

Beaver County Office on Aging COVID-19 Task Force Newsletter Volume 6, May 6, 2020

Open Your Heart to a Senior

Senior citizens or people with disabilities, who are unable to grocery shop due to health concerns during the COVID-19 situation, may contact Open Your Heart to a Senior through the United Way of Southwestern Pennsylvania for assistance. Call 724-205-6282 and leave a message with your name, telephone number, municipality and that you are requesting grocery shopping assistance. Your call will be returned by a staff member to take your information and grocery order. A volunteer will shop and deliver groceries to you within two to three days, while following current safety guidelines. Open Your Heart to a Senior has been a resource to older adults for over a decade.

Survey Results about Older Adult Food Access, Public Risk Factors and Social Connection

The Pennsylvania Department of Aging and the Pennsylvania Council on Aging (PCoA) released the findings of a statewide survey conducted by PCoA to assess the status, needs and interests of older adults during the COVID-19 outbreak. The survey inquired about food access, public risk factors and social connection.

The online survey, conducted during the first week of April, drew more than 3,700 responses from older adults across Pennsylvania. Those aged 60-80 made up 81 percent of the survey respondents, and people over 80 made up 17 percent. This mirrors the Pennsylvania population of older adults, according to the US Census.

Some of the major findings are:

- Older adults, on average, are going out almost twice weekly to get groceries.
- Older adults are also going to the pharmacy at high numbers, even though almost all pharmacies have offered delivery and drive-through options for shopping and prescription-filling.
- Adults age 85 and older reported that senior centers were the third source they relied on for their community connection. The first two were family and religious institutions.
- Almost 6% of the “oldest” older adults (91 years and older) reported that they still attended religious events.
- Fewer than 20% of the “oldest” older adults have access to smartphones, but more than 20% stated that they were interested in virtual connections.

The survey revealed differences among age groups and rural and urban settings in how older adults connect with their communities, how they access food, and what technologies they use to stay connected. Several themes emerged highlighting areas where older adults can be supported during this pandemic and in the future. Some of these themes and related recommendations include:

- Evaluating how older adults can access food more safely
- Implementing services and support to maintain communication with older adults and minimize social isolation
- Increasing access to virtual connectivity across the commonwealth for older adults

CDC Coronavirus Self Checker

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has a Self Checker. It is a guide to help you make decisions and seek appropriate medical care. The system is not intended for the diagnosis or treatment of disease or other conditions, including COVID-19. The project was made possible through a partnership with the CDC Foundation and is enabled by the Microsoft Azure Platform.

To use the checker, visit: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/symptoms-testing/symptoms.html>

Information from PA Attorney General's Office

The Attorney General's Office of Consumer Advocate called on the Pennsylvania Utility Commission to prohibit the shutoff of electric, natural gas, water, wastewater, telecommunication and stream utilities for the duration of the crisis. It became effective on March 13, 2020 therefore your utility can not be turned off during this crisis. The Attorney General's Office recommends that you call your utility company to see if you qualify for any discount programing and to alert them that you lost your job.

PA CARE Package: Banks are required to provide some financial protections for homeowners and borrowers that are struggling during this crisis. You must contact your bank to make arrangements. The Attorney General's Office states that many banks voluntarily expanded their efforts. You could be entitled to:

- 180 to 360- day grace period for mortgages
- 90-day grace period for other consumer loans, like auto loans
- 90- window for relief from fees and charges, like overdraft, late, insufficient funds, and monthly service fees
- No new foreclosures, evictions, or motor vehicle repossessions for 60 days
- No adverse credit reporting for accessing relief on consumer loans.

There may be some benefits available for borrowers with student loans but not all federal loans are eligible.

- No payments for 6 months. Borrowers would go into a zero- interest forbearance, meaning that your balance and payment will be the same after 6 months.
- The months in this forbearance will count as payments for Public Service Loan Forgiveness and forgiveness under other income driven repayment plans.

The Attorney General's Office recommends that you contact your bank to see what other relief option is available for you.

If you suspect any price gouging you see you can report it to the Office of Attorney General's Bureau of Consumer Protections with their price gouging complaint form- <https://www.attorneygeneral.gov/pricegouging>

When you submit a compliant you will need:

- Name of business or online website
- Addresses of business
- Specific Product brand and name
- Price prior to emergency
- Price now
- Any receipts, invoices or pictures you can download

Avoid and report scams. If you suspect any scam you can report them to the Attorney General's Bureau of Consumer Protection through the online complaint form- <https://www.attorneygeneral.gov/scams>

Some common scams to be aware of:

Unemployment compensation- Calls or emails offering to help people apply for benefits should not be trusted. You can apply for unemployment compensation at <https://www.uc/pa/gov>.

Stimulus checks- (Economic Impact Payments)- Do not respond to unsolicited information about EIP. They will be directly deposited into your accounts or mailed to your home.

Attorney General's office has many resources in regard to COVID-19. For more information, visit www.attorneygeneral.gov

Mental Health Assistance is Available

The Department of Human Services (DHS) marked Mental Health Awareness Month with a reminder that it is okay to not feel okay and that help is available. It seeks to raise awareness and understanding and to fight stigma of mental illness and substance use disorders.

"We know that the COVID-19 emergency is a difficult time for everyone, and many are struggling with feelings of fear and anxiety. It is okay to feel this way," said DHS Secretary Teresa Miller. "This crisis may not always allow people to tune in to their personal needs, but in order to have the ability and emotional capacity to take care of others, you must take care of yourself."

DHS has a statewide Support & Referral Helpline staffed by skilled and compassionate caseworkers who are available 24/7 to counsel Pennsylvanians struggling with anxiety and other challenging emotions due to the COVID-19 emergency and refer them to community-based resources that can further help to meet individual needs. The toll-free, 24-hour support line is available at 1-855-284-2494. For TTY, dial 724-631-5600.

Older Adult Protective Services

If you feel an older adult is being abused, neglected, or exploited, call Older Adult Protective Services at 724-775-1786. The hotline is open 24 hours a day.

Ombudsman Service is Available

The Beaver County Office on Aging Ombudsmen are working full time, at home, and are available to accept calls and handle any complaints or questions related to nursing facility and personal care home resident rights and problem resolution. We will return your call by the end of the next business day. Ombudsman calls are considered and treated with highest confidentiality.

To contact the Ombudsman program you may: email Ombudsman@BCOA.US; call the Ombudsman direct phone line 724-480-8589; or call the Office on Aging main phone 724-847-2262, identify your call as an Ombudsman issue, with no details, as these calls are highly confidential and leave your name and phone number only.
