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## PROGRAM MEMO

**TO:** Area Agencies on Aging

**NO:** PM 20-18

**DATE ISSUED:** 9.15.20

**EXPIRES:** NA

**PROGRAMS AFFECTED:** Supportive Services (Title IIIB), Nutrition (Title IIIC), Disease Prevention and Health Promotion (Title IIID), and Family Caregiver Support (IIIE)

**SUPERSEDES:** PM 20-16

**SUBJECT:** Updated Guidance for Temporary Alternative Service Delivery of Older Americans Act Programs Operations During the COVID-19 Pandemic

### **Purpose**

This Program Memo (PM) provides updated guidance on temporary alternative service delivery for the Older Americans Act (OAA) programs during the COVID-19 pandemic as it correlates with the State of California's [Blueprint for a Safer Economy](#). The *Blueprint* refines the approach for reopening businesses and activities originally documented in the State's *Resilience Roadmap*. Suggested activities through the *Blueprint* tiers are provided for the OAA programs including Supportive Services (Title IIIB), Nutrition (Title IIIC), Disease Prevention and Health Promotion (Title IIID), and Family Caregiver Support (IIIE) in updated Appendices A through C.

### **General Guidance**

The guidance provided is subject to change based on Federal and/or State guidance which may result in the decrease and/or conclusion of flexibilities to program requirements.

### **Advancing through Tiers of the *Blueprint for a Safer Economy***

The State's *Blueprint* allows for county variance based on State and local public health guidance and on meeting readiness criteria and metrics. The framework of the *Blueprint* is informed by increased knowledge of disease transmission and provides revised criteria for how businesses and activities can open in counties to reduce the risk of COVID-19 community spread. The *Blueprint* describes the measures that each county must meet to move through the tiers, noting that a county may be more restrictive than the tier framework.

Older adults remain at higher risk for COVID-19 and serious outcomes. The concern for community spread of COVID-19 and risk for older adults is addressed in the [Statewide Public Health Officer Order, August 28, 2020](#):

*“Higher levels of community spread also increase the likelihood of infection among individuals at higher risk of serious outcomes from COVID-19, including the elderly and those with underlying health conditions who might live or otherwise interact with an infected individual”.*

Based on the higher risk to older adults, the current guidance for the AAAs is to defer non-essential in-home services and in-person group programs or activities until after a county reaches Tier 4. Since AAAs work with a higher risk population, it would be prudent to defer non-essential in-home services and in-person group programs or activities until a county has remained in Tier 4 for several weeks.

AAAs should continue to monitor State and local county public health guidance and follow their county public health recommendations. The decision to adjust service delivery of OAA programs will be made at the local level and should be based on state and local public health guidance, along with an assessment of the readiness of the older adults in the community. County-specific information regarding tier status and activities is provided on the State’s COVID-19 website:

<https://covid19.ca.gov/safer-economy/>.

### General Program Guidance

Suggested strategies are provided for each of the OAA programs aligning with the four tiers of the *Blueprint*. The guidance for each OAA program defers non-essential in-home services and in-person group programs or activities until a county has remained in Tier 4 for several weeks, unless they can be delivered remotely. Refer to the updated Appendices for program-specific guidance.

A critical aspect of service delivery for OAA programs will be to follow recommended safety precautions to prevent the spread of COVID-19. AAAs and their service providers should take steps to reduce the risk of COVID-19 and create a safe environment for staff, volunteers, and clients. The following resources provide information and tools for reducing the risk of COVID-19.

- Understand how COVID-19 spreads and the necessary precautions, including wearing face coverings, handwashing, and physical distancing to prevent the spread of the virus. Refer to Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) resources: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/prevention.html>
- Follow *Guidance for the Use of Face Coverings*, which requires the use of face coverings in California when in public or common spaces. Refer to the California Department of Public Health (CDPH) guidance, including a listing of individuals who are exempt from wearing face coverings: [Guidance for the Use of Face Coverings](#).
- Utilize print resources to support COVID-19 recommendations. Refer to CDC resources: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/prevention.html>

- Clean and disinfect. Refer to CDC guidance to ensure program sites are appropriately cleaned and disinfected: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/cleaning-disinfecting-decision-tool.html>

### Addressing Social Isolation

Addressing social isolation, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic, is essential to the well-being of older adults. AAAs should continue to address social isolation in all tiers of the *Blueprint*. Some strategies to engage older adults virtually include:

- Establish or expand virtual visiting programs by engaging staff and volunteers to make daily phone calls to older adults.
- Leverage social networking platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram to share content and to stay connected with others.
- Offer computer-friendly services to support new users of electronic devices.
- Share links to virtual events, such as concerts, museum tours, amusement park rides, and aquarium visits with clients.
- Find more tools for virtual connections:
  - [Addressing Social Isolation for Older Adults During the COVID-19 Crisis](#)
  - [Engage CA](#)
  - [Senior Centers Connect](#)

### Background

Following the stay-at-home order on March 20, 2020, the State released the *Resilience Roadmap* which outlined the four stages of reopening. On July 13, 2020, California closed some indoor business operations statewide and additional indoor operations in designated counties. Most recently, on August 28, 2020, with increased knowledge of disease transmission, the State has released the *Blueprint for a Safer Economy* to reduce risk as California continues to reopen its economy and protect public health.

The *Blueprint* outlines the four Tiers for the opening of business and activities, replacing the four Stages of the *Resilience Roadmap*. The Tiers are based on the risk of community disease transmission as follows:

- Tier 1: Widespread
- Tier 2: Substantial
- Tier 3: Moderate
- Tier 4: Minimal

The *Blueprint* describes the measures that each county must meet to move through the tiers, noting that a county may be more restrictive than the tier framework. Every county in California is assigned to a tier based on its COVID-19 test positivity and adjusted case rate and tier status is updated weekly. Counties must remain in a tier for at least three weeks before moving forward. To move forward, a county must meet the next tier's criteria for two consecutive weeks.

To learn more about tier assignments, refer to the California Department of Public Health website: <https://www.cdph.ca.gov/Programs/CID/DCDC/Pages/COVID-19/COVID19CountyMonitoringOverview.aspx>.

The guidance provided in PM 20-16 was to defer non-essential in-home services and in-person group programs or activities until Stage 4, unless they could be delivered remotely. This guidance aligned with the State's *Resilience Roadmap* which advised that higher risk individuals stay at home until Stage 4. Tier 4 of the *Blueprint for a Safer Economy* is comparable to Stage 4 of the *Resilience Roadmap* in terms of when higher risk individuals (i.e. older adults) could consider resuming higher risk in-person group activities (e.g., congregate meals, adult day care, senior center activities, etc.).

Based on the higher risk to older adults, the current guidance for the AAAs is to defer non-essential in-home services and in-person group programs or activities until a county has remained in Tier 4 for several weeks.

### **Updated Appendices**

Appendix A: Nutrition Program (Title IIIC)

Appendix B: Supportive Services (Title IIIB) and Family Caregiver Support (IIIE) Programs

Appendix C: Disease Prevention and Health Promotion Program (Title IIID)

### **Inquiries**

For Title IIIB program inquiries, email: [CDASupportiveServices@aging.ca.gov](mailto:CDASupportiveServices@aging.ca.gov)

For Title IIIC and IIID program inquiries, email: [CDANutritionandHealthPromotion@aging.ca.gov](mailto:CDANutritionandHealthPromotion@aging.ca.gov)

For Title IIIE program inquiries, email: [CDAFamilyCaregiver@aging.ca.gov](mailto:CDAFamilyCaregiver@aging.ca.gov)

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