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PROGRAM MEMO

TO: Area Agencies on Aging
NO: PM 23-05
DATE ISSUED: February 3, 2023
EXPIRES: NA

PROGRAMS AFFECTED: Supportive Services (Title IIIB), Nutrition (Title IIIC), Health Promotion – Evidence-Based (Title IIID), Family Caregiver Support (IIIE)

SUPERSEDES: [PM 21-10](#)

SUBJECT: Guidance for transitioning to standard operations for the Older Americans Act programs following the end of the COVID-19 Major Disaster Declaration.

Purpose

This Program Memo (PM) provides guidance for transitioning to standard operations for the Older Americans Act (OAA) programs following the end of the California COVID-19 Major Disaster Declaration (MDD). This memo and corresponding appendices provide guidance on ending the program flexibilities tied to the MDD and the Public Health Emergency (PHE) and resuming standard (pre-pandemic) and/or adapted operations for OAA programs, including Supportive Services (Title IIIB), Nutrition (Title IIIC), Health Promotion - Evidence-Based (Title IIID), and Family Caregiver Support (IIIE), by June 30, 2023, and transitioning back to standard operations effective, July 1, 2023.

Background

In March 2020, when older adults and the public were asked to stay home due to the COVID-19 pandemic, many aging services in the community, such as nutrition services and aging program worksites, transitioned to remote services. Both the Administration for Community Living (ACL) and the California Department of Aging (CDA) authorized OAA program flexibilities due to the need for safety precautions to prevent the spread of COVID-19.

In June 2021, with increased vaccination rates and decreased COVID-19 cases, California reopened its economy. Since that time, it has been at the discretion of the Area Agencies on Aging (AAA) to resume in-person services based on state and local public health guidance, along with an assessment of the readiness of the program staff and older adults in the community.

California's SMARTER Plan

The [SMARTER Plan](#) was released February 17, 2022 and provides guidance for the next phase of California's COVID-19 response which is focused on mitigation and adaptation. Components of the plan include **S**hots, **M**asks, **A**wareness, **R**eadiness, **T**esting, **E**ducation, and **R**x.

The [SMARTER Steps](#) one-pager provides a simple tool to navigate the SMARTER Plan. This resource provides current recommendations to be prepared for future COVID-19 surges or variants. The steps include:

- Shots – All individuals are recommended to stay up to date with COVID-19 vaccinations.
- Masks – [Current masking recommendations](#) are based on [community COVID-19 levels](#).
- Ventilation – Meet/dine outdoors if possible; improve ventilation when indoors by opening doors and windows and using portable air cleaners.
- Tests – Testing to help California minimize the spread of COVID-19.
- Isolation – [Current guidance](#) for individuals testing positive for COVID-19.
- Treatment – Learn more about available treatments.

Ending the MDD and PHE Flexibilities

Major Disaster Declaration

The reversal of OAA program flexibilities, except for the waiver of nutrition requirements, is tied to the ending of the California COVID-19 MDD. A majority of the COVID-19 MDD executive orders ended in June 2021, including requirements for physical distancing. Currently, only five percent of the COVID-19 MDD provisions remain in place. On October 17, 2022, the Governor announced that the COVID-19 MDD will end on February 28, 2023.

As noted in [PM 21-10](#), the AAAs will have a six-month transition period to return to standard operations with the ending of the MDD. With the announcement of the MDD end date, CDA has notified the AAAs that the six-month transition period will begin January 2, 2023. This timeline will ensure the return to standard operations by July 1, 2023, including complete data reporting for Fiscal Year (FY) 2023-24, while allowing continued flexibility through the winter respiratory virus season as needed.

Public Health Emergency

The waiver of nutrition requirements, including following the Dietary Guidelines for Americans (DGA) and providing one-third of the Dietary Reference Intakes (DRI) in each Title IIIC meal, is granted at the federal level and is tied to the PHE. Health and Human Services (HHS) will provide a 60-day notice before ending the PHE. The waiver of nutrition requirements ends when the PHE ends or by July 1, 2023, whichever date occurs earlier.

General Guidance

The OAA program flexibilities, as most recently documented in the [Updated COVID-19 FAQs](#), cover a number of topics such as contracts, data, monitoring, and programmatic flexibilities for the IIIB, IIIC, IIID, and IIIE programs. Details regarding the reversal and/or allowable adaptation of each program flexibility is detailed in the COVID-19 Flexibilities and Return to Standard Operations FAQs.

A six-month transition period, beginning January 2, 2023, and ending June 30, 2023, provides AAAs and service providers time to adjust service operations. Note that some program adaptations that were

essential during the COVID-19 pandemic, such as To-Go meals, will continue to be allowable post-MDD. Guidance on the management of To-Go meals is provided in Appendix A.

The six-month transition period does not apply to the waiver of nutrition requirements for Title IIIC meals, unless the PHE is extended beyond July 1, 2023. The AAAs and nutrition providers will receive a 60-day notice prior to the end of the PHE and the waiver of nutrition requirements. Title IIIC meals must meet nutrition requirements when the PHE ends, or by July 1, 2023, whichever date occurs earlier.

The decision to resume in-person services remains at the discretion of the AAAs based on state and local public health guidance, along with an assessment of the readiness of the program staff and older adults in the community.

CDA will ensure that the ending of the MDD flexibilities occurs during the transition period through Technical Assistance (TA) with AAA partners and follow-up. Following each TA meeting, the AAAs will need to follow-up with CDA to provide information detailing the activities that have been completed toward ending the MDD flexibilities.

Resources

The following resources provide information and tools for reducing the risk of COVID-19:

- The SMARTER Steps: A one-page tool for navigating California's SMARTER Plan <https://files.covid19.ca.gov/pdf/CA-Smarter-Plan-one-sheet--en.pdf>
- COVID-19 by County: CDC provides COVID-19 levels by county and recommended prevention actions <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/your-health/covid-by-county.html>
- Guidance for the Use of Face Masks: CDPH provides current guidance on when masks are recommended <https://www.cdph.ca.gov/Programs/CID/DCDC/Pages/COVID-19/Guidance-for-Face-Coverings.aspx>
- Face Coverings Q & A: CDPH provides guidance on masks for a variety of scenarios <https://www.cdph.ca.gov/Programs/CID/DCDC/Pages/COVID-19/Face-Coverings-QA.aspx>

Appendices

Refer to the Appendices for program-specific guidance to assist the AAAs and their service providers in returning to standard operations.

[Appendix A](#): Nutrition Program (Title IIIC)

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

[Appendix C](#): Health Promotion – Evidenced-Based Program (Title IIID)

Inquiries

For Title IIIB program inquiries, email: CDASupportiveServices@aging.ca.gov

For Title IIIC and IIID program inquiries, email: CDANutritionandHealthPromotion@aging.ca.gov

For Title IIIE program inquiries, email: CDAFamilyCaregiver@aging.ca.gov

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