

WHAT WE DO

makes a difference

Older
Americans
Month
May
2003

BUILDING AWARENESS



Publicity Guidebook

- Overview
- Strategies & Tools
- Useful Resources





Making a Difference

Each of you receiving this promotional guide for Older Americans Month make a difference in the lives of older Americans, their families, and caregivers. This month is an opportunity to share the valuable work you do as well as to celebrate the efforts of the millions of older Americans who make their communities better places to live. This guide explains how you and your organization can play an important role in publicizing Older Americans Month.

The theme of Older Americans Month 2003—"What We Do Makes a Difference"—provides the focal point for all related public awareness initiatives. After all, making a difference for aging citizens is the point of everything we do.

This promotional guide highlights many national issues affecting older Americans and some of the programs funded through the Older Americans Act (OAA) and administered by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration on Aging (AoA), working in concert with members of the National Aging Services Network. This kit also provides a national framework for sharing how your organization is making a difference. We hope you will join us this May in encouraging others, as individuals, to make a difference by helping older Americans age with dignity and respect.

In the first section of this guide, you'll find tips on promoting Older Americans Month among your constituents. These guidelines show how you can prepare press releases, letters to the editor, op-ed pieces, proclamations, public service announcements (PSAs), and special events that highlight vital programs, rights, and needs of aging citizens.

The second part of the brochure describes what's included in your Older Americans Month kit: a CD-ROM, feature articles, PSAs, fact sheets, informational vignettes, graphics, and a poster designed to promote Older Americans Month. These tools can help you conduct outreach activities in your area.

Using these resources, we can raise awareness and support to improve the lives of older Americans. Celebrate Older Americans Month with us. What we do makes a difference.



How to Boost Awareness

Many organizations lack expertise in marketing their programs because they rightly focus on providing services like respite care, nutrition, or transportation. It is important to do both. To assist you in promoting Older Americans Month, you may want to enlist the help of local college students majoring in journalism or public relations to help you concentrate inexpensively on promotions. But no matter what approach you take, you can raise awareness of Older Americans Month by taking a few simple steps. The AoA provides the following helpful tips, along with the items in this kit to get you started. We also suggest additional strategies you may wish to consider.

Get the word out. Remember the first rule of public relations: The more people you can get to help tell your story, the more effective—and affordable—your efforts will be. Here are some of the best tools you can use to spread your message:

- **Create a buzz** about Older Americans Month with your constituents, including employees, customers, members, and supporters. We find that starting within your organization is the best place because your organizational partners often are the best conveyers of positive messages. This buzz creation can start easily using your organization’s current communications tools, such as newsletters, bulletins, announcement boards, e-mail lists, payroll and invoice statements, direct mail pieces, employee publications, and Web pages. Use some of the stories and short news items provided in this kit for the Older Americans Month content in your current communications vehicles. During scheduled events, make literature about older Americans available or incorporate the message of “What we do makes a difference” into the presentations given. Make sure that your constituents know that May is Older Americans Month and that you’re promoting that what they do makes a difference.
- **Issue news releases** to alert the media to high-priority events, issues, and initiatives. Make sure to communicate the news value of your event—its urgency, timeliness, and relevance to the community. Answer important questions, such as Who?, What?, Where?, When?, Why?, and How? Include data and quotes from

involved individuals to make your case. The feature articles included in this kit can be easily customized with local data or references for you to send to local media. Provide contacts that journalists can call to get additional information from your office or other knowledgeable sources. When writing op-ed pieces or letters to an editor for Older Americans Month, focus on the theme’s essence of what we do, both individually and collectively, and how we can make a difference. If the story is about an event your organization is planning, fax the release to news editors and reporters, especially those who have previously covered your organization, about three days before the event.

- **Submit letters to the editor and op-ed pieces** to local newspapers and relevant magazines. This will allow you to share information in a way that lets you control the content of your message. For details regarding the number of words or who to send the letter to, refer to the publication itself or call the publication’s editorial department. Letters are published more frequently if they are responding to an aging-related story that has run in the past day or two. If possible, schedule a meeting with the editorial board to increase the likelihood of getting your issue covered. Writing an opinion editorial, or op-ed, can call attention to specific concerns and recommend solutions to an issue affecting older Americans. When writing op-ed pieces or letters to an editor for Older Americans Month, focus on the theme’s essence of what we do, both individually and collectively, and how we can make a difference. Review examples of op-eds that have run recently, follow the publication’s rules for length and format, and send your submission to the appropriate editor.
- **Run public service announcements (PSAs).** Enlist the broadcast media to reach audiences who may prefer television, cable, or radio. (This kit contains copy for two radio PSAs you can adapt to record your own PSAs.) Contact local broadcasters as





soon as possible—since public service program planning often is done far in advance—about running your PSA during Older Americans Month. Explain in a cover letter that the PSA should be run as a community service, promoting awareness of the needs of aging citizens and their caregivers. If you can, link the PSA to a specific event or an issue that is in the news.

- **Hold a special event** to draw attention to older Americans' issues and showcase important programs, resources, and services. Consider launching an initiative, hosting a ceremony or a banquet, giving awards to volunteers, or recognizing aging citizens who make outstanding contributions to your community. Team with other local partners within the National Aging Services Network and with other organizations that might be supportive of older Americans, such as the faith and medical communities. Don't forget to work with the local business community. Whenever possible involve local celebrities or government officials whose presence can make the event more newsworthy. Before the event, invite media to attend it or even co-sponsor the event. When reporters do cover the event, have information and materials ready to help them write about the event in the broader context of Older Americans Month.
- **Issue a proclamation.** Ask your governor, mayor, or city council members to support Older Americans Month by issuing it. Offer sample text and suggest localizing the national theme by adding the name of your city or county, as in "Hometown, U.S.A.: What We Do Makes a Difference." Capitalize on the forum where the proclamation is issued to make connections with community partners, attract media coverage, and heighten public awareness about aging. On the CD-ROM enclosed in this kit is a sample proclamation you can recommend to your local or state government officials.

Use a "hook" to get media attention. As the previous examples suggest, it often is not enough to point out ongoing concerns or important issues. To gain media attention, those concerns and issues must be linked to interesting events, announcements, or news items. You can apply the strategies outlined above to make your organization's work

newsworthy. Some of the qualities of news that media executives value include timeliness, uniqueness or rarity, prominence of those involved, consequence or impact, proximity or nearness, and conflict.

Older Americans Month itself provides a hook, a way to make aging-related issues timely. Be sure to weave the Older Americans Month theme and graphic throughout all your outreach efforts in May. But remember, that alone won't do the job. Take the steps necessary to really make news in your community.

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Time it right. Your publicity efforts will pay off best when your timing allows the media to set aside time, space, and resources to report on your event. For maximum impact, get your message in front of your audience starting in the last week of April. This means organizing your effort months or weeks ahead of time.

When Older Americans Month arrives, time your announcements and events to maintain visibility all month. This will allow the news media and other partners to plan on addressing your issues throughout May.

Give the media what they need. Put yourself in the shoes of your media contacts and anticipate what they need to do their jobs. If you want reporters to cover a local program, for instance, you must provide background data, quotes, and contacts—and show why newspaper readers would want to know about the program.

Sometimes, what journalists need is a reminder. Have someone follow up with each media contact to answer questions and keep Older Americans Month on their minds. After sending a press release, for example, make a phone call or send an e-mail asking whether there are any questions about your story idea and when you might expect to hear back.

Think about the needs of other media contacts, too. You can't rely on any one media outlet to do the whole job. Offer a diverse set of materials that institutions, providers, and others can use immediately—from posters and PSAs to flyers and fact sheets they can use in their own materials. By exploring a variety of approaches, you improve your chances of success.



How to Use This Kit

To help you get the maximum impact from your marketing efforts, the AoA is providing a variety of flexible resources in this kit. Feel free to customize these materials for your community or use them “right out of the box.” Either way, the following items offer a variety of options and formats for attracting media coverage.

This kit features virtually all the materials you need to get started. All the materials in this kit are available on the enclosed CD-ROM.



Feature Articles. The five feature articles provided in the kit concentrate on essential parts of our success story: the National Aging Services Network, elder rights, health promotion and disease prevention, caregiving, and transportation. With compelling statistics and insights from experts, older persons, and caregivers, these articles offer powerful portraits of the need to address these issues and efforts already underway. These features can be tailored to include local information, quotes, and data.

Informational Vignettes. These news briefs, or informational “vignettes,” are suitable for reprint in newsletters or hand-outs or for e-mail distribution. They are geared to older Americans and their caregivers.

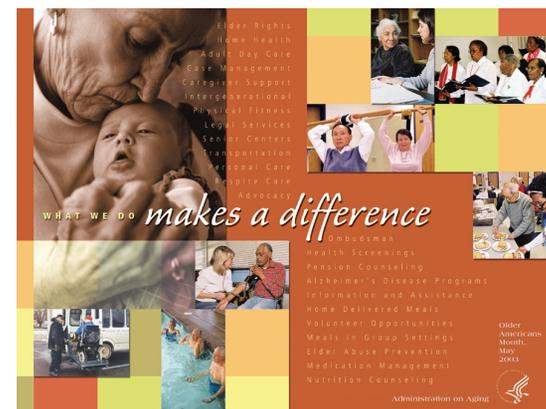
Fact Sheets. Use the fact sheets wherever appropriate to provide key information on caregiving, health promotion, volunteerism, senior centers, elder rights, nutrition, information and referral, and mental health. These fact sheets may supplement materials distributed to the media.

Public Service Announcements (PSAs). These PSAs enable you to control the awareness message spread to your community. The kit includes two print PSAs that magazines and newspapers might print free of charge. The kit also includes two printed scripts that allow you to record your own 30-second or 15-second PSAs. You could read the PSAs as announcements in your meetings, religious gather-

ings, or at other events. Give these PSAs to local media with the hope they will publish or air them as a community service.

Graphics. You can proudly display the Older Americans Month icon in all print materials you design for local efforts. Use it in any press releases, proclamations, and special events you develop. This attractive graphic, available in various formats, creates an immediately recognizable visual identity that links campaigns to raise awareness nationwide.

Poster. The poster serves as an eye-catching reminder of Older Americans Month as well as of the aging citizens, caregivers, service providers, and others we celebrate in May. You're encouraged to hang the poster in a highly visible public place.



Other Resources Outside the Kit

Collaboration. Collaborating with other organizations can enhance your Older Americans Month efforts. The AoA collaborated with the Leadership Council of Aging Organizations on strategy and content for the Older Americans Month kit. In addition, AoA worked with the Humane Society of the United States, the Corporation for National Service, the National Asian Pacific Center on Aging, the Heritage Day Health Center, and the Older Women's League on targeted outreach strategies.

Web Site. Finally, don't forget to visit the AoA's Web site (www.aoa.gov) for additional materials. Information resources dealing with the Older Americans Act, the National Family Caregiver Support Program, the Elderly Nutrition Program, the Long-Term



Care Ombudsman Program, state programs and plans, statewide collaboration efforts, health promotion and disease prevention, budget and fiscal information, and a host of other programs and services are available at the click of your mouse.

Taken together, the Web site and other materials featured in this kit comprise a set of powerful tools you can use to grab the attention of community members. The more ways you can find to get the word out, the more likely you are to make an impact. Remember, what we do makes a difference.

Thank You

Your contribution to publicizing Older Americans Month in your community is valuable to our national effort. Let us know what you think about this kit by completing the enclosed evaluation form. Thank you for making a difference in the lives of older Americans.



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