



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Chatham County Council on Aging Announces COVID-19 Actions

PITTSBORO, NC—The Chatham County Council on Aging is joining others across the globe, nation and state in acting decisively to curtail the adverse impact of novel coronavirus (COVID-19).

“We are especially concerned about the well-being of Chatham seniors, their families and our volunteers,” remarked Dennis Streets, director of the Council. He added, “The actions we are taking are designed to protect the health of all—especially those at high risk of serious illness—and are consistent with the recommendations coming from the science and medical communities.”

Eastern and Western Senior Centers

Effective Monday, March 16, 2020, the Council will suspend its congregate meals program and other activities offered at its Eastern and Western Senior Centers (in Pittsboro and Siler City). The centers will be closed to participants and visitors.

Individuals needing assistance should contact the Council in advance and the Council will work to meet the identified need. This includes frozen and shelf-stable meals for homebound seniors, help with assistive equipment, the provision of incontinence supplies, and emergency assistance with utility bills.

The Council is actively identifying other ways to assist those seniors who normally attend the centers’ noon-day meals program. “We are providing instruction, equipment, supplies and encouragement so that participants can continue exercise and entertainment at home,” noted Liz Lahti, Health Promotion Coordinator and Senior Center Manager at the Eastern Center.

For participants for whom the center is a major social connection, the Council will offer friendly check-in calls.



“We are also scheduling a weekly conference call to allow all participants to hear an update about the Council’s status and to ask questions. We hope these calls can provide another social outlet for those without much outside contact,” shared Lacey Monte, the Council’s Deputy Director and Finance Officer.

Meals on Wheels

Also effective Monday, March 16th, the Council will suspend its home-delivered (Meals on Wheels) program. This action is being taken to protect both the homebound meals recipients and the volunteer drivers, many of whom are seniors themselves.

“This is a group about whom we are especially concerned. We hope that by providing frozen or shelf-stable meals and friendly calls, we can provide adequate support,” reported Streets. “Of course, we will also work to provide other assistance such as incontinence supplies.”

“We welcome volunteer assistance in delivering the shelf-stable and frozen meals once a week and making friendly calls to check on the homebound seniors. The weekly visit will provide one more social contact that many of these participants lack, while utilizing all current health protocols to minimize risk to volunteers and meal recipients alike,” suggested the Council’s Volunteer Coordinator, Allison Andrews. Anyone interested in volunteering may contact Andrews at Allison.Andrews@chathamcouncilonaging.org or 919-542-4512. The Council wants to ensure that volunteers are using sound health and safety practices such as wearing gloves that the Council will provide.

VITA

The Council will end its Volunteer Income Tax Assistance program (VITA) on Wednesday, March 18th. The Council does not anticipate scheduling any more tax assistance appointments before the end of this year’s tax deadline.

SHIIP

The Council requests anyone seeking Medicare counseling from the Seniors’ Health Insurance Information Program (SHIIP) to call the State’s toll-free line at 1-855-408-1212. This call center is open Monday through Friday, 8 am to 5 pm.

Veterans Service Officer Assistance



Chatham’s Veterans Service Officer will not be available at the Western Center in Siler City as long as the Western Center remains closed to participants and visitors. For assistance, veterans should contact David Kennedy at 919-545-8334, 919-357-4999 (mobile), or david.kennedy@chathamnc.org.

Transportation

While the Council is suspending its use of Chatham Transit for transporting seniors to its centers, the Council will continue to arrange rides with Chatham Transit for medical appointments.

The Council recommends, though, that seniors follow the guidance from geriatric experts and cancel non-essential appointments. If a person is not feeling well, they should call their health provider for guidance before scheduling a medical ride.

“We wish none of these steps were necessary and hopefully we can soon restore these valued services and programs,” concluded Streets. “In the meantime, we appeal to friends, neighbors and family to touch base by phone with those who are isolated, and help with shopping and other needs—all the while using the good public health practices that have been well publicized such as frequent hand washing.”

“As the situation continues to evolve, we will do our best to update our participants of any changes that may come. We also encourage everyone to use reliable sources of information about the novel coronavirus (COVID-19), including www.chathamnc.org/coronavirus,” added Streets.

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