

March 2009

In 2006, the sizable population of Baby Boomers began turning 60, bringing the needs and issues of older Americans to the forefront. The American Association of Retired Persons (AARP) conducted a study of some of its 60-year old members and discovered “87% want to take better care of their physical health; 72% plan to spend more time on their interests and hobbies; and 47% want to do more volunteering” (American Association of Retired Persons, 2006). These statistics reflect the ever-growing demand to address the needs and services available to seniors, which can best be achieved through senior centers.

Statistics

Percentage of Senior Citizens (65+ years) within Total 2006 Population		
Region	General Population Total*	Senior Population (%)
Bandera County	20,203	16.3
Bexar County	1,555,592	10.2
Comal County	101,181	13.7
Kendall County	30,213	14.8
Texas	23,507,783	9.9
United States	299,398,484	12.4
* Census Bureau population estimate (U.S.Census Bureau, 2008)		

The 65 and over population, numbering 37 million and representing over 12% of the United States population in 2006, is projected to increase to approximately 72 million by 2030 (U.S. Administration on Aging, 2007). In Texas, over 50% of all individuals 60 and older currently reside in the three largest metropolitan areas: San Antonio area, Houston-Galveston region, and the Dallas/Fort Worth metroplex (Texas Department of Aging and Disability Services (DADS), 2003).

The San Antonio region is expected to experience a 75% growth in the senior population from 2000-2020 and a 36% growth from 2020-2040, while the city of

San Antonio can expect an approximate 147% senior population growth from 2020-2040 (DADS, 2003). All four counties served by the Kronkosky Charitable Foundation – Bandera, Bexar, Comal, Kendall – consist of senior populations higher than the Texas state average.

Senior Center Services

The Joint Commission of City/County on Elderly Affairs was created in 2002 through the collaboration of the San Antonio City Council and Bexar County Commissioner’s Court to provide support, services, and advocacy to seniors in the community. In 2003, the Commission conducted a survey to determine the most pressing issues among the elderly in order to determine where future policy agendas should be directed. The areas of greatest concern for seniors currently attending area senior centers were prescription assistance, nutrition, Medicare/Medicaid, and transportation (Joint Commission of City/County on Elderly Affairs, 2003). The types of services offered at senior centers vary, but often include nutrition, exercise, socialization, education, and referrals.

Commonly provided services at senior centers include:

- Arts classes
- Education courses
- Employment assistance
- Financial assistance
- Health and wellness (i.e. blood pressure clinics, medical/dental care)
- Intergenerational functions
- Meal programs
- Opportunities to volunteer
- Referrals to other senior services
- Social networking
- Transportation
- Travel and tours

(National Council on Aging, 2005)

In addition to providing services and activities for older adults, senior centers ideally represent a

“community focal point” by offering public information, community education, advocacy, and opportunities for older adults. Senior centers are further defined by the National Institute of Senior Centers (NISC) as seniors coming “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” (National Council on Aging, 2005).

Types of Senior Centers

1. *Multi-purpose centers*: offer comprehensive programs and services (Aday, 2003)
2. *Intergenerational centers*: programs where children and elders interact during scheduled activities and both participate in ongoing services at the same site (Generations United, 2006)
3. *Specialized Centers*: focus on a single program, such as a meal or a medical program (Gitelson, Ho, Fitzpatrick, Case, & McCabe, 2008)

One of the first senior centers was the William Hodson Community Center, which opened in New York City in 1943 and had a membership of 350 seniors by 1947 (William Hodson Senior Center, n.d.). With the passage of the Older Americans Act of 1965 and the apportionment of federal funding for senior centers in place, the number of senior centers in the United States has steadily increased since 1970 (Miltiades & Grove, 2005). In 2005, there were over 15,000 senior centers serving approximately 10 million American senior citizens (National Council on Aging, 2005). This reflects the growing population of senior citizens in the United States.

Characteristics of Senior Center Participants

The following is the profile of a typical senior center participant:

- Between 70 and 79 years old
 - Female
 - White ethnicity
 - Low to middle income
 - Desires social interaction
- (Gitelson et al., 2008)

A study conducted by the Administration on Aging (2007) documented characteristics most strongly predictive of higher participation in senior centers:

1. Lower education level
 2. Poorer health conditions
 3. Lower income levels
 4. Less access to transportation
- (As cited by Gitelson et al., 2008)

As more senior centers open across the country, it has become increasingly apparent that more diverse groups of seniors are seeking access to program services. Meeting the needs of seniors in their 60's is very different from aiding those in their 90's, creating challenges for those who provide services to seniors from different age groups.

Accreditation of Senior Centers

Senior centers are not required to be accredited, but a national accreditation process does exist for interested centers. In 1998, NISC received a grant to create a national accreditation process for senior center operation. The Garland Senior Center in Garland, Texas was one of eight centers utilized during this pilot process. The NISC, a unit of the National Council of Aging, defines accreditation as the “official recognition that a senior center is meeting its mission in a nationally accepted professional fashion” (National Council on Aging, 2008).

Accreditation occurs in two phases, a community self-assessment followed by the actual accreditation process, which includes compiling documentation, an on-site visit, a review by the National Accreditation Board, and a cost of \$1,200-\$2,800, depending on the center's operating costs. There are nine key areas examined during accreditation.

Senior Center Accreditation Areas

1. Purpose
2. Community
3. Governance
4. Administration
5. Program planning
6. Evaluation
7. Fiscal management
8. Records and reports
9. Facility

(National Council on Aging, 2008)

The accreditation process lasts between 6 to 12 months and those who are chosen retain their status for five years. After five years, the senior center is eligible to reapply for accreditation. 153 senior centers, many on the East Coast, have applied and met the requirements for NISC accreditation to date. 38 centers accredited between 1998-2003 completed and achieved re-accreditation after their initial five year period. Currently, only six senior centers in Texas, the Galveston Community Center and Baycliff Community Center in Galveston, the Johnson Community Center in La Marque, the Dickinson Community Center in Dickinson, the Plano Senior Center, and the Good Samaritan Center in San Antonio hold accreditation (National Council on Aging, 2009). The Good

Samaritan Center completed accreditation in 2008, becoming Bexar County’s first nationally accredited senior center.

Challenges Facing Senior Centers

Approximately 15 % of senior citizens attended senior centers in the late 1990’s, fewer participants than in previous decades. The Texas Department of Aging and Disability Services (2007) states that less than 10% of seniors currently attend a senior center on a regular basis.

In addition, some seniors choose not to participate because of lack of accessibility due to disability, health issues, hours of operation of the center, and misperceptions. Two common misperceptions are that senior centers only service low-income people and that only “older” seniors can participate in senior center activities.

The current trend is for traditional senior centers to reinvent themselves as life-enrichment or life-long learning centers to avoid the stigma of the name “senior center” and to appeal to current senior populations. Senior centers also face competition from a variety of assisted living/retirement facility programs, inter-faith community organizations, and parks and recreation programs. The services offered at senior centers must appeal to younger and older seniors, and must continue to be redefined as the Baby Boomers age. For example, to better meet the needs of the current senior population, many senior centers are adding more varied fitness programs and Internet courses.

2006 Senior Citizen Internet Use	
<u>Age</u>	<u>Internet Use</u>
50-64	68%
65-74	52%
75+	24%

(American Association of Retired Persons, 2007)

Senior Centers in the San Antonio region

The Elder Options of Texas web provides an on-line directory of senior services and resources for Texans. Currently, the site lists 36 senior centers in Bexar County, one (1) in Comal County, and the Alamo Area Agency on Aging as a resource for Bandera and Kendall Counties (Elder Options of Texas, 2007). The following represents a partial listing of senior centers in the San Antonio region:

Bandera County

- *Silver Sage Senior Center:* Provides nutrition services (both Meals on Wheels and congregate),

arts and crafts, recreational, social and fitness activities.

Bexar County

- *Casa Helotes:* Provides congregate and home-delivered meals as well as games and activities.
- *Catholic Charities:* Provides assistance with daily living, guardianship, money management services, and senior volunteer activities.
- *Christian Senior Services:* Provides nutritional services, both home delivery and at several sites across the city, and offers day respite programs for elderly with Alzheimer’s disease.
- *Claude Black Community Center:* Provides nutritional services, assistance with daily living, and homemaker services.
- *El Carmen Center:* Provides nutritional services and social day-activities.
- *Ella Austin Community Center:* Provides nutritional and social day-activities.
- *Good Samaritan Center:* Provides senior activities and nutritional services.
- *House of Neighborly Service:* Operates a senior volunteer program.
- *Jefferson Area Co-Op:* Provides assistance with daily living activities and grocery and meal deliveries.
- *North East San Antonio Community Outreach for Older People:* Services include: escorted transportation to medical appointments, grocery shopping and delivery, weekly telephone reassurance calls and minor home repairs or maintenance.
- *Presa Community Center:* Provides nutrition, social day-activities, and notary services.
- *The City of San Antonio* also operates 48 Nutrition/Community Rooms in churches and housing properties throughout the city.

Comal County

- *Bulverde Senior Center:* arts and crafts, recreational, social and fitness activities.
- *Comal County Senior Citizens Center:* Provides nutrition services (both meals on wheels and congregate), arts and crafts, recreational, social and fitness activities, and Adult Day Care Center.

Kendall County

- *Rainbow Senior Center:* Provides nutritional services, social day-activities, transportation services, and health and wellness programs. (Alamo Area Council of Governments, 2008)

References

- Aday, R. (2003). *Identifying important linkages between successful aging and senior center participation*. Paper presented at the Joint conference of the National Council on Aging/American Society on Aging. Retrieved February 9, 2009 from <http://www.aoa.gov/prof/agingnet/seniorcenters/nisc.pdf>
- Alamo Area Council of Governments. (2008). *Local Nutrition Providers/Senior centers*. Retrieved February 6, 2009, from <http://www.alamoaging.org/program/nutrition.asp>
- American Association of Retired Persons. (2007). *The state of 50+ America, 2007*. Retrieved February 6, 2009, from http://www.aarp.org/research/reference/agingtrends/fifty_plus_2007.html
- American Association of Retired Persons. (2006). *Boomers turning 60*. Retrieved February 6, 2009, from <http://www.aarp.org/research/family/lifestyles/boomers60.html>
- Elder Options of Texas. (2007). *Search results for senior activities centers in all Texas counties*. Retrieved from the Services portion of the Elder Options of Texas Web site on February 6, 2009, from http://www.elderoptionsoftexas.com/listings/listings_search.cfm
- Generations United. 2006. *Intergenerational Shared Sites: Making the Case*. Retrieved March 3, 2009, from http://www.gu.org/documents/A0/GU_Making_the_Case_FINAL.pdf
- Gitelson, R., Ho, C., Fitzpatrick, T., Case, A., & McCabe, J. (2008). The Impact of Senior Centers on Participants in Congregate Meal Programs. *Journal of Park and Recreation Administration*, 26(3), 136-151. Retrieved February 20, 2009 from https://www.sagamorepub.com/ebooks/User/IP2008/jpra263/08_PTW.pdf
- Joint Commission of City/County on Elderly Affairs. (2003). *Report to City Council and Bexar County Commissioners Court*. Retrieved on February 9, 2009 from <http://www.sanantonio.gov/COMMIT/OEA/OEApdfs/2003%20JC%20Report.pdf>
- Miltiades, H. & Grove, S. (2005). *Understanding the Impact of Senior Community Center Participation on Elders' Health and Well-Being*. Retrieved February 11, 2009 from <http://www.aging.state.pa.us/aging/lib/aging/SeniorCenterstudy.pdf>
- National Council on Aging (NCOA). (2005). *Senior centers*. Retrieved February 18, 2009, from <http://www.ncoa.org/content.cfm?sectionID=103&detail=2741>
- National Council on Aging (NCOA). (2008). *Accreditation; Self Assessment*. Retrieved February 9, 2009 from <http://www.ncoa.org/content.cfm?sectionid=131>
- National Council on Aging (NCOA). (2009). *Nationally Accredited Senior Centers*. Retrieved February 18, 2009, from http://www.ncoa.org/userfiles/file/1_3_NAC_Nationally_Accredited_Senior_Centers_12609.pdf
- Texas Department of Aging and Disability Services (DADS). (2003). *Texas demographics: Older Adults in Texas*. Retrieved March 18, 2008, from http://www.dads.state.tx.us/news_info/publications/studies/NewDemoProfileHi-Rez-4-03.pdf
- Texas Department of Aging and Disability Services (DADS). (2005). *Aging Texas Well: State of Our State on Aging*. Retrieved February 18, 2009, from http://www.dads.state.tx.us/news_info/publications/studies/2005_sos_exec_summary.pdf
- Texas Department of Aging and Disability Services (DADS). (2007). *Senior centers*. Retrieved February 18, 2009, from http://www.dads.state.tx.us/services/agingtexaswell/recreation/senior_centers.html
- U.S. Administration on Aging. (2007). *A Profile of Older Americans: 2007*. Retrieved February 9, 2009 from <http://www.aoa.gov/prof/Statistics/profile/2007/2007profile.pdf>
- U.S. Census Bureau. (2008). *State and county quick facts*. Retrieved February 9, 2009, from <http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/48000.html>
- William Hodson Senior Center. (n.d.). *Our history*. Retrieved February 9, 2009, from <http://www.find-us.net/dfta/page.cfm?pageid=history&username=william>