



STRATEGY 17

Strengthen North Carolina’s Local Senior Centers

- a. The North Carolina General Assembly should strengthen the skill and ability of senior centers to provide vital social connections, activities, exercise, and other programs integral to the lives of older adults and their families by:
 - i. Supporting the 2023–2024 Senior Tar Heel Legislature priority to “Increase Recurring Funding for Senior Centers by \$1.26 Million”
 - ii. As part of this funding increase, the General Assembly should also request a study of the current senior center certification program to evaluate effectiveness and identify opportunities for strengthening certification to ensure that needs of older adults are being met, that centers are serving a population representative of the community with regard to race, ethnicity, and disability of older adults, and to evaluate how funding can meet the goal of incentivizing certification.
- b. The North Carolina Division of Aging and Adult Services should conduct the analysis of the senior center certification program recommended in Strategy 17.
 - i. To identify strengths and weaknesses and opportunities for improvement. This process should include Area Agencies on Aging, a representative sample of senior centers and participants, and representatives of the Senior Tar Heel Legislature and Governor’s Advisory Council on Aging.

Priority of the Senior Tar Heel Legislature 2023–2024

Increase the Senior Center General Purpose Appropriation by **\$1,265,316** in recurring funds.

Senior Center General Purpose funding is currently **\$1,265,316**, which is not meeting the demands of a growing population.

Desired Result – North Carolina’s senior centers will have a strengthened capacity to serve the diverse groups of older adults in their communities.

Why does the task force recommend this strategy? – Senior centers offer a variety of programs and services that help older adults connect to needed resources, experience social connections, and remain physically active. Despite the importance of senior centers for many older adults in communities across North Carolina, state Senior Center General Purpose funding has decreased by 18% since 2004 when adjusted for inflation, while the population of people aged 60+ has grown by 82% during the same time (see Figure 5).⁷ With increased funding should also come accountability, which is why the task force recommends a review of the senior center certification program to evaluate whether it is fulfilling its purpose of ensuring best

practices in programming and administration. A review and revision of the certification requirements and process can help to make sure senior centers are meeting modern needs (e.g., supporting digital literacy) and serving a variety of community constituents.

Context – Senior centers offer a wide array of services and programs, which can include but are not limited to:

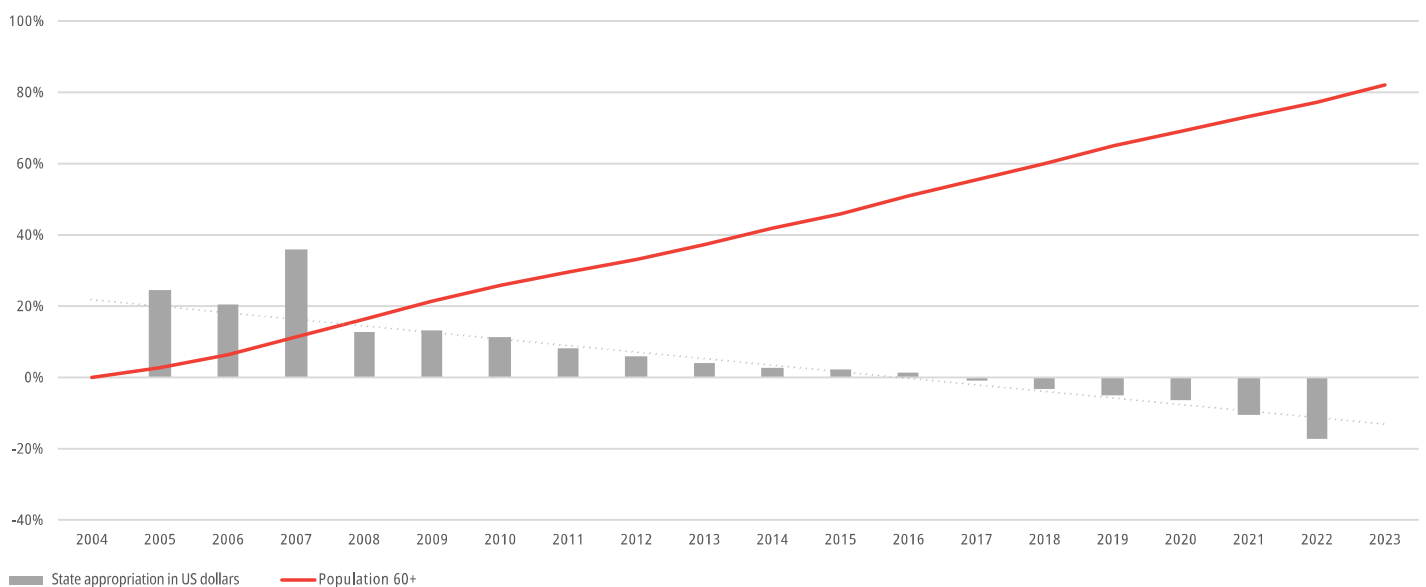
Individual services:⁸

- Information and referral
- Case assistance
- In-home assistance
- Home-delivered meals
- Job search and training
- Legal assistance
- Health insurance counseling and claims assistance
- Transportation
- Volunteer opportunities

Group services:

- Congregate meals
- Educational sessions
- Cultural events
- Health education sessions and wellness activities
- Retirement planning
- Support groups
- Community service projects
- Intergenerational programs
- Recreational trips

FIGURE 5. Senior Center General Purpose Funding, Adjusted for Inflation, Compared to Change in 60+ Population, 2004-2023



Source: Senior Tar Heel Legislature Priority #2, Funding for NC Senior Centers. <https://ncseniortarheellegislature.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/2023-24-STHL-LEGISLATIVE-PRIORITIES-FACT-SHEETS.pdf>

Participation in senior center activities is associated with a variety of benefits for older adults, including lower levels of depression, increased supportive friendships, lower levels of stress, and improved perceptions of social and physical health.⁹

Senior Center General Purpose Funding and Certification

Senior centers are typically funded through three to eight different funding sources.⁹ These sources can include municipal or county government tax dollars, federal and state government, fundraising events, grants, participant contributions, in-kind donations, and volunteer hours.⁹

In North Carolina, Senior Center General Purpose (SCGP) funding is allocated from the state to Area Agencies on Aging to distribute to local senior centers. One purpose of the SCGP is to incentivize senior centers to complete a state certification process to increase their base funding levels. Funding levels are determined by a center's status as a "Center of Merit" or "Center of Excellence" and funds require a 25% local match.¹⁰

The certification process reviews the following criteria for senior centers:

- Information and referral/case assistance services
- Publicity for the center and its programs
- Marketing to special populations and the community
- Activities
- Opportunities for volunteers
- Advocacy
- Transportation to the center
- Governance
- Input from older adults
- Planning
- General personnel practices
- Individual training and professional development planning
- Other operational issues



Anita is a retired physician and an active member of her community who enjoys spending time with her friends at the local senior center. At the senior center, she participates in exercise classes, keeps up her computer and other technology

skills, and finds deep joy in the relationships she has built through the center's knitting group. Anita has even found opportunities to share her professional expertise and passion for caring for people by coordinating information sessions on different health topics for center participants and by helping to develop a partnership with a nearby clinic for monthly health screenings at the center. In these ways, the senior center has both benefited from Anita's participation and provided endless opportunities for her to explore and learn new things, create and sustain friendships, and keep up her physical activity.

**This is a composite story that represents the experiences of many older adults who participate in senior center activities.*

How would this impact the health of older adults?



Senior centers can offer physical activity and falls-prevention programming to reduce the risk of falls in older adults.



Senior centers often offer physical activity programming and transportation services to help older adults stay mobile.



Many senior centers participate in congregational meal programs and/or offer other nutrition support services.



Senior centers offer a variety of programming that helps older adults build and maintain social connections.