It is a new year with new hope. A time to look back and forward.

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Looking back none of us would have predicted that a pandemic would be added to the normal problems of aging. No one predicted that we would go months without seeing loved ones and friends. No one would have predicted that that within a month of the initial shut down in the spring beloved programs such PEARLS, Walk with Ease and the Chronic Disease Self-Management Program would be offered via Zoom or by phone. No one would have predicted that by the end of the year, most of the Evidence Based Programs including Matter of Balance, EnhanceFitness, Fit & Strong1 and HomeMeds would be offered or ready for remote delivery. To date more than 10,000 people had participated in these programs, pandemic, or not. Again, we have shown the agility of the aging community.

Even in the darkest hours there has been light. We now have many ways of offering many programs. This means that more people can attend. Some things have not changed. First serving older people in communities where they live is key. Community agencies throughout the nation, although overwhelmed with serving their communities, have found the wherewithal to offer programs in their communities.

Second, we are learning that even with social distancing loneliness can be chased away and new friendships made. We have welcomed new programs. We receive letters from people attending remotely delivered programs. Here is some of what they say:

“Just knowing that someone cared enough to have a program like this really touched my heart. This was what I needed to encourage me, to help myself.”
“I especially enjoyed the two break-out sessions we had. Gave us the opportunity to share with each other”

“I want to thank you for providing funding for this and other health related courses that if continued, would save millions in health-related costs to the Government.”

“This Zoom class was extremely helpful in setting a new path for better health. I would never have committed the time and effort to an in-person class. Being able to participate from my home was more than doable.”

And we move forward. We will not be anywhere near a new normal for many months. We will continue to social distance, wear masks, stay mostly in our homes. There is also a new thing we can do, get vaccinated. After ten months alone, ten months of worry, ten months of uncertainty, I am more than ready. For me, getting vaccinated is part of good self-management. At the same time, I understand the hesitancy and distrust of many. You are not bad, evil or ignorant. Everyone has a reason for their beliefs and actions.

For those of you who do not want to get a vaccination, I ask that you consider the risks with the benefits. If bad things were happening to the millions of people already vaccinated, we would know. It is hard to hide what is happening to that many people living all over the country. They represent every state, every race, every ethnicity, every age. They are us.

If you just don’t trust the vaccine, ask yourself if you trust yourself, your family, your friends, and your community to be safe without the vaccine? The vaccine will only allow you and the rest of us to return to normal when most of us are vaccinated. Then the disease cannot find a home in our home or our community.

If you are worried that we do not know enough, you are right. We do not know how long immunity will last, but even if it is a few months or years, in the meantime we will live, we will learn and if need be get vaccinated again.

If you are worried about long term side effects of the vaccine, ask if the risk of the unknown is worth the possible long-term effects of the disease.

And so, we move forward. If you would like to attend an exercise, falls prevention, diabetes, pain, chronic disease, caregiver, depression management,
behavioral health, or other healthy living program in the comfort of your own home, go to http://www.eblcprograms.org/evidence-based/map-of-programs/ and call the nearest organization offering programs. If they cannot help, call another organization in your state.

Thanks so much to all our program leads who have worked so hard to move programs to virtual delivery.

Thanks so much to the wonderful community agencies who continued to offer programs in a very difficult time.

Most of all, thanks to all of you who participated in our programs and showed what was possible.

Looking forward to seeing you in person or seeing you online. Elders and their wisdom lead the way.