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## **Gov. Wolf and Aging Sec. Torres Share Community-Based Solutions Helping Pennsylvanians 65-plus Access the COVID-19 Vaccine**

**Harrisburg, PA** – As the state continues to get vaccine to Phase 1A eligible Pennsylvanians, today Governor Tom Wolf and Secretary of Aging Robert Torres highlighted some of the community-based solutions that are working to help Pennsylvanians 65-plus access the COVID-19 vaccine.

“We need to foster these community-based solutions,” Gov. Wolf said. “Every community in Pennsylvania has unique needs and challenges, but we can learn a lot from listening to one another and lifting up creative solutions that are making a difference in the state’s vaccination efforts.”

Acknowledging that vaccine distribution has been slower than anyone would prefer and can be frustrating for Pennsylvanians, the governor noted that making a direct comparison between states is not an accurate reporting.

“Every state is different and has different needs, just like every community in Pennsylvania has different needs,” Wolf said. “Pennsylvania has one of the largest populations of older adults in the nation, but we’ve received an allotment of just over 150,000 vaccine doses a week so far from the federal government, which provides all the vaccine the state receives. Still, we are making progress with more than 1.4 million Pennsylvanians receiving one or both of their vaccine doses to date.”

With restricted supplies, the state and communities are working to meet unique challenges and present solutions to help more people get vaccinated.

Throughout the commonwealth, adults age 65 and older are eligible for the COVID-19 vaccine now in Phase 1A. Older adults in long-term care are getting the vaccine through the facility where they live through the Federal Pharmacy Partnership, but there are thousands of other Pennsylvanians 65 and older who live on their own or in senior housing or other settings that don’t qualify them for the long-term care vaccine program.

Not every older adult has access to the Internet or, if they do, may find it challenging to go online to find providers in their area who have received vaccine, and even more challenging to navigate online appointment portals. Some need someone to help them navigate the process.

On Tuesday, the Department of Health launched the [Your Turn](#) vaccine eligibility tool that gives anyone who signs up a reminder when it is their turn to receive the vaccine and guides them how seek an appointment from a local provider.

Older adults who have questions about vaccine availability in their community and how to make an appointment may also call the Department of Health hotline at 1-877-724-3258 to get help.

Efforts to get more eligible people vaccinated are taking place on the local level, too. Sec. of Aging Robert Torres joined the governor to outline what local Area Agencies on Aging and his department are doing to provide unique, working solutions to Pennsylvanians 65-plus.

“Since the first case of COVID-19 was announced, Area Agencies on Aging (AAAs) have helped to ensure that the needs of older adults are being met,” Sec. Torres said. “Now, AAAs and their community partners are responding to the call to help older adults navigate the COVID-19 vaccination process.”

Depending on capacity and resources, AAAs are:

- Coordinating with their local health care providers, county government and EMS
- Providing guidance and support
- Assisting with scheduling
- Arranging transportation
- Offering senior centers to serve as vaccine clinics, and
- Participating in county COVID-19 planning commissions

Torres detailed the successful work of the Butler County Area Agency of Aging, which has been part of the county’s COVID-19 Planning Commission since the beginning of the pandemic, and that is working now with local vaccine providers to help those 65-plus obtain vaccine appointments. The AAA also is providing information, coordinating transportation and even helping at vaccination sites to ensure those receiving the vaccine aren’t having any immediate side effects.

“Butler County AAA has helped more than 1,200 older adults obtain vaccine appointments and is ensuring that forms are completed in the system for the older adult,” Torres said. “The vaccine appointment no-show rate for these older adults is zero percent.”

AAAs also enlisted community senior center workers to help with appointment reminders and coordinating transportation, or just to check how someone is feeling post-vaccination.

Torres also outlined how PACE, Pennsylvania’s low-cost prescription program for older adults, has launched a comprehensive assistance and outreach effort to help its 275,000 PACE/PACENET enrollees obtain vaccines.

PACE designated a team of phone operators in its Harrisburg Call Center to serve as the COVID-19 Special Scheduling Unit -- a dedicated unit for arranging vaccinations for PACE cardholders.

These operators will also be working with cardholders to arrange for transportation to the vaccination site or working with PACE's pharmacy network members to vaccinate at a cardholder's residence, if necessary.

For older adults who don't have access to a computer, PA Link to Aging and Disability Resources, which connects older adults and adults with disabilities to services and technical supports, is also stepping up to take calls and offer assistance.

When people call the PA Link for help with getting a vaccine, PA Link counselors will assess the caller's situation, offer guidance and transfer to a scheduling team. For those callers with transportation needs, the Link counselors will also be able to contact PA Link partners and AAAs at the local level to assist with coordinating local transportation. The PA Link number is 1-800-753-8827.

"Community-based solutions like these are being developed every day, and my administration is working to support them," Gov. Wolf said. "We'll continue to lift up successes so that communities across the commonwealth can learn from one another, but we can't expect a cookie cutter approach. Every community is different, and the solutions that work in Butler County may not be the ones that are most needed in Luzerne County or any other county in the state.

"We can overcome the challenges before us by improving collaboration and coordination, and we should leverage the knowledge and experience of the people who know their communities best. Thank you to all of these dedicated, hardworking people at the Area Agencies on Aging and the Department of Aging. Your work is saving lives."

**MEDIA CONTACT:** Lyndsay Kensinger, [ra-gvgovpress@pa.gov](mailto:ra-gvgovpress@pa.gov)

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