



Older Americans Act Reauthorization: Multipurpose Senior Centers for Positive Aging Issue Brief

Background:

The Older Americans Act (OAA) defines a multipurpose senior center as “a community facility for the organization and provision of a broad spectrum of services, which shall include provision of health (including mental health), social, nutritional, and educational services and the provision of facilities for recreational activities for older individuals.”

In order to effectively engage and address the needs of the aging population, it is crucial that the expertise of over 11,000 multipurpose senior centers be fully tapped to leverage resources and partnerships to achieve the goals of the Older Americans Act in communities across the nation.

By providing a broad mix of services, senior centers are generating positive outcomes that can be seen qualitatively and measured quantitatively. Older adults who participate in senior centers find tools, information and options that support them in their own self-care, prolonging independence and delaying institutionalization. Participation in senior center programs empowers older adults to lower their risk of disease and disability, maintain high levels of mental and physical functioning, and engage actively in their communities. Older adults who access civic engagement opportunities at senior centers are also serving as part of the solution for community needs: helping children, families (including kinship families) and other seniors as caregivers, tutors, and Aging Services Network volunteers.

Anecdotal and intuitive evidence already suggests that cumulative positive outcomes for individuals impact the nation in two major ways: **healthy, active seniors make enormous contributions within their communities, and healthy, active seniors reduce the overall federal budget by lessening the demand for Medicare and Medicaid expenditures.**

Proposal:

- Create a senior center modernization fund to foster senior center innovation, leadership, and capacity-building.
- Tap into the vast expertise of multipurpose senior centers by expanding their role in state and local needs assessment and planning.
- Preserve and strengthen the Congregate and Home-Delivered Nutrition Programs, and oppose consolidation, to ensure that hunger **is** not exacerbated for low-income seniors and to expand flexibility to better reflect the multi-generational face and nutritional needs of older adults.
- Ensure the role of multipurpose senior centers in the development and implementation of Aging and Disability Resource Centers (ADRCs), as well as clarify the importance of formal partnerships between aging and disability organizations in order to successfully implement an ADRC network.
- Create clear direction to incorporate multipurpose senior center resources into Healthy Community initiatives to promote safe and livable neighborhoods.

Rationale:

Multipurpose senior centers are the natural community-based resource for healthy aging, particularly evidence-based programming. There is already acceptance among senior center leaders that centers receiving modernization fund investments would be held to a certain level of accountability, standards or accreditation. The “innovators” should receive support to continue to develop and test new models, and technical assistance and training should be provided so that the majority of senior centers can modernize themselves.

The expertise that senior centers have developed from decades of providing community-based services to older adults should be enlisted for needs assessment and plan development at the state and local levels, as well as creation and expansion of Healthy Communities. Multipurpose senior centers are also an integral, established and recognized community resource for information and assistance, and thus should also be fully incorporated into the ADRC network.

The Congregate and Home-Delivered Nutrition Programs should be preserved as separate and distinct initiatives. Eligibility criteria differ between programs and any merge of funding would disenfranchise segments of community elders from access to nutritionally sound meals. The OAA currently allows for transfers of funding between the Congregate and Home-Delivered Programs, and this authority has not been exhausted by the network. Community input into plans for the respective programs could be strengthened, and greater flexibility could be provided to address the diversity of today’s seniors (age, gender, cultural competence, chronic conditions, etc.)

For additional information, please contact Marci Phillips at marci.phillips@ncoa.org or (202) 479-6658.
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NCOA’s National Institute of Senior Centers supports a national network of over 2,000 senior center professionals dedicated to helping older adults remain active, engaged, and independent in their communities. NISC is setting the standard for the future of senior centers through its national accreditation program, cutting-edge research, promising practices, professional development, and advocacy. For more information, please visit www.ncoa.org/nisc.

The National Council on Aging is a nonprofit service and advocacy organization headquartered in Washington, DC. NCOA is a national voice for older Americans—especially those who are vulnerable and disadvantaged—and the community organizations that serve them. It brings together nonprofit organizations, businesses, and government to develop creative solutions that improve the lives of all older adults. NCOA works with thousands of organizations across the country to help seniors find jobs and benefits, improve their health, live independently, and remain active in their communities. For more information, visit www.ncoa.org.