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## **UNH City Fiscal Year 2020 Budget & Policy Priorities** **Aging Services**

**Aging Services** – The older adult population is growing rapidly in New York City, with the 60+ population estimated to rise from 16% of New Yorkers in 2000 to 21% of New Yorkers by 2040, according to the Department for the Aging (DFTA). Older adults need a robust community based infrastructure that provides positive supports for healthy aging. There is a strong need to bolster services and programs that support older adults to address this growing population, especially as the City looks to issue new Requests for Proposals (RFPs) for senior centers and home delivered meals.

### **In FY 2020, the City must take the following actions to support older New Yorkers:**

- Include the second \$10 million in promised senior center “model budget” funding.
- Include an investment of \$20 million to support congregate meals and kitchen staff in senior centers.
- Create a \$10 million emergency repairs fund for senior centers in need of capital and expense budget repairs and building improvements.
- Invest \$15 million in the DFTA Home Delivered Meal program to continue providing daily meals to homebound seniors.
- Baseline the \$1 million increase in NORC funding from FY 2019, ensure Council Discretionary funding continues to fund the current NORC programs, and add an additional \$750,000 to cover nursing services required in NORC contracts.
- Increase the Geriatric Mental Health Initiative from \$1.9 million to \$2.5 million to support these services, and support the administration’s \$1.7 million add to Geriatric Mental Health services.
- Restore the Healthy Aging Initiative at FY2019 level of \$2.04 million to continue providing supports.
- Restore the Support Our Seniors Initiative at FY2019 level of \$4.08 million to continue providing supports.

### **Senior Centers**

***Model Budget*** – DFTA’s \$20 million “model budget” initiative for senior centers provides a critical investment that began to correct long-standing funding deficiencies. DFTA called for the first \$10 million, allocated and baselined in FY 2018, to be used in senior centers to boost programs through increased salaries, additional staff, and to address other operational challenges. The second \$10 million in baselined funding has been promised as part of this initiative by FY 2021. This funding must be allocated immediately. With the opportunity of an additional \$10 million infused in senior center programs, we urge DFTA to provide flexibility in categories that were excluded from previous model budget funding such as meals, occupancy, and OTPS.

***Congregate Meals*** – With 249 DFTA-funded senior centers across the City, additional funding beyond the \$20 million in “model budget” funding is necessary to adequately support senior centers. There is especially a need to strengthen congregate meal funding to help pay for raw food costs, disposables, supplies, maintenance, and kitchen staff to provide daily meals within senior centers. The most recently-available data shows that DFTA provided \$9.06 per meal while the national average cost per meal was \$10.69, though these figures do not address the steep need for increased staff and salaries, the higher cost of living in New York City, and many underfunded requirements needed to run a kitchen. Beyond previously-promised model budget funding, a new investment of \$20 million for congregate meals would help stabilize this program and support senior nutrition.

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***Infrastructure and Repairs*** – DFTA-funded senior centers often face a challenging reality when it comes to building upkeep, with issues ranging from broken stoves to leaking roofs. According to DFTA, in the summer of 2018, 30 air conditioners did not work in senior centers that were designated as official NYC cooling centers. This problem is even more acute for those senior centers that are located in NYCHA facilities – given the multitude of crises NYCHA currently faces, the upkeep of senior centers in NYCHA facilities run by community-based organizations has become a back-burner priority. Senior center maintenance and repairs are not covered in DFTA contracts, and available funding for repairs comes from a confusing range of agencies and pots of money. At the same time, senior centers often face administrative challenges and delays even after funding has been secured. DFTA and the Council should create a \$10 million emergency repairs fund to support much-needed repairs and building improvements, covering both expense funding and capital funding for major projects worth \$35,000 or more.

***Senior Center Procurement*** – As the City looks to re-procure the senior center system with contracts beginning in July 2021, it is essential that DFTA utilize transparent methodology, ensure funding is flexible to match needs, and meaningfully include providers in the process of envisioning the new senior center system.

***Home Delivered Meals*** – Home delivered meal programs provide a daily nutritious meal to homebound older adults who are unable to prepare their own food. In addition to receiving a meal, older adults who may be at risk for social isolation receive an important wellness-check from delivery staff. These programs are currently struggling with rising costs for purchasing raw food for meal preparation, maintaining competitive wages for delivery staff, and dealing with unplanned expenses like vehicle maintenance and parking tickets. On average, DFTA’s reimbursement rate is less than the real cost of providing a meal. The most recently available data shows the national average cost of providing a home delivered meal is \$11.06 per meal. In the UNH network, the average reimbursement rate is only \$8.12 per meal, and \$8.42 per meal within the DFTA network at large.

Through the leadership of the City Council and the Administration, this deficiency was recognized in FY 2019 and \$2.84 million was added to the Home Delivered Meal program, though it was not baselined. Averaging 46 cents per meal, this funding brought the reimbursement rate to \$8.94 per meal. Without a higher reimbursement rate, home-delivered meal providers will continue to struggle to ensure program quality and meet the dietary needs of older adults. Current contracts remain in place until June 2020. A financial investment of \$15 million would offer meaningful relief to providers who struggle to provide high-quality and specialized/culturally-appropriate meals to the City’s homebound older adults.

***Naturally Occurring Retirement Communities (NORCs)*** – NORCs are housing developments or neighborhoods that were not intentionally built for older adults, but are now home to a significant number of older people. NORCs coordinate support for housing, social service, and health care providers to promote health and stability among older adults in apartment buildings and housing complexes, as well as in lower-density neighborhoods. Currently, DFTA supports classic NORCs through \$6.5 million in baselined funding (to which \$1 million was added in FY 2019 but was not baselined), and the City Council supports additional programs, including Neighborhood NORCs, with \$3.65 million in discretionary funding.

NORCs are struggling to meet requirements for on-site nursing hours, which are mandated in DFTA contracts. Nurses provide important services to keep people healthy while living at home, and many residents rely on these nurses as their main source of health care. At many NORC sites, providers secure pro-bono nursing service through Visiting Nurse Service, hospitals, students, retired volunteers, and other means. However, these arrangements are becoming unstable in the wake of recent state billing changes, and many nurses and NORC directors are worried about maintaining the arrangements. Consequently, NORCs are spending more to maintain the same level of service they have continuously provided. In effect, nursing hours represent an unfunded, though important, mandate in DFTA contracts. An additional \$750,000 in Council funding (which should not impact service delivery level requirements) would cover the loss in pro-bono nursing hours in DFTA-contracted NORCs over the last several years.

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**Geriatric Mental Health Initiative (GMHI)** – Currently funded at \$1.9m, GMHI is a critical City Council initiative designed to strengthen the capacity of senior service programs to assess and provide mental health services in non-stigmatizing ways to older adults. Restoring the initiative to previous budget levels of \$2.5 million would support strong programs and expanded service. To meet the growing behavioral health needs of the City’s aging population, UNH also recommends expanding the program to support additional communities.

**Healthy Aging Initiative** – The Healthy Aging Initiative provides funding for health promotion services to prevent chronic disease, prevent falls, and promote good nutrition and exercise at senior centers and other sites throughout the City. Providers credit the Healthy Aging Initiative with helping them offer holistic services to the older adults they serve through their senior center or NORC contracts.

**Support our Seniors Initiative** – The Support Our Seniors Initiative funds organizations with a city contract that operates senior services and programming. Similar to the Healthy Aging Initiative, providers cite the Support our Seniors Initiative with allowing them to offer holistic supports to the older adults they serve through senior center or NORC contracts.

UNH recommendations: Bolster services and programs that support older adults to address this growing population, especially as the City looks to issue new Requests for Proposals (RFPs) for senior centers and home delivered meals. See above for specific recommendations as they relate to Senior Centers, Home Delivered Meals, NORCs, GMHI, Healthy Aging Initiative, and Support our Seniors Initiative.

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