

Efforts Launched To Meet Seniors' Future Needs

Responding to Mayor Michael Bloomberg's call to address the future for seniors and to "completely re-envision what it means to grow old in New York", the city Commissioner on Aging last week launched a project to modernize aging services and address seniors' future needs.

At the same time, City Council Speaker

Senior Spotlight

By John Toscano

Christine Quinn hosted the first in a series of round-table discussions of how business will be affected by an aging population and what changes may be needed to accommodate the needs of older New Yorkers.

In his recent State of the City address, the mayor announced the start of the All Ages Project in collaboration with the city council and the New York Academy of Medicine. The project would meet the challenge presented by the prospect of the seniors' population nearly doubling in the next 25 years, growing to 20 percent of the city's residents.

Addressing this population explosion, Edwin Mendez-Santiago, commissioner of the Department of the Aging (DFTA), said his modernization effort would focus on his department's three core services: case management, home delivered meals and senior centers.

The new case management system, he said, will be focused on assisting older adults "to age in place and to be engaged in their communities".

The future home delivered meals policy will provide greater efficiency, flexibility and choice to frail homebound seniors. The system will be streamlined to help meet the growing demand of the city's most frail elderly, while providing them with healthy and specialized dietary meals.

In addition, Mendez-Santiago said seniors will benefit from telephone reassurance, friendly visiting and other community supports to make certain that they are safe and secure.

Under the third segment of the modernization of services, senior centers will be transformed into "Healthy Aging Centers", Mendez-Santiago said. The original focus of senior centers was to provide meals as part of the nation's anti-poverty programs. But today, he pointed out, nearly half of DFTA's 325 senior centers are underutilized, resulting in close to one million free meals going unserved annually.

The commissioner said, "Senior centers of tomorrow, by adopting a comprehensive 'wellness' approach, will become places that promote social, physical and mental wellness. While continuing to offer seniors meals and a support system, centers will also offer disease prevention programs, exercise classes, provide opportunities for meaningful volunteerism and civic engagement activities, and present creative opportunities, such as courses and lectures, performing and visual arts and career resources."

The DFTA head summed up:

"Centers can promote social wellness, not only by providing a physical space that allows for gathering and socializing, but also by exploring opportunities to create communities outside their material walls."

Quinn's round-table discussion of how business will respond to aging populations was hosted by Partnership for NYC President Kathryn Wylde. Other participants were New York Academy of Medicine President Jo Ivey Boufford, Councilmember Maria Del Carmen Arroyo, Aging Committee chair, and James Vacca, Senior Centers Subcommittee chair, and business leaders.

The goal of these round tables is to develop a comprehensive set of proposals on how to remain an age-friendly city in a range of areas such as health care, transportation, housing and work force development.

Quinn opened the program by declaring, "When talking about seniors, it's easy to focus on issues—like health care or transportation access—that are so often associated with older New Yorkers. But as our population ages, it's clear that this demographic shift is going to impact how we in New York City do business. We need to be looking at what can be done to help keep people in the work force longer and what support businesses require to help them accommodate the needs of older workers."

Recent studies indicate that although corporate America foresees a significant workforce shortage as baby boomers retire, it is not dealing with the issue presently and may be underestimating the challenges ahead.

Specific topics discussed at the roundtable included:

- Increasing opportunities for people to work
- Creating a NYC index to determine which industries will suffer as older workers retire to plan in advance

- Establishing alumni networks to keep older workers connected to each other and their former employers

- Identifying new and innovative ways to retain older employees and their institutional knowledge

- Increasing mentoring opportunities using older workers, and training older employees in the use of new technologies

- Exploring a public/private partnership to find ways to extend health benefits beyond the immediate family, to accommodate older employees that are raising grandchildren or other family members.

"This partnership to make New York City the best place to age offers an exciting opportunity for the city to join a network of other global cities working to make themselves age-friendly," Boufford said. "Discussions such as the one today are just the beginning in a process designed to address quality of life issues for older adults and, subsequently, for residents of all ages."

"The depth and diversity of our work force is a key competitive strength of New York City. The business community is eager to support an effort to keep older workers productive and contributing to our economy," Wylde said. "The discussion begun today will help ensure that as New York's age demographic increases, the city will capture net benefits from a trend that could otherwise be costly."

THE SAVVY SENIOR

Senior-Friendly Home Makeovers

Dear Savvy Senior,

My husband and I (both in our 60s) are interested in remodeling some areas of our home to make it more senior-friendly, but we're not sure what to do or who to call for help. Any suggestions?

Home Bound Bobbie

Dear Bobbie:

How to make a home safer and easier to live in as you age has become a common question today, as most older Americans want to live out their lives in their own homes. Here are some resources that can help.

Getting Started

There are literally dozens of different things you can do to modify a home for aging-in-place. Modifications can range from simple, inexpensive do-it-yourself projects to extensive remodeling jobs that can cost thousands of dollars (see Home Modifications below). To learn more about senior-friendly modifications and universal design, see these resources:

- **National Resource Center on Supportive Housing and Home Modification** (www.homemods.org). They offer a national directory of home modification resources, information on design and products and places to find

architects and contractors.

- **AARP Home Design section** (www.aarp.org/families/home_design). This Web page provides information and resources on universal design and remodeling solutions, including a checklist that helps you evaluate each room for safety and long-term livability.

- **North Carolina State Center for Universal Design** (www.centerforuniversaldesign.org). This site offers an array of information on universal design projects, services, publication lists and other resources.

Finding Help

Looking for more hands-on help? A good resource to start with is your Area Agency on Aging (call 800-677-1116 to get your local number). They may be able to refer you to aging-in-place resources or professionals in your area.

Another option is independent living centers, which are nonprofit organizations that provide services to seniors and people with disabilities. There are about 600 of these centers across the country, many of which offer free or low-cost home assessments and can make recommendations on how to modify your home to make it more senior-friendly. They can also help you find household product resources, design consultants and

contractors in your area. To locate a center near you, visit www.ilru.org.

Occupational therapists are another good resource to call on. They understand both the physical and mental processes of aging and can make recommendations based on your home and specific needs.

Hiring a Contractor

If your project requires a professional contractor or remodeler, look for one that's a Certified Aging-In-Place Specialist (CAPS). These are professionals that have special training in dealing with the specific needs of older homeowners. See www.nahb.org/caps to learn more or to search for a CAPS contractor in your area.

Savvy Tip: As with any other type of contractor, it's wise to get several bids on a home modification job before deciding on one. Be sure they have experience, ask for a written agreement with estimates and check them out with the local Better Business Bureau. ServiceMagic.com and [angieslist.com](http://AngiesList.com) are also good resources for researching contractors or handymen.

Home Modifications

Simple, inexpensive changes can include:

- Securing carpets and throw rugs with double-sided tape.
- Adding non-skid mats inside and outside the bath/shower.
- Adding reflective, non-slip tape on all non-carpeted stairs.
- Installing hand rails on both sides of all steps, inside and outside.
- Replacing doorknobs with levers and light switches with rocker switches.
- Installing easily grasped D-shaped handles for all drawers and cabinet doors.

- Using brighter full-spectrum bulbs in light fixtures and installing night lights throughout the house.

- Placing a bench near each entrance for setting down packages and resting.

- Installing closet lights as well as adjustable rods and shelves.

- Widening doorways by two inches and installing offset door hinges to accommodate wheelchairs or walkers.

Some projects that might require a handyman or contractor are:

- Creating a no-step entrance into the house. Ramps are a simple solution.

- Widening doors and hallways, installing a stair-lift or elevator for multi-floor access.

- Adding light fixtures around the house for better visibility and putting multiple controls in different parts of a room or installing sensors that turn lights on automatically.

- Adding features like hand-held, flexible shower heads and grab bars in the shower and by the toilet. Replacing the tub with a walk-in shower or installing an elevated toilet, which is easier to stand up from.

- Adjusting the height of kitchen countertops, cabinets, appliances or sink for easier access. Adding pull-out cabinet shelving or installing a lever-handle faucet.

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