Successful Practices
Telework & Outreach During the COVID-19 Pandemic

In March 2020, the Administration for Community Living (ACL) emailed a survey to SHIP, MIPPA, and SMP networks that asked about program needs and success stories related to the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition, the networks hosted two webinars on COVID-19 in April and collected successful practice feedback from discussion on the network's listservs and with the resource centers. Below are some successful practices gleaned from the conversations and survey results. Here are links to a sampling of responses grouped by the following topics: counseling, media, training, and volunteer management.

Workplace Tips

Before addressing outreach efforts, you must first decide how your SMP will operate during this pandemic. Notify your state representatives, partners, volunteers, and community that you are open for remote services.

Working at Home

- Update your website, Facebook page, and voicemails to reflect your new operating practices and hours.
- Have contact information for your organization posted on the doors.
- Those who can work from home should make sure they have a phone, computer, and internet access.
- Do an evaluation of volunteers' situations, attitudes, skills, and equipment.
- Toll-free calls:
  - Implement an automatic phone routing system for your toll-free number.
  - Have the phone forwarded to one person or several staff members.
  - Use Google Voice, Comcast, MightyCall, LogMeIn, Grasshopper, or another Voice over Internet Protocol (VoiP) system to place calls without needing to use your personal phone number.
- Discontinue the use of faxes for referrals since the fax is usually at the office. Use an encrypted email system or document sharing service like Dropbox or WeTransfer.
- Address and train on confidentiality issues surrounding storing and securing personal identifying information while working from home.
- Have team members do recertification and training during this time to keep them involved. This can be through webinar recordings, online training in TRAX, or printed versions of the manuals.
- Use texting to advise callers that a return call will be coming soon.

Working at the Office

- If available, those who prefer to work at the office should have a private office, practice social distancing, and close the door.
- The office should be closed, however, to in-person visitors.

Maintaining Relationships

- Overcommunicate. Regularly, if not daily, check in with your team members through texts, emails, phone calls, and/or conference calls. Discuss "business" topics along with "social" topics.
- Stay positive. Review resources to help you communicate during the pandemic such as the: [Let's Talk About Person-Centered Care During Pandemics Webinar](#) and [Caring Communication and Messages during COVID-19](#).

Trainings and Meetings

- Conduct volunteer and staff trainings utilizing Zoom, WebEx, GoToMeeting, Microsoft Teams, or another conferencing software. Be sure to provide a call-in number also for those who do not have internet.
- Use platforms like Doodle Poll to help organize meeting times and scheduling.
- Use online training available from the SMP Resource Center or SHIP TA Center to train team members.
- Access live or recorded webinars from the SHIP, MIPPA, and SMP resource libraries.
- Create your own online trainings for items not covered by the resource centers.
- Utilize videoconferencing software when possible to promote morale.
- Review current Volunteer Risk and Program Management (VRPM) policies, volunteer handbooks, and other materials and make needed updates.
- Develop protocols for how to do onboarding if staff or volunteers get brought on to the team.

Outreach Tips

Once you decide how your SMP will operate, you will need to prioritize your core services. Below are ideas from professionals on how to reach beneficiaries when you can no longer provide outreach in person:

Social Media

- Increase your use of social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter.
- Create your own posts and/or repost messages and infographics from the SMP Resource Center, SHIP TA Center, and other trusted partners.
- Create and post short PSA videos using Facebook Live. You could:
  - Read the SMP consumer fraud tip sheets.
  - Discuss how not to become a victim of fraud during this pandemic.
  - Read the Medicare Minutes.
- Boost (pay for advertising on Facebook) a post to reach people who are not already following your page.
- Start a Facebook group centered around bringing older persons and/or caregivers together during this time of isolation.
- Take advantage of the fact that many people are at home and online and consider online advertising.
  - Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Google, Pinterest, LinkedIn, internet radio (Pandora), are all examples of places that currently have online advertising available.
- Contact religious organizations that are planning to conduct live online services to ask them if there is any way to do some sort of seminar or information session during the worship session.

Counseling

- In-person counseling should be discontinued, and it should instead be done by phone, or when possible, through Skype, Google Hangouts, or another platform that allows for a virtual face-to-face session.
- Have staff communicate with clients to inform them of services available and to check on them.

- Mail or email materials to beneficiaries related to the topic you need to discuss, such as New to Medicare, so they have them before having a phone or virtual conversation.
- Create annotated paper applications to mail out packets, which can then be used to more easily walk a caller through application completion.
- Mail prepaid envelopes to clients who need to submit wet signatures/documentation to support their benefits applications.
- Help combat social isolation
  - Establish a buddy system for team members to reach out to seniors in isolation to prevent loneliness and to spread the SMP/SHIP/MIPPA messages.
  - Utilize nursing students to assist with wellness calls to homebound clients.
  - Go through last year's client list to make wellness check-ins.
  - Rate people on an isolation scale and call those who rate high on the scale back quickly.
  - Include crossword puzzles, sudoku, word searches, board games, puzzles, etc. in meal boxes.

Webinars

- Provide live, interactive webinars for volunteers and the community. For those who do not have internet, be sure to also promote the call-in number.
- Use more than one platform to host web-based events. Some are better for video chat and others are more interactive.

Television and Radio

- Send the COVID-19 press release to all television and radio markets in your area.
- Work with local TV and radio stations to allow the SMP to provide weekly updates to inform the community to look out for possible COVID-19-related fraud and to contact the SMP with any questions.
- Contact TV and radio stations and offer to do interviews about COVID-19 scams.
- Work with the governor's office to have him/her mention your program during their daily briefing to get the word out to older adults in the community.

Print

- Insert program materials, flyers, stickers, and/or labels into home-delivered meals and curbside meals.
- Provide program materials to senior housing complexes, food pantries, home health agencies, visiting/county nurses, and other partners who work with beneficiaries on a regular basis.
- Have outreach materials available at grocery stores and pharmacies during senior/high-risk shopping hours.
- Send the COVID-19 press release to all newspapers and newsletters in your area.
- Do a direct mail campaign to send postcards to spread COVID-19 safeguard messaging.
- Partner with an organization in your area to cobrand messaging about COVID-19 and avoiding scams.
- Utilize billboards to spread community awareness.

Email

- Create a distribution list of partners, team members, beneficiaries, and caregivers.
- Use distribution lists to promote webinars, e-newsletters, fraud alerts, volunteering, and other SMP program information.
- Contact partner organizations with distribution lists to have them send an SMP fraud alert or forward your e-newsletters.

Key Resources

SMP Consumer Fraud Alert Resources

- [COVID-19 Fraud Page](#)
- [SMP Consumer Fraud Alerts Page](#)
- [SMP Consumer Fraud Alert: COVID-19](#)
- [SMP Consumer Fraud Alert: COVID-19 (Spanish)](#)
- [COVID-19 Fraud Infographic](#) *Optional:* When posting about COVID-19 use #SMPwatchCOVID19
- [COVID-19 Fraud Infographic (Spanish)](#)
- [COVID-19 Consumer Tip Sheet](#)
- [COVID-19 Consumer Tip Sheet (Spanish)](#)
- [COVID-19 Medicare Coverage: Medicare Beneficiary Questions and Answers](#)

OIG Fraud Alert Resources

- [OIG Fraud Alert](#)

Social Security Fraud Alert Resources

- [SSA OIG Fraud Alert](#)
- [Social Security Phone Scams Infographic](#)

NCOA Resources

- [COVID-19 Resources for Older Adults & Caregivers](#)
- Tools & Tips for Reaching a Remote Audience (Webinar)
  - [Access the webinar recording & transcript](#)
  - [Get the accompanying tip sheet on different technology tools](#)
- [Resources for Urgent Relief (food, prescriptions, transportation)](#)
- [Economic Impact Payment Information Center](#)
- [Q&A About Economic Payments](#)
- [Families First COVID-19 Toolkit](#): Covers the major program changes that affect individuals, small businesses, and taxpayers

Other COVID-19 Resources

- [Administration for Community Living (ACL)](#)
- [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)](#)
- [Federal Trade Commission (FTC)](#)
- [Medicare](#)