

onset, access to neighborhood resources was limited to reduce transmission risks. Changes to economic arrangements and socio-spatial norms have profoundly impacted daily life, though how these influence health and well-being is largely unknown. It is likely that these effects may vary in different communities and contexts; for example, neighborhoods that are able to self-organize to safely provide social support and resources may fare better. This symposium brings together cutting-edge studies in urban and rural U.S. places to explicate how the pandemic is transforming aging-in-place experiences and perspectives. The first presentation shows how rapidly community-based services have adjusted operations to meet the needs of their communities. The second presentation explores strategies to provide social support in rural communities. The third presentation highlights the social health needs of a subset of older adults who had not formed friendships with their neighbors. Together, these studies suggest that close examinations of aging-in-place conditions and mechanisms from organizational, socio-spatial, and social network perspectives are evermore important amid a pandemic. We discuss the implications of these empirical findings in relation to emerging theories within environmental gerontology.

#### UNSUNG HEROES: HOW SENIOR CENTERS HAVE ADAPTED TO PROVIDE ESSENTIAL SERVICES IN THE FACE OF COVID-19

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This presentation will describe the ways in which senior centers in Massachusetts have adapted during the COVID-19 pandemic. Three surveys (distributed in April, August, and November, 2020) were conducted with 342 senior centers in the state to learn about current operations through the pandemic, challenges faced, and steps taken to solve those challenges. Results suggest that almost all senior centers (91%) continued to provide limited programming or essential services during the pandemic. Senior centers are prioritizing socialization and nutritional needs as critical services, but are changing the way they operate to continue to meet those needs. Despite facing uncertainty about the future, senior centers continue to adapt to changing conditions as they seek to meet their core mission. This presentation will discuss effects of COVID-19 on how senior centers will continue to operate through and post-pandemic times as well as local and state policy implications.

#### COMMUNITY LEADERS' PERSPECTIVE OF STRATEGIES TO ENHANCE SOCIAL CONNECTEDNESS IN RURAL COMMUNITIES

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Age-Friendly communities are charged with fostering a social environment where social connections are available, accessible, and meaningful. Thematic content analysis of 67 interviews (representing 73 communities) conducted between 12/09/2019 and 01/24/2020 and 59 interviews (representing 71 communities) conducted between 12/14/2020 and

1/19/2021 with age-friendly leaders in rural Maine suggested the importance of expanding multi-sectoral collaborations and developing flexible strategies that allow older people to create and maintain social connections, even during COVID. Prior to the pandemic, common strategies were: (1) local partners and volunteers; (2) in-person activities; (3) accessibility; (4) reciprocity; and, (5) neighborhood-specific solutions. During the pandemic, there was an increased reliance on regional partners and funders to develop low or no-tech and tech-enabled social opportunities. Additional adaptive strategies included: (1) intergenerational ties; (2) emphasizing fun; and, (3) flexibility. The study has implications for understanding how rural age-friendly communities develop and grow multi-sectoral collaborations to enhance social connections.

#### SOCIAL CONTACT PRIOR TO COVID-19 AND LONGITUDINAL MENTAL HEALTH TRAJECTORIES DURING COVID-19 AMONG ADULTS AGES $\geq 55$

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Social support protects mental health during a crisis. We examined whether prior contact with social organizations and friends/neighbors was associated with better trajectories of loneliness, depression and self-rated memory during the COVID-19 pandemic. We conducted latent class analysis and regression analysis on longitudinal data from the COVID-19 Coping Study of US adults aged  $\geq 55$  from April-October 2020 ( $n=3105$ ). Overall, prior contact with friends ( $B=-.075, p<.001$ ), neighbors ( $B=-.048, p=.007$ ), and social organizations ( $B=-.073, p<.001$ ) predicted better mental health amid COVID-19. Three classes were identified: Class1 had the best outcomes, whereas Class3 had the worst outcomes and were most likely to live alone ( $B=.149, p<.001$ ). For Class1, prior contact with social organizations ( $B=-.052, p=.044$ ) predicted decreasing loneliness. For Class2, prior contact with friends ( $B=-.075, p<.001$ ) predicted decreasing loneliness and better memory ( $B=-.130, p=.011$ ). Conversely, prior contact with neighbors ( $B=-.165, p=.010$ ) predicted worsening loneliness among Class3. Our findings pose new questions on the role of neighborhood networks to mitigate poor mental health outcomes among older adults during a crisis.

#### Session 3215 (Symposium)

##### ESPO AND BEHAVIORAL AND SOCIAL SCIENCES SECTION SYMPOSIUM: ADDRESSING THE NEEDS OF BLACK, INDIGENOUS, AND PEOPLE OF COLOR (BIPOC) COMMUNITIES THROUGHOUT THE STAGE MODEL

Chair: Briana Sprague

Co-Chair: Kylie Meyer

Discussant: Chivon Mingo

Behavioral interventions have been successfully deployed to prevent and manage chronic conditions among older persons, improve mental health, and support caregivers' ability to cope with care stressors. However, intervention effects may not be equally distributed among populations, nor equally acceptable or accessible among Black, Indigenous,