April 28, 2020: **COVID-19 in Long-Term Care Facilities.**

Speakers:
- Marie Kennedy, AZ State Director of AARP
- Maddy Bynes, Area Agency on Aging State-wide Public Policy and Advocacy Coordinator
- Dustin Schaffer, Executive Director of Haven of Scottsdale
- Dave Voepel, Executive Director of AZ Health Care Association

Our first ZOOM meeting, as we practice our social distancing in compliance with Arizona’s Stay Safe, Stay Healthy, Stay Connected executive order, brought together representatives from AARP, Arizona Area Agency on Aging, Haven of Scottsdale and Arizona Health Care Association discussed the legislative initiatives, new online and phone resources, healthcare procedure changes and staffing and equipment deficits related to this epidemic.

All organizations recognized the need for online tools to create and retain a sense of community for caregivers and seniors in assisted living homes and facilities. There is a need for new or upgraded technology to facilitate virtual visits, transparency and the use of online tools and resources. AARP, Arizona Area Agency on Aging (AAAA) and Be Connected Arizona (focused on veterans, their families and helpers) spoke about their new coronavirus-focused websites and helplines. Be Connected Arizona is focused on connecting veterans in rural areas of the state. AARP is hosting a tele-town hall every Thursday. AAAA has a long-term care ombudsman, information and referral hotline and resource directory online. And in response to the stay-at-home order, AAAA has opened a 24-hour National Friendship Hotline that will call seniors once, or once a week to check in on them.

Tangible services for seniors at home have been adapted; meal delivery has changed to a drive through grab-and-go type distribution. It is not the preferred method of delivery – negating personal contact and conversation to assess possible needs - but it’s a viable meal delivery method. There are concerns about COVID-19 transmission via caregivers and problems getting personal protective equipment (PPE) for these caregivers.

Haven Health of Scottsdale and Arizona Health Care Association representatives spoke about the physical restructuring of space to prevent transmission or isolate in “step down” COVID-19 only facilities, if necessary. Dave Voepel from the AZ Health Care Association stated that less than 27% of Arizona care facilities have COVID19, but once it’s in the building they “burn through the PPE.” Both organizations struggle to maintain permanent staffing with back up teams and acquire sufficient PPE and testing materials. Many nurses and caregivers have been exposed to or infected with the virus, due to the lack of PPE. The Governor’s office has put together a buying consortium to facilitate the purchase of PPE, but Dave was not sure if they were purchasing or just sourcing materials.
Another challenge for care facilities is coordinating messaging for reporters. The Arizona Health Care Association presents positive messaging but the media is looking for negative stories and human-interest items. Reporters are very interested in entering the facilities, which is, of course, risky for residents.

There is positive news! AARP representative Dana Kennedy spoke about the organization’s legislative actions, soliciting support from Arizona Senators to ensure the $1,200 federal stimulus checks go to social security recipients and those who haven’t filed taxes. AAAA has received funds from federal programs such as Family First and CARES for COVID-19 initiatives. And, in a partnership between Governor Ducey, the Arizona Department of Health Services and health care partners across the state a “testing blitz” will occur for three weekends in May.  

Upcoming Meetings:

- May 1, 2020 - AZ Broadband Strategic Plan – Helping Aging Arizonans, rural communities and telemedicine opportunities
- August 18, 2020 - Long term care facilities and group homes; insight from Administrators and caregivers