

Oklahoma Healthy Aging Initiative's Quick Pivot to Virtual

As the world scrambled to react to the new reality of the pandemic, the Oklahoma Healthy Aging Initiative (OHAI) was ready to pivot. With an active Facebook page already up and running, they started to discuss how they might respond to COVID-19 in February 2020. As a result, they were ready to ramp up virtual programming.

In fact, OHAI was one of the first ACL grantees to offer virtual classes, starting just a week after stopping all in-person programming on March 12, 2020. Soon they were livestreaming Tai Chi and SAIL (Staying Active and Independent for Life) classes five times a day, Monday through Thursday, attracting 20-30 viewers each time. Recorded sessions sometimes have views in the hundreds.

Virtual services have benefitted a state in which 75 out of 77 counties are considered rural with a great need for programming like that offered by OHAI. Oklahoma ranks 47th of the 50 states in overall health and physical activity. It also ranks 36th for falls.

Headquartered at the University of Oklahoma Health Sciences Center, OHAI is a statewide initiative with five regional offices. The organization offers a variety of programs – SAIL, Tai Chi for Better Balance (TCBB), older driver safety, medication management, caregiver skills, chronic disease management, and others. OHAI's goal for the Administration for Community Living grant was to serve 1,500 older adults and people with disabilities with TCBB and SAIL. Working with local public health systems, libraries, churches, senior centers, area agencies on aging, long-term care facilities, and others, they offered classes at 77 different sites in 2019, reaching over 1,100 participants.

They didn't want to lose this progress—and these meaningful contacts with participants—to distance. And thanks to their existing social media presence and quick response, they didn't.

Starting in mid-March 2020, SAIL and TCBB moved to Facebook Live with no registration required. Since then, more than 1,200 people have taken part in falls prevention classes on Facebook Live. OHAI also offers several other classes via Zoom to registered participants.

OHAI considers not only how many virtual classes it offers, but the quality of them. Staff trained all OHAI educators in best practices for using Facebook Live. They also watch educators on the new platform to ensure quality programming, and they created a system for tracking participation, comments, shares, likes, and views.

OHAI continues to work on its process with post-program surveys. Using social media and a web-based survey tool, staff can survey their most frequent participants. Based on the positive response to virtual programming, OHAI expects to continue even after in-person classes resume—extending their reach to more Oklahomans.