

In 2011, the sizable population of Baby Boomers began turning 65 at an amazing rate of approximately 8,000 people per day (American Association of Retired Persons [AARP], 2013). As a result, by 2013, there were 44.7 million Americans 65 years and older making up 14.1% of the total population (U.S. Administration on Aging [AOA], n.d.a). This increase in population brings the needs and issues of older Americans to the forefront.

STATISTICS

The 65 and over population, which increased 24.7% between 2003 and 2013, is projected to almost double between 2013 and 2040 (AOA, n.d.a). Three of the Kronkosky counties of interest consist of senior populations equal to or higher than the Texas state average, as shown in the following table.

Percentage of Senior Citizens (65+) within Total Population		
Region	Total Population	Senior Population
	# (2014)	% (2014)
United States	318,857,056	14.5
Texas	25,956,958	11.5
Bandera	20,892	24.6
Bexar	1,855,866	11.3
Comal	123,694	17.4
Kendall	38,880	19.1

(U.S. Census Bureau, n.d.)

The American Association of Retired Persons (AARP) conducted a study in 2012 of some of its members (aged 50 and over) and discovered 92% were concerned with staying mentally

sharp; 90% wanted to take better care of their physical health; 85% wanted to maintain a healthy diet; 73% planned to spend more time on their interests and hobbies; 24% spent some time volunteering; and 24% wanted to take classes or learn something new. Additionally, 60% were concerned about their financial security in retirement (AARP, 2013). These statistics reflect the ever-growing demand to address the needs and services available to seniors, particularly those available at senior centers.

SENIOR CENTER SERVICES

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. There are currently estimated to be over 11,000 senior centers serving approximately 1 million American senior citizens every day (National Council on Aging [NCOA], 2015). This reflects the growing population of senior citizens in the United States.

The types of services offered at senior centers vary, but senior centers serve to connect older people to community services in order to help them stay healthy and independent. In fact, “research shows that older adults who participate in senior center programs can learn to manage and delay the onset of chronic disease and experience measurable improvements in their physical, social, spiritual, emotional, mental, and economic well-being” (NCOA, 2015).

Commonly provided services at senior centers include:

- Meal and nutrition programs
- Information and assistance
- Health, fitness, and wellness programs
- Transportation
- Public benefits counseling
- Employment assistance
- Volunteer and civic engagement opportunities
- Social and recreational activities
- Educational and arts programs
- Intergenerational programs (NCOA, 2015)

According to the National Council of Aging, “more than 60% of senior centers are designated focal points for delivery of Older Americans Act services – allowing older adults to access multiple services in one place” (NCOA, 2015).

TYPES OF SENIOR CENTERS

1. *Multi-purpose centers*: coordinate and integrate services for the older adults such as congregate meals, community education, health screening, exercise/health promotion programs and transportation (AOA, n.d.b)
2. *Intergenerational centers*: programs where children and elders receive services and interact during both scheduled activities and informal encounters at the same site (Generations United, 2015)
3. *Specialized Centers*: focus on a single program, such as a meal service at a Senior Nutrition Site (City of San Antonio, 2016)

Characteristics of Senior Center Participants

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

- ✦ 70 years or older
- ✦ Female
- ✦ Widowed or living alone
- ✦ Fixed, low income
- ✦ Limited education

(Jellinek, Pardasani, and Sackman, 2010)

Characteristics most strongly predictive of lack of participation in senior centers:

- ✦ Male
- ✦ Higher income levels
- ✦ Married
- ✦ Extensive social circle
- ✦ Significant health problems
- ✦ Lack of transportation to site

(Jellinek, et al., 2010)

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. “Participants are increasingly ethnically and racially diverse, including many first-generation immigrants and bilingual seniors” (Jellinek, et al., 2010, p.4). Additionally, meeting the needs of seniors in their 60’s is very different from aiding those in their 80’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. The National Institute of Senior Centers (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” (NCOA, n.d.d).

Accreditation occurs in two phases, a community self- assessment followed by the actual accreditation process, which includes compiling documentation, an on-site visit, and a review by the National Accreditation Board (NCOA, n.d.b). There are nine key areas examined during accreditation.

SENIOR CENTER ACCREDITATION AREAS

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

(NCOA, n.d.c)

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. There were 116 accredited senior centers as of February 2016, only five of which are in Texas (NCOA, n.d.a).

The Good Samaritan Center, which completed the accreditation process in 2008, is Bexar County's first and only nationally accredited senior center (Good Samaritan Community Services, n.d.). The Good Samaritan Center recently finished its first re-accreditation process and is fully accredited by the National Institute of Senior Centers for another five years (NCOA, n.d.a).

The average characteristics of the first 100 accredited senior centers included:

- An urban/suburban governmental agency
- 16 advisory board members
- Open 43 hours a week and 5 days a week
- Serves 3,700 people a year
- Average daily attendance of 200
- Females make up 2/3 of participants
- Participants are white and 60-74 years old (Morgan, J., n.d.)

CHALLENGES FACING SENIOR CENTERS

Some seniors choose not to join senior centers 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 (NCOA, 2015).

A study conducted in 2010 of the senior centers in New York City resulted in 14 recommendations to ensure that senior centers are able to meet the challenges presented by the varying needs of the emerging senior population. Senior centers should (provide):

1. New center models built on current strengths and successes
2. Adequate base funding to strengthen capacity
3. Implement a small construction and repair program
4. Workforce support for professional staff
5. Maximize collaborations between a variety of resources
6. Adequate number and diversity of nutritious meals
7. Social work services and mental health programs
8. Health promotion services and programs
9. Bring lifelong learning opportunities to senior centers
10. Accessible, reliable and affordable transportation
11. Develop older adult and staff leadership in social action and advocacy
12. Increase funding and collaborations of creative arts
13. Volunteer opportunities for seniors
14. Encourage intergenerational programs (Jellinek, et al., 2010, p.17)

SENIOR CENTERS IN THE SAN ANTONIO REGION

In a community survey of San Antonio seniors conducted by NCOA (2013), 52% of those surveyed felt that the San Antonio community was doing enough to prepare for the future needs of the growing senior population. Some areas for community improvement included: better transportation options (24% of those surveyed); affordable housing (23% of those surveyed); and more affordable healthcare (22% of those surveyed). In general, "89% of San Antonio seniors are somewhat or very

confident in their ability to maintain a high quality of life in their senior years” (NCOA, 2013, p.1).

The Alamo Service Connection (ASC) (2016) Network of Care website provides an on-line directory of senior services and resources for the San Antonio region. Currently, the site lists 35 senior centers in the San Antonio region (not a comprehensive list):

BANDERA COUNTY

*Silver Sage Senior Center** (n.d.): Provides nutrition services (both Meals on Wheels and congregate), arts and crafts, recreational, social and fitness activities.

BEXAR COUNTY

Barshop Jewish Community Center: Provides congregate meals, social day-activities, health and wellness programs, and continuing education classes.

Bethany United Methodist Church Senior Nutrition Center: Provides nutritional, recreational and socialization opportunities with weekly free health screening for blood pressure, blood sugar, etc.

Bob Ross Senior Multi-Service Health & Resource Center: Comprehensive services & information for seniors age 60 & over, focusing on case management, health & wellness, education, social & cultural activities & volunteer opportunities.

CASA Helotes Senior Citizen’s Center: Provides congregate meal services and social day-activities.

*Catholic Charities**(n.d.): Provides assistance with daily living, guardianship, money management services, and senior volunteer activities.

Chandler Senior Center: Provides congregate meal services and social day-activities as well as day and overnight trips, defensive driving, and monthly seminars.

*Christian Senior Services** (n.d.): Provides nutritional services, both home delivery and at several sites across the city, and offers day respite programs for elderly with Alzheimer’s disease.

Ella Austin Community Center: Provides nutritional and social day-activities.

Good Samaritan Community Services: Provides senior activities (dance therapy, arts and crafts) and nutritional services.

Greater Randolph Area Service Program (GRASP) Senior Services: Offers congregate meals; Meals-on-Wheels; transportation for medical appointments, day trips, crafts and other activities.

*House of Neighborly Service** (n.d.): Operates a senior volunteer program, food program, and social programs.

Madonna Neighborhood Center: Provides social activities and supportive services such as information and referral, transportation, counseling and food assistance.

*Presa Community Center** (2016): Provides nutrition, social day-activities, and notary services.

Wellmed/Elvira Cisneros Senior Community Center: Provides congregate meals, social day-activities, health and wellness programs, and continuing education classes.

*The City of San Antonio** also operates more than 50 Nutrition/Community Rooms in churches and housing properties throughout the city as well as nine comprehensive centers (City of San Antonio, 2016)

COMAL COUNTY

Bulverde Spring Branch Activity Center & Nutrition Site (aka Bulverde Senior Center): arts and crafts, recreational, social, fitness activities and meals on wheels.

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

Greater Randolph Area Services Program (GRASP) also covers this county (see description above).

*not listed on the Alamo Service Connection website

KENDALL COUNTY

Kronkosky Place (Rainbow Senior Center): Provides nutritional services, social day-activities, transportation services, and health and wellness programs.

Health and Wholeness Center: Operates a center for persons age 55 or older. Offers water aerobics, Tai Chi classes, spirituality classes, share groups, day trips, and pot-lucks.

The Golden Age Center: Operated by the Rainbow Senior Center & Foundation in Comfort, TX.

Bulverde Spring Branch Activity Center & Nutrition Site also covers this county (see description above).

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