

POLICY POSITION
PENNSYLVANIA ASSOCIATION OF AREA AGENCIES ON
AGING, INC.

Senior Community Centers

BACKGROUND NARRATIVE

Pennsylvania's Senior Community Centers constitute a vast network, which is one of our Commonwealth's Greatest Resources. Over 650 full and part time senior community centers are listed by the Pennsylvania Association of Senior Centers. They consist of both independently owned not-for-profit, and county-operated centers, reflecting the development and experience of more than 30 years of service to older citizens.

- ☑ Over \$34 Million for health promotion, recreation socialization is directed to senior community centers annually from the local Area Agencies on Aging.
- ☑ Over \$39 Million for nutritious meals served at senior community centers and satellite centers annually through the local Area Agencies on Aging.¹

Senior Community Centers in Pennsylvania form a critical link to all available services. Additionally, they meet a crucial need in the array of services required to enable elderly citizens to remain in their homes and communities. The Centers are a gathering place where seniors can participate in educational, recreational and wellness activities (such as falls prevention education, exercise programs and flu shots) that promote healthy and successful aging, and maintain contacts with other members of their community. Through the congregate meal programs, seniors are assisted in maintaining good nutrition, a significant factor in allaying illness and deterioration. In many places, senior community center kitchens are the distribution point for home delivered meals to area elders who are homebound, and are usually staffed by generous volunteers. Information and access to a broad range of important programs, as diverse as the communities in which they are located, make the Senior Community Centers ideal focal points, and resource centers, for all our older citizens.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

Program & Staff Development: Present & Future Needs

¹ Statistical Information provided by the Pennsylvania Department of Aging.

Funding for Senior Community Center programs has been relatively flat for approximately the last two decades, while the cost of doing business has been increasing. As more seniors around the state choose to 'age in place,' increased frailty places new demands on staff skills and time. Additionally, as areas of Pennsylvania continue to attract citizens of diverse cultures, programs of interest to new groups are needed. Increasingly, 'younger' seniors will begin to 'check out' what's happening at the 'senior center,' and they will be looking for programs and facilities that offer new and engaging experiences.

Maintaining the Infrastructure: Capital Assistance

The infrastructure of the senior community centers is aging. Many buildings and facilities have passed their useful life expectancy. The funding that senior centers receive from the Area Agencies on Aging is primarily that which comes from the Pennsylvania Lottery. It is not expected that this funding will increase to an extent that would make it possible for major capital projects at senior centers to be paid for through the Area Agencies on Aging. Projects such as new buildings, additions, renovations, roofs, parking lots, air conditioning and heating system refurbishment, etc., require funding far in excess of what Lottery funding and fund raising events will allow.

GOAL:

Senior Friendly Communities: "Towards a Society for All Ages."

The theme of the 1999 UN International Year of the Older Person was: "Towards a Society for All Ages." Senior Centers truly are best appreciated within the context of the local community in which they are established. In as much as seniors have been supportive members of their local communities, seniors now have a right to expect that that same community will reach out to assist them and support their needs. It is today's seniors who have built much of the infrastructure of the local community, that is, the schools, libraries, government buildings, churches, etc., and continue to support and fund them through their tax dollars.

Often, the local municipality, through funds collected for park and recreational uses, and other funding sources, meets the recreational needs of its youngest members while overlooking the opportunity to share those same recreational resources to meet the needs of its oldest members. Local community leaders must plan and provide for the needs of all members of the community.

It would, no doubt, be an encouragement to local community leaders if their community support dollars could leverage increased support from the state. When the entire community acknowledges the contributions, past and present, of its older members, and shares its resources with them, communities will be recognized as senior-friendly.

THE POSITION

1. Senior community center program and resource development must continue, and funding must be annually increased proportionate to the cost of doing business so that adequate staff and volunteers can be recruited, and trained, to offer appropriate and beneficial services to seniors with increasingly divergent needs.
2. The Pennsylvania Association of Area Agencies on Aging believes that more needs to be done to support, expand, and fund the continued development of the network of senior community centers, to adequately prepare for the needs of the coming wave of older Pennsylvanians.
3. The Senior Community Center Capital Assistance Grant Program should be restored on a permanent and annual basis and expanded to meet this important need.

CONCLUSION:

It is unimaginable that the vibrant network of senior community centers could be considered anything short of essential to the growing number of older people in Pennsylvania. The Commonwealth needs to provide the financial support needed to maintain and enhance this treasured resource.

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