

ILLINOIS COUNCIL ON AGING
WEBEX MEETING/DRAFT MINUTES

TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 28, 2021

10:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m.

ILLINOIS COUNCIL ON AGING (ICoA) MEMBERS PRESENT:

Phyllis Mitzen, Anthony Frazier, Jane Angelis, Julie Bobitt, Nancy Chen, Christine Goleman, Melvin Grimes, Margaret Huyck, Talat Khan, Britta Larson, Susan Lawler, Sylvia Mahle, Patricia Marton, Mubarak Mirjat, Robert Mueller, Robert O'Connor, Dylan Olthoff (on behalf of Representative Rita Mayfield), Steve Wolf

ICoA MEMBERS ABSENT:

Paulette Hamlin, Kim Hunt, Anna Oestreich, Senator Mattie Hunter, Senator Dave Syverson, Senator Brian Stewart, Representative Anna Moeller

VISITORS/GUESTS:

Amy Wiatr-Rodriguez, Administration for Community Living
Danny Weiler, Administration for Community Living

ILLINOIS DEPARTMENT ON AGING (IDoA) STAFF:

Paula Basta, Director
Lora McCurdy, Deputy Director
Mike Berkes, Division Manager, Planning, Training, Research & Development
John Eckert, Deputy Division Manager, Planning, Training, Research & Development
Amy Lulich, Senior Policy Advisor
Lee Moriarty, Deputy Ombudsman
Katherine Ostrowski, Legislative Liaison
Iris Schweier, Public Information Officer
Kelly Richards, State Ombudsman
Latorya Simon, Administrative Assistant
Lisa Zuurbier, Division Manager, Community Relations & Outreach

SUMMARY

Opening:

The meeting was called to order by Phyllis Mitzen at 10:02 a.m. Roll call was taken and it was determined that a quorum was established.

Introductions:

Phyllis shared that Steve Wolf announced his resignation. She thanked him for his several decades of service and dedication to the Council. She mentioned that Steve has provided a valuable facility-based perspective for many years. Steve added that he joined ICoA to share his skilled nursing background and will miss serving but wishes ICoA the best as it moves forward. It was agreed that the Council would seek to recommend another candidate to the Governor's Office for ICoA appointment who had facility-based knowledge and experience.

Phyllis welcomed new members: Robert Mueller is from Stark County and is a retired educator. He currently serves on the Board of the Central Illinois Area Agency on Aging. He is interested in serving as a voice for the rural areas of Illinois.

Rev. Dr. Melvin Grimes previously served on ICoA. He is senior pastor with the Tabernacle Baptist Church in Moline and is celebrating 50 years in the ministry. He also serves on the Board of the Western Illinois Area Agency on Aging which represents 10 counties in western Illinois.

Sylvia Mahle provided background regarding her education and career. She mentioned that she served 29 years with the Midland Area Agency on Aging, including six months as interim director. Sylvia retired in 2014 and is interested in all aspects of aging.

Administration for Community Living (ACL) Presentation:

Phyllis introduced Amy Wiatr-Rodriguez, Regional Administrator from Region 5 of the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, Administration for Community Living (ACL). Amy presented on ACL priorities, innovative practices and resources of the new administration.

Amy provided background on ACL, sharing that its mission is to maximize the independence, well-being, and health of older adults, persons with disabilities, and their families and caregivers. She mentioned that ACL administers more than 3000 different grants, awards and contracts (not counting COVID supplemental awards) that focus on keeping people healthy and independent in their communities for as long as possible.

Amy reported that in Federal Fiscal Year (FFY) 2020, ACL had \$2.2 billion in regular Older American Act (OAA) funding plus \$1.2 billion in the Family First Coronavirus Response Act (FFCRA) and Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act (CARES) Act supplemental funding to administer. In FFY 2021, there is \$4.4 billion in funding including \$2.3 billion OAA regular funding, supplemental COVID funding, as well as funding made available through the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA).

Amy talked about the recognition of employee/volunteer fatigue and the challenges of providing extra services with additional funding. She went on to say that providers may be hesitant to add new services, not knowing if these efforts will be sustainable. These concerns are shared by Aging Networks across the country. She stated that this might be an opportunity to upgrade equipment, invest in training, and look at projects and services that are currently limited.

Amy thanked the entire Illinois Aging network, on behalf of the ACL, for serving older Illinoisans' throughout these incredibly challenging times. She also congratulated IDoA for having a newly approved State Plan on Aging, effective October 1.

She then went over the key priorities guiding ACL's work. These include COVID recovery, advancing equity, expanding access to home and community-based services and building a caregiving infrastructure that includes support for both paid and unpaid caregivers. She shared the link, <https://acl.gov/COVID-19>, that contains extensive resources and information for aging and disability agencies, as well as consumers.

Amy talked about ACL's effort to advance equity. She mentioned that ACL funds the Older Adults' Equity Collaborative (OAEC) that is made up of five national Minority Aging Technical Assistance and Resource Centers housed in the following organizations: SAGE, the National Caucus and Center on Black Aging, National Indian Council on Aging, MHP Salud, and the National Asian Pacific Center on Aging. She encouraged ICoA members to visit the OAEC Resource Library at <https://www.nyam.org/center-healthy-aging/advising/oaec-resource-library/>.

Amy shared that the Recognize, Assist, Include, Support, and Engage (RAISE) Family Caregiver Act became law in January of 2018 and requires a national caregiving strategy to be developed. The strategy will identify actions that communities, providers, government and others are taking to recognize and support family caregivers. Input is currently being gathered from family caregivers across the nation. A national strategy is expected to be released in 2022.

Amy added that efforts include supporting grandparents raising grandchildren. Supporting Grandparents Raising Grandchildren Act (SGRG) became law in 2018. Recommendations have been made that intend to advance change to help grandparents and other older relatives meet the needs of the children in their care.

With regard to expanding access to home and community-based services, Amy said that there is focus on disrupting the hospital to nursing home pipeline and helping institutionalized people return to living within the community. She said that ensuring access to home and community-based services is intrinsic to nearly all the programs funded through OAA.

Amy shared that ACL's goals include advancing innovative practices. These practices may include implementing virtual and hybrid services, increasing the availability of person-centered and self-directed services, and ensuring a menu of flexible services. She added that the need for a sufficient workforce was also a target, prioritizing better wages, training and benefits for direct care staff.

Ms. Rodriguez concluded by providing a link to sign up for ACL's email updates at <https://cloud.connect.hhs.gov/acl-subscriptions>, as well as a list of other resources. She shared her contact information and encouraged ICoA members to reach out to her if they have questions or need assistance.

Phyllis thanked Amy for her attending the meeting and providing such an informative presentation.

Approval of the Minutes:

Phyllis asked for a motion to approve the minutes from the June 15, 2021 meeting. Britta Larson entered a motion. Julie Bobbitt seconded the motion; all members voted aye, and the minutes were unanimously approved.

COVID-19 Pandemic/Aging Network Resiliency:

Phyllis then introduced Director Basta to talk about the resilience of the Aging Network during the COVID-19 pandemic. The Director shared statistics from March 2020 through June 2021 regarding the number of in-home participants served and the number of in-home service hours provided. She reported that 119 in-home providers with 298 contracts provided a total of over 45 million hours of service to an average of 54,700 individuals a month. She noted that those numbers do not include services provided through an Managed Care Organization (MCO).

She went on to explain how our good relationships with Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and the Illinois Emergency Management Agency (IEMA) helped the Department to secure more than one million pieces of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) for the safety of providers and participants. The Department was also able to help providers by providing PPE offset payments of \$34 million to allow for service provision to continue during the COVID-19 Public Health Emergency (PHE).

The Director mentioned that Emergency Senior Services (ESS) was implemented as a gap filling service, that met the immediate needs of older adults in a timely manner. ESS helped individuals stay in their homes safely during the crisis and covered things such as the delivery of groceries, PPE, and targeted vaccine outreach including transportation to and from vaccination appointments.

She mentioned that as Adult Day Services (ADS) closed due to the pandemic; however, the Department worked with providers to develop plans to offer remote services. ADS providers continued to provide meals, wellness checks, routine wellness calls, medication monitoring, and transportation without use of their physical sites. She added that as of today, 60 of 70 ADS centers are re-opened.

The Director also spoke on how the Illinois Cares Connections initiative provided nearly 4,000 bundles of technology and equipment to homebound older adults and persons with disabilities. She noted that the training was provided through a partnership with the Illinois Assistive Technology Program (IATP) so individuals could correctly use the equipment they received.

Director Basta also spoke on the importance of food security. She stated as a result of closing congregate dining sites to slow the spread of COVID-19, many seniors who previously received meals at these sites were added to the Home Delivered Meal (HDM) program. As a result, HDM doubled in participants from approximately 43,000 in FFY 2019 to 89,000 participants in FFY 2020.

Deputy Director Lora McCurdy expressed appreciation to the Illinois Aging Network for how well everyone has stepped up during the pandemic to serve older adults and how they are continuing to do so. She added that the Area Agencies on Aging (AAAs) have provided vaccine outreach to more than 156,000 seniors, and that the Case Coordination Units (CCUs) have engaged more than 95,000 older adults in vacation outreach and education.

With regard to lessons learned during the COVID-19 pandemic, Deputy Director McCurdy mentioned the importance of identifying and mitigating the negative impact of social isolation on older adults. She added that the Department will provide funding to the Aging Network to tackle social isolation over the next couple of years. She emphasized the importance of taking a holistic approach across all work areas and including mental health in all discussions specific to home and community-based services programming.

A brief discussion period followed. During that time, Deputy Director McCurdy clarified that the Executive Order recently issued requiring health care worker vaccinations did not pertain to in-home service workers but did apply to ADS staff. She added that the Department was waiting on further guidance to be issued through the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA).

Acknowledging that there was some confusion around COVID-19 vaccine boosters, Director Basta shared that we will be working with the Illinois Department of Public Health on messaging around booster shots.

Department Updates:

Katherine Ostrowski provided a brief legislative report, noting that the Department's priorities in the next year included expanding Adult Protective Services (APS) to include better protections for financial exploitation and allow for the reporting of suspicious deaths. She also spoke on aligning the Nursing Home Care Act to better protect residents from improper discharges.

Mike Berkes discussed the federal medical assistance percentage (FMAP) spending plan for home and community-based services. He quickly reviewed the ten spending areas that include: 1) CCU workforce retention grant; 2) assistive technology/assistive devices; 3) community re-integration/deflection; 4) CCU rate increases; 5) Emergency Home Response Service (EHRS) enhancements; 6) environmental modifications; 7) community outing offset payments; 8) ADS rates; 9) intensive home services; and 10) in-home service and ADS service rate increase.

CLOSING REMARKS:

Phyllis thanked meeting attendees for their participation.

MOTION TO ADJOURN:

The meeting was adjourned at 2:05 p.m.

Phyllis Mitzen, Chair

Illinois Council on Aging