

CONVERSATIONS WITH MIKE MILKEN



Jo Ann Jenkins

CEO, AARP

April 15, 2020

Mike Milken: Jo Ann, thank you for joining us today.

Jo Ann Jenkins: Thank you, Mike. It's my pleasure to be with you.

Jo Ann, AARP represents 38 million Americans, well over 10% of the population. You've been a force for decades, but today, uh, your efforts are probably more important to your members than ever. Tell us what AARP is doing and how you've redefined the mission in the last few months.

Well, thank you Mike. I know most of your listeners know that AARP is really an organization that fights every day to make life better for people who are 50 and older in this country. But never did we envision this kind of pandemic that was affecting so many people around the world and particularly so many older people. And so,

over the last two months, we have really had to revision, redefine our organization and our operating systems to be able to meet the needs of our members. We were fortunate that we had already, several years ago, put in a business continuity plan that allows every

"It is that American spirit and willingness to give of oneself to make life better for others that is behind everything that we do at AARP."

one of our employees to work from home. And so, our colleagues around the country have been working from home going into our fourth week. And I am impressed every day about the creativity of which they've been able to go about their work and connect with our members with information and resources and services to make sure that we are providing them with what they need at this most difficult time.

Communication with your members is probably more important than ever today. How do you communicate effectively with such a large community?

As you said, we have over 38 million members, but we are fortunate that we have over 30 different communication channels where we push out information and also get information from our members.

Each week we host a tele-townhall from here in Washington that addresses one of the issues or subject matters related to COVID-19. Just yesterday we did one on mental health. We had over 75,000 members call in to that. I think the number of questions was well over 700, and obviously we couldn't answer all of those questions, but afterwards we go online and answer those so our members have access to it. We've been doing that every week and it's simply a dial-in phone call with top health experts to be able to answer questions.

“In the last two weeks, we've trained over 900 people who have said, I'm willing to pick up the phone and make a call to someone that I don't even know, to just check on them.”

And our state offices – we have offices in all 50 States and the U.S. territories – have been doing the same kind of tele-townhall meetings but focused on their particular states. And we're seeing that so many of the governors are reaching out to a AARP for expertise and guidance about how to address issues related to older populations, the issues that we've seen around nursing homes and caregivers, and just being able to share just-in-time information with our members.

Obviously, we have our aarp.org website that people can go through, and we've totally readdressed the focus of that website. Everything that we know – about the virus, and access to health and information, and now the small business loan and unemployment – you can find right there on our website. And obviously we're continuing to mail information to those members who don't have access to the technology to be able to do some of this.

Jo Ann, you are so close to your members. What are the questions they're asking? What are their urgent needs?

At the beginning a lot of the questions were – and they still continue to be – around what to do if they think they see some of the symptoms. Should they go into the doctor's office? We've been really pushing our members to use telemedicine and be able to speak directly to the doctors rather than going into the office.

We've had a lot of calls around loss of income and what they could expect with the Care Act that just passed regarding the rebates that the federal government is going to be sending out. A lot of requests around small business information, trying to get in touch with the small business information. Unfortunately a number of questions around fraud. We've been trying to push out information to be on alert for fraudulent kinds of activities, to not give out your social security and credit card information over the phone.

And then the last area, Mike: I've been so pleased with some of the grocery retailers because we were able to work with them and they set up – most of them, particularly the larger chains – have set up senior-only shopping hours so that they can go in, get those food items that they need as well as pick up their medicines and be able to get back safely to their homes.

Jo Ann, you've worked very closely with The Center for the Future of Aging, and one of the things we've talked about for a long time is this feeling of isolation. For Lori and myself, we have not been able to interact in person with our 10 grandchildren for six or seven weeks now. This is the case throughout the country. Jo Ann, how do you deal with this issue of loneliness?

Mike, you and I have talked about this issue of isolation for a number of years. I've always said that isolation is one of the biggest issues that we're going to have to face, not just in this country but around the world as people continue to live longer lives. We hope that they are *healthier*, longer lives, but we know that that's not the case for many.

“We've been really pushing our members to use telemedicine and be able to speak directly to the doctors rather than going into the office.”

But particularly when there's some kind of disaster, whether it's a hurricane or a storm, we tend to forget about those folks who live alone and who are isolated. And with this pandemic, that is certainly coming to the forefront as people cannot connect with their kids or their grandkids or their neighbors or friends. And so while we at AARP had a strategic objective in place as we continue to try to educate our members on the use of technology and different forms of technology like Skype and Zoom and Microsoft teams and all those other technologies that allow you to virtually see that person, we've had to accelerate that from what we thought was a two- to three-year kind of timeframe in a matter of two months.

We are working with partners around the country now to try to get a simple, clear training about how to connect virtually and and go through this process of learning to use technology. We're working with some of the nursing homes and our associations to see how we can facilitate the use of technology so that people in the hospitals can connect with those loved ones and hope for the best in terms of their cure and being able to get out of the hospital.

The strength of the country is the willingness to help others, to be part of the community. And you now have 60,000 volunteers.

Yes!

What roles are they playing, Jo Ann?

We're so excited that our members and our volunteers are still wanting to be engaged to see how they can help in their community. Two weeks ago, we launched a website called [AARP Community Connections](#). I describe it as a mutual aid group that people can come together in a community and say, I need this, or I can provide this service. Does anybody need me to go to the grocery store? Does anybody need me to pick up their prescription? When I looked this morning, we had over 700 mutual aid groups that had formed providing services for people who were in need in communities all over the country.

In the last two weeks, we've trained over 900 people who have said, I'm willing to pick up the phone and make a call to someone that I don't even know, to just check on them, to make sure, to have a phone conversation, to have that connection with someone over the phone who may not have spoken to someone in the last couple of weeks. And so, it is that American spirit and willingness to give of

“We've had a lot of calls around loss of income ... a lot of requests around small business information [and] unfortunately a number of questions around fraud.”

oneself to make life better for others that is behind everything that we do at AARP. We couldn't be more pleased with all of our volunteers and all of our staff all over the country who continue to do this every single day.

Jo Ann, you span such a wide age group: 50s, 60s, 70s, 80s, 90s, over 100. Do you find a similar request across the age bands or are they different based on the age of the members?

Well, I would say that the questions are really varied. It really doesn't matter with respect to age with the exception of the part of the financial and those who are already

in receiving their social security checks. I think the rest of the issues regarding access to health and information, and what they should do, and fraud, I think is ageless. But clearly for those folks who depend on their social security checks, which for many unfortunately in our country is their only source of income, we've seen a differentiation of those of people who are 62 and over.

Jo Ann, what about where they're located? You have some seniors, many of them living in their homes, living in their own apartment or their condominium. You have other seniors in nursing homes or retired. Is there a difference in how you're serving those groups based on where they're living?

I can't say that we have a direct strategy based on where people are living, but we are intently focused on people who are in nursing homes and in nursing facilities. We're hearing from those loved ones who either want to make sure that they can have some access to their parent or grandparents who might in a facility and, and because someone may have tested positive in that facility, there is no access to it.

It goes back to the conversation we were having about the use of technology and whether or not some of these nursing facilities and care facilities have technology in place that allows their patients to still communicate virtually with their loved one. We're getting a lot of questions about how we can do that and who are the technology partners who would be willing to step up to the plate from governors all around the country. For those who are staying in their homes, we are fortunate that so many neighbors are really stepping up to the plate and trying to help. But our message is clear to all of our members regardless of where they live and regardless of their age: that they need to stay in their home. It's difficult, but it's what's best for all of us to make sure that we can curb the spread of this virus and hopefully bring it to closure as soon as possible.

A number of young people have asked us, they'd like to help senior citizens, whether it's to pick up food, whether it's to pick up medicine. Is there a way to tie in to AARP for volunteers?

So, if anyone wants to go to the aarp.org website, there will be volunteer links there that people can sign up to, regardless of where they live in the country, and sign up for whatever kind of service that they want to be able to deliver on. And we are glad to be facilitators in that process. We also have a program that we call Mentor Up where we have college students who are volunteering to go out and do simple tasks or come into the homes and do tasks for our members and even those who are not our members during this difficult time to be able to do that. I would direct everyone to AARP.org. That's our main website, and everything we're doing is connected to that website.

Well, Jo Ann, thank you for joining us today and just want to thank your efforts here to deal with your members and as you've said, people that are not members with their needs at this time.

And thank you Mike, for everything that you, you guys are doing. We wouldn't be as far along with trying to come up with some of these cures if it were not for the efforts of you and *FasterCures* and all of the work that you have done in this area. So thank you so much and I wish you good health and to stay home and stay healthy.
