

SENIOR CENTERS

STRONG TODAY STRONGER TOMORROW

California Commission on Aging
Senior Center Initiative
Final Report

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Recognizing the value of senior centers to an aging population, the California Commission on Aging (CCOA) in 2008 undertook a two-year Senior Center Initiative to help centers focus on a future of innovation and relevance to an aging Baby Boom generation. The three-part endeavor provided a comprehensive exploration of the future of California's senior centers, including imaging, role in the community, governance, programming and facilities.

The Senior Center Initiative began as a way to support senior centers as they move toward a future with growing numbers of older Californians who have increasingly diverse needs. In the effort, CCoA partnered with the California Association of Senior Service Centers, the Aging and Activities Section of the California Parks and Recreation Society, the National Council on Aging's National Institute of Senior Centers and the Congress of California Seniors to strength the capacity and presence of these organizations in California. For both years of the Initiative, CCoA staff attended and presented at the two association's annual meetings.

Part 1 of the initiative involved completion of a Literature Review to establish a base of knowledge about centers both in California and nationwide. The Literature Review received national distribution via the National Council on Aging.

Part 2 was a highly successful statewide Senior Center Stakeholder Forum co-sponsored by governmental, for-profit and non-profit organizations. The CCoA anticipated 150 attendees at this first-ever event and had to cut-off attendance at 300 when the room capacity was reached. The accomplishment of bringing together center staff, constituents and policymakers was described as "historic" by at least one attendee. In an effort to help centers increase their visibility, Forum organizers worked with the Governor's Office to secure a proclamation declaring February 2009 as Senior Center Month in California. The Forum featured national leaders in the field of senior center innovations and research, providing participants with new ideas and inspiration about their work. Working collaboratively in break-out groups, attendees developed vision statements for centers of the future, providing a road map to follow and clear ideals to guide centers forward through uncertain economic conditions.

In conjunction with the Initiative, the Congress of California Seniors (CCS) compiled an updated electronic listing of senior centers that today serves as a networking, communication and advocacy tool among centers as well as a valuable tool for those seeking to locate center services throughout California's communities.

Also carried out in partnership with the CCS, Part 3 of the initiative involved the daunting task of surveying California's more than 700 centers to learn about their current and future facility infrastructure needs. The impressive 51% response rate enables us to now document a complete picture of what the state's centers might need in the future. The data support the call for additional private and governmental resources as conditions allow.

The Senior Center Stakeholder Forum proved an inspiring model for aging providers throughout the state. Follow-up Forums were held in Ventura, San Diego and Riverside, bringing some of the original Forum presenters to help local centers work to identify their own goals and ideals.

The recurring success and momentum of our two-year Initiative has been tempered due to the economic downturn during the same period. Over the duration of the effort, the economic decline has affected all levels of government. As a result, the Initiative, which was started to support centers in a transition to a future of more older Californians with diverse needs, had to shift as we have learned about the number of senior centers that have downsized, adjusted operations, restricted hours and a few that have cut programs or closed their doors entirely. Even so, the value of senior centers as trusted point of entry will undoubtedly remain a vital and critical part of the state's aging network.

This Final Report provides evidence for centers to embrace new roles in the future. Just as no two communities are alike, no two centers are alike. California's increasing diversity can be well served in the future by centers that take a serious look the changing demographics and community needs (current and emerging) and balance that information with the center's resources and capacities. By continuing to adapt and evolve, centers will need to draw on their strengths, continue their linkages with strategic partners and expand their collaboration with other organizations to become even more of a community hub linking individuals to a wider array of activities and services.

INTRODUCTION

What is the condition of California's senior center network? How well are these facilities prepared for natural disasters, changing technology needs, or an exploding population of adults over age 65? Are California's senior centers equipped to deal adequately with today's older adult needs in light of cuts to public funding and severe reductions in many programs on which older adults depend? These are among the questions asked by the California Commission on Aging (CCoA) in 2008 as it embarked on a multi-year, multi-faceted Senior Center Initiative.

Shortly after adopting the Initiative, the CCoA was joined in the effort by the Congress of California Seniors (CCS). Among other endeavors, the CCS took on the daunting task of updating a more-than-10-year-old roster of California Senior Centers and converting it to a user-friendly on-line listing. The listing can be found at www.calseniorcenters.org.

In addition, the development of the Senior Center Initiative was guided by an Advisory Committee comprised of center directors, senior program administrators and other stakeholders. A list of the Senior Center Advisory Committee is found in Appendix A.

Historically senior centers have been viewed as the community's focal point for older adult services -- the trusted first point of entry for assistance and support to older adults and/or their families and caregivers. Senior centers serve the entire community with information on aging; support for family caregivers, training for professionals, lay leaders and students; and developing innovative approaches to addressing aging issues.¹ Through their nutrition, fitness and social networking programs, the 700-plus senior centers in California support successful aging through programs that promote optimal mental and physical health. These services have been implemented effectively for many different segments of the older adult population. In addition, senior centers provide an essential service for our most vulnerable populations in times of emergencies and natural disasters. The vast array of new services and programs that have been developed throughout the history of senior centers illustrate their responsiveness to community needs.²

With the baby boomer population reaching age 65 in 2008, the timing was right for a statewide discussion about the future of California's senior centers. The CCoA envisioned a three-part initiative that included a literature review, a stakeholder forum, and a survey of the state's senior center infrastructure needs.

¹ NCOA – National Council on Aging, <http://www.ncoa.org/>

² Dal Santo, T. Ph.D., Senior Center Literature Review; Reflecting and Responding to Community Needs. February 4, 2009. California Commission on Aging. www.ccoa.ca.gov

This Final Report is a compilation of the results from the three components of the initiative, including a description of the trends identified and a listing of proposed recommendations for consideration as centers chart a new course. Throughout this document the term “senior center” and “center” are used interchangeably in respect to the fact that many facilities are grappling with both name and image changes.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The CCoA commissioned a literature review to examine the existing knowledge about senior centers in order to have a starting point in the discussion about California centers. The literature review was conducted by Teresa DalSanto, PhD.

The literature review revealed a total of 40 reports in a nation-wide search. Most were cross-sectional surveys that failed to explore the long-term impact senior center services have on the lives of older adults. The majority of the studies provide an overview of the basic elements of senior center functioning, including their characteristics, services offered, participant characteristics and case studies of pilot programs.

In light of all the accomplishments centers have made in servicing older adults, it was disappointing to uncover such a small number of studies. Still, the literature review provides senior center directors, policy makers and researchers an overview of the accomplishments made and a vision for their future direction.

The success of the aging service network, including senior centers, has resulted in people living longer in the community. This success has given rise to new paradigms of service and new clientele that is fragmented across a much wider span of age groups, experiences and interests. Fortunately, senior centers are designed to meet the challenges of a changing environment. The full literature review can be found at www.ccoa.ca.gov.

SENIOR CENTER STAKEHOLDER FORUM

As part of the CCoA’s Senior Center Initiative, the CCoA along with the Congress of California Seniors (CCS) and the Triple-A Council of California hosted a Senior Center Stakeholder Forum in February, 2009. The one-day Forum was designed to allow senior center staff, participants and other stakeholders from across the state to gather together to share information and engage in discussion about the future

roles and needs of centers as well as to develop recommendations for how to keep them vital and relevant as the population changes.

The first event of its kind in California, the Forum brought close to 300 individuals to Sacramento to share experiences, gain new insights and discover new approaches to frame the message of senior centers in the community. The Forum also resulted in the creation of strong partnerships, both in the sponsorship of the event and in ongoing relationships with organizations like the National Council on Aging, the California Association of Senior Service Centers and the Aging and Activities Section of the California Park and Recreation Society. A variety of organizations, including Foundations, and private sector funders helped sponsor the event and provide scholarship support to center staff who might not have otherwise been able to attend. See Appendix B.

A highlight of the forum was a Proclamation from Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger recognizing the invaluable services provided by senior centers and declaring February 2009 as “Senior Center Month” in California. A copy of the Governor’s Proclamation is in Appendix C.

The Forum provided attendees with informational presentations from prominent leaders in the senior center field and the opportunity to meet in work groups to share their ideas for vision, policy and practices in ten interest areas. Despite the fears of the economic downturn and pending California budget deficit, the Forum was very successful, with participants attending in large numbers, representing a wide array of leaders, change agents and committed individuals dedicated to moving forward with the topics raised at the Forum and identifying a future direction for Californian centers.

As a result of the Forum, a series of vision statements for California centers was collected. The collection serves to promote discussion and directions for centers embracing their future. The proceedings from the Forum can be found at www.ccoa.ca.gov

The Forum also created a template for three subsequent regional meetings held in San Diego County, Ventura County and Riverside County. The regional meetings continued the momentum of the statewide forum and allowed a specific locale to create a vision for centers in their community. In addition, the Advisory Council to the Aging and Independence Services (serving as San Diego County’s Area Agency on Aging) created a document Future of Senior Centers to help shape the policy affecting the future of senior centers.

SENIOR CENTER INFRASTRUCTURE SURVEY

The Senior Center Infrastructure Survey was the final component in the CCoA's Senior Center Initiative. Due to the enormity of the task, the survey became a joint project with the Congress of California Seniors (CCS) taking the lead. The survey's goal was to document the infrastructure needs of California's centers.

In 1984, California voters approved a \$50 million Senior Center Bond Act. Funding from this Bond supported new construction and remodeling projects at centers throughout California. In part, the results of the infrastructure needs survey could indicate the need for another Bond Measure sometime in the future and document center's efforts to respond to the need for safe and accessible facilities. Even in this time of economic decline, local governments and non-profits are building or expanding new centers to support community needs.

The Senior Center Infrastructure Survey was conducted in 2009 by Christina Martinek, Doctoral Candidate. The study consisted of a six page paper-based survey mailed to over 770 senior centers across California. Three hundred and ninety-eight surveys were returned for a response rate of 51.4%. Out of California's 58 counties, surveys were received from the 57 counties where multipurpose senior centers are located. Nearly all counties had a response rate of 40% or above.

The intent of the survey was to develop a profile of centers in California, including senior center demographics, current services provided, capacity of the facilities, preparedness for natural disasters, telecommunications, accessibility, maintenance needs and energy utilization.

The full results of the Senior Center Infrastructure Needs Survey can be found at www.ccoa.ca.gov.

CALIFORNIA SENIOR CENTER ELEMENTS

The components of the CCoA's Senior Center Initiative resulted in a collection of data, information, paradigm shifts, new methodologies, best practices, research findings and local innovations in and about the way California's centers are structured and marketed. Independently many centers through their staff and Governing Boards have been crafting new visions for their facilities and operations. The Initiative brought the topic to the forefront, energized the state associations and center staff, allowed centers to find their voice through a statewide networking session, focused statewide attention on centers and captured the interest of policy makers.

This section of the Final Report identifies those elements and trends that were cross cutting through the entire Initiative. These trends include the following elements:

- Operations & Funding
- Clientele & New Customers
- Programs & Services
- Staff & Volunteers
- Facilities

What follows is a more detailed description about each of these elements and their impact on the California senior centers.

OPERATIONS & FUNDING

The infrastructure created by the federal Older Americans Act³ (OAA) laid the foundation for the current senior center network to meet the community service needs of older people. Today, California's senior centers rely on a combination of federal, state, and local resources to fund programs. Just under half of senior centers are operated by non-profit organizations, while the remainder is operated primarily by city or county governments.

While the OAA historically designates, funds, and defines focal-point senior centers, only 26% of the centers in California report receiving federal funds. Senior centers' success in securing additional resources is dependent on the political and economic circumstances of state and local governments and the ability to leverage private sector funds. As a result, most centers have three or more funding sources helping to maintain their average \$1.01 million annual operating budgets. Table 1

³ Older Americans Act of 1965 (OAA), 45 U.S.C. § 3025 (2006).

summarizes senior centers' reported funding from their various sources from the SCICS (2009).

Table 1. Source of Senior Center Funding

SOURCE	PERCENT
City Government	58%
Individual Donations or Gifts	57%
Participant or Activity Fees	47%
Foundations or Grants	42%
County Government	35%
State Government	28%
Building Rental Fees	28%
Federal Government	26%
Other*	20%

**Other funding sources reported include: fundraisers, thrift stores, bingo, account interest, agency reserves, local tribal contributions, property taxes, service clubs, and redevelopment funds.*

As federal, state and local governments strive to meet growing needs and budget crises, they have increasingly looked to the aging services network and senior centers to expand the scope of their responsibilities. Unfortunately, 43% of senior centers report that their current budgets are not keeping pace with expenses. Almost half have had to lay-off staff or reduce key services. Nearly 25% of the respondent centers are in danger of closure due to decreased funding.

Senior centers must remain or become connected to the entire network of community and aging services (and vice versa) so that they and their clients can better benefit from collaboration and partnerships with other service providers. By increasing their degree of involvement with other community organizations, senior centers and their partner organizations will be better able to meet the needs of the growing population of older adults and increase the number of services they provide.

Senior centers will continue to face increasing challenges in financing and delivering a wide range of community services for older adults. Policymakers will need to focus on actions to sustain or bolster these community programs in the face of growing demand. Below, Table 2 provides a summary of various highlights from the CSCIS (2009).

Table 2. California Senior Center Infrastructure Survey Highlights

Government funded	46%
Average annual operating budget	\$1,009,485
Budget declined over past 5 years	43%
In danger of being closed	23%
Built prior to 1980	40%
Charge fees or encourage donations for services	80%
Average number of seniors that visit per day	145
Average number of paid employees	8.75
Average number of volunteers	73
Average annual number of volunteer hours	10,324
Need more room for future or existing activities	60%
Regular evening senior programs	25%
Average Saturday hours	1.4
Deferred maintenance	68%
In need of earthquake retrofit	60%
Set up to be a shelter during a disasters	53%
Insufficient computers for staff & volunteers	40%

Clientele and New Customers

Along with the operational and funding changes that senior centers have experienced over the years, there are vast changes in the senior population. Nationally, it is estimated that between 8-14% of the population over age 60 participates in senior centers. In California, the estimated number of seniors who visit a given center daily averages 145, and that number has changed little for 75% of senior centers over the past five years. Multiplied by the average number of attendees, the state's 774 senior centers serve approximately 112,230 users each day, making them one of the largest programs for older adults.

Since many senior centers do not collect demographic information from their participants, it is difficult to determine the demographic characteristics of today's senior center clientele. From the CSCIS (2009), senior centers report serving the entire spectrum of the older adult population, with the largest portion serving those age 75-84 (91%) and low-income (83%). In addition, 85% of senior centers report serving Caucasians, 75% serve Hispanic participants, 63% serve Asians, 58% indicated serving African Americans, and Native Americans are served by 28% of the centers.

Future California senior center participants will be increasingly diverse and have more chronic conditions than current participants. Due to population aging and immigration, the fastest-growing ethnic group will be elderly Hispanics, with Asian Americans not far behind. African-American and Hispanic residents in general are more likely to be diagnosed with specific chronic conditions, such as cancer or diabetes. Moreover, these groups are more likely to be diagnosed earlier in life and at a more advanced stage, and therefore are more likely to experience an elevated risk of disability and death.⁴

California's diversity is reflected in some of the new senior centers, with a spike in the number of ethnic-specific centers and an increase in the number of centers targeted to LGBT clients.

Population Needs

Senior centers have successfully assisted older adults and their families make the transitions between work and retirement, from full independence to limited support, between good health and chronic conditions. Today senior centers will play a key role in helping older adults delay these transitions as long as possible by promoting the keys of successful aging: health maintenance, overall functional ability, and being part of a social network.⁵ Given the current economic uncertainties, in the future centers will be asked to respond with programs that support employment opportunities for older adults.

⁴ Strategic Plan for an Aging California Population, 2003

⁵ Rowe, J. W., & Kahn, R.L. (1998). *Successful aging*. New York: Dell.

However, just as seniors are facing transitions in their lives, senior centers must also transition to bridge those developmental gaps and play an even more important role in helping older adults and their families. Senior centers are facing a dilemma; while many boomers believe centers are for dependent “old people,” senior centers may not be serving newly frail or disabled older adults in need of care. Centers will need to find the balance between attracting boomers to assure their connection to the services they will undoubtedly need, while at the same time continue serving the elderly population of today.

The baby boomer generation, which is just beginning to turning 65, is already redefining what it means to be older. Stereotypes about aging are slowly crumbling as attitudes about the aging process and what it means to be old change. Today, people who are in their 60s typically do not consider themselves old, and it is normal to find 80 and 90-year-old individuals who are active, healthy, and fully engaged.

Despite boomers’ wishes and projected decreases in disability prevalence rates, disabled Californians over age 65 will comprise a significant proportion of the total state population as the boomers age and the cohort of “oldest old” (age 85 and over) increases in size. While centers have been significantly involved with programming for frail older adults, it is estimated that only 5-10% of participants are vision or hearing-impaired, frail in health, or cognitively impaired. Research shows that older people with physical and mental impairments are less likely to attend a senior center than their healthier counterparts by a ratio of between 3 and 5 to 1.⁶ Senior centers appear to be more responsive to the needs of long-time participants who become frail than they may be to new participants who come to the center with physical or mental impairments.

The overall well-being of an older adult is in large part shaped by his or her access to public and personal health services, mental health programs, social supports, educational opportunities, employment/income and more over the course of a lifespan. Societal investments that impact the population at all ages significantly shape the aging experience. Senior centers can play a key role in the campaign to prepare for an aging California, serving as a hub for a continuum of services meeting the spectrum of older adult interests and needs. To be successful, senior centers should fully collaborate with other aging service providers to meet the needs of their clientele. Senior Centers are an obvious leader in helping the public prepare for the aging experience, providing lifelong learning and the supports necessary to enjoy a high quality of life in the later years.

⁶ Krout, J. (1996). Senior center programming and frailty among older persons. *Journal of Gerontological Social Work*, 26(3/4), 19-34.

Programs and Services

Health, wellness and social programs are among the most common services offered at senior centers.⁷ The CSCIS (2009) found that California senior centers offer a significant variety of services, with nearly every senior center offering services in the following categories:

- Social and recreational activities
- Information assistance and referral
- Congregate meal programs
- Fitness/exercise/wellness classes
- Education and training opportunities

The majority of California's senior centers are multipurpose (83%), with the remainder functioning solely as nutrition sites (11%) or activity driven programs (6%) (CSCIS, 2009). The specific programs and services of a center should reflect the community's goals, the needs of its older adult population, and available funding. Programs must be superimposed with the constant balance between the needs of the current senior center participants and strategic planning to ensure that new services are relevant to new generations of participants. One of the most important roles senior center leaders must perform in cooperation with other aging service providers is the identification of focused priorities to maximize limited resources to meet increasingly diverse community needs.

The baby boomer generation will bring new topics to the senior center agenda. With the uncertainty of today's retirement benefits and rising health care costs, many baby boomers will find continued employment a necessity and they will need ongoing opportunities for retraining and career transition assistance. Baby boomers participating in senior center programs are more likely to need training and support in caring for their own parents as they will continue to be the primary caregivers for older adults living in the community.

Senior centers will need to be increasingly consumer directed, with full recognition that one size does not fit all. Aging baby boomers will be more likely to demand their choice of the broad array of support service options that will help them to live meaningful, independent lives. To this end, senior centers should strive to become connection points, linking community members to each other and to groups with common interests or concerns. As seniors transition to more complex healthcare needs, centers can strengthen their roles as information and resource hubs that

⁷ Beisgen, B. & Kraitchman, M. (2003). *Senior centers: Opportunities for successful aging*. Springer Publishing Company: New York.

help consumers find and connect with resources, such as housing, transportation and supportive services.

With limited resources, programming should focus on documented best practices to promote health, well-being and prevention to maintain the independence of their clientele for as long as possible. The Center for Healthy Aging is one resource that encourages and assists centers to develop and implement evidence-based programs that deal with chronic disease management, disabilities, fall prevention, health promotion, medication management, mental health/substance abuse, nutrition and physical activity. These types of programs can and should be implemented throughout California's senior center network.

Staff and Volunteers

The primary element of any successful senior center is its staff. The evolution of senior center operations, funding, population and programs outlined in this report illustrates the complexity of senior center operations and reinforces the need for highly trained, experienced staff to meet the expanded needs of a growing and changing population of older adults. Boosting the diversity of staff and offering ethnically appropriate programming has been proven to draw the interest and participation of minority elders in senior center activities, helping centers to better serve their communities.⁸ Additionally, legislation requiring senior services to reach out to the aging lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender individuals calls for cultural sensitivity in both center staff and more traditional participants.

According to the CSCIS (2009), senior centers report an average of 8.75 paid employees (median 4 employees) with a range between zero and 180 paid employees. In addition, most senior centers rely heavily on volunteers to perform many of their important functions and to run programs. Senior centers rely heavily on volunteer support, with an average of 74 volunteers donating an average total of 10,324 hours per year.

Clearly, senior centers will continue to rely on and gain from future generations' need for civic engagement. Mutually beneficial arrangements must be established that can expand the role of baby boomer volunteers. Centers must think beyond their traditional recruitment strategies and identify ways to build the capacity to support and engage volunteers in meaningful experiences, incorporating new approaches such as use of clear volunteer job descriptions, skill requirements and time limits. Volunteers will likely require senior centers to treat them more like contract employees and demand a seat at the center's administrative table.

As government programs are reduced, provision of care management services will be more important as senior centers become the only visible means of connecting

⁸ Pardasani, M. (2004b). Senior centers: Increasing minority participation through diversification. *Journal of Gerontological Social Work*, 43(2/3), 41-56.

frail elderly participants to the assistance they need. Linking with other agencies and organizations in the community through case management is fundamental to including frail individuals in the senior center's services. Centers can additionally provide assistance to families caring for elderly relatives, offering caregivers training and assistance to handle the emotional, physical and financial demands of long-term care-giving.

Facilities

The actual form and function that senior centers take will have a dramatic impact on their future. To achieve goals and reach new target populations, centers will need to be functional, attractive, and accessible. Having the appropriate environment facilitates active learning and provides an inviting setting for participants to share their knowledge and socialize.⁹ Without adequate facilities for socialization and program participation, conflicts, cliques and territorial behaviors can result.¹⁰

The design of future centers will need to serve the populations and programs offered, including such features as areas for nutrition and socialization (coffeehouse, café meal service, special diets, and kitchen facilities), classrooms (computer labs, wireless connections, access to online technology), and space for physical exercise (swimming, dancing, game courts, walking trails). The basic elements must include features important to older adults, such as good lighting, good acoustics and universal design features. Finally, programming for frail elders requires provision of physical environmental supports, such as ramps, elevators, special tables and chairs or fully accessible bathroom facilities.

To be accessible to the people they serve, senior centers should be located close to public transportation, facilitate door-to-door transportation services, or include adequate parking. Eventually, many seniors will no longer have the ability to access senior centers on their own, so some type of driver/escort program may be necessary to reach the oldest old participants. Table 3 summarizes seniors' most used modes of transportation to California centers as identified by the California Senior Center Infrastructure Survey (2009).

To reach a multi-generational community, including seniors who are working later in life and working family caregivers, senior centers may have to broaden their hours of operation to include evenings and weekends. Nearly all centers indicate being open Monday through Friday for an average 7.5 hours a day. Fewer centers are open on Saturday (23%) and Sunday (14%) for an average of 1.4 hours and .9

⁹ Eaton, J. & Salari, S. (2005). Environments for lifelong learning in senior centers. *Educational Gerontology*, 31(6), 461.

¹⁰ Salari, S., Brown, B. & Eaton, J. (2006). Conflicts, friendship cliques and territorial displays in senior center environments. *Journal of Aging Studies*, 20(3), 237.

hours, respectively. Only one-quarter of the centers indicate they have regular senior programs in the evening.

Table 3. Reported modes of transportation to senior centers

Drive themselves	390 (94%)
Center's or other facility's van	229 (55%)
Family and/or friends	340 (82%)
Public transportation	321 (77%)
Other	116 (28%)

The majority of senior centers (62%) anticipate needing additional space for a growing population and/or additional activities. Fewer than half of centers have sufficient (or any) outdoor space for activities. Half of senior centers expect to need additional facilities for features like computer labs, updated dining areas, classrooms, meeting rooms, or arts studios. To maximize space, senior centers have discovered that not all activities have to be held on site: many centers are working to identify opportunities to co-locate with universities and housing facilities to meet future needs of the community.

Today's average senior center building is 25 years old. Many were built with funding from the original Senior Center Bond Act. Nearly half of senior centers have deferred maintenance, with eight percent reporting safety issues as a result of postponed maintenance concerns. Among the needs are leaking roofs, hazardous stairway and walkways, and mold problems. Table 4 provides a summary of some of the specific facility highlights from the CSCIS (2009).

Computers

Staff and volunteers must have the tools to perform their duties, including adequate computers, Internet access, and up-to-date software. Increasingly, the online network will have an important role for senior center staff and participants, providing access to virtual senior centers, social networking, education, and online caregiver support.

According to the CSCIS (2009), approximately, 40% of senior centers do not have sufficient computers for their staff and volunteers. Two-thirds of centers have computers five years old or older, and nearly a quarter of centers lacked Internet connections for either some or all of their computers. The vast majority of centers (62%) have no wireless capacity whatsoever. This means that half of senior centers are not communicating with clientele in the most efficient way (via e-mail or text message), and most would not be able to send an announcement or emergency alert via the internet. Finally, only half of the centers (53%) indicate they have

computers available for older adults to use, and half of those centers report not having enough computer units to meet participant demands.

Center Utilities & Energy

One way to trim senior center expenditures is through “greening” opportunities that save resources by reducing, reusing, and recycling energy and materials. Only 30% of senior centers report having had an energy audit within the past four years. Moreover, more than half of centers do not have any double pane windows and 23% indicate their center is not adequately weatherized or insulated.

Table 4: California Senior Center Infrastructure Survey (2009)
Facility Highlights

Own senior center building	60 %
Built before 1980	40%
Built to provide services for seniors	50%
Need additional space for future or existing activities	60%
Anticipate need of earthquake retrofit	60%
Not equipped to serve as shelter in a disaster	40%
Have not or unaware of ADA compliance inspection	48%
Deferred maintenance	60%
Unsure of energy audit status	70%
Electricity as primary energy source (not self-generated)	92%
No double pane windows	54%
Not weatherized or unsure of weatherization status	57%
Heating, ventilation and air conditioning installed prior to 1990	23%

Centers and Disaster Preparedness

Natural disasters are a frequent occurrence in California and can have a devastating impact on senior center facilities, services, and clients. Almost 54% of the state's senior centers are located in earthquake zones. In addition, twenty-nine percent are in areas vulnerable to wildfires and 14% are in flood-prone areas. Only 40% of the centers have undergone an earthquake retrofit.

Senior centers have had and will always play an important role as emergency shelters during manmade and natural disasters. Fortunately, a vast majority of the centers – nearly 84% - have a disaster or security preparedness plan in place, yet only 53% are set up to provide direct service to seniors during times of disaster.

RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE INITIATIVE

The Senior Center Initiative served to identify a range of clear policy directives to support and enhance the workings and sustainability of California's senior center network. The California Commission on Aging is pleased to present the following recommendations as guidance for policymakers, center administrators and stakeholders to consider in their efforts to meet the changing needs of the growing population of older Californians.

- Senior center leaders should adapt and develop a new agenda, aligning their boards, staff, mission and practices to promote and sustain quality of life for an increasingly diverse and changing community of older adults.
- Senior center leaders should review center governance practices to implement changes in operational structures that include new approaches to service delivery. New methods should make better use of volunteers in center program operations and should develop new mechanisms that enhance community involvement, diversify funding streams, and re-emphasize open and transparent procedures.
- Sources of senior center funding should allow for more local discretion and flexibility to allow coordination and collaboration among a variety of service providers to better meet the needs of the area's senior population.
- Senior centers should examine their facilities, communications, programs and staff to determine if they are inviting, compassionate, easily accessed, and respectful of all members of the community.

- Senior center leaders and stakeholders should work to develop new imaging and marketing techniques that send positive messages to the older adult population, the baby boom generation and the larger community about senior centers.
- Senior centers should retain and strengthen core programs and services that focus on information and referral, volunteer opportunities, late-life employment, retirement options and caregiver support.
- Senior center leaders and staff need increased training to develop skills that help promote and sustain the quality of life needs of an increasingly diverse population of seniors, including development of cultural competency skills.
- Senior centers need sufficient funding to equip facilities with the necessary technology to streamline senior center operational and administrative duties, as well as provide online access and training for center clientele.
- Senior center leaders and stakeholders should identify ways to assist seniors in advocating for their needs and should develop targeted advocacy and policy strategies to enhance their future operations.
- Senior centers, no matter their operating structure or funding mechanisms, should be included in local strategic planning activities to increase their visibility, promote programs and attract resources.
- Senior Centers could benefit from passage of a new Senior Center Infrastructure Bond Act. If such bond funding should be made available, funds should support new construction and center renovation specifically to ADA compliance inspections, earthquake retrofit requirements, and energy audits.

CONCLUSION

The California Commission on Aging has completed a two-year effort that resulted in a comprehensive exploration of the future of senior centers in California, including operations, staffing, governance, programming and facilities.

Our Initiative began as a way to support centers in their transition to a future of more older Californians with diverse needs. We sought to work in partnership with the state's two center associations and the National Council on Aging's National Institute of Senior Centers to strength the capacity and presence of these organizations in California. For both years of the Initiative, CCoA staff attended and presented at the two association's annual meetings.

We commissioned a Literature Review to have a base of knowledge available to centers in California and nationwide. The Literature Review received national distribution via the National Council on Aging.

The successful statewide Senior Center Stakeholder Forum was a significant effort co-sponsored by government, for-profit and non-profit organizations. The CCoA planned on 150 attendees at this first-ever event and had to cut off attendance at 300 when the room capacity was reached. The goal of bringing together center staff, constituents and policymakers was reached – one participant described the event as “historic.” In an effort to help centers increase their visibility, the Forum organizers worked with the Governor's Office to secure a proclamation declaring February 2009 as Senior Center Month in California. Allowing attendees in break-out groups to create their vision statements for centers of the future provides a road map to follow and several ideals for centers to work toward.

Working with the Congress of California Seniors (CCS), an updated electronic listing of senior centers was created and today serves as a networking, communication and advocacy tool among centers as well as a valuable tool for those older adults seeking assistance in California communities.

Also in partnership with the CCS, we began the huge undertaking of surveying the more than 700 centers in California to learn about their current and future facility and infrastructure needs. We were pleased to receive a response rate of 51% and can now document the complete picture of what the state's centers might need in the future. The data supports the call for additional private and governmental resources as funds allow.

The recurring success and momentum of our two-year Initiative has been tempered due to the economic downturn during the same period.

During the two years of our study, the economic decline has affected all levels of government. As a result, our Initiative, which was started to support centers in a transition to a future of more older Californians with diverse needs, had to shift as we have learned about the number of senior centers that have downsized, adjusted operations, restricted hours and a few that have closed operations or programs entirely. Even so, the value of senior centers as trusted point of entry will undoubtedly remain a vital and critical part of the state's aging network.

This Final Report provides evidence for centers to embrace new roles in the future. Just as no two communities are alike, no two centers are alike. California's increasing diversity can be well served in the future by centers that take a serious look at the changing demographics and community needs (current and emerging) and balance that discussion with the center's resources and capacities. By continuing to adapt and evolve, centers will need to draw on their strengths, continue their linkages with strategic partners and expand their collaboration with other organizations to become even more of a community hub linking individuals to a wider array of activities and services.

Appendix A

Senior Center Advisory Panel

Cathy Angstadt

Senior Center Supervisor, Senior & Community Center, City of Laguna Niguel

Chuck Ayala

President/CEO Centro de Latino (San Francisco)

Betty Cheng (Volunteer) and Beth Ryan (Executive Director)

Langley Senior Center (Los Angeles County)

Kathy Hasset

Deputy Director, Area Agency on Aging, Merced County Senior Service Center

Joyce Hayes, R.D.,

Executive Director, Humboldt Senior Resource Center

Jane Kibbey

Coordinator, Fairfield Senior Center & current CASSC President

Craig Lambert, MSW, LCSW

Senior Director of Older Adults Services , Jewish Family Services of San Diego

Marian Last, LMFT, CPC

Community & Senior Services Manager, Jack Crippen Senior Center, El Monte

Lauri Linder

Senior Center Program Coordinator, City of Selma & current President, Aging Services & Activities Section, CPRS (Fresno County)

Sharon Monck

Chair, CCoA Ad Hoc Senior Center Initiative Committee
Chair, Senior Center Initiative Advisory Panel

Gary Passmore

Representing Congress of California Seniors

Pat Trotter

Retired Director, Fullerton Senior Multi-Services Center

Martin Tucker

Representing Triple-A Council of California

Laurie Webb, R.N.

Director, Amador County Senior Center

Appendix B

Forum Partners

Aging Services of California
Alta Manor
ApexCare, Inc.
California Association of Health Facilities
California Association of Senior Service Centers
Community Action Commission of Santa Barbara County
California Department of Corporations
California Foundation on Aging
California Parks and Recreation Society, Aging and Activities Section
California Senior Legislature
Congress of California Seniors
Eskaton Senior Services and Residences
Kaiser Permanente
National Association for Hispanic Elderly
National Council on Aging
Sutter Senior Care/PACE
The Mel & Grace McLean Foundation
Verizon Wireless

EXECUTIVE DEPARTMENT
STATE OF CALIFORNIA



PROCLAMATION

Senior centers are the community focal point for older adult services. They are a one-stop shop, connecting our seniors, their caretakers and families to vital resources.

With approximately 4.5 million people over the age of sixty-five, California has the largest older adult population in the nation. And as our state's baby boomers age, that number will only increase, making it crucial that we work to ensure that senior centers adequately meet the needs of our older residents.

Our state is home to more than 700 senior centers. With assistance including health care, nutrition, recreation, legal advice and more, they act as a central place for our older Californians to learn how to maintain their well-being and to participate in stimulating social opportunities not offered anywhere else. The programs available at these centers also allow more individuals to remain safely in the community and avoid unnecessary institutional care.

This month, I applaud all those who are working to make our senior centers the best they can be, and I especially thank the California Commission on Aging and its partners who have planned the first statewide Senior Center Forum. Our older residents deserve to have safe and caring places to enjoy themselves, and I commend senior centers for filling this role.

NOW, THEREFORE, I, ARNOLD SCHWARZENEGGER, Governor of the State of California, do hereby proclaim February 2009, as "Senior Center Month."

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, I have hereunto set my hand and caused the Great Seal of the State of California to be affixed this 3rd day of February 2009.



ARNOLD SCHWARZENEGGER
Governor of California

ATTEST:

DEBRA BOWEN
Secretary of State