



70 West 36th Street, 5th Floor, New York, NY 10018
Phone: (212) 967-0322 Fax: (212) 967-0792 www.unhny.org

**Testimony presented by Carin Tinney, Policy Analyst for Aging Services
United Neighborhood Houses**

**Before the
Senate Standing Committee on Aging
Senator Rubén Díaz, Sr., Chair**

**Hearing on the 2011 Reauthorization of the Older Americans Act
Friday, April 9, 2010**

Good afternoon Senator Diaz and members of the New York State Senate. My name is Carin Tinney and I am the Policy Analyst for Aging Services at United Neighborhood Houses (UNH). UNH is the 90-year-old membership organization of New York City's settlement houses and community centers. Our 38 member agencies, working at over 400 sites with close to 10,000 staff members and 7,500 volunteers, comprise one of the largest human service systems in the city and provide high quality programs and services to over half a million New Yorkers each year. These diverse programs and services include, but are not limited to: congregate and in-home services for older adults, child care, after school and youth development programs, English and adult literacy classes, job training, immigrant legal services, and eviction prevention programs. UNH supports its members through policy development, advocacy, and capacity-building activities.

We commend the Senate for being a champion for older adults and for openly engaging with the provider community in visioning the future of services for this population. The Older Americans Act has been a great asset to the community; our members agencies have received funding from the Department for the Aging to carry out many of the core services under Title III, including home delivered and congregate meals, senior centers, Naturally Occurring Retirement Communities (NORC's), caregiver support services and other supportive services like case management and case assistance. Our agencies also provide

training and support to seniors in seeking out employment and retraining under Title V.

By now we are all acutely aware that the older adult population is about to blossom; the first Baby Boomer will turn 65 in 2011. What often escapes our attention is that this older adult 'population' spans a good thirty to forty years. We can begin delivering a meal to a senior at the age 60, who in turn can keep receiving that meal until she is 100 years old. We note this because we want to underscore that the older adult population is by far, one of the largest populations we provide publicly funded programming for in the country. This expansive population is not short of needing support either, currently in NYC it is estimated that 43% of those 65 or older had some form of disability.¹ Moreover, based on the cost of living in New York City, it is estimated that almost one in three seniors (32%) is living in poverty.²

Today, we offer four recommendations. In order for us to adequately support the older adult population we need programs and services funded by the Older Americans Act to:

- ❖ **Offer a continuum of services, supports and opportunities to seniors who have varied needs and interests; and for those services to be strongly and strategically linked to one another.**

Programs that are successful in enabling a senior to remain in the community are most often ones that can meet the needs of a senior at any level of functioning and engagement with society. Time and time again, we hear that life can change overnight because of a fall, a chronic illness, the loss of a car service (like access-a-ride), an eviction, or a death in the family. It is a community based organization's ability to respond to and provide known, trusted opportunities and services to that person at any stage that will prove valuable in the end.

UNH asks that to the extent possible, services not be compartmentalized and siloed any further than they need to be- we should work to strengthen the existing aging network.

¹ <http://www.nyam.org/initiatives/docs/AgeFriendly.pdf>

² <http://www.nyam.org/initiatives/docs/AgeFriendly.pdf>

- ❖ **Be holistic in their design- paying attention to the social, cultural, psychological, physical health, and spiritual impacts of a program/service on a senior.**

In recent years, NYC's home delivered meals program has undergone a tremendous restructuring- with the intent of increasing efficiency and improving quality. During the process, UNH members and other providers purported that a meal is not simply food- the home delivered meal program provides a much needed meal, daily companionship, and monitoring of the senior's well-being. Moreover, food is more often than not an integral part of one's culture and the home delivered meal program is a key deterrent of social isolation. If we only pay attention to the health aspect of the meal- we would be missing the social, cultural, psychological and spiritual aspects of the service we are providing.

UNH asks that all programs pay heed to the multifaceted and complex nature of human beings as we move into the future of aging services.

Further, we recognize and praise the addition of more medically oriented initiatives being offered in conjunction with existing services- e.g. evidence based chronic disease management in a senior center or adult day setting. We would like to raise a caution here however; we believe that core senior services like the home delivered meals program and senior centers- should be holistic- weighting on the side of social rather than medical. Oftentimes seniors describe "their centers" as their second homes and will seek out a service that provides foods that are reflective of their culture. Putting increased emphasis on restrictive diets, taking salt shakers off of tables, takes away an adults right to choose and eventually could lead to a senior not attending a program- putting them at increased risk for social isolation. Let us not repeat what our sister community- residential/institutional long term care- is now trying to undo. Over-medicalization of daily tasks of living became the norm and thus institutions (rightfully) got a bad rap, seniors facing increased disability can often be heard saying: "I'd rather die than live in a nursing home." For the past 10-15 years nursing homes have begun to recognize the imbalance of social, medical, spiritual and psychological realms of life in their organizations and engaged in the Culture Change movement. We raise this again to say, let's not over-medicalize, limit choice and

creativity of programs, in our efforts to provide evidence-based, quality services to our senior population.

UNH asks that seniors continue to have real choices and decision-making power in the services available to them. Further, providers of OAA programs should continue to have the maximum amount of flexibility in designing program services so that they can be responsive to a senior's social, cultural, psychological, physical health, and spiritual needs.

- ❖ **Adequately fund OAA programs at a level that affords programs the opportunity to provide services to those in need and attract and retain professionals who can provide quality services.**

The joint statement by the National Association of State Units on Aging and The National Association of Area Agencies on Aging³, indicates that there is a discrepancy between the OAA's intent of providing services to all people over the age of 60 and the federal funding to do just that. We are seeing some residual side effects of this reality in the world of home care; there are wait lists to receive non-Medicaid funded homecare and housekeeping. Subsidized home care and housekeeping are essential services that enable seniors not eligible for Medicaid and unable to afford private home care-remain living independently in the community. After years of cuts at the local and state level, providers can no longer do more with less.

UNH asks that increased funding be allocated to programs and services under the Older Americans Act.

- ❖ **Innovate and expand on successful models.**

The home delivered meals program, senior centers, caregiver resource centers and home care services are now established epicenters for the home and community based aging services network. Over the past several years, we've begun to recognize the value of other programs that have proven successful in enabling seniors to live in the community: Naturally Occurring Retirement Communities (NORC's) and the Senior Employment Programs. We urge continued, baselined funding for these programs as they each solve very real

³ Prepared for the Listening Forum on the Reauthorization of the Older American's Act in Virginia, February 2010.

problems seniors face: housing and employability/income. We want to highlight the latter program- Senior Employment. Our members have found great value in this program as it helps to retool/retrain seniors who choose to remain in the workforce and who have been attritioned or laid off; who can no longer perform the job functions of the career they had for decades; and seniors who simply feel that their time is best spent working. Senior employment programs provide training for new careers and assistance in finding employment. With the crash of the market, this program isn't simply self-actualizing, but it's necessary, in many cases, to simply keep food on the table. Further, we recommend that AoA pay attention to the gap created between Title V programming that has means testing and ReServe like programs that prequalify 'professionals' to work. There are many seniors in need of retraining/retooling who are not eligible for either of these programs and are finding it difficult to secure employment for many reasons, including the stigma attached and stereotypes associated with older adults.

UNH asks that the Administration on Aging through the reauthorization of the Older Americans Act innovate and expand programs that have now proven to be successful at meeting the older adult populations varied needs.

Again, I would like to thank Senator Diaz for engaging the community in this dialogue about the 2011 Reauthorization of the Older American's Act.

UNH Members: Arab-American Family Support Center * BronxWorks * CAMBA * Center for Family Life in Sunset Park * Chinese American Planning Council Claremont Neighborhood Centers * Cypress Hills Local Development Corporation * East Side House Settlement * Educational Alliance * Goddard Riverside Community Center * Grand Street Settlement * Greenwich House * Hamilton-Madison House * Hartley House * Henry Street Settlement * Hudson Guild * Jacob A. Riis Neighborhood Settlement House * Kingsbridge Heights Community Center * Lenox Hill Neighborhood House * Lincoln Square Neighborhood Center * Mosholu Montefiore Community * New Settlement Apartments * Northern Manhattan Improvement Corporation * Project Hospitality * Riverdale Neighborhood House * Queens Community House * SCAN New York * School Settlement Association * Shorefront YM-YWHA of Brighton-Manhattan Beach, Inc * Southeast Bronx Neighborhood Centers * St. Matthew's and St. Timothy's Neighborhood Center * St. Nick's Alliance * Stanley M. Isaacs Neighborhood Center * Sunnyside Community Services * Third Street Music School Settlement * Union Settlement Association * United Community Centers * University Settlement