

GAO@100 Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-22-104425](#), a report to congressional addressees

Why GAO Did This Study

COVID-19 relief funding in 2020 and 2021 totaled over \$2.7 billion to support OAA services during the pandemic. OAA provides services, such as home-delivered meals, in-home personal care, and caregiver support services, to help older adults age in place in their homes and communities.

As part of GAO's CARES Act oversight responsibilities, this report examines (1) states' use of OAA COVID-19 funds and related flexibilities, (2) strategies selected states and localities used to serve older adults during the pandemic, and (3) ACL's efforts to oversee COVID-19 funds and support states.

GAO reviewed national data from ACL on OAA service expenditures from fiscal years 2019 and 2020 (the most recent available), related ACL guidance, and relevant federal laws and regulations. Additionally, GAO interviewed officials from four state units on aging (Georgia, New Mexico, New York, and South Dakota), selected based on their percentages of older adults, and demographic and geographic diversity. In these states, GAO interviewed officials from eight localities that deliver OAA services in both rural and urban areas. GAO also interviewed ACL headquarters and regional officials and representatives from six national aging organizations.

View [GAO-22-104425](#). For more information, contact Kathryn A. Larin, (202) 512-7215 or larink@gao.gov

December 2021

COVID-19

Selected States Modified Meal Provision and Other Older Americans Act Services to Prioritize Safety

What GAO Found

States spent most of their supplemental COVID-19 funding from the Older Americans Act of 1965 (OAA) to provide meals, and reported using certain pandemic-related flexibilities to waive some related requirements. In fiscal year 2020, states overall provided about 24 million more meals—using COVID-19 and other funds—compared to 2019, according to national data from the Department of Health and Human Services' Administration for Community Living (ACL). Compared to meals, states spent much less of the supplemental funding on other OAA services, such as providing in-home care. In addition, officials from four selected states reported using CARES Act flexibilities to help address pandemic-related challenges. For example, officials from most of the selected localities in these states said waiving nutrition requirements for OAA-provided meals helped them meet demand by providing frozen meals, shelf-stable meals, or groceries.

Officials GAO interviewed from the four selected states and eight localities reported adapting to safety concerns during the pandemic by modifying meal services or temporarily suspending other OAA services, although in-person services in most localities resumed by September 2021. For example, some localities reported converting from meals served in group settings to meals that could be taken home (see photos). In addition, most localities reported holding wellness classes or other activities online. Some localities reported reducing or temporarily suspending in-home care services due to safety concerns. Officials from most of the localities reported leveraging new or existing partnerships with public health and emergency agencies, and most localities reported assisting with COVID-19 vaccinations.

Selected Localities Found Alternative Methods for Providing Meals to Older Adults during the Pandemic



Source: GAO photos. | GAO-22-104425

ACL modified state reporting processes to oversee COVID-19 spending and supported states by providing guidance and information. For fiscal year 2020, ACL asked states to report their use of COVID-19 supplemental funds in narrative form. Due to the flexible format, ACL received varying levels of detail that ACL said required considerable follow-up with states. For fiscal year 2021, ACL developed a template for state reporting, which officials said will help them efficiently collect more consistent information on the use of COVID-19 funds. ACL supported states by providing frequent guidance, sharing information on the use of funds, and suggesting ways to modify services.