

# Services for seniors more critical than ever

By Jim Cornelius  
Editor in Chief

The population of Sisters Country is aging — and the challenges of aging are exacerbated by the coronavirus pandemic.

Seniors who might be facing a higher degree of isolation due to lack of transportation or connection are even more inhibited by the need to stay socially distanced.

Central Oregon Council On Aging (COCOA) has worked to bring Sisters seniors out of isolation with senior lunches at Sisters Community Church. Those activities have been curtailed — but the organization has pivoted to keep connecting seniors with services and social interaction.

COCOA Communications Director Denise Labuda noted that the organization is specifically designated to assist struggling seniors

— those who don't have the resources and wherewithal to access the services they need. They serve as a primary point of contact for seniors and their families to work through issues with housing, food access, in-home care, medical assistance, transportation and help for caregivers.

"We have a variety of services we can connect people to and in some cases pay for — but we are not the provider of those services," she said.

COCOA is noted for its lunch program in Sisters, which switched over to a to-go model in order to maintain COVID-19-safe protocols. Labuda noted that they are actually serving three times more people than they were with their sit-down dining. The service is offered at Sisters Community Church from noon to 12:30 p.m. on Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday.

"I'd say we're feeding about 70 people in Sisters right now," Labuda said.

Maintaining that social connection is critical to the mental, emotional, and ultimately physical well-being of the seniors COCOA serves, and Labuda and the rest of the staff are acutely aware that more challenges await as Sisters Country slides into winter.

She said the program may move to a delivery model when weather makes it dicey for seniors to be on the roads.

COCOA also connects seniors to Meals-on-Wheels delivery.

"Meals-on-Wheels drivers no longer go into the home to drop off the food or sit down to have a conversation," Labuda said.

However, she said, they'll still talk outside, and "we are also dedicating staff to call them once a week."

Labuda said that COCOA is also developing a volunteer-based calling program to offer seniors some connection during the cold months, when isolation is expected to increase. Labuda told *The Nugget* that food insecurity is the biggest issue for seniors in Sisters, "and we believe we're going to see more with isolation and loneliness... We're trying to get ahead of what we think is

going to be a hard winter for seniors."

Individual seniors are only part of the picture when it comes to caring for the elderly population. Their families play a big role too. Labuda said that COCOA helps families come up with a plan for loved ones as their needs change — needs for housing, food, medical care and more.

And for family members who are carrying the load of care, the organization can connect them with respite care services.

COCOA offers Medicare counseling, and the season for that service is fast approaching.

"We'll start taking appointment requests on October 1," Labuda said. "This year will be phone only, again because of COVID-19 safety concerns."

COCOA is open Monday through Friday, 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Volunteer inquiries are welcome.

Labuda wants families in Sisters to know that, whatever their need, Central Oregon Council on Aging should be their first point of call, making it easier to navigate through the range of services available to ensure and enhance quality of life for Sisters' seniors.

# Nutrition essential for health

By Jodi Schneider  
Correspondent

When you're enjoying a great slice of pizza, you're probably not thinking about the vitamins, minerals, and other nutrition it provides: the lycopene in the tomato sauce, iron in the meat, calcium in the cheese. Or the carbs, fat, and protein that help your body run.

Basically, your diet is like your medicine cabinet. Every time you reach for an apple, chips, or peanut butter, it's like taking a drug that's promoting health or hurting it.

Eating a well-balanced diet is an important part of remaining healthy as you age. It can help you maintain a healthy weight, stay energized, and get the nutrients you need.

Nutrition has a huge impact on the physical health and well-being of older adults. Many people may not realize that nutrition needs vary depending on a person's age. Just like toddlers have different dietary needs than teenagers, nutritional needs for older folks are different

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— Denise Labuda



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