

The sizable population of Baby Boomers (born between 1946 and 1964) are turning 65 at an amazing rate of approximately 10,000 people per day (Transamerica Center for Retirement Studies [TCRS], 2020). As a result, by 2018, there were 52.4 million Americans 65 years and older making up 16% of the total population (Administration for Community Living [ACL], 2020, p.5). This increase in population brings the needs and issues of older Americans to the forefront.

STATISTICS

The 65 and over population, which increased 34% between 2008 and 2018, is projected to almost double by 2060 (ACL, 2020, p.5). Three of the Kronkosky counties of interest consist of senior populations higher than the Texas and U.S. percentages, as shown in the following table.

PERCENTAGE OF SENIOR CITIZENS (65+) WITHIN TOTAL POPULATION		
REGION	TOTAL POPULATION	SENIOR POPULATION
	# (2019)	% (2019)
United States	328,239,523	16.5
Texas	28,995,881	12.9
Bandera	23,112	27.9
Bexar	2,003,554	12.4
Comal	156,209	18.3
Kendall	47,431	19.3
(U.S. Census Bureau, 2020)		

The Transamerica Center for Retirement Studies (TCRS) released a study in 2018 to examine the current conditions of U.S. retirees (aged 50 and over) and how they fare in retirement. They discovered that 49% of retirees plan to rely on family and friends for

long term care; 53% wanted to live closer to friends and family; 47% were concerned about declining health that requires long term care; 63% were primarily insured through Medicare; 47% were worried about Social Security being reduced or unavailable in the future; 30% indicated that they did not save for retirement; 26% fear the lack of access to adequate and affordable healthcare; additionally, 37% stated they worried about outliving their savings and investments (TCRS, 2018). These statistics reflect the ever-growing demand to address the needs and services available to seniors and what improvements can be made to strengthen the retirement system.

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 10,000 senior centers serving approximately 1 million American senior citizens every day (National Council on Aging [NCOA], n.d.e). 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, n.d.e).

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, n.d.e)

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, n.d.e).

Due to COVID-19, all senior centers in San Antonio that were due to open up at reduced capacity, have been ordered to stay closed for the remainder of the year 2020. These centers will continue to offer virtual programming as well as curbside meals and are set to reopen January 2021 (Salinas, 2020).

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 (ACL, 2017)
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, 2020)
3. *Specialized Centers:* focus on a single program, such as a meal service at a Senior Nutrition Site (City of San Antonio, 2020)

SENIOR CENTER PARTICIPANTS

“Senior centers have become one of the most widely used services among America’s older adults. Today, almost 10,000 senior centers serve more than 1 million older adults every day” (NCOA, n.d.e). The following is a profile of a typical senior center participant:

- ✦ 75 years old
- ✦ Female
- ✦ Caucasian
- ✦ Widowed or living alone
- ✦ Fixed, low income

(NCOA, n.d.e)

Seniors who attend senior centers also typically have higher levels of health, social interaction, and life satisfaction as compared with seniors who do not participate in senior centers activities.

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.f).

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.c). 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.d)

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 102 accredited senior centers as of February 2016, only five of which are in Texas (NCOA, n.d.b).

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.b).

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.

A recent study of New York City senior centers revealed that younger, more active seniors did not participate in senior centers because they were too busy working, had other social and leisure activities, didn't need programs or services, didn't need or want socialization, and they felt that other members were not like them (age, functionality) (Pardasani & Berkman, 2016).

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. 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, n.d.a).

SENIORS IN THE SAN ANTONIO REGION

In a community survey of San Antonio seniors conducted by Clover Health (2020), only 50% of those surveyed reported that they exercise at least 3 days a week, for 20 minutes or longer. One third of local seniors (30%) reported a sedentary lifestyle. According to the CDC, regular physical activity is crucial for healthy aging and offers numerous health benefits. Physical activity can help delay, prevent, or manage many chronic diseases common in adults 50 years or older (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention [CDC], 2019). Many senior centers available offer safe and convenient access to healthy lifestyle programs designed to promote physical activity.

SENIOR CENTERS IN THE SAN ANTONIO REGION

The Alamo Service Connection (ASC) (2020) Network of Care website provides an on-line directory of senior services and resources for the San Antonio region. These services are designed to help address some of the challenges that seniors face. The site lists 36 senior centers in the KCF counties of interest (not a comprehensive list):

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

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**(2020): Provides assistance with daily living, guardianship, money management services, and senior volunteer activities.

*Meals on Wheels San Antonio** (2020): 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.

Frank Garrett Multi-Service Center: Provides congregated meals, fitness, aerobics, dance classes as well as an open field for outdoor team sports.

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** (2020): 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** (2020): 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** (2020) also operates more than 50 Nutrition/Community Rooms in churches and housing properties throughout the city as well as nine comprehensive centers.

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: 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 previous description).

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.

Comfort Golden Age Center: Nutrition site, recreational activities, computer and exercise classes.

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

*not listed on the Alamo Service Connection website

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