



# COVID-19 UPDATE MAY 7, 2020

Supporting the Independence of Older Vermonters Since 1974

Dear community supporters and stakeholders,

We'd like to take this opportunity to thank you for your support, patience and compassion during the COVID-19 pandemic, extend our best wishes to all of our friends and neighbors in southwestern Vermont, and provide a brief update on our agency operations.

Southwestern Vermont Council on Aging (SVCOA), which provides essential services to older Vermonters and younger disabled individuals throughout Bennington and Rutland counties, has seen its share of challenges in recent weeks.

Like other organizations and programs, SVCOA has been tasked with implementing a series of evolving operational adjustments to keep staff and clients safe while also maintaining a high level of service to older Vermonters in our region amidst an unprecedented increase in service demand.

While this job has not been easy, we are proud to say that have we met these challenges head on, and, thanks to our dedicated staff, hardworking volunteers, supportive community partners, and understanding clients, we have been able to deliver when called upon.

Although we are well aware that we are not yet "out of the woods," and that both our agency operations and our entire way of life may continue to look different for many weeks to come, SVCOA remains committed to those who rely on our services and is hopeful for the future.

With that said, we'd like to share the following agency update with you, and remind you that we're always here, ready and willing to help. Be safe and take care.

SVCOA Directors,  
Chris Adams, Development & Communications Director  
Dana McMahan, Rutland County Aging Services Director  
Jennifer Plouffe, Bennington County Aging Services Director  
Rosemary Greene, Business Operations Director  
Courtney Anderson, Nutrition Director

[SVCOA.ORG](http://SVCOA.ORG)

SVCOA HelpLine: 1-800-642-5119

PROUD PARTNERS:

ADMINISTRATIVE  
OFFICE  
143 Maple Street  
Rutland, VT 05701  
(802)-786-5990

BENNINGTON OFFICE  
Benmont Mill  
160 Benmont Avenue, Suite 90  
Bennington, VT 05201  
(802)-442-5436



Vermont  
Association of  
Area Agencies  
on Aging



## COVID-19 Service Impacts & Results

- 636 calls processed by SVCOA's HelpLine since March 9
- 3,364 supportive contacts made to clients by SVCOA case managers and options counselor since March 9
- 17,251 total meals served to older Vermonters in March alone, including 13,349 home-delivered to 681 individuals
- 154 new Meals on Wheels clients since March 9
- SVCOA is now processing in a span of two days the same number of Meals on Wheels intakes it would typically see in an entire month
- On average, two to three additional frozen "emergency meals" are being sent to all Meals on Wheels clients on a weekly or monthly basis
- 95 clients served by SVCOA's new grocery and supply delivery service supported by 45 volunteers
- 25 clients served by SVCOA's phone check-in program supported by 15 volunteers
- SVCOA HelpLine continues to manage a significant increase in COVID-19-influenced calls related to stimulus checks, lack of caregivers, nutrition needs, insurance assistance (SHIP program) and mental health/ isolation
- SVCOA has developed a new caregiver registry designed to help meet a recent increase in demand among older Vermonters in immediate need of caregivers that provide homemaker-related services. All caregivers on the registry would be background checked by SVCOA and listed with their available service areas, days and hours, tasks etc.

**"Thank you for giving me my volunteer. She comes down and helps me do grocery shopping because I'm legally blind and my wife has cancer. She's been incredible, she has been a godsend, and you guys have been a godsend. I can't thank you enough."** - SVCOA grocery shopping service client, April 2020

## Office Operations

- SVCOA's Bennington and Rutland offices remain closed to public visitors, including clients. If a client, community partner, service representative etc. needs to contact the agency, they are asked to do so via telephone or email.
  - o For SVCOA's HelpLine, call: 1-800-642-5119 or 802-786-5990. Please leave a message if / when prompted and the appropriate staff member will respond accordingly.
  - o To contact the Rutland office, call: 802-786-5990
  - o To contact the Bennington office, call: 802-442-5436
  - o To contact SVCOA by email, send email to: [infoandassistance@svcoa.net](mailto:infoandassistance@svcoa.net)
- SVCOA staff and volunteers have ceased home visits to clients. Services to clients are continuing to be provided using various technologies and alternative methods.
- SVCOA staff continue to conduct all meetings with community partners via telephone or videoconferencing.
- Similar to many community organizations, SVCOA has been continuously adjusting its internal operational policies and protocols based on updated guidance from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the Vermont Department of Health (VDH), the Vermont Department of Disabilities, Aging and Independent Living (DAIL), and Governor Scott. These adjustments will continue regularly as additional guidance is provided.

## Program Updates

### **Nutrition**

SVCOA's nutrition program, as noted previously in the COVID-19 impacts section of this update, has been inundated with new requests for its home delivered meals service (Meals on Wheels) since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic. In the midst of this rapid rise in demand, SVCOA's nutrition team was also tasked with altering operational protocols for both home delivered and community-based meals in order to keep both clients and meal service personnel safe. Additionally, the team, in collaboration with SVCOA's volunteer coordinators, launched the new SVCOA grocery and supply shopping service to enable older Vermonters to get needed food and supplies while being able to stay home and limit any potential exposure to COVID-19. This support service, which has been utilized widely across Bennington and Rutland counties, has received positive feedback from clients and has been featured by various media outlets. Lastly, SVCOA's nutrition program continues to assist clients virtually through 3Squares Vermont Outreach grants with benefit and application assistance.

### **Case Management & Options Counseling**

SVCOA's Case Management & Options Counseling team continues to support clients as usual, but is currently leveraging telephone communication in place of traditional in-person visits. The team has been completing weekly check-in's with all Choices for Care, Veteran's Directed Program and Moderate Needs Group clients. Case Managers are also reaching out to AAA clients every two to three weeks and addressing any issues that they are seeing. Like other functional areas of the agency, the Case Management & Options Counseling arm is witnessing a significant increase in needed assistance around public benefits and accessing supports.

### **HelpLine**

The SVCOA HelpLine has been working tirelessly to process hundreds of calls in recent weeks, many of which have been directly related to COVID-19 issues. While some calls have been focused on topics we normally work with clients on, the COVID-19 pandemic has added to the complexity of such issues. As noted in the COVID-19 impacts section of this update, SVCOA's HelpLine has seen an uptick in calls related to stimulus checks, a lack of available caregivers, nutrition needs, insurance (SHIP) assistance, and mental health / isolation. HelpLine staff are also making regular check-in calls to clients with complex issues around COVID-19 to make sure they are being connected to the services and supports they need.

### **Eldercare Clinician**

SVCOA's Eldercare Clinicians have been working to continue to support clients using telephone and other assistive technology to facilitate communication. As many are aware, mental health and isolation are growing needs at this time, and SVCOA's Eldercare Clinicians in both Bennington and Rutland counties are currently accepting and taking on new clients that are now eligible for support due to COVID-19.

### **Green Mountain RSVP - Sponsored by SVCOA**

Green Mountain RSVP continues to make positive impacts in Bennington, Windham, and Windsor Counties. Some of our volunteers never skipped a beat, and have continued to safely volunteer as Meals on Wheels drivers or in supporting food pantries. Other Volunteers have continued to deliver food via the commodities program as well. Some of our volunteer activities have evolved to remove in-person contact and include telephone support for clients from different agencies. One of our peer lead exercise programs, a Tai Chi class in Windsor County, is now being offered via the Zoom Meeting platform. A new program that we support across multiple agencies is food shopping services for homebound seniors. We are in the process of converting our "Fraud Squad" elder justice presentation to a video version to be shared with older Vermonters. We also have a number of volunteers eagerly making cloth masks which are donated to agencies in need.

## SVCOA In The News



Volunteer shopping program gets rolling in southern Vermont



### Volunteers to deliver groceries to seniors

By Gordon Dritschilo Staff Writer Apr 6, 2020

Seniors who don't want to risk a trip to the supermarket have another option.

The Southern Vermont Council on Aging has organized volunteers to go shopping for the elderly — one of the populations at higher risk for complications from COVID-19 infections. The service is available to anyone 60 and older, as well as "eligible younger disabled individuals."

[Letter: Council on Aging thanks volunteers - Bennington Banner, 5/1/20](#)

[Letter: SVCOA thanks volunteers - Rutland Herald, 5/5/20](#)

[Across Vermont, nonprofits worried about an increase in another illness: hunger - Vermont Digger, 3/23/20](#)

[Meals on Wheels sees volunteer decline - Bennington Banner, 3/20/20](#)

[Volunteer shopping service gets rolling in Southern Vermont - WCAX News, 4/16/20](#)

[Volunteers to deliver groceries to seniors - Rutland Herald, 4/6/20](#)

[SVCOA launches shopping service for older Vermonters - Vermont Journal, 4/9/20](#)

[Grocery service offered to older Vermonters - Bennington Banner, 4/6/20](#)

[Shopping service available for older Vermonters - Mountain Times, 4/8/20](#)

[SVCOA launches shopping service for older Vermonters - Vermont Digger, 4/6/20](#)

## How To Support Our Efforts

**Volunteer:** SVCOA is always looking for volunteers to support its various programs. To learn more, call 802-786-5990. We'd love to work with you!

**Make a donation:** SVCOA welcomes any and all donations to help us continue our work. Donations may be made online at <https://www.svcoa.org/ways-to-donate> or can be mailed to SVCOA at 143 Maple Street, Rutland, VT 05701. SVCOA is a 501(c)(3) non-profit, and contributions are tax-deductible to the extent permitted by law.

### SVCOA thanks the following donors for their generous support during the months of March and April!

Nancy & James West  
John Cioffi & Judi Howland  
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