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### Senior Center Response to COVID-19: Mid-Year Operations 2021

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# Senior Center Response to COVID-19: Mid-Year Operations 2021

## Background

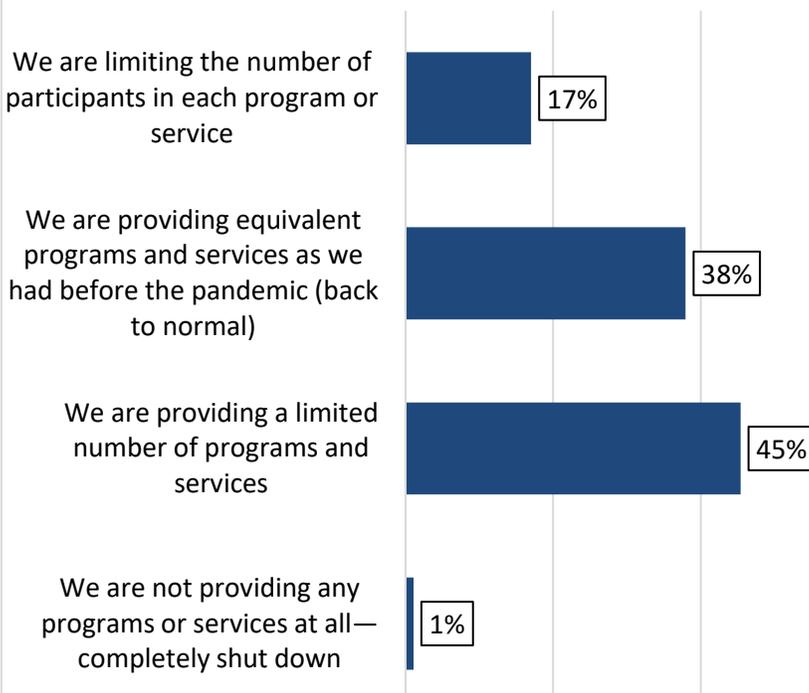
Senior centers/COAs in Massachusetts remained largely operational through the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, and continued to assist older adults in the community. With the introduction of a vaccine, return to 'normal' operations has become more feasible. By mid-2021, senior centers were returning to some in-person operations and continued adaptations for safety, including mask-wearing, limiting capacity, fewer walk-ins, and increased hand sanitization availability.

**"COVID has helped us better educate the community about the role of COAs. It's helped foster stronger community partnerships and support for programming."**

## Highlights

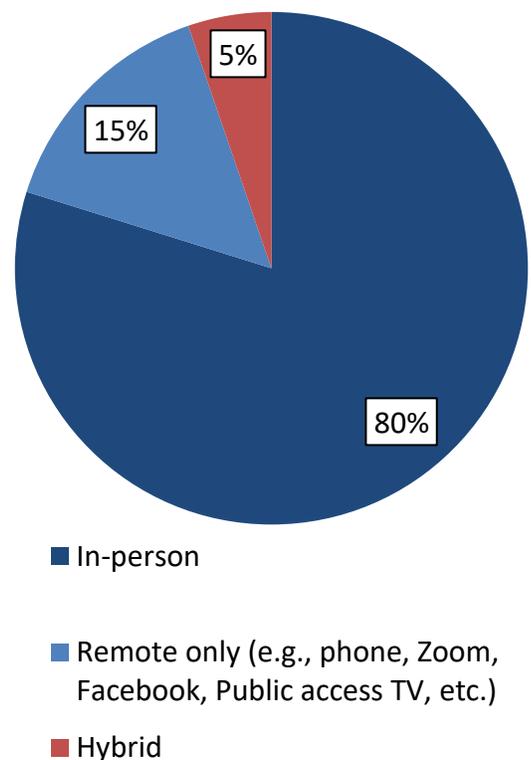
- 38% of senior centers reported providing equivalent programming compared to pre-pandemic times (**Figure 1**).
- On average, 80% of senior center programming was being provided in-person by August 2021 (**Figure 2**).
- Senior Centers are continuing to adapt their space, technology, and health protocols to keep providing programs and services safely as the pandemic continues into 2022.

**Figure 1. Operations as of August 2021**



Percentages will not sum to 100% since respondents could select more than one response

**Figure 2. Average Distribution of Program/Service Provision Method, August 2021**



## Senior Center staff reported a number of ways they are providing programs and services while maintaining health and safety measures

"**The needs of our clients shifted** and the staff worked throughout the pandemic to meet those needs. Outreach and meals increased dramatically."

"**We never closed**, while some activities were suspended, others were not. We transitioned programs to open air venues, zoomed and when the weather deteriorated, we brought them back inside with restricted numbers."

"**We have endeavored to make a safe location** through placement of...hand sanitizing stations, hands free soap and paper towel dispensers, installing of plexiglass shields at the front desk, using spray sanitizing guns after every program. We also have everyone call to sign up for a program and do not allow walk ins, and limit the number of participants in a class or activity."

"On a positive note, **COA staff mastered Zoom logistics** and created a cable television program 'Insights' to provide programs and services...We also **mastered COA Broadcast Alerts**, developed weekly eBlasts, created a 12 page newsletter monthly that was mailed to residents 60 years of age and older. "

"**Hybrid programming post pandemic has been successfully achieved** by using a Meeting Owl Pro, a gift from the Friends of the [Town] Council On Aging"

As a part of the MCOA Database project, three surveys were conducted with all Councils on Aging (COAs) in Massachusetts to collect data about the organization, operations, and programs and services provided locally through COAs. Surveys were distributed in May 2020, August 2020, and November 2020. Each survey included a section of questions addressing current response to COVID-19. An additional survey was distributed in August 2021 solely focused on current COVID-19 response.

This fact sheet includes data highlights from 282 COAs that responded to the August 2021 survey (82% of all COAs). Over 1 year into the pandemic, COAs were returning to in-person operations and continuing to adapt to meet the social and mental health needs of their constituents.

To learn more about the MCOA Database and its contents, please contact us at [CSDRA@umb.edu](mailto:CSDRA@umb.edu).



Massachusetts  
Councils On Aging

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