



HELPING OLDER ADULTS DURING SOCIAL DISTANCING TIPS AND RESOURCES

Michigan.gov/Coronavirus

What can you do to help older adults during this time of social distancing? Here are some ideas for minimizing the effects on our more vulnerable Michiganders. Please follow CDC Coronavirus (COVID-19) Guidance (cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html) and the current guidelines on the State of Michigan website for COVID-19 (Michigan.gov/Coronavirus) when supporting older adults, including following recommendations for social distancing of 6 feet and that items be disinfected before bringing them into homes.

- 1. Phone Calls and Ideas for Keeping Busy:** Call retired neighbors and make sure they are doing well. A friendly voice can help reduce anxieties during this time. You don't have to talk about their health, and the calls don't need to be marathon sessions – 15 minutes can do a lot to keep the distancing only physical and not social. You may talk about what they are doing to stay occupied or about their hobbies. Ask about family and if they have heard from them. Encourage calling a family member(s) or others to touch base, as well as reading or listening to audiobooks, working on crossword or table puzzles, taking walks, standing outside for short periods, or decorating front doors/windows with hearts of hope or other positive messages of support during COVID-19.
- 2. Volunteer for a Telephone Reassurance or Comfort Line Program:** These are programs that match volunteers with homebound older adults who are seeking additional companionship through phone calls. Find out if your community has a program by contacting the local Area Agency on Aging (AAA) or calling 211 for information. See www.michigan.gov/aasa for a list of AAAs. Another resource is the Friendly Caller Program for LGBTQ+ with SAGE Metro Detroit www.sagemetrodetroit.org/friendly-caller-program/ or call 248-567-2363.
- 3. Deliveries:** Many grocery stores will assemble groceries for delivery or curbside pickup, but the family member/friend/neighbor may not be able to get out of their vehicle or be able to order items online. You can be a life saver by ordering or shopping for them and dropping the items off, or meeting the delivery service at their door. You may also offer your time and energy as a delivery service between homebound seniors and local retailers that are open and willing to offer free or otherwise goods and services, including nutrition service providers such as Meals on Wheels. Don't forget to tell them to wipe down packaging with bleach/disinfectant wipes, throw out bags, and wash their hands and all produce. Also, remember they may also need prescriptions picked up as well.

- 4. Telehealth:** Many physicians' offices are offering appointments via telephone, Skype, Zoom, or Doxy links during COVID-19. Contact your health provider for information. Additionally, many health insurance companies are making exceptions to requiring face-to-face visits. Please check with your insurance provider. To reduce the risk of exposure, **Medicare** has expanded its coverage of telehealth services. The expanded services provide access to medical professionals from a wider range of communication devices, such as a smart phone, tablet or computer. To find out more, visit: www.medicare.gov/coverage/telehealth or call the Michigan Medicare Medicaid Assistance Program (MMAAP) at 800-803-7174.
- 5. Cell Phones and Internet Access:** Provide older adults who need assistance with guidance on using the many features available such as how to access emails, the internet, organize electronic photos or set up video chats. Keep in mind that old cell phones may be kept next to the bed to dial 911 in case of an emergency. (Make sure they are charged.) If their cell phone plan allows, urge them to play games, watch YouTube concerts, movies or how-to videos to learn new skills. Connect using Twitter, Instagram and Facebook. People are sharing photos of their doors and windows decorated with hearts to be supportive of others in a Facebook group: www.facebook.com/groups/822636184897888/?fref=nf.
- 6. Texting:** Give family/friends/neighbors directions about how to text on a cell phone and send them a video of something of interest. It could be a new recipe video, hobby video, video of their grandchildren/pets, or a news clip.
- 7. Technology For Those with Computers and Internet Access:** Suggest older adults establish communication links in their area by email blasts to a subdivision mailing list, a faith-based mailing list, or any other group mailing list you can think of such as clubs, hobby/sports groups, fraternities, sororities, etc. Organize a Zoom/Skype/Skype Team virtual get together for a coffee break, lunchtime, evening cheer, or give them the web addresses/links to virtual museum tours/field trips or concerts.
 - Smithsonian Museum Virtual Tours: naturalhistory.si.edu/visit/virtual-tour The Smithsonian, National Museum of Natural History virtual tours allow visitors to take self-guided, room-by-room tours of select exhibits and areas within the museum.
 - National World War II Virtual Field Trip: Is an interactive, fast-paced virtual field trip. www.nationalww2museum.org/virtual-field-trips
 - Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund Virtual Tour: <https://www.vvmf.org/Virtual-Tour/>
 - *Travel and Leisure* 12 Virtual Museum/Gallery Tours (Natural History Museum, British Museum, National Gallery of Art-Washington, D.C., The Louvre Paris, etc.) www.travelandleisure.com/attractions/museums-galleries
 - Aquarium/Zoo Virtual Tours throughout the U.S. www.apartmenttherapy.com/aquariums-zoos-animal-live-streams-36736902
 - Philadelphia Orchestra live performance of "BeethovenNOW: Symphonies 5 & 6" www.philorch.org/performances/special-performances/live-stream/.

- 8. Radio and TV:** Encourage older adults to listen to their favorite music or watch a new show or movie on TV. If you have DVDs or VHS tapes you could drop them off or leave them in front of your home for neighbors/family/friends or suggest swapping them for other videos.
- 9. Share/Drop Off:** Pass along used books/games/puzzles and offer to rotate these items with others. Wipe down items as appropriate; items sitting on shelves in closets for months/years are unlikely to be contaminated unless recently handled. After cleaning out closets offer family/friends/neighbors items they might use like fabric, paint and various craft supplies (sewing, knitting and wood working). Place items in a container in front of your home. Also, write and send notes to family and friends. If you have an old Kindle in a drawer, or a cell phone, tablet or computer, you could download Hoopla www.hoopladigital.com, with a library card, which offers free online audio books, movies, music videos and TV shows. Once downloaded to read/watch/listen, internet access may not be needed. Many older adults are members of AARP, which offers an array of information, games, support groups, and other information that older adults may find useful: www.aarp.org/.
- 10. Other Important Information:**
- Report Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation by calling 855-444-3911.
 - Report Potential Scams and Price-gouging to the Attorney General's Consumer Protection team by calling 877-765-8388 or filing a complaint online: www.michigan.gov/ag/0,4534,7-359-82915_82919_86407---,00.html

Prepared by the State Advisory Council on Aging