



**Recommendations/Suggestions to the General Assembly on How to Address the
COVID-19 Pandemic as it Pertains to Older Adults
Submitted by The NC Coalition on Aging
May 19, 2020**

As a Coalition comprised of a diverse array of 75 consumer, provider, and advocacy programs/organizations that represent North Carolina's aging population, we have sought input from our members about the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on their operations and the persons they serve. Based on that input, we are pleased to have this opportunity to share with you suggestions for policy solutions that would help ensure the continuing viability of programs and organizations that serve older adults and protect the health and well-being of our state's seniors. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), adults who are 65 years of age and older, those in long-term care facilities, and those with underlying medical conditions might be at higher risk for severe illness or death from COVID-19. Today in our state, there are approximately 1.7 million people age 65 or over. According to state data, 84% of people 65 and over have at least one chronic disease and 55% have two or more chronic diseases. With this data in mind, we make the following suggestions:

- Ensure that staff working with older adults in the home (ex. from local aging agencies and county departments of social services) and in all care settings (including home care, hospice, assisted living, and nursing home) have adequate personal protective equipment (PPE) and that issues with testing for COVID-19 are addressed to the extent possible. In addition to gloves, face masks, and gowns, there is also a need for adequate supplies of diapers, wipes, and hand sanitizer. Staff who work with older adults, particularly those with compromised immune systems, should also be a priority for COVID-19 testing.
- Look at ways to better support existing staff as well as steps the state can take to expand the workforce across the continuum of services for older adults from direct care workers to medical personnel. Provisions pertaining to healthcare access, sick leave benefits, child care assistance, and other workplace provisions need to be strengthened.
- Facilitate voting by older adults in upcoming elections by expanding absentee voting provisions and increasing the number and use of Multipartisan Assistance Teams (MATs). Older adults will likely be adhering to social distancing provisions during the election times this year. Accommodations for ensuring they can vote without physically going to their polling site will help to keep them safe. MATs are currently maintained by every County Board of Elections to help those in facilities such as nursing homes, hospitals, and assisted living facilities request and submit absentee ballots. The role of MATs could be expanded to assist anyone outside of these facilities who needs assistance.

Respectfully submitted by Allison Costanzo, Executive Director, NC Coalition on Aging