

## **Senior Center Fact Sheet June 2008**

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### **DEFINITION OF A SENIOR CENTER**

Senior centers are designated as community focal points through the Older Americans Act. The National Institute of Senior Centers defines a senior center as a place where “older adults come together for services and activities that reflect their experience and skills, respond to their diverse needs and interests, enhance their dignity, support their independence, and encourage their involvement in and with the center and the community.”

### **SERVICES OFFERED AT SENIOR CENTERS**

While senior centers typically provide nutrition, recreation, social and educational services, and comprehensive information and referrals, many centers are adding new programs such as fitness activities and internet training to meet the needs and interests of the new generation of seniors. Some centers also offer case management programs, long-term care ombudsman services and operate adult day health care centers.

Senior centers serve as focal points in the community where a collaboration of agencies can provide services to their target populations in a single facility with staff and support systems that maximize the opportunity to assist the population to age successfully.

### **EVOLUTION OF SENIOR CENTERS**

The first senior center opened 59 years ago in New York City. There are now some 15,000 senior centers across the country, serving close to 10 million older adults annually.

### **SENIOR CENTERS IN CALIFORNIA**

It has been over a decade since the last hard copy listing of senior centers in California was produced. Currently the Congress of California Seniors (CCS) is compiling an electronic listing of the senior centers in California. The web site is expected to be operational in the fall of 2008.

Preliminary data provided by the CCS indicates their web site will contain 727 listings for senior centers in the state. The listing does include a yet-to-be-determined number of nutrition sites. Nutrition-only sites will not necessarily meet the criteria for senior centers identified above.

In California, senior centers generally fall under the jurisdiction of local governments or are non-profit agencies. A preliminary review of CCS data shows 405 (56%) of the identified senior centers are operated by local governments. The remaining centers are predominately non-profits.

In addition to operational differences; there is great diversity in California's senior centers, including level of services and range of programs provided, ethnicity, staffing, funding sources, volunteer opportunities, hours of operation, structure, technology, ease of access and utilization. There is no state entity charged with the responsibility to oversee senior centers.

### **SENIOR CENTER ORGANIZATIONS IN CALIFORNIA**

There are two senior center organizations in California. The largest organization is the Aging Services and Activities Section of the California Park and Recreation Society which is comprised of 150 senior center directors and staff representing mostly local government supported senior centers. The second organization, the California Association of Senior Service Centers (CASSC), has a membership of 50-75 members, consisting primarily of senior center directors and staff.