



JB Pritzker, Governor
Paula A. Basta, M.Div., Director

*Respect for Yesterday
Support for Today
Plan for Tomorrow*

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May 14, 2021

Dear Aging Network:

As you know, May is Older Americans Month, and we are encouraging everyone to *build strength* in the lives of our older Illinoisans. [Communities of Strength](#), the theme of this year's recognition, is both a celebration of connection and a reminder of the role older Illinoisans play in cultivating the strength of our communities. IDoA is proud to release a Public Service Announcement (PSA) recognizing Older Americans Month and creating awareness of how important it is to support our older family members, friends, and neighbors. The PSA is also meant to raise awareness of programs and services available for our older Illinoisans and encourages everyone to build strength. [Check it out here.](#)

After more than a year of social distancing to help prevent the spread of COVID-19, we are more aware than ever before of the strength we draw from the people in our lives. Older Illinoisans have been unable to participate in activities at the local Adult Day and Senior Centers, gather indoors at their favorite restaurant with their grandchildren, friends, and family for a celebratory meal, or even casually interact with staff at a movie theater or grocery store. Study after study show that this kind of connection is good for our mental and physical health, and we are worse off without it. While older Illinoisans are already at increased risk for social isolation and loneliness, rates of depression, substance use, and anxiety have soared among all age groups and communities. We are proud to know that more help is on the way through the American Rescue Plan, which includes \$16 million specifically to address social isolation, as well as IDoA's efforts through the [Illinois Care Connections Program](#).

From tucking notes into "contactless" home-delivered meals, to bringing people and their caregivers together via Zoom for conversation, music therapy, and sing-alongs, the Aging Network has developed new ways to reach out and connect with our older Illinoisans. After a year of continued resilience, enhanced innovation, and adjustments to service delivery and programming amid the pandemic, we are inviting our Aging Network to share their Stories of Strength. These stories can focus on your employees, community partners,

other older Illinoisans and even young adults who have been supporting our seniors - individuals who have gone above and beyond to build strength. We would like to recognize these dedicated individuals and share our - and your - gratitude for a job well done! If you have a story you'd like to submit, please provide the following information:

Stories of Strength Submissions

- Name of your organization:
- Location of your organization:
- What or Who you see Building Strength:
- Story of Strength, positive feedback, or quotes from older adults or caregivers (3-4 sentences):
- Photo (if available, and subject to social distancing and other health and safety precautions)

You can reply directly to this email or send your submission to Michael.Dropka@illinois.gov, anytime **between now and June 1st**. We hope that by sharing your Stories of Strength, we can support and recognize the amazing work being done in our communities, encourage others, and trade ideas. It is through stories like these, that we continue to find new inspiration and recognize the tremendous accomplishments of - and work still ahead for - older Illinoisans, communities, and the Aging Network. And it starts with connection.

I would also like to invite you all to celebrate LGBT Elders Day on May 16th with [AARP](#), [SAGE](#), and the [National Black Justice Coalition](#) for the [Black Women Legendary Elders Wisdom Awards & Tea](#). LGBT elders certainly embody strength and demonstrate continued resilience. You can [save your spot for the event here](#).

Finally, in addition to May being Older Americans Month, May is also [Asian American & Pacific Islander Heritage Month](#), which is a time to pay tribute to the generations of Asian and Pacific Islanders who have enriched America's history and are instrumental in its future success. Tragically, we recently learned of the passing of Bernarda Wong, 77, a pillar in Chicago's Chinese American community. Bernie leaves a void; in the Aging Network and in the hearts of every individual she helped. Her involvement in the Illinois Council on Aging made important connections between state officials and those in need. We know that many of you had the pleasure of getting to know and working with Bernie through the years - and as an agency - we will always be grateful to have worked with Bernie to further advance our agency's principles of **respecting yesterday, supporting today, and planning for tomorrow**. Please continue to stay safe and be well.

Sincerely,



Paula Basta, M.Div.
Director, Illinois Department on Aging

The Illinois Department on Aging does not discriminate in admission to programs or treatment of employment in programs or activities in compliance with appropriate State and Federal statutes. If you feel you have been discriminated against, call the **Senior HelpLine at (800) 252-8966; (888) 206-1327 (TTY)**

