



DEI *Perspectives*

Older Americans Month

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(They/Them/Theirs)*

Established in 1963, Older Americans Month (OAM) is celebrated every May. Led by a federal agency, the Administration for Community Living (ACL), this month recognizes older Americans' contributions to society, highlights aging trends and reaffirms commitments to serving the older adults in our communities.

This year's theme is "Powered by Connection" to recognize the profound impact that social connections have on our health and well-being. At a recent in-office FUN Day, Vizo Financial staff filled out cards for a local assisted living facility. This exercise allowed us to be a part of that connectedness by combatting isolation, loneliness and other issues.

The [U.S. Surgeon General's Advisory on the Healing Effects of Social Connection and Community](#) shows that after decades of research, it is clear that social connections have a profound impact on individual health, especially in older individuals. Their document states that "Data across 148 studies, with an average of 7.5 years of follow-up, suggest that social connection increases the odds of survival by 50 percent." In addition, "Chronic loneliness and social isolation can increase the risk of developing dementia by approximately 50 percent in older adults." Something as simple as the cards we sent in March or small care packages can go a long way in building those connections!

I personally use my Community Volunteer Leave to volunteer with a wonderful group of retired women, and George (he pickles beets and the ladies all fight over the beets), and together we do projects for our local school district and a local women's shelter. Pre-pandemic, the group also planned outings and bus trips to socialize together. We have monthly meetings, but the women that knit also get together weekly to work on knitting projects for families in need. The joy in the room is enough to show me this research is on to something!

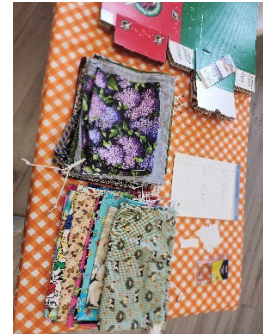
Groceries for a food pantry we donate to at the local school.



An auction to raise funds that we donate personal items to.



Bags we sew to fill with items for women and children at a local shelter.





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How can community groups, businesses and organizations mark OAM?

- Spread the word about the mental, physical and emotional health benefits of social connection through professional and personal networks.
- Encourage social media followers to share their thoughts and stories of connection using hashtag #PoweredByConnection to inspire and uplift.
- Promote opportunities to engage, such as cultural activities, recreational programs and interactive virtual events.
- Connect older adults with local services, such as counseling, that can help them overcome obstacles to meaningful relationships and access to support systems.
- Host connection-centric events or programs where older adults can serve as mentors to peers, younger adults and youths.

What can individuals do to connect?

- Invite more connection into your life by finding a new passion, joining a social club, taking a class or trying new activities in your community.
- Stay engaged in your community by giving back through volunteering, working, teaching or mentoring.
- Invest time with people to build new relationships and discover deeper connections with your family, friends, colleagues or neighbors.