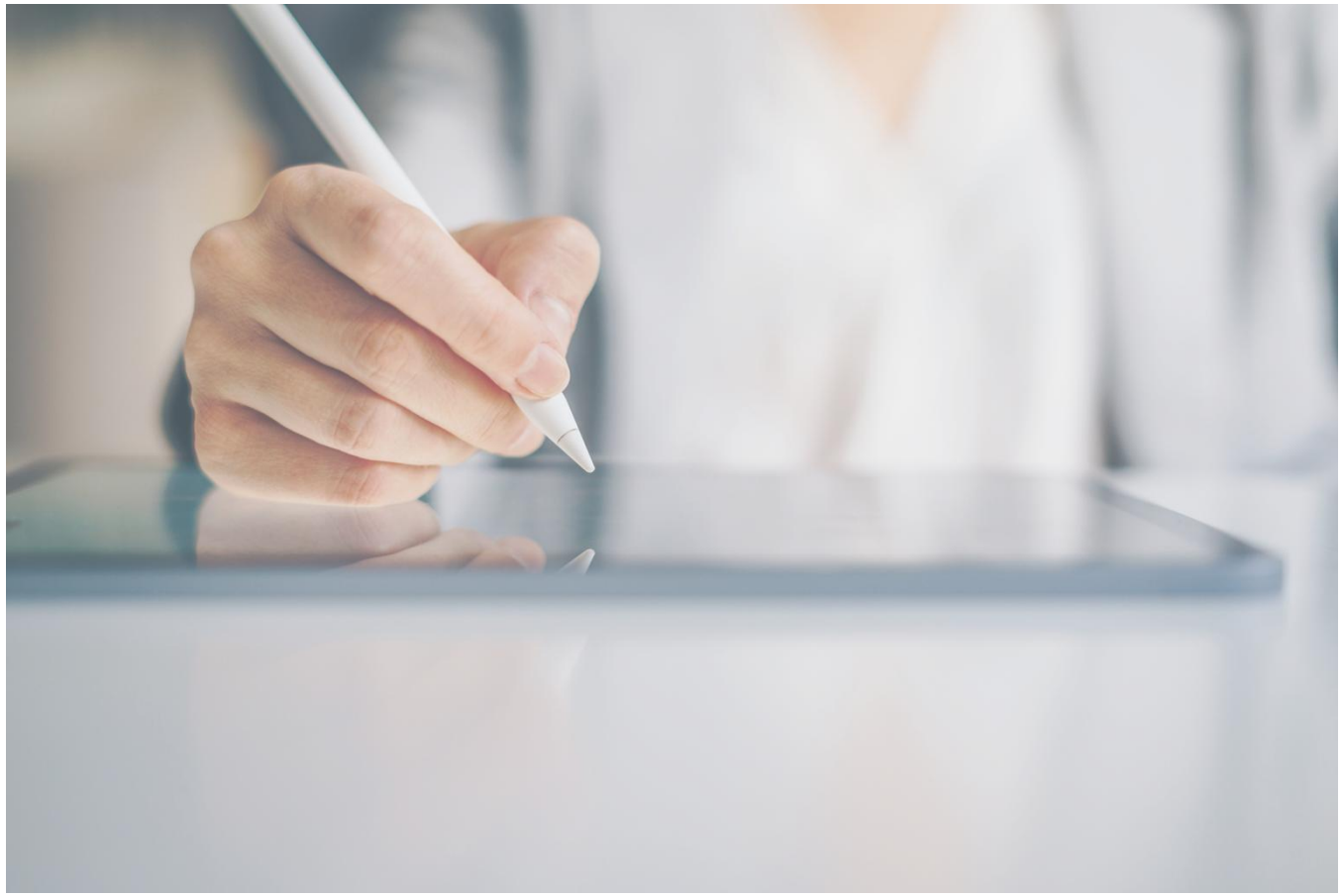
Connected at Home: A Collaborative Virtual Senior Center for Older Adults



AGING AHEAD

November 2, 2026

WashU Bursky Public Health

Federal Definition

ACL recognizes the value of virtual meal programs

- Tele or Virtual Nutrition Education for Older Adults (acl.gov)
- Commit to Connect | ACL Administration for Community Living

Final Rule

- Recognizes direct services that happen in-person or virtually including multipurpose senior centers and direct services (1321.3 Definitions)
- Congregate meals that happen in-person or virtually (1321.87 and 1322.27).

AGING AHEAD | CONNECT

- CHOICE at Aging Ahead brings the services of a Senior Center directly to older adults at Focal Points where older adults naturally congregate such as the public library, community centers, and now their homes via ***Aging Ahead-CONNECT***. CHOICE allows older adults to choose which educational and social programs they would like to attend.

With ***Aging Ahead-CONNECT***, Older Adults have access to

- Educational programming, including nutrition and exercise
- Social gatherings via Zoom
- Information on Aging Ahead Services
- Virtual Congregate Meals

How does *Aging Ahead-CONNECT* work?

Virtual Senior Center participants are expected to participate in a combination of virtual educational content and Zoom gatherings each month to remain active in the Virtual Senior Center.

- Virtual Congregate Meals
  - Participants receive virtual congregate meals delivered directly to their door.
- Educational Content
  - Participants are provided with a list of educational content that covers a variety of topics and interests, including information on nutrition, exercise, Medicare benefits, online safety, and services available at Aging Ahead.
- Meals and Mingle
  - Participants are provided the opportunity to enjoy their lunch and gather on zoom to socialize and discuss the provided educational content in breakout rooms.

Background

- Inheriting the program and devices from the St. Louis County Library, Aging Ahead introduced 750 older adults to the Virtual Senior Center (VSC).
- Pilot testing of this group prior to April 2025 found that
  - After 3 months, VSC participants were more likely than Home Delivered meal clients who weren't part of the VSC to say:
    - "My social relationships are supportive and rewarding"
    - "I think it is wonderful to be alive right now"
    - "I generally feel full of energy"
- VSC participants also reported better outcomes for health and well-being

Program overview

- Funding began April 2024
- Website developed with input from VSC participants
- *Aging Ahead-CONNECT* programs are updated monthly
- Enrollment May 2025-September 2026
  - Home-delivered meal clients receive a tablet designed for low digital proficiency
  - Congregate clients receive a login to access from any device
- Evaluation includes 5 surveys over 12 months

GOAL: Improve feelings of loneliness, isolation and overall well-being

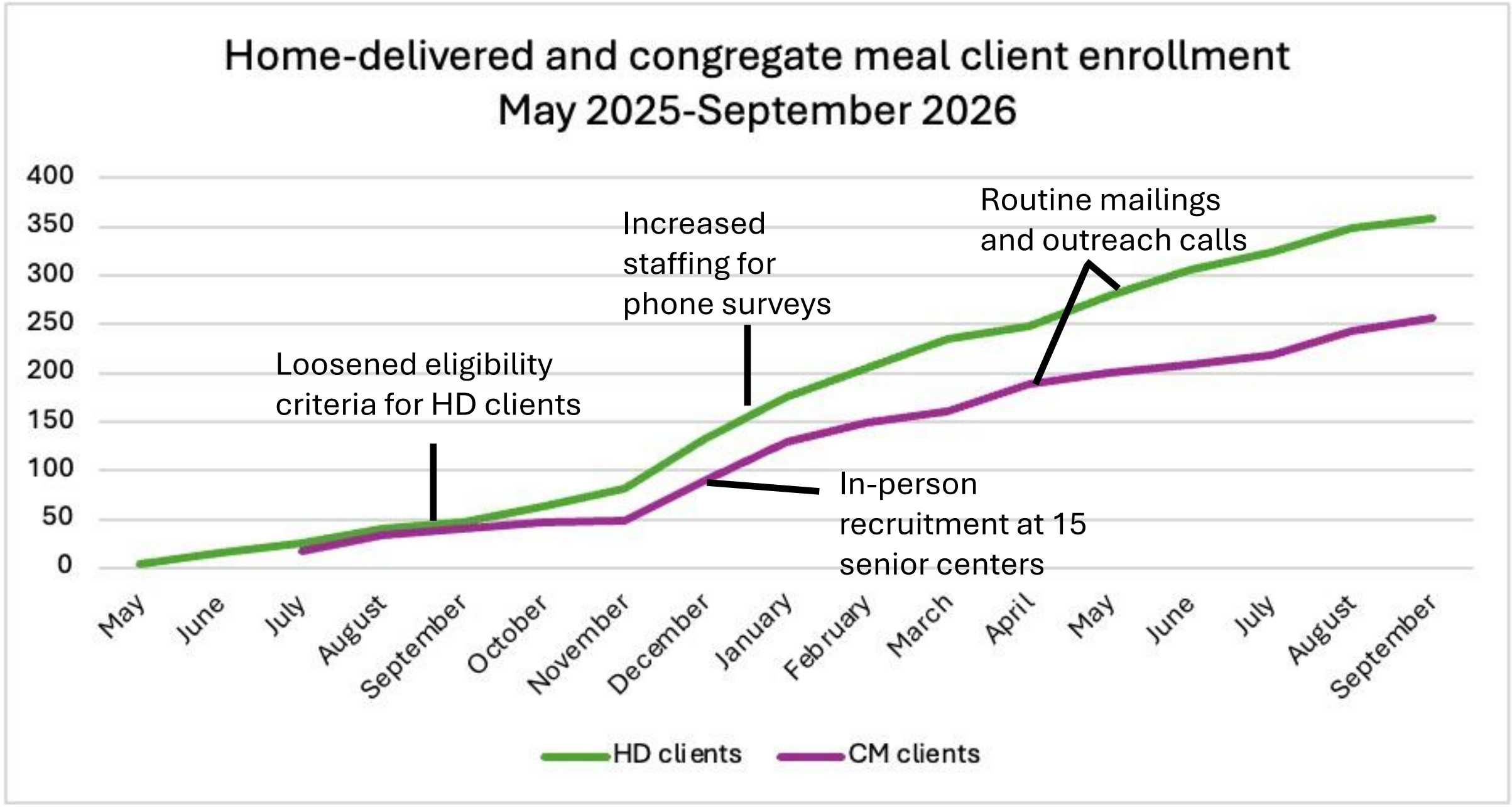
Staffing impact

- Supported outreach calls to clients for recruitment.
- Lead programming about 2-3 hours a week.
- Support clients with connecting to the website, troubleshooting, or directing them to higher levels of support.
- The CHOICE Team assigns tablets to participants and coordinates with centers, families, and volunteers to pick up the device along with instructions for use.



Enrollment process

- May 2025-September 2026
- Home-delivered meal clients and congregate clients
  - 4 counties in eastern MO: St. Louis, St. Charles, Jefferson, and Franklin
- High touch approach by Aging Ahead CHOICE team to assess eligibility and interest in participating
  - Mailing letters
  - Sending flyers with meal deliveries
  - Responding to voicemails
  - Internal referrals
    - Support from SCAs, HDMCs, and COS staff
  - In-person discussion at senior centers
- Clients were officially enrolled after completing their first survey


Home-delivered and congregate meal client enrollment
May 2025-September 2026
400
350
300
250
200
150
100
50
0
May
June
July
August
September
October
November
December
January
February
March
April
May
June
July
August
September
Loosened eligibility criteria for HD clients
Increased staffing for phone surveys
In-person recruitment at 15 senior centers
Routine mailings and outreach calls
HD clients
CM clients

Who enrolled in *Aging Ahead-CONNECT*?

363 Home-delivered meal clients

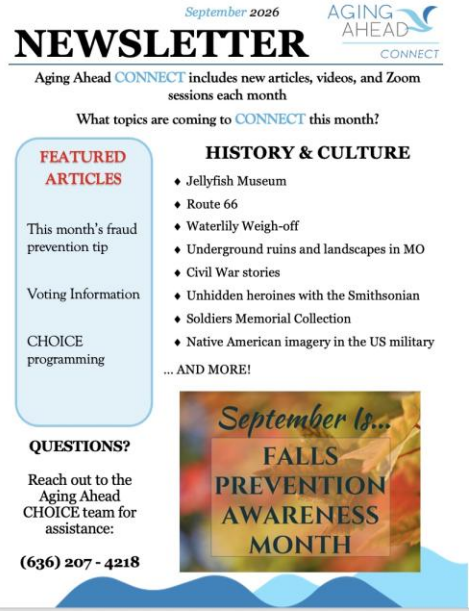
- Average age 73 years
- 67% female
- 52% Non-Hispanic White
- 37% Non-Hispanic Black
- County of residence:
  - 58% St. Louis
  - 15% St. Charles
  - 15% Franklin
  - 9% Jefferson
- 59% live alone
- 42% had a tablet/computer/laptop

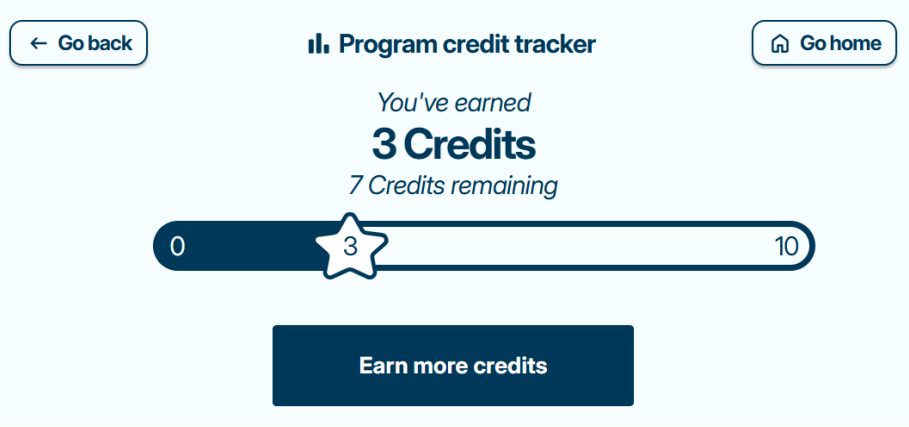
256 Congregate meal clients

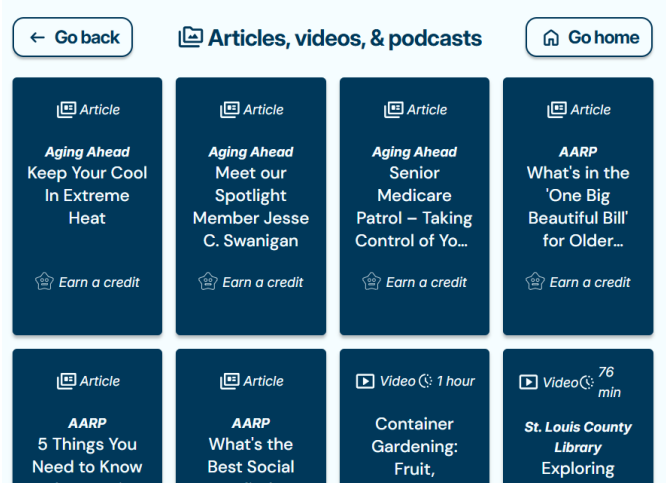
- Average age 74 years
- 73% female
- 67% Non-Hispanic White
- 24% Non-Hispanic Black
- County of residence:
  - 45% St. Louis
  - 22% St. Charles
  - 16% Franklin
  - 13% Jefferson
- 57% live alone
- 70% had a tablet/computer/laptop

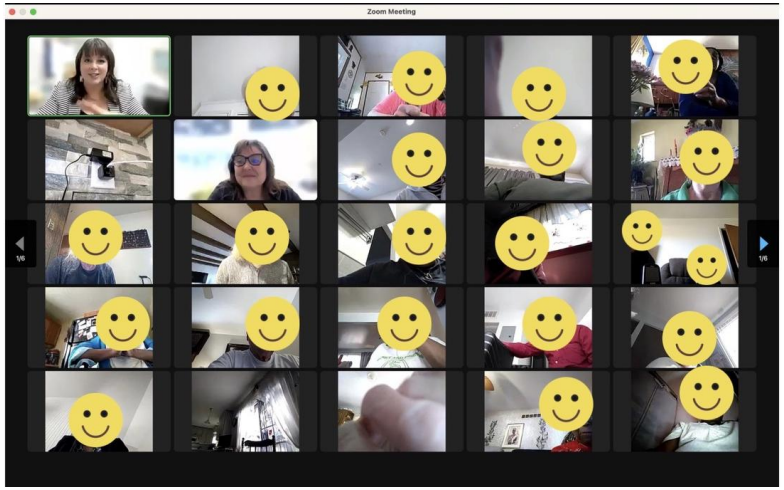
Programs

- Aging Ahead plans around 40 programs each month
  - Articles, videos, podcasts, exercise videos, and Zoom
    - Partnership with St. Louis County Library supports Zoom webinars
  - HD clients are asked to complete 10 programs/month
- Accessible from any device
- Congregate clients receive a monthly newsletter









In their own words…

Family members of Virtual Senior Center participants shared how the Virtual Senior Center has impacted their family:

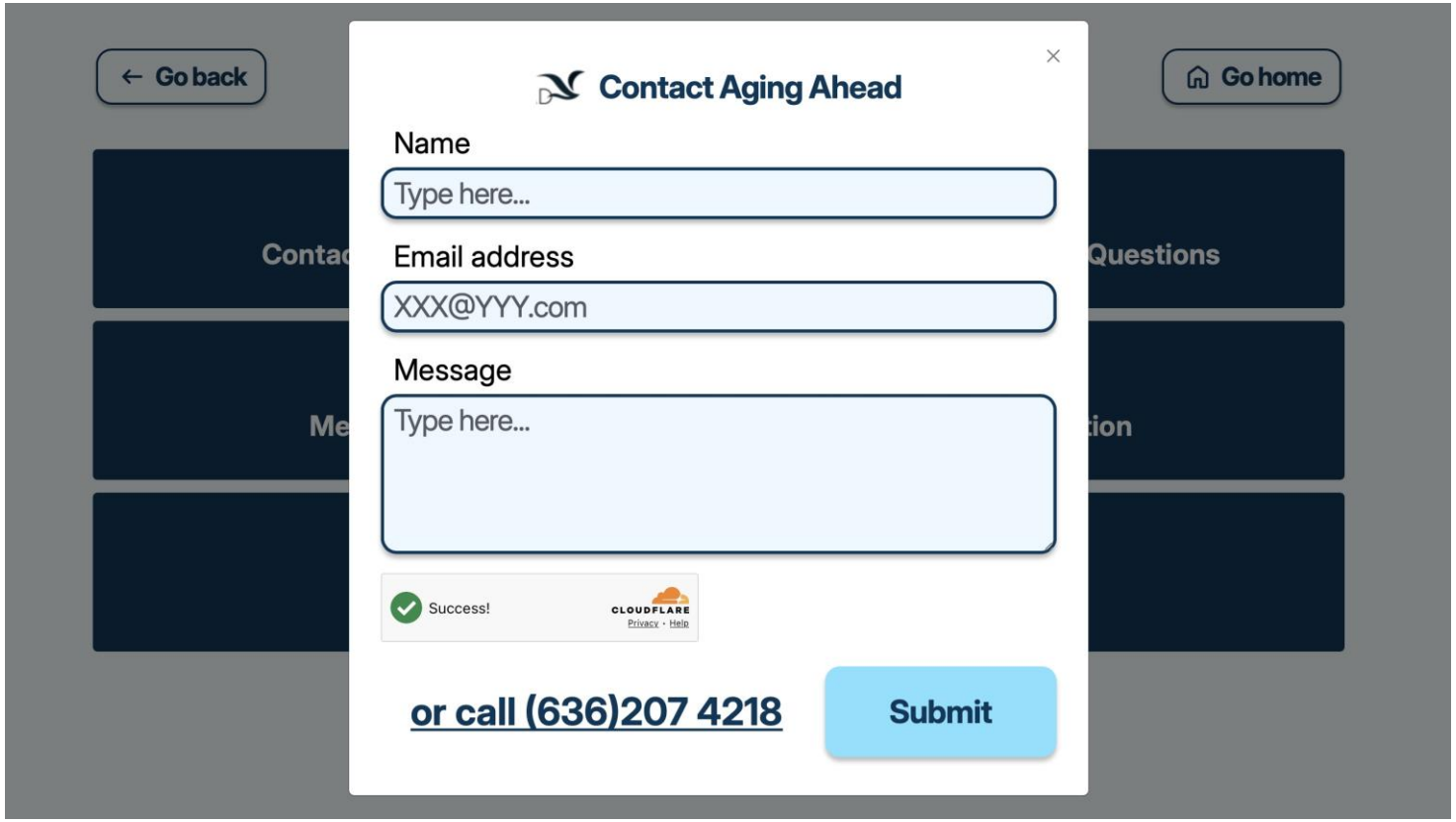
She has done one hour of exercise a day. We are so grateful for this [Tablet] and this opportunity for my mom to do exercises. I want to make sure you know what an incredible impact this [Tablet] has been for my Mom.

It kept her connected to family that were away at college which was a lifeline for her, she LOVES the games and content, and is enjoying the virtual programs she participates in. It is keeping her connected to others since she is in the house now and unable to get out in a social situation.

It helps her learn technology, She uses it daily. It helps her answer questions she has. It gives her independence.

Connecting with Aging Ahead

- Contact form for Aging Ahead through the *CONNECT* website
  - Additional option for clients to reach out to arrange services



Considerations

- Enrollment
  - Perception of ability to participate
- Tablet distribution
  - Many phone calls to arrange pick up or delivery
  - Utilize existing staff routines to get devices to centers in four counties
  - Intermittent home-delivered meal receipt impacts eligibility for tablet
- Getting started with the tablet and CONNECT
  - CHOICE staff aren’t available 24/7 to help with navigation or login
  - Receive paper instructions to describe login process and device features
  - Help support from tablet provider
    - Prepared to provide additional support and match clients with local partners

Aging Ahead-CONNECT funding

Currently funded by

- OAA IIIB for devices (consumable)
- OAA IIIC for congregate virtual meal
- OAA IIID for EBP virtual (as applicable)
- OAA IIIE for FCG Training & EBP
- NIH Grant with WashU
- SSGDF
- Suggested contributions

Other potential funding sources

- Local foundations
- Technology grants

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Next steps

- *Aging Ahead-CONNECT*
  - Evaluation via 5 surveys during the next year to assess participation and changes in social isolation and loneliness
  - Continue monthly program updates
  - Explore potential opportunities to expand participation
- Update on original VSC participants:
  - 200 active participants since 2021
    - Ended *GrandPad* tablets for this group
  - 147 participants are continuing with the program
    - Using provided android tablet or own device
    - Received a login like the congregate participants

Contact information

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