

# The Future of Senior Centers

## Background

- Senior centers promote healthy aging by providing older adults and their caregivers access to multiple resources, education, and activities to stay active and independent.
- According to Medicine Encyclopedia, “between 10 to 20 percent of elderly adults in this country currently attend senior centers at least once a year.”
  - These centers typically attract those with lower levels of income. (NCOA, 2015)
- 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)
- There is a common misconception that older adults who go to senior centers are lonely, poor, and/or impaired—cognitively, physically, or both.
  - In reality, senior center participants have higher levels of health, social interaction, and life satisfaction. (NCOA, 2015).
  - Underfunded senior services do not help combat these stereotypes.

## Growing Population of Older Adults

- By 2034, the United States is expected to enter a demographic shift where adults age 65+ outnumber children in population—for the first time ever. (U.S. Census, 2018)
- The older population is becoming more racially and ethnically diverse. Between 2018 and 2060 the share of the older population that is non-Hispanic white is projected to drop from 77 percent to 55 percent. (PRB, 2019)
- California is a rapidly aging state, and needs the support of senior centers in order to help sustain the livelihood of our aging population.
  - California has the second highest life expectancy in the nation (81.9 years old).
  - 7,000 Californians turn 65 each week; by 2030, it is expected that 20% of Californians will be 65+.
  - California is currently the sixth youngest state in regard to population, but its older population is expected to increase more than three times as much as the rest of the nation.

## Changing the Conversation

- Is the term “senior center” still appropriate and reflective of the way people are aging today?
  - “Senior center” is a term of familiarity among older adults and communities, and elicits a particular set of expectations that we have come to understand.
  - However, do older adults wear that term/badge with honor? Can the term be read as derogatory?
  - As the aging continuum continues to expand, we must look towards the guidance of our older adults on what falls under the term “senior.”

## Meeting the Needs of Older Adults

- Engaging, dynamic senior centers that meet the needs of older adults today and in the future are crucial for communities throughout the country.
- GenSpace serves as a pioneer in better understanding what diverse older populations want and need, as its location in Koreatown is one of the densest and most culturally diverse communities in the country.
- The needs of older adults are not what they used to be—particularly with a technologically advancing and more mobile society. Senior centers must adapt to these advancements in order to help older adults remain connected and address their needs.
- GenSpace conducted robust focus groups of diverse older adults living in the Koreatown community to find out what they wanted and needed in a new community space. GenSpace’s programming and classes are a direct reflection of this.

## California’s Focus on Aging

- California published the Master Plan on Aging (MPA) in 2021, with initiatives such as pandemic triage rules to prioritize older people with COVID-19 over younger ones.
- Governor Newsom released a 2021-2022 budget with specific earmarks for aging issues, such as \$5 million for Master Plan for Aging leadership and operations; \$15 million for Alzheimer’s research, caregiver and provide training and an education campaign; and \$17.5 million for senior nutrition.
- Governor Newsom signed Executive Order N-73-20, tasking a new Statewide Action Plan to address the digital divide experienced by older Californians.
- Los Angeles Department of Aging released a Four-Year Area Plan on Aging with many important emphases, such as sustaining an older worker program with job training for homeless or at-risk older adults, and creating diverse social hubs for older adults.

## The GenSpace Approach

- Building on the strides that California has made thus far in order to create a more age-friendly state, GenSpace is spearheading a reinvigoration of what it means to be a “senior center.”
- Part of GenSpace’s mission is to lead the way in changing the national conversation on senior centers through evidence-informed programming:
  - **Combating Social Isolation**

GenSpace is dedicated to fostering connection for older individuals through many different facets. By creating opportunities for storytelling and fostering meaningful intergenerational conversations through partnerships with schools and other younger localities, GenSpace takes on a community-based approach to combating social isolation.
  - **Programming**

From a cutting-edge Tech Bar, to intergenerational chats, to a horticultural therapy space, to everything in between, GenSpace is working to develop meaningful programs for older adults. Our approach is based on research and in partnership with the local ecosystem of non-profits and small businesses. We encompass both in-person and virtual programming, so that no older adult is without access to our classes and events.
  - **Wallis Annenberg Leadership Initiative**

The Leadership Initiative works with national tech, business, health, and entertainment leaders to reassess how we as a society view older age, and how we can change the stereotypes and conversation around older adults.
- GenSpace actively promotes older adults’ use of and familiarity with modern technology.
  - **State-of-the-Art Tech Bar**

Technology has become an increasingly important tool for older adults to stay connected, providing access to the goods, services, and support systems needed to stay healthy and thrive in today’s world. Through digital services, older adults can check in with family and friends, schedule time with health care providers, find healthy foods and recipes, share their knowledge, volunteer for meaningful causes, and even learn new skills—all from a safe distance. Promoting familiarity and connectedness with emerging technology will be major priorities of GenSpace’s state-of-the-art Tech Bar, which will include laptops, tablets, and smartphones.
  - **Ongoing Tech Events**

As part of its “Aging Out Loud” Leadership Initiative series, GenSpace will host periodic panels and events discussing the relationship between technology and older adults, and the role that older adults play in the future of technology. Our first such event, Digital Bridges: Why the Future of Tech Depends on Older Adults, was held on November 18, 2021 and included panelists from the programming

and inclusivity side of tech companies, to intergenerational media influencers who focus on aging, to experts in age-friendly design and why it matters.

### **Annenberg Foundation's Commitment to Older Adults**

In addition to founding the Wallis Annenberg GenSpace—which is the brainchild and vision of Wallis Annenberg herself—the Annenberg Foundation has:

- Established equitable vaccination clinics throughout the COVID-19 pandemic to ensure that all individuals—especially older adults—are able to easily get the resources to stay safe and healthy.
- Launched the Annenberg Inclusion Initiative at USC Annenberg School for Communication and Journalism, a think tank focused on studying diversity and promoting the inclusion of marginalized groups, including older adults, in entertainment and media.