This toolkit provides an overview of a quality improvement process to reduce the social isolation of residents during the COVID-19 pandemic through increasing the number and variety of activities. As part of a QAPI Performance Improvement Project, this toolkit provides your team with actionable steps to increase resident engagement and reduce the effects of isolation.

**Area for Improvement Increase the number and variety of resident activities as well as resident participation**

Social isolation affects everyone; however, it has a deep emotional impact on frail older adults living in nursing homes who often suffer from chronic diseases as well as impaired hearing and vision. The effects of social isolation include depression and anxiety and may impact physical health such as weight loss, falls, pressure injuries, and urinary tract infections. For an excellent Special Report summarizing the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on nursing home residents as well as recommendations and resources, [click here.](https://altarum.org/sites/default/files/uploaded-publication-files/Nursing-Home-Resident-Survey_Altarum-Special-Report_FINAL.pdf)

**Root Cause Analysis  Review and select which factors apply to your activities program**

1. The effects of **physical isolation due to infection prevention precautions** in your facility may depend upon many factors such as building design and room arrangement, culture, staffing, and resources. Consider all the factors which impact residents such as:
* Resident room restrictions/isolation
* Limited or no resident access to communal dining and activity rooms
* Elimination of nonessential workers such as volunteers and other community workers
* Limited or no family visitation
* Lack of physical touch due to infection prevention measures such as PPE
* Restriction of outside trips to events and activities
* Focus on urgency of pandemic, not activities
1. **Staffing** in long-term care is always tough and especially now during the pandemic. Inadequate frontline coverage and the use of agency staff who may not know the residents impact the reach and success of an activities program. When collaboration of frontline staff to help with resident participation is lacking, participation in activities is often low.
2. Residents may be experiencing increased **anxiety and depression** due to the toll of the COVID-19 pandemic on residents, families, as well as staff. Assess and analyze how your residents are exhibiting signs of mental distress.
3. A large percentage of nursing home residents have some form of **dementia** which makes it especially difficult to develop appropriate activities for engagement. Behavioral symptoms related to dementia greatly impact all aspects of an activities program.
4. There are several quality measures that may indicate the effects of social isolation due to COVID-19. Examining your baseline versus current rates can be helpful in determining where the effects are most acute.
* **Antipsychotic medications** – South Carolina 13.9% and national is 14%.
* **Antianxiety or hypnotic medications** – South Carolina 20.6% and national is 19.7%
* **Depression** – SC 1.4% and national 5.1% (Often, the QM for depression is low not because of the low incidence of depression but because of inadequate assessment efforts.)
* Other possible markers include weight loss, ability to move independently, and the need for help with activities of daily living.

**Set a Goal  Develop a specific, measurable, relevant, and time-bound goal**

**SMART Goal Examples:** (1) Establish a baseline of resident activities and increase the number of activities per week by 25% by June 30, 2021. (2) Establish a baseline of resident participation and increase resident attendance by 25% by June 30, 2021. (3) Conduct a survey to determine which activities residents experience as the most enjoyable and increase those activities by 25% by June 30, 2021.

**Strategies for Improvement  Analyze barriers discovered during RCA and select which strategies best address them**

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| **Challenges** | **Strategies**  |
| **SECTION 1:** **Mental health issues**  | * HQIN’s [Simple Strategies for Resident Mental Health](https://hqin.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Simple-Strategies-Resident-Mental-Health_508.pdf).
* HQIN’s [QM Tip Sheet Depression](https://hqin.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/PERCEN1.pdf).
* Listen to the recording of the webinar, [Supporting Resident’s Mental Health during COVID.](https://hqin-org.zoom.us/rec/share/wheaZyHQLE6uElQ2DfdqrlZ8-n-Ojpp_q6xt2UvcJlZ1Fifb-MrSgo36h0YPt0H_.KllwbpoWYQquTnF_)
* Listen to the recording of the webinar, [Coping with Grief and Loss](https://hqin-org.zoom.us/rec/share/qmAFEhRevIZt8KidWcxDaBc2c-iUJ2TSqMFehZDlS04fCZZYd40D81IEHoVhx758.7dRbp4H4EgNjPiaI).
* Listen to the recording of the webinar, [Reducing the Impact of Social Isolation and Loneliness.](https://hqin-org.zoom.us/rec/share/D_B4vNxqQD5JRCdqtWiynIh_kdP0QvHJa6RoBQbleUL6VjvpUtz5eDQvZ_Zm6ds.YBzUEpeZitWCe7jX)
* Review HQIN’s [Simple Strategies for Engagement and Sleep Hygiene](https://hqin.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/Simple-Strategies-Engagement-and-Sleep-Hygiene_508.pdf).
* Review the CMS toolkit, [Developing a Restful Environment Action Manual (DREAM)](https://www.cms.gov/Medicare/Provider-Enrollment-and-Certification/SurveyCertificationGenInfo/LTC-CMP-Reinvestment) on non-pharmacologic approaches to improve sleep. Watch the video, [Sleep Matters](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ekvQBW_VzJk&feature=youtu.be).
* Assign staff to be available to families and residents to answer questions and concerns about health, safety, loneliness, and isolation.
* Leadership staff should provide daily updates on COVID-19 for residents and staff and distribute information to families.
* Ensure that residents nearing the end of life have opportunities to see their families before the last few hours of life. Provide a dignified death, palliative care, and companionship of family.
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| **SECTION 2:****Physical isolation**  | * Assess each resident for social isolation and loneliness and create approaches to mitigate these risks. Document in care plans.
* Gather ideas from the [Advancing States publication](http://www.advancingstates.org/sites/nasuad/files/u24453/Social%20Isolation%20Response_04092020.pdf) for innovative ideas for social engagement and mental stimulation during COVID-19.
* Access the [website](https://www.nccap.org/covid19) for the National Certification Council for Activity Professionals (NCCAP).
* [#ActivitiesAlacart Ideas](https://www.facebook.com/groups/729849371188814) is a Facebook group where Activity Professionals can join and get ideas for a cart and share their own cart creations.
* [Leading Age](https://leadingage.org/resident-engagement-during-social-isolation) offers ideas for building community and keeping active during COVID-19.
* If you haven’t already, apply for up to $3000 to purchase communication devices, [CMP Communicative Technology Funding](https://scdhec.gov/health-regulation/health-facility-regulations-licensing-con/medicaid-medicare-certification/nursing-home-civil-money-penalty-cmp-reinvestment-projects).
* Provide regular reliable access to communication technology devices such as smart phones, tablets, and computers and assistance for their use.
* Use a variety of activity baskets, boxes, and aprons for individual activities.
* Share best practices with other nursing homes.
* Conduct music programs and exercise programs using social distancing and masks.
* Create visiting plans for residents who want to see family and friends and conduct visitation according to federal and state guidelines.
* Seek out ideas from staff and others about innovative online planned activities.
* Gather family and resident input on activities and ways to connect that are of interest to them. Maintain a running list of suggestions to implement.
* Reintegrate residents back into the larger community using social distancing and masks.
* As weather permits, encourage residents to be outside daily if they wish.
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| **SECTION 3:****Behavioral symptoms related to dementia**  | * Review the extensive list of resources provided by the [National Partnership to Improve Dementia Care in Nursing Homes](https://www.cms.gov/Medicare/Provider-Enrollment-and-Certification/SurveyCertificationGenInfo/National-Partnership-Dementia-Care-Resources).
* Review the extensive list of activities in the [Electronic Dementia Guide for Excellence (EDGE) Project.](https://www.health.ny.gov/diseases/conditions/dementia/edge/index.htm)
* Use resources from [Music and Memory](https://musicandmemory.org/).
* Review HQIN’s [Simple Strategies for Antipsychotics](https://hqin.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/Simple-Strategies-for-Antipsychotics-508.pdf).
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**Measure Your Success  Collect and analyze data for specific measures**

Measurement is an important component of a performance improvement program which helps to identify areas of low performance and target future interventions. Both outcome measures and process measures should be part of the measurement process.

In this instance, an outcome measure may be the number of resident activities or the variety/type of activities offered. Another approach would be for those residents who are prescribed an antipsychotic or sedative hypnotic, monitor their behavioral symptoms that require medication when participation in activities increases.

Process measures are in response to the findings of root cause analysis and therefore are specific to each facility. They must be measurable either through audits or observation. Examples of process measures include:

1. Number of staff involved in helping with resident activities
2. Staff in-services on resident engagement

**Celebrate Success  Express gratitude and appreciation when goals are met**

Celebrate when staff make progress towards the goals of increasing activities and resident engagement. Use incentives, pizza parties, posters, raffles, small gift cards, and other rewards for excellence. Ensure that leadership demonstrates gratitude and encouragement during and following your campaign.

 

 