



184 ELDRIDGE STREET
NEW YORK NY 10002
212-453-4555
UNIVERSITYSETTLEMENT.ORG

Testimony of University Settlement before the New York City Council

Joint Oversight Hearing: The Needs of Immigrant Older Adults in NYC

Committee on Aging, Chair Crystal Hudson
Committee on Immigration, Chair Alexa Avilés

Submitted by Xing Hui Zheng,
Assistant Director of the Houston Street Center,
University Settlement

February 27, 2024

My name is Xing Hui Zheng, and I am the Assistant Director of the Houston Street Center at University Settlement on the Lower East Side.

Every year, University Settlement partners with 40,000 New Yorkers in Lower Manhattan and Brooklyn through programming for all ages. For 18 years, the Houston Street Center has provided programming for older adults from all five boroughs, mostly immigrant, Cantonese & Mandarin speakers.

At HSC, we work to reframe aging as a positive process and provide our older adults participants with the knowledge and skills to age well. This guides our programming, which encourages older adults to be physically active and lifelong learners through a variety of online and in-person classes. We know that staying intellectually and physically engaged is immensely helpful during the aging process.

We see that immigrant older adults need social services and support. This includes increased access to affordable, healthy, and culturally appropriate food which is important to our participants, who are often living on a shoestring budget and frequent food pantries.

It also includes help navigating complicated, bureaucratic systems and connecting them to city services. Our staff regularly help our participants translate or fill out forms and make phone calls. Our staff across all of the University Settlement older adults programs connect participants to SNAP, help get answers to complicated medical insurance questions, and help participants work through complicated systems to qualify for home health care services.

Our participants also need safe transportation options. Many older adults, particularly AAPI immigrants, are afraid to ride the subway.

Finally, many of our older adults need affordable housing. Some of our participants live with their extended families; others remain in small Chinatown apartments too often on the top floor of a walk-up, a housing situation that is not tenable as people get older. Most want some form of independence and community that affordable senior housing can bring.

LEAD. ACT. IMPACT. 領導。行動。影響。 LIDERA. ACTÚA. IMPACTA. अग्रणी कार्यवाही अग्र DIRIGEZ. AGISSEZ. IMPACTEZ. .ረዳሽ. ለሰራተኞች. .ሰራተኞች. ЛИДИТЬ. ДЕЙСТВУЙ. ВЛИЯЙ. 领导。行动。影响。



184 ELDRIDGE STREET
NEW YORK NY 10002
212-453-4555
UNIVERSITYSETTLEMENT.ORG

In addition to these services, our immigrant older adults need community and wellness programs in languages that they speak and offered by people they trust.

Our immigrant older New Yorkers, particularly the primarily AAPI older adults that we serve, experience isolation and loneliness, especially if they don't have access to a place like HSC. By developing flexible, culturally-responsive programming that reflects their interest and are in the languages that they speak, HSC connects older adults to neighbors and friends, which in turn, makes them healthier.

Every month, Houston Street Center's HeART program offers 16 in-person and online classes with a total of 202 participants aged 50 and above. In addition to these classes, our HeART program organizes monthly community health event specifically designed for older adults, actively engaging with and benefiting an additional 229 community members since the beginning of this fiscal year.

Our Wellness Together program, which aims to improve quality of life for older adults who are homebound for health reasons or because they're caregivers, offers 6 online classes that interact with around 60 older adults.

Our older adults are drawn to HSC and the relationships they develop with our staff. They depend on our team because they feel isolated or experience a generational or cultural gap even within their own families. We would love to offer more intergenerational programming to help our older adults feel more connected and seen.

Because the demographic category of older adults includes the largest range of years—it includes 60-year-olds to even over 100 years old—we also believe that we need to recognize the different needs of younger older adults. For example, many older adults want to continue working, but their skills and experience may be vastly different depending on their age. We would encourage developing programming for more targeted age groups.

Thank you so much for your time. I will be happy to answer any questions at xing@universitysettlement.org.