



# Celebrating Seniors

## Semi-Annual Report

April 27, 2021

The goal of the Ionia County Commission on Aging is to strengthen the well-being of all Ionia County Senior Citizens and to be the cornerstone of support services for their continued independence.

Ionia County Commission on Aging

115 Hudson Street Ionia MI 48846

(616) 527-5365 (888) 527-5365 [iccoa@ioniacounty.org](mailto:iccoa@ioniacounty.org)



# Mid-Year Update

## ICCOA Operations and Services

Thank you for this opportunity to update you on the business of the Ionia County Commission on Aging midway through our fiscal year. Due to the COVID pandemic, we continue to deliver many services in new ways, or on modified schedules. We continue to be flexible, and to adapt to changing conditions, in order to safely provide services and support Ionia County Seniors.

In this report I'd like to focus on where we are in meeting our goals for fiscal year 2021 and to update you on new agency business.

Our goals for FY 2021 , as identified in our October 2020 Semi-Annual Report, include:

- Scale up Meals on Wheels™ service to serve all clients at their assessed level
- Scale up Congregate to GO! service, to additional areas of Ionia County
- Fill numerous vacant positions which prevent our agency from meeting the needs of Ionia County Seniors – in particular in the area of In Home Services
- Continue to adapt to changing conditions, while keeping both clients and staff safe
- Keep the option open for facility Improvement in our existing building

A look into each of these areas follows.

We are all anxious to move beyond the current crisis and are feeling the wear of a pandemic year. I am unable to express just how proud I am of our staff and how they have stepped up to the plate under these conditions to continue to deliver services to our clients and our community. While this report covers just a fraction of the services COA delivers day to day, week to week and throughout the year, to a person, our team has shown incredible dedication, collaboration and flexibility as we have weathered the storm together.

Thank you for your support of our agency and services. We take real pride in the work we do and the difference we make in the community. It is truly a pleasure to serve Ionia County and the needs of our older adults and caregivers.

Carol Hanulcik, Director

## **Scale Up Meals on Wheels™ Service**

We are happy to report that we were successful in meeting this goal as of February 2021!

Meals on Wheels Service (MOW) is a recurring meal delivery program. A caseworker contacts a client for an assessment, and determines the client's needs, based on a number of factors. Most of our MOW clients are assessed to receive one meal per day, up to seven meals per week. However some clients, who need additional assistance, may qualify for up to 2 meals per day, up to 7 days per week.

Due to a number of factors, but especially the loss of several staff members and volunteers at the start of the COVID crisis, some clients were "underserved" for MOW delivery for several months – in other words, we were able to provide a maximum of one meal per day.

In February we found a solution to deliver these additional meals by providing cold, second meals to clients. While this is working for now, we know that hiring is the only way to guarantee we can continue to meet these needs. We are currently looking to replace one full-time cook position, one part-time kitchen aide position, and two substitute meal driver positions in our Nutrition Department.

Our delivery schedule is currently 3 days per week, still reduced from our pre-pandemic delivery schedule of 5 days per week. Cold or frozen meals are provided for those days we do not deliver. Drivers and site hostesses have been flexible and working outside the parameters of prior job responsibilities to help in the kitchen, or to deliver USDA food boxes, on the other days of the week. Soon they'll begin Senior Project Fresh Coupon distribution.

With current staff levels, we also need to purchase some pre-made frozen meals, as we are unable to prepare all the meals required to meet client needs. With an additional cook we may be able to move additional meal-prep in-house and to add a 4<sup>th</sup> delivery day.

We are also investigating whether there is a need to add an additional, 8<sup>th</sup> meal route. Meal routes should make it so that all meals can be delivered within 4 hours from leaving our kitchen. We anticipate transferring 1 to 2 MDOT-funded, retired transportation vehicles to MOW to replace older vehicles or to expand the fleet within the next 12 months.

## **Scale Up Congregate to GO! Meal Service**

We have successfully expanded Congregate to Go! Services in FY 2021 and continue to expand

to offer curbside pick-up in multiple locations, on multiple dates.

We launched our “pilot” Congregate to GO! curbside meal program in September 2020, in Clarksville. We then expanded the program to add weekly service in Ionia, starting in October 2020.

Special one-time, holiday, curbside meals at all sites – Belding, Clarksville, Ionia, Lake Odessa, Portland and Saranac – were added in both November and December, and special meals are planned for all sites in April, May, June and July. Conditions permitting, we hope to participate in a safe Senior Day at the Ionia Free Fair as well.

We look forward to opening all meal sites for in-person service, safely, in the future. Our ultimate goal is a grand reopening of our Ionia Senior Center in the fall with a special event.

Of our eight site hostess positions, 3 are currently vacant, with in-person meal service paused. The remaining 5 staff are working in other areas – delivering meals, working in the kitchen, etc.

### **Fill Vacant Positions**

Our agency is currently operating with a very lean team. While this has allowed us to realize cost savings in some areas, in other areas it prevents us from earning our funding, and more importantly, it prevents us from delivering needed services to clients. Our current staff levels are temporary and not sustainable.

As mentioned previously, several positions are vacant in our Nutrition Department – a full-time cook, a part-time kitchen aide and 2 substitute meal drivers – also three of our eight site host positions are currently vacant and will need to be filled once we reopen Congregate Meal Sites.

In our Transportation Department, we are looking to replace one retiring driver and will welcome back a second driver who has been out on leave. We will wait to seek to fill other allocated, staff positions until we have completed the rollout of our new Dispatch Software, but we are actively recruiting volunteers. **For additional transportation updates, please see the report to our Local Advisory Committee + Coordination Committee for Transportation, which follows as an appendix to this report.** ICCOA works closely with Ionia Dial A Ride to provide transportation in our area. Together we are planning a Transportation Open House to be held outdoors on June 5<sup>th</sup>, in conjunction with the Ionia Classic Car Show.

The area of greatest need for staff is in In-Home Services. While new Department Head Emily

Higbee has increased staff hours worked in recent weeks, they are still just a fraction of where we would like them to be in order to meet demand for services, even scaled back for COVID. We know we cannot make further progress without hiring and multiple positions are vacant. Emily has been conducting interviews and has scheduled a virtual Job Fair with MI Works on May 19.

Office staff hours are at approximately 95% of allocated/budgeted hours. Thankfully, we have the ability to have office staff work remotely. This has helped us to meet the moment under COVID, to have the staff resources needed to adapt to repeatedly changing conditions and to take advantage of new programming and new funding opportunities.

### **Continue to Adapt to Changing Conditions/COVID + Facility Improvements**

As it turns out, these two items are linked. In March we began renovations of our facility. Recently, while exploring how we might improve ventilation, we learned that major HVAC improvements are needed to make our building safer for our county's seniors, today and in decades to come.

While this was unanticipated in the original scope, we are moving forward and hope to make this additional investment in our building, our seniors and our county. We trust that the investments we are making will be taken into consideration when we are asked to make contributions toward the general fund.

The cost savings our agency has earned, the funding we have secured, and the fund balance we have built, merit investment in services and projects that directly benefit our Senior Citizens.

Our vision for the future is encapsulated in the improvements we are making to our Senior Center in downtown Ionia. To respect our past and plan for the future, we aim to transform our facility into a welcoming destination for social interaction, enriching programming and a hub for information, where seniors have a voice and a hand in both content and community.



**Celebrating Seniors**

**Report to the  
Local Advisory Committee  
&  
Coordination Committee  
for Transportation**

**FY 2022 MDOT Application**

*Review of Coordinated Public Transit and  
Vehicle Accessibility Plans*

*Responding to the challenges of the COVID-19 Pandemic*

The one constant during the past year, for our agency and the nation, has been change.

At the Ionia County Commission on Aging, we have found ourselves adapting to change on a continual basis - to new guidelines, to new services, to new funding opportunities. It's been quite a challenge but one we have successfully met head on.

Our training, coordination with local partners and support at both the state and local levels provided a solid foundation for action.

Collaboration with IDART helped COA clients get to dialysis when our services were temporarily placed on hold. Sharing of information helped us locate and procure safety equipment and PPE when it was hard to find so that we could successfully relaunch services.

Support from MDOT helped us to develop and implement safety protocols to resume transportation and help our clients get the transportation they need. An increased reimbursement rate helped us earn our grant funding. Allowing alternate service delivery – such as delivering food boxes – helped us serve our clients in new ways. Numerous resources were shared on safe, best practices. Additional funding was provided for vehicle barriers, an electrostatic sprayer to clean our vehicles and PPE to protect staff and clients.

Relationships with local partners such as the Ionia County Health Department helped our drivers to get vaccinated, and increase available transportation, which had been reduced for safety and to avoid cross contamination. Our county's Emergency Manager procured a small number of N-95 masks to be used in case of emergency. Our local hospital provided fit training.

Resources provided by multiple partners were leveraged to help us develop and deploy targeted training solutions and to successfully relaunch services, safely, and with the confidence of staff and clients.

Our agency and our staff have adapted to working under the new normal and are nimble and open to change. If and when additional changes are needed, I am confident our agency is prepared to meet the challenge and to find solutions to deliver services and support seniors, under any circumstances.

*The Ionia County Commission on Aging*

## Agency Information

Ionia County Commission on Aging  
115 Hudson Street Ionia MI 48846  
Phone: (616) 527-5365, (888) 527-5365  
Email inquiries: [iccoa@ioniacounty.org](mailto:iccoa@ioniacounty.org)  
Web: <https://ioniacounty.org/health/commission-on-aging/>

**Hours of Operation:** Monday - Friday, 8:30 until 5:00. Agency is closed for all observed Ionia County Holidays.

**Department Coordination & Dispatch:** Sherry Jones, [sjones@ioniacounty.org](mailto:sjones@ioniacounty.org)  
**Agency Administrative Coordinator, Procurement:** Emily Higbee, [ehigbee@ioniacounty.org](mailto:ehigbee@ioniacounty.org)  
**Agency & Department Administration & Procurement:** Carol Hanulcik, [chanulcik@ioniacounty.org](mailto:chanulcik@ioniacounty.org)

**Staff:** Current staff for fleet transportation includes 7 part-time, staff drivers with one driver currently on leave.

In FY 2020, MDOT approved volunteer-provided transportation, using our MDOT fleet vehicles, for any volunteers who meet the same training standards as our staff drivers, at least temporarily. One volunteer driver is currently available and we are seeking additional volunteer drivers to help increase the amount of transportation our agency is able to provide.

Additional staff include one full-time time Transportation Coordinator and Dispatcher: Sherry Jones. Sherry will be retiring in September 2021; we will miss her excellent stewardship and amazing customer service skills!

Thankfully we have added to our transportation team with Emily Higbee, who in 2020 took over the procurement of dispatch software and tablets funded under an MDOT grant. Emily is also trained to cover dispatch along with our three part-time Administrative Assistants.

**Geographic Coverage:** Transportation throughout Ionia County comprises most trips, however travel to Grand Rapids, Lansing, Ann Arbor, and other areas is provided as necessary and as availability permits. Out-of-county transportation was paused since our relaunch in August 2020, but will resume in February 2021. We feel it is especially important to resume this travel so that seniors do not delay out of county medical appointments.

**Fare Structure:** Fares for transportation provided by the COA Fleet vehicles have not changed since they were established in 2013: \$1.50 for each one-way trip inside Ionia County and \$10.00 for each one-way trip that travels outside Ionia County.

Our Volunteer Transportation Program provides services for Seniors 60 and over on a donation basis. When MDOT approved volunteer-provided transportation, it was also determined that no fare would be

required to be charged under these circumstances. ICCOA's volunteer program has frequently stepped in for those clients who were unable to pay a fare for travel.

## **Our Clients**

**Eligibility:** We serve Ionia County residents who are sixty and above, and disabled individuals under the age of sixty.

At ICCOA our focus is on:

- Assisted Transportation – Door to Door
- Both In-County and Out-of-County Transportation
- Providing Wellness Checks and reminder calls
- Assisting clients in the transition from driving themselves to having someone else do the driving

Our agency places a high priority on medical transportation needs such as dialysis. However, every effort is made to meet additional, necessary transportation needs of older adults and of the disabled by providing transportation to grocery shopping, senior meal programs, community events and so forth.

In the last year approved alternate service delivery has helped in agency efforts to deliver thousands of food and personal care boxes, to pick up PPE and more. Having this flexibility allowed our agency to provide local support when it was much needed.

**Outreach and Awareness:** We continue outreach into the community and endeavor to reach all who have need of our services. Efforts to reach clients include:

- Referrals among agencies
- ICCOA newsletter
- Agency brochures
- Website
- Facebook
- Free listings and targeted advertising
- Community and ICCOA Events
- Local media coverage

## **Coordination of Services**

Coordination in providing transportation services is accomplished through the collaborative efforts of the Ionia County Commission on Aging (ICCOA) with Ionia Dial A Ride (IDART) and the work of the Local Advisory Committee (LAC).

The LAC reviews funding applications of both ICCOA and IDART, long term and short-term plans and provides critical input concerning transportation and more.

ICCOA works in coordination with IDART through:

- Inter-agency referrals, to find the right fit for clients
- Collaborating to provide transportation when ICCOA services were on hold
- Sharing Dial A Ride info with clients at ICCOA's Senior Center and through caseworkers
- Training coordination, advice, input and expertise (IDART provided PASS securement training, IDART Director serving on selection committee for ICCOA dispatch software purchase
- Information sharing – safety protocols, best practices, PPE and procurements

ICCOA and IDART coordinate with outside agencies via:

- Monthly Ionia County Community Collaborative meetings
- Direct outreach to, and linkages with, community partners such as DHHS, EightCAP and the Right Door
- Our work with our respective boards, participation through these bodies with others such as AASA State Advisory Council on Aging members, AAAWM Board Members and Advisory Council Members

ICCOA regularly seeks and receives direct community input through:

- Annual Surveys
- Outreach events
- Presentations to local groups and organizations
- COA board meetings
- Facebook

### **Vehicle Accessibility Plan**

Three new vehicles were purchased and received in FY 2020, all of which were wheelchair accessible.

Funding is in place to replace 3 vehicles in in FY 2021, bringing the fleet to 6 of 7 vehicles being wheelchair accessible. All will be purchased under MDOT's current state contract.

Goals for our fleet include:

- Move from 4 of 7 vehicles being accessible to 6 of 7
- Complete SUV procurement to provide safe access to clients in isolated, remote areas
- Install partitions in entire fleet for safety
- Roll our Dispatch Software and increase on-demand availability, reduce "deadhead" time due to cancellations
- Respond to increased transportation needs, including projected needs in our state

## **Funding**

ICCOA's transportation services are funded through MDOT, the Ionia County Senior Millage, client fares, special designated gifts (Memorials), a limited number of trips billed to another party (Ionia High School Cancer Fund, Medicaid Waiver transportation) and our fundraising efforts. Assisted Transportation, provided by our volunteers under a separate program, is supported through Title IIIB funds received from the Area Agency on Aging of Western Michigan, client donations, fundraising and Senior Millage funds.

By far, the largest provider of funding for COA's transportation services is the Ionia County Senior Millage. The Ionia County Senior Millage provides half of all *agency* funding, and roughly 20% of this goes toward transportation services. While MDOT generously provides funding for our fleet and other supportive equipment, the Senior Millage is essential for operational funding – for wages, fuel, maintenance and so forth.

In 2020 our agency was charged under a Cost Allocation Plan for the first time, for services provided by Ionia County. It's anticipated this could add approximately \$20,000 in additional operating expenses annually to our transportation program.

Our funding request to MDOT for FY 2022 includes:

- \$25,178 for operating funds (the max allowed)
- \$1,200 to purchase a smartphone to communicate with fleet
- \$2,500 to purchase 2 Windows Tablets for transportation drivers
- \$1,200 for tablet mounts and accessories

## **Growth of Program**

Since 2016, total units provided under MDOT fare structure (non-Waiver or other funding source) have grown steadily, increasing from 4,325 units in 2016 to 5,907 trips in 2019. *Total* transportation units increased from 6,220 in FY 2016 to 7,289 in FY 2019. Units took a dip in 2020 due to COVID, with total units coming in at 3,979, but with an increase in unique clients due to alternate service delivery.

Our 2022 application anticipates delivery of 6,000 trips provided under the MDOT program and a return to prior projected growth. Some of this growth will be due to safer conditions, once more clients are able to receive a COVID vaccine we anticipate more will travel – to our Senior Center and other social events. But the need will be there even before this happens, for necessary transportation to medical appointments that clients have delayed due to COVID, or for other delayed transportation. We look forward to meeting these needs starting right now and to being a partner in health for our clients.

Carol Hanulcik  
Director, Ionia County Commission on Aging  
January 2021