

DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA OFFICE ON AGING NEWS

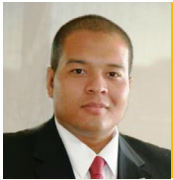


Spotlight on Community Living

Wednesday, November 6, 2013

Serving D.C. residents who are age 18+ with a disability or age 60+ and their caregivers

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Executive Director's Message

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In this month's edition of the **Spotlight on Community Living**, I would like to discuss seniors and food in Washington, DC. According to the American Community Survey 2011 estimates, there were nearly 70,000 seniors age 65 years and older who headed households in the Washington Metropolitan Region with incomes under \$30,000 annually. Many of these seniors are living with chronic diseases and are struggling to pay for medical care, mortgage or rent, utility payments, food, transportation, and entertainment. Consequently, low income seniors constantly face competing budget priorities and are at risk of hunger, which is a problem as hunger can increase seniors' vulnerability to disease and impair their functionality. Unfortunately, seniors with poor health are at greater risks of hospitalizations and nursing home placements, which average \$110,000 annually. This is a cost that most cannot afford and, ultimately, becomes the state government's responsibility to pay through its depleting Medicaid budget.

The District of Columbia Government's Effort to Combat Senior Hunger

Vincent C. Gray, Mayor of Washington, D.C. and I are strong proponents of seniors living in their communities as the first option and to accomplish this goal, seniors must have access to one of the basic necessities of life - food. The District has been working tirelessly in tackling senior hunger in the District. In October 2012, Mayor Gray released his 5-year New Community Living Strategic Plan, which includes as the third goal, "All seniors will have access to nutritious meals,

physical and recreational activities, and be financially prepared for retirement and their long-term care needs."

To accomplish this strategic goal, the Mayor has increased the food budget by 111% in the last two budget cycles. The increased funding allows DCOA to continuously assess and open additional congregate meal sites that are inviting to seniors. For example, senior apartment buildings or other dwellings that are occupied by a large number of seniors make ideal locations logistically as seniors do not have to travel far for a nutritious meal. Moreover, it is an opportunity for some of them to get to know their neighbors as they engage in socialization and recreational activities beyond enjoying their meals.

The increased food budget has also enabled DCOA to serve every senior who was previously on a waiting list for the homebound meal program. This is a huge success for the District as hundreds of homebound seniors were waiting months for these meals. Moreover, the increased food budget enables DCOA to hire more dietitians and nutrition personnel to assess additional homebound seniors for enrollment into the program. This proactive approach will ensure that no homebound senior goes without a meal.

Beyond tackling senior hunger through the congregate meal and the homebound meal programs, DCOA is in its second year of administering the Commodity Supplemental Food Program and the Seniors Farmers' Market Nutrition Program, two programs that were acquired from its sister agency, the Department of

Health. The rationale of bringing these two programs to DCOA was to increase seniors' access to multiple nutrition programs. Thus, seniors are able to enjoy nutritious meals at a congregate meal site or at home and still take advantage of the commodity food program if they qualify based on their income.

Tackling Senior Hunger by Increasing the Food Supply

The aforementioned food programs are effective ways to ensure that seniors are getting a hot meal daily; however, it is not the panacea for ending senior hunger. Thus, DCOA is expanding the food supply in the District by creating vegetable gardens. In partnership with Simon Elementary City Year Team, DCOA established an intergenerational garden at one of its senior wellness centers. The purpose of this garden is meaningful in a number of ways. First, seniors are engaging with the younger generation, which promotes positive socialization for the multiple age groups. Second, seniors who

are gardening are being physically active. Third, seniors have an opportunity to grow produce that can be consumed, which is a success, especially for those seniors who live in food deserts or areas where fresh produce is not readily accessible. DCOA looks forward to establishing more of these gardens across the District so that seniors can take advantage of the resources.

An Age-Friendly DC without Senior Hunger

Under Mayor Gray's leadership, the District began the five-year journey in October 2012 when the Mayor unveiled his New Community Living strategic plan. An age-friendly city is an inclusive and accessible environment that encourages active and healthy living for all residents by making improvements focused on eight domains of city life affecting the health and well-being of older people. These domains include: outdoor spaces and

buildings, transportation, housing, social participation, respect and social inclusion, civic participation and employment, communication and information, and community support and health services. The District has taken the liberty to include two additional domains as they greatly impact the well-being of seniors: elder abuse, neglect and exploitation and emergency preparedness and resilience.

In an age-friendly city, seniors should not experience senior hunger. To combat senior hunger, DCOA is taking a multipronged approach that addresses the age-friendly city domains. The basis for this work is a focus on economic security. That is, the District of Columbia government and its community-based partners must enhance programs and services that enable seniors to preserve their dollars that could be used to purchase groceries and pay other bills. For example, the District is in the midst of overhauling senior transportation services for seniors, which means greater options for traveling the District. Traditionally, the District's senior transportation primarily served seniors going to life sustaining medical appointments such as chemotherapy and dialysis or to the doctor's office. In this new approach, seniors will be given the flexibility to travel free of charge for the purpose of grocery shopping, recreational activities, and

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SOCIAL SECURITY ANNOUNCES 1.5% BENEFIT INCREASE FOR 2014

Monthly Social Security and Supplemental Security Income (SSI) benefits for nearly 63 million Americans will increase 1.5 percent in 2014, the Social Security Administration announced today. The 1.5 percent cost-of-living adjustment (COLA) will begin with benefits that more than 57 million Social Security beneficiaries receive in January 2014. Increased payments to more than 8 million SSI beneficiaries will begin on December 31, 2013.

Information about Medicare changes for 2014 is available at www.Medicare.gov. The COLA calculations are determined by the Social Security Act. To read more, please visit www.socialsecurity.gov/cola.

SENIOR/DISABLED DEDUCTION INCOME THRESHOLD INCREASES TO \$125,000

As of October 1, 2013, the District of Columbia real property Senior/Disabled Deduction income threshold has increased to \$125,000 from \$100,000. This benefit reduces real property taxes by 50 percent for property owners who are 65 years old or older, or disabled.

To qualify for the deduction, the property owner must apply for the deduction and own 50 percent or more of the property or cooperative unit. In addition, for Tax Year 2014 (beginning October 1, 2013) the total federal adjusted gross income of everyone living in the property or cooperative unit, excluding tenants, must be less than \$125,000 for the 2012 income tax filing (due April 15, 2013).

To obtain a copy of the Homestead Deduction and Senior Citizen/Disabled Property Tax Relief Application, FP-100, or cancellation form, please visit www.taxpayerservicecenter.com or <http://www.taxpayerservicecenter.com> under "Tax Forms and Publications." Call the Office of Tax and Revenue's Customer Service Administration at (202) 727-4TAX (4829) for more information.

MAYOR GRAY SWEARS IN MEMBERS OF THE AGE-FRIENDLY DC TASK FORCE, SAYING D.C. SHOULD SUPPORT RESIDENTS AT ALL STAGES OF LIFE

Mayor Vincent C. Gray recently swore in the members of the District's new Age-Friendly DC Task Force, which will develop a strategic plan incorpo-

rating resident-driven recommendations to improve security, increase independence, boost health outcomes, and enable more purposeful living for older adults in the District by 2017.



In September, the Mayor appointed George Washington University President Steven Knapp and

Deputy Mayor for Health and Human Services Beatriz "BB" Otero to co-chair the Task Force. The other task force members include DCOA Executive Director John M. Thompson, Ph.D., FAAMA, D.C. Commission on Aging Chairperson Romaine Thomas and other members from the government, community partners and members of the business community.

The D.C. Office on Aging (DCOA) has been gathering input from older residents for a year. Community consultations will continue

through the fall, involving District residents in group discussions about the city they envision. In early 2014, the Age-Friendly DC Task Force will consider the feedback they've received and make recommendations to the Mayor about the work that the District's private and public sectors need to undertake to transform the city. The plan will build on the many improvements the District has made to a number of aspects of community life to ensure that they are friendlier to aging residents. ~

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S MESSAGE (cont'd)

much more. Increasing transportation options for seniors means more money in their pockets to cover other expenses. In another example, we continue to advocate that employers who hire seniors offer health and other benefits. It is not sufficient to only give seniors an income, but to also offer the benefits to them that minimize out-of-pocket health and prescription drug expenses, which also means more money for food.

Narrowing the Gap Between the Elder Economic Security Standard and Seniors' Annual Income

Through collaboration with Wider Opportunities for Women (WOW), DCOA has begun its journey of increasing the public's awareness about the importance of planning ahead. WOW is a national organization aimed at building pathways to

economic security and equality of opportunity for women, families, and elders. WOW produces a wide range of policy and economic security-related research that are used for advocacy and public awareness campaigns. Of WOW's many useful research products, I am very amazed by the Elder Economic Security Standard Index or Elder Index data and tables. Based on the Elder Index, the annual economic security standard index for single renters in DC is \$30,012. This figure represents the amount of money that a senior renter would need to make ends meet living in the District of Columbia, taking into consideration only the bare essentials for survival. The index considers rent payments, food, transportation, healthcare services, and miscellaneous items. The index does not take into account money for vacations or for dining out.

It is interesting to note that the Federal Poverty Level (FPL) is \$11,490 which is \$18,522 less than the elder economic security standard. Based on this analysis, we can see how seniors struggle between making difficult decisions in paying for prescription drugs, doctors' visits, food, rent, utilities, and other expenses. The average Elder Median Income in Retirement for seniors residing in DC is \$16,544,

which is a little higher than the FPL, but \$13,468 short of the elder economic security standard. Consequently, such income deficit adversely impacts a senior's quality of life.

DCOA will use the data for planning and budgeting purposes. For example, two programs that are in great demand are the food and transportation programs. According to the WOW's Elder Economic Security Standard Index data, food and transportation make up about 24% of a senior's monthly budget. Thus, continued investments in food programs and offering affordable and free transportation to help seniors get around town will help to narrow the gap between the economic security standard index and the senior's actual median income.

One approach to offering free transportation service beyond DCOA's financed transportation is by establishing TimeBank programs throughout the District of Columbia. I recently had the pleasure of meeting Professor Edgar Cahn, who founded the timebank concept in 1980. According to Cahn, "timebanking is a reciprocal service exchange that uses units of time as currency." For example, if an individual contributes one hour of his time in fixing someone's computer than he earns onetime credit that may be used to redeem a reward. Today, timebanking is in 32 nations and 44 states and have proven to be an effective approach of providing incentives and rewards for volunteers and clients willing to contribute collectively or individually to improving their communities.

Through a new collaboration with Professor Cahn, DCOA will work with its community-based providers and senior villages in establishing the timebank system in the District of Columbia. The benefits of this program are endless as some seniors lack companionship, transportation, food, and other necessities that many other citizens take for granted. Through timebanking, many people have an opportunity to contribute their time to visit seniors, cook them a hot meal, take them to the grocery, and much more. In return, seniors can also give of their time in the program. For example, through DCOA and DC Public Schools' Intergenerational Program, where seniors work with 3 and 4-year old students during reading, lunch, snack, and recess time, seniors could earn timebanking hours for their service. Seniors would be able to cash in their hours for services that they need at a later time. The timebanking program helps build communities which would be advantageous in age-friendly Washington, DC.

The discussion in the aforementioned sections provided you with an overview of the District of Columbia Government's effort to effectively address senior hunger in its jurisdiction. However, it will take a commitment from many stakeholders, both private and public, who have the supply to meet the seniors' demands for food. I trust that in the short years to come, we will observe a noticeable impact in our endeavor to end senior hunger in the District of Columbia. ~

SPOTLIGHT ON COMMUNITY LIVING

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Sexual harassment is a form of sex discrimination which is prohibited by the Act.

In addition, harassment based on any of the above protected categories is prohibited by the Act. Discrimination in violation of the Act will not be tolerated. Violators will be subject to disciplinary action.