

Staying Connected from Home

We New Yorkers find ourselves in a unique and difficult time, where everything we took for granted and normal has been upended. Yet we are all adjusting and defining this new normal for our health and safety and others. New Yorkers are being asked to hunker down – study remotely, work from home, and stay indoors as much as possible, especially older adults who are vulnerable to COVID-19.

As part of the city shutdown, the New York City Department for the Aging (DFTA) temporarily closed nearly 300 congregate centers, which served as a hub of social activity, support and community for about 21,000 older New Yorkers. DFTA and its partners have worked to transition many of the services provided at congregate centers to the home, including the direct delivery of lunch meals they received at centers. We had to create a new system to implement the enormity of this transition! DFTA's network, which had served an average participation of 21,000 daily, saw that number grow to 39,000 within one week. During this crisis, we had to learn to fly as we're flying! This was made possible with



DFTA partner Encore Community Services' staff help deliver meals to older New Yorkers.

our network of partners. Together, we were able to provide more than 500,000 meals to over 39,000 individuals citywide.

We knew early on that many of the 1.74 million older adults who were independent would find themselves socially isolated and food insecure. To address this issue, the Mayor established a Food Czar to lead the GetFoodNYC initiative and address the broader issue of food insecurity and hunger. GetFoodNYC will have the capacity to serve the many older adults not enrolled in DFTA's direct delivery system. Older New Yorkers, who

have not enrolled, can call 311 or visit nyc.gov/getfood to do so.

We've also transitioned other programs to services that are accessible at home. Our congregate centers' staff are doing wellness check-ins by phone to increase social engagement and combat social isolation. DFTA's Friendly Visiting program, which pairs older adults with volunteers for weekly visits, has also transitioned from in-person visits to telephone calls done two to three times a week, helping continue friendships that the program has helped build. At this time, we continue taking new volunteers. Anyone wanting to volunteer, or be part of the program, can call Aging Connect, DFTA's contact center, at 212-Aging-NYC (212-244-6469).

To help older adults stay active and engaged, many centers are offering virtual classes, including nutrition workshops, fitness programs, and more. Recently, Greenwich House launched its virtual art show featuring the work of senior center members. You can call your local senior center to find out about virtual programming.

While this is a difficult time, we want older New Yorkers to know that they are not alone. There are resources and support available, and DFTA and its partners are here to help. New Yorkers are tough, but we are also compassionate and giving. Together, by supporting and staying connected with each other, we will get through this.



**NYC Department for the
Aging Commissioner
Lorraine Cortés-Vázquez**