



*Improving the Lives of Older Adults and People with Disabilities  
Through Services, Research, and Education*

December 16, 2021

Dear ACL grantees,

Older adults and people with disabilities have been disproportionately at-risk and have experienced dire consequences from COVID-19, as you all know too well. Throughout the pandemic, ACL's aging and disability networks have been at the forefront of the all-hands-on-deck effort to protect the people we serve from the virus itself, while also doing everything possible to continue to provide the services needed for so many to live safely in the community.

Most recently, you have played a critical role in getting people vaccinated, helping address the barriers that too many disabled people and older adults face. Your assistance with vaccine access and education is a key reason that almost all older adults and most people with disabilities have received at least one dose. You're also a driving force in the effort to get people boosters.

Boosters are [now recommended](#) for everyone 16 and older who is at least six months past their second Pfizer or Moderna shot or two months past their J&J shot, and they are particularly important for the people we serve. Although an initial COVID-19 vaccination remains effective in preventing severe disease, data suggest vaccination becomes less effective over time, and many vaccinated adults are experiencing waning immunity. A booster helps keep protection up.

This is even more important as we enter the winter months, when we spend more time indoors and many gather with loved ones for the holidays. The discovery of the Omicron variant adds another jolt of urgency. While there remains much we do not know about the new variant, studies are showing that increasing immunity, including through vaccinations and boosters, increase protection against any COVID-19 variant. Getting a booster now is especially important for people with increased risks from COVID-19, including older adults, people with disabilities and chronic health conditions, and people living in congregate settings.

The good news is that research is showing that people are receptive to getting boosters. But some do not know they are eligible, or do not understand the urgency. As trusted members of your communities – and trusted messengers – you have a tremendous ability to help people understand the importance of taking action now to protect themselves.

Throughout the country, the aging and disability networks have been developing innovative models and strategies to help educate older adults and people with disabilities about, and facilitate access to, vaccinations. Answering questions about the vaccine, ensuring the accessibility of vaccination sites, setting up vaccine clinics, and offering at-home vaccinations or free rides to vaccine sites are just a few of the ways you have been making a difference.

The networks have also forged new partnerships in their vaccine efforts, both with each other and with other local and state public health officials. Notably, many successful efforts have focused on people with disabilities and older adults in marginalized communities, including communities of color and rural and tribal communities. Over the last several weeks, I have heard from so many of you about how you are building on these innovations and strategies for boosters.

The impact of the work you are doing is recognized at the highest levels. There is rarely a week that goes by where ACL is not brought to the planning table by the White House and other divisions within HHS because they recognize the power of our networks and the importance of what you do. And, of course, the COVID-19 supplemental funding we have received from Congress is a testament to your impact.

I want to make sure all grantees are aware of the funding ACL has distributed that can be used to support your work to accelerate vaccinations and boosters. The COVID-19 supplements, most recently through the American Rescue Plan, can be used for, among other things, vaccine and booster-related activities. And, of course, the [\\$100 million from CDC](#) distributed earlier this year is specifically for vaccine-related activities, including boosters. As we recently announced, we will soon be distributing [\\$150 million in public health workforce funding](#) that also can be used for vaccine and booster activities. ACL stands ready to offer guidance and technical assistance to support you in your vaccination efforts, and to help you take advantage of the flexibilities available to meet your community's needs. Please contact your program officer or regional administrator with any questions.

We also are building [a webpage](#) to help our networks share ideas, strategies and solutions. On that page, you'll find [this flyer](#) – which you can co-brand – to help get the word out about the importance and urgency of boosters. (We also have versions that are ready to go without customization for both [print](#) and [digital](#) use). We've started adding promising models, case studies, and resources about vaccinations and boosters, and we will post more over the coming days. We also will post the recording of Tuesday's webinar with U.S. Surgeon General Vivek Murthy on the latest COVID-19 updates. We'd like to keep adding to this page, so please send us information about your booster efforts, new resources, or anything else that could help colleagues across the network. I also hope you will continue to check [acl.gov/COVID-19](https://acl.gov/COVID-19) for the latest information and resources and, if you haven't already, please sign up for [ACL Updates](#).

I want to end by expressing my gratitude and appreciation for everything the aging and disability networks across the country have done and are continuing to do. It has been heartbreaking for all of us to see the impact the pandemic has had on people with disabilities, older adults, their families, and the direct care workforce. You all have faced incredible challenges and encountered problems that at times had no obvious solutions. Yet regardless of the obstacles you faced – including dealing with the impacts of COVID in your own personal lives – you have forged on with perseverance, creativity and resolve.

Thank you for answering the call to help protect our communities as we enter the winter. Your work is literally saving lives. As always, we appreciate your partnership and stand ready to support you.

Sincerely,



Alison Barkoff  
Principal Deputy Administrator