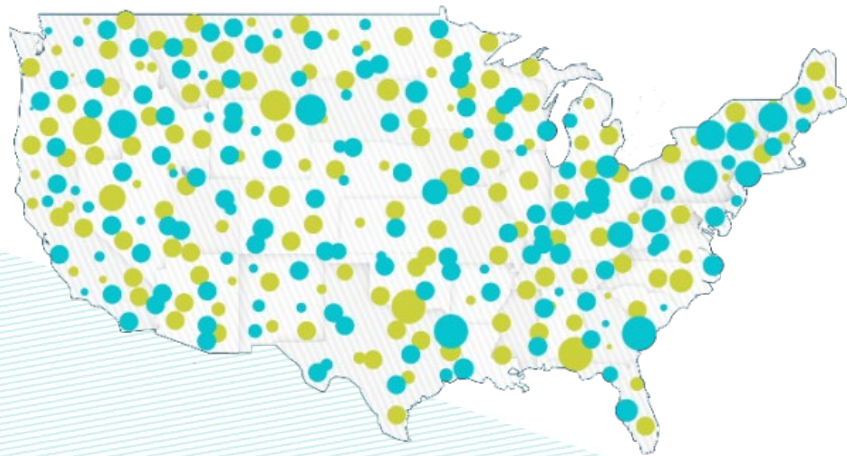# ADAPTING TECHNOLOGY-BASED ENGAGEMENT STRATEGIES IN RESPONSE TO COVID-19

L. CARTER FLORENCE

MEALS ON WHEELS AMERICA

MEALS ON WHEELS AMERICA

A national leadership organization supporting the 5,000+ local, community-based Meals on Wheels programs across the country through advocacy, education, research, and national partnerships and campaigns.

POLL

WHICH SECTOR BEST REPRESENTS YOUR WORK?

1. Senior Nutrition Program
2. Healthcare
3. State Unit on Aging
4. Technology
5. Other Aging Services

SOCIAL ISOLATION AND LONELINESS

A COMPLEX PROBLEM IN NEED OF UNIQUE SOLUTIONS

Loneliness and social isolation are associated with poor health outcomes including cognitive decline, suicide, and death. Social isolation is associated with increased healthcare utilization and spending, to the tune of $6.7 billion in additional Medicare expenditures.

58% of home-delivered meal recipients live alone, and for many of them, **the person delivering the meal is often the only person they will see** that day

1 IN 4 FEELS LONELY

1 IN 4 SENIORS LIVES ALONE

HALF OF SENIORS LIVING ALONE
lack the financial resources to pay for **basic needs.**

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY INTERVENTIONS

A PROMISING APPROACH

Research suggests that information and communication technology interventions may be effective at reducing social isolation and loneliness for older adults.
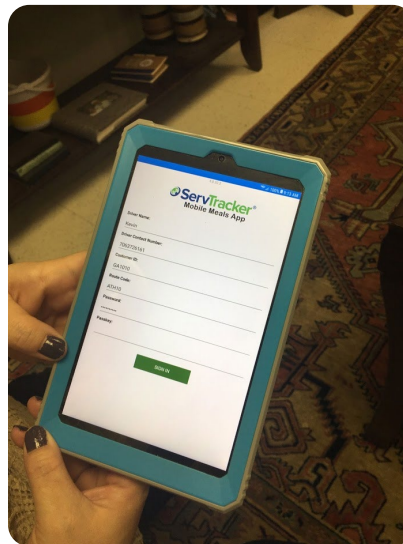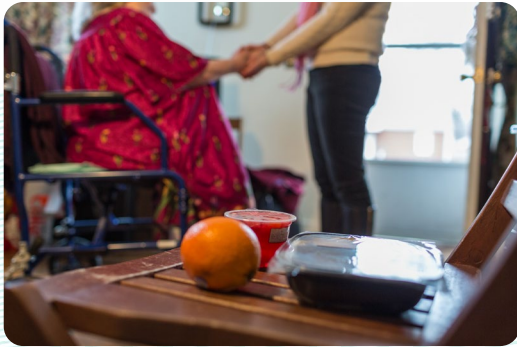
OUR APPROACH

OUR APPROACH

- Goal: Develop and evaluate a program – Talking Tech – to address barriers to technology adoption by providing in-home, one-on-one training to encourage digital literacy, including participation in a virtual community for older adults.

- Client participants matched to "TechMate" volunteers, who, over 14 weeks, train participants to use technology and connect to Well Connected
  - 4 weeks of one-on-one, in-home training
  - 6 weeks of scheduled phone calls
  - 2 weeks on-call assistance

OUR APPROACH

- Pre- and post-surveys
  - Social Isolation – perceived isolation Lubben social network scale)
  - Loneliness – UCLA three-item loneliness scale
  - Technology use – modeled from National Health and Aging Trends Study (NHATS) Technology Environment section
- Semi-structured interviews
- TechMate Reports

OUR FINDINGS & LIMITATIONS

- Well received by older adults
- Perceived to reduce loneliness
- Effective in teaching older adults to use technology and access the internet
- No statistically significant changes in self-reported social isolation, loneliness or technology use from baseline to follow-up. Although trend towards desired outcomes were seen.

- Of those participants who stopped training, all reported that they were too overwhelmed by stress caused by COVID-19 or unrelated health problems.
- Small sample size (n=21)

THE COVID-19 ADJUSTMENTS

- In some cases, altering timelines for both the program and the evaluation.
- In some cases, participants stopped training due to COVID-19 related concerns.
- Attempted to move in-person, one-on-one training to phone.

THE COVID-19 ADJUSTMENTS

CLIENT, VOLUNTEER, & ORGANIZATIONAL EXPERIENCES

"I just have to figure it out because I haven't been using it and I never got finished with what I was supposed to learn. [...] So, it's just bad timing, but the program itself, I think, was a great idea. Really I don't know how I got this lucky" – Participant

POLL

WHICH COVID-19 ADJUSTMENTS HAVE YOU MADE IN YOUR WORK?

1. Moved to telephone-based interactions
2. Moved to internet-based interactions
3. Increased use of personal protective equipment (PPE)
4. Moved to a mostly or fully remote workforce
5. Reduced or limited the use of volunteers to deliver services
6. Other, please put in the chat

COVID-19 ADJUSTMENTS

MORE EXAMPLES FROM THE MEALS ON WHEELS NETWORK

- Increase demand
- Increased number of clients and meals served
- Modifications to delivery protocol
- Messages of Love
- Telephone reassurance and befriending programs
- Telephonic and virtually delivered programming
- Increased or continued pet assistance

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