

"Planning for Eldercare" August 20, 2009

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Community Aging Services and Senior Centers

Community Aging Services and Long Term Care

There are many private, religious and government organizations across the country that provide supportive services for older people. Many of these services center around helping people stay in their homes and avoid having to go to live in an institution or perhaps move in with family. Because of the emphasis on helping people remain independent, many community aging programs could be viewed as long-term care programs. In fact it's probably just a matter of semantics; long-term care and community aging services are just two sides of the same coin. Other community services may provide socialization or training opportunities. Community aging programs might include:

- Meals served in community centers or delivered to the home
- Community Senior Center activities and training
- Transportation and shopping services for people who can't drive or leave their homes
- Home repairs, snow shoveling, telephone support, caregiver support, care management, legal services, energy and weatherization services, housing subsidies, home health care, counseling and much more
- Adult day care
- Protection from abuse
- Help with health insurance and government entitlement programs

Private support groups might be the Red Cross, women's auxiliaries or foundations. Many religious communities support activities for their elderly members as well as nonmembers. Both private and religious groups often provide services for free to people with little income and few assets. They may, however, charge people for services who have adequate income or assets. Many of these groups may also operate nursing homes and assisted-living facilities.

Senior centers are often the focal point for all aging services in a community. Experts or contact people are housed in senior centers and can provide many services in the center itself or refer out to other organizations that can help. The community served meals or congregate meals in senior centers are a means for attracting older people into the centers. Seniors can then be exposed to the many services that are available.

Government support for aging services comes from the Older Americans Act, passed in 1965. This act, over the years, has produced a large network of care providers and local government managers called Area Agencies on Aging. This network also includes federal agencies, state agencies as well as local area agencies and is called the "national aging network".

The National Aging Network

The Older Americans Act establishes an effective interrelationship between the federal government, State aging units and local service coordinators called Area Agencies on Aging. All three centers of service, the Federal, the state and the local engage in detailed future planning in order to accomplish their jobs. Input at the local level is received from diversified advisory boards representing stakeholders in the elder community. Community meetings and feedback from patrons of senior centers are also used in the planning process. Over the past 44 years, a great deal of thought and energy and research has gone into devising a delivery system that is both efficient and cost effective. In fact, the 29,000 service providers nationwide providing care under the act are the largest single network of long-term care providers in the country.