds and scams. Approximately 1,200 older adults in Warren County received the kits.



“We’ve kept a close eye on the needs of our clients and the community during this pandemic,” said Council on Aging CEO, Suzanne Burke. “But we knew there were people out there who likely needed help, but for whatever reason had not reached out. We saw these wellness kits as an opportunity to extend a helping hand and to let community members know that we are here to help if they need us.”

Throughout the pandemic, COA remained connected to the more than 26,000 individuals enrolled in its programs and services. COA also heard from many individuals who never before needed services. The greatest needs were personal care supplies, personal protective equipment and food.

During the summer of 2020, COA distributed 20,000 reusable cloth masks to enrolled clients and to individuals living in low-income senior apartment buildings in southwestern Ohio. COA also worked with a variety of community partners during the pandemic to procure and distribute personal care supplies, additional personal protective equipment and meals to older adults in need.

COA received calls and letters from people who received the kits expressing appreciation for the help. Pro Seniors, a local non-profit organization dedicated to helping older Ohioans with legal and long-term care problems through a variety of free programs, contributed to the project. Each wellness kit included a Pro Seniors brochure, highlighting the organization's free legal hotline, and information about frauds and scams prevalent during the pandemic.