



Leadership Council  
of Aging Organizations

**Max Richtman, Chair**

July 30, 2020

The Honorable Mitch McConnell  
Majority Leader  
United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Chuck Schumer  
Minority Leader  
United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Majority Leader McConnell and Minority Leader Schumer:

The Leadership Council of Aging Organizations (LCAO) is a coalition of national nonprofit organizations concerned with the well-being of America's older population and committed to representing their interests in the policy-making arena. The undersigned organizations endorse the following pieces of legislation to address the broadband and telehealth needs of older adults and urge you to incorporate them into the upcoming COVID-19 relief legislation.

The COVID-19 pandemic continues to be a threat to older adults, particularly the vast majority who have multiple chronic conditions and people of color. This will be the last group to emerge from social distancing and re-engage with their families and communities in person. Technology solutions ranging from telehealth to food delivery have provided much-needed services for those who can access high-speed internet without the barriers of location or income. In the coming months, it will be crucial that older adults have access to the proven, evidence-based programs that can help them manage chronic conditions, prevent injuries such as falls, and combat the negative effects of isolation.

According to the Pew Research Center, a [third of adults age 65 and older](#) report they never use the internet and almost half lack home broadband. The digital divide is even greater for older adults of color. For example, Pew has [found](#) that 55 percent of black older adults do not go online and 70 percent do not have broadband at home. Recent research shows that smartphones have enabled more black and Hispanic individuals to go online, yet the older adult population continues to be the only group of which a [clear majority](#) do not own smartphones. While the pandemic may result in greater adoption of technology among older adults, physical access and affordability remain obstacles.

Like many low-income Americans who rely on the Federal Communications Commission's Lifeline program for phone and internet access, older adults are reporting that they are running into limits on minutes and data as they use technology to get food delivered (often with SNAP benefits) and access telehealth. We endorse the Emergency Broadband Connections Act of 2020 (H.R. 6881/S. 4095) to provide unlimited data and minutes to current users and expand and streamline eligibility to more Americans in need. The legislation also addresses the gaps in

access to devices that will help children complete their schoolwork, workers apply for jobs and safety net benefits, and older adults access telehealth.

The use of devices to access telehealth services, stay connected to friends and family, and safely receive necessary goods can only be possible, however, if older adults have access to reliable internet. Broadband infrastructure must be improved and expanded. A crucial place to start are the subsidized housing facilities in which many low-income older adults reside. We urge Congress to consider COVID-19 relief provisions in the Emergency Housing Assistance for Older Adults Act (H.R. 6873/ S. 4177) that would support installation and service fees for wireless internet in HUD-assisted senior housing communities. More than 770,000 low-income older adults live in these properties, many of which currently lack building-wide internet connections. According to National Housing Conference [research](#), 70% of very low- income senior renters do not have a computer and 74% do not have home internet access.

Closing the digital divide for older adults, particularly those who are low-income, will ensure they have equal access to services that can help them remain healthy and independent at home. We believe these pieces of legislation focused on emergency needs during the pandemic are a step in the right direction.

Sincerely,

Aging Life Care Association  
Alliance for Retired Americans  
American Association of Service Coordinators  
American Geriatrics Society  
American Society on Aging  
APWU Retirees Department  
B'nai B'rith International  
Center for Medicare Advocacy  
Center For Workforce Inclusion  
The Consumer Voice  
The Gerontological Society of America  
International Association for Indigenous Aging  
Justice in Aging  
LeadingAge  
Meals on Wheels America  
Medicare Rights Center  
NANASP  
National Adult Day Services Association (NADSA)

National Adult Protective Services Association  
National Asian Pacific Center on Aging (NAPCA)  
National Association of RSVP Directors  
National Association of Area Agencies on Aging  
National Association of Social Workers (NASW)  
National Association of State Long Term Care Ombudsman Programs  
National Committee to Preserve Social Security and Medicare  
National Council on Aging  
National Indian Council on Aging  
National Senior Corps Association  
SAGE  
Social Security Works  
Womens Institute for a Secure Retirement

cc. House Speaker Nancy Pelosi and Minority Leader Kevin McCarthy  
Representative Marc Veasey and Senator Ron Wyden  
Representative Katie Porter and Senator Robert Menendez