

agejustice

News for NYC Seniors and Allies - May 2019

DEBATE OVER CITY'S BUDGET FOR AGING SERVICES



City Council Aging Committee Chairwoman Margaret Chin is pushing for more funding for DFTA. Photo: NYC Council

BY JARRETT MURPHY

New York City is getting older. Already, there are 1.6 million people older than 60 in the city—more than the entire population of Philadelphia or Dallas. By the year 2040, one in five New Yorkers will be 60 or older.

That's good news: It means people are living longer, and staying in the city later in life. The increasing population of older people, however, will also create challenges the city has never faced before, like how to house all those seniors, make sure they have enough to eat, adapt the transit system to meet their needs and combat social isolation.

Mayor de Blasio's administration has taken some steps to meet these challenges, like redesigning its senior meals program, revamping the way it assists care-givers and spending \$10 million last year to improve programming at senior centers through a "model budget."

But as the City Council and mayor get down to negotiating the budget for next fiscal year, which starts July 1, senior advocates say recent spending increases for the Department of the Aging (DFTA) fall short of aging New Yorker's needs.

"The DFTA budget still accounts for less than 1 percent of the city's total budget, a point that is only exacerbated by the fact that aging New Yorkers are now the fastest growing demographic," Katelyn Hosey, director of public policy for LiveOn NY, testified at a March hearing on the mayor's preliminary budget.

DFTA administers the city's 246 senior centers, which are largely run by nonprofit contractors and serve 30,000 seniors a day – a 97 percent utilization rate. It also provides resources to caregivers for senior citizens, does case management for tens of thousands of people, provides homecare for 3,000 New Yorkers, oversees home-meal de-

liveries and gives help to victims of elder abuse.

De Blasio's executive budget proposed spending \$363 million on DFTA next year, \$23 million less than the budget adopted for the current year. The City Council has recommended the administration spend another \$15 million to improve senior centers and eliminate waiting lists for homecare and case-management services.

For their part, advocates are pushing for millions to improve meal services and pay food-service workers more, and also for the restoration of funding for services targeted at the city's "naturally occurring retirement communities," or NORCs.

Soon, the mayor will release his executive budget—his official proposal. That will trigger a final flurry of public City Council hearings and private negotiations between the mayor and the Council, led by Council Speaker Corey Johnson.

Advocates will have their say, too. May 8 has been designated a lobby day for senior centers—their members will meet with all 51 Councilmembers and hold a rally on the steps of City Hall.

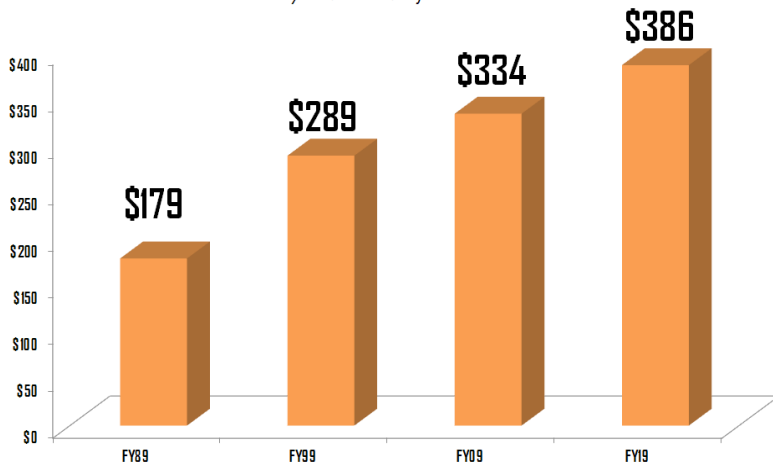
The budget is only one key element in the city's policy for aging people. A new "request for proposals" for senior centers is expected soon – and that could reshape how the city provides everyday services to older New Yorkers.

An aging population is not unique to New York. By 2035, for the first time in U.S. history, the number of people over age 65 will outnumber the number of children younger than 18. Worldwide, the population aged 60 or is expected to more than double by 2050.

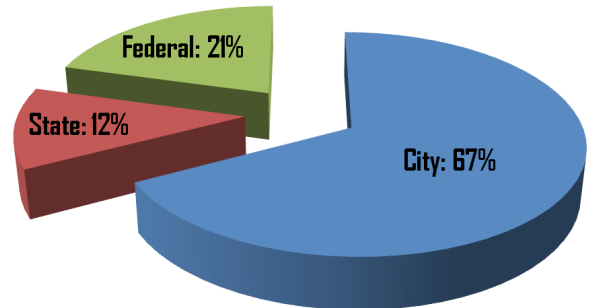
New York's Budget for the Aging

Budget of the NYC Department for the Aging






Selected years, millions, adjusted to 2018 dollars



Where Aging Services Funding Comes From



HOW DFTA'S BUDGET MEASURES UP

 <p>POLICE DEPARTMENT \$5.6 BILLION</p>	 <p>DEPARTMENT OF SANITATION \$1.7 BILLION</p>	 <p>DEPARTMENT FOR THE AGING \$386 MILLION</p>	 <p>THE MAYORALTY \$140 MILLION</p>	 <p>EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT \$57 MILLION</p>
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THE BUDGET PROCESS

JANUARY: The mayor releases his preliminary budget, indicating his initial revenue estimates and spending plans.

FEBRUARY/MARCH
The Council holds hearings on different parts of the budget.

EARLY APRIL: The Council issues a report on and response to the mayor's preliminary budget.

LATE APRIL: The mayor issues the executive budget, which is his official proposal.

MAY: The Council holds hearings on the executive budget.

JUNE: The mayor and Council agree on a final budget. This becomes the "adopted budget."

JULY: The adopted budget takes effect as a new fiscal year begins on July 1.

TAKE ACTION!

Do you think the DFTA budget should be larger, smaller, different? Make your voice heard by doing one or more of these:

1. Call or email your City Councilmember. Find them at <https://council.nyc.gov/districts/>
2. Write a letter to the mayor: Mayor Bill de Blasio, City Hall, New York, NY 10007
3. Attend the May 8 rally at City Hall Park or watch the live webcast at citylimits.org
4. Take the survey: Text "senior" to 646-916-3930

City's Commitment to Diverse Seniors is Unprecedented



DFTA Commission Cortes-Vazquez visits the Elmhurst Jackson Heights Senior Center. Photo by DFTA.

BY LORRAINE CORTÉS-VÁZQUEZ

New York City is home to approximately 1.6 million older adults whose cultures, personal experiences and shared identity as resilient New Yorkers make the City stronger. DFTA, as the New York City Department for the Aging is known, stands at the center, serving older New Yorkers through advocacy, direct services and partnerships with hundreds of community-based nonprofits. The mission to ensure the quality of life for older persons is greatly improved from Woodlawn in the Bronx to Floral Park in Queens and neighborhoods in between.

After serving as a senior advisor to Mayor Bill de Blasio, I am honored to serve as commissioner of DFTA and to achieve the Mayor's vision of making New York one of the leading Age-friendly Cities in the country. We are poised to accomplish this with an increasingly diverse older population — economically, culturally, religiously and linguistically. Older New Yorkers primarily speak 14 languages, and more than 40 percent of seniors are foreign-born. As this immigrant population grows, especially the large Asian and Latino populations, we are redoubling our efforts to respond to the cultural differences of more communities.

Simply put, immigration and economic status are never a barrier to receiving DFTA's supportive services.

With that in mind, I expect to build on existing successes and shape a path to better serve all seniors for years to come. To date, this administration has allocated more than \$90 million to DFTA — an unprecedented amount — bringing the agency's current budget to \$397 million. This funding has allowed for vital services.

The ThriveNYC DFTA Geriatric Mental Health Initiative breaks down stigmas by providing group engagement and one-on-one counseling in senior centers. Recently, the administration announced an additional \$1.7 million that could double the number of Geriatric Mental Health sites. DFTA is also home to the successful ThriveNYC Friendly Visiting initiative, which has provided isolated seniors with more than 50,000 hours of visits from trained volunteers to date.

We are equally committed to providing more affordable senior housing through the Home Sharing Program. This case worker-led matching service pairs homeowners or leaseholders with people in need of housing; at least one housemate is 60 or older. In addition to splitting costs, home sharing combats social isolation and

can promote intergenerational engagement between housemates.

For caregivers facing burnout, our Caregiver Resource Center has expanded respite services, giving them time to reset and recharge. Supporting caregivers, who are often women with full-time jobs outside the home, is central to strengthening families. The message is straightforward: Let us care for you while you care for others.

Looking ahead later this year, we plan to launch a pilot program for 24/7, app-based car service for seniors and people with limited mobility who live in parts of the Bronx, Brooklyn and Queens that are underserved by current transportation options. We are also planning requests for proposals for home-delivered meals and senior centers, with the senior center RFP potentially broadening our network by 2021.

Under Mayor de Blasio, DFTA is far from alone in this critical work. Older adults are greatly helped by services such as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program through the Human Resources Administration; the Rent Freeze and Senior Citizen Homeowners' Exemption programs through the Department of Finance; the Seniors First initiative with Housing Preservation and Development; and dozens of other programs outlined in "Age-friendly NYC: New Commitments for a City for All Ages." Information about all of the City's services are available by contacting 311.

I look forward to working with the Mayor's Office, City Council and advocates to strengthen resources for aging services. One thing is clear: We share the same unwavering commitment to supporting older New Yorkers as they age in place with dignity.

Lorraine Cortés-Vázquez is commissioner of the New York City Department for the Aging. Prior to joining the de Blasio administration, she served in executive leadership roles with AARP, EmblemHealth and other organizations. She also served as New York's first Latina Secretary of State.

It's Time to Make NYC a #FairCity4AllAges

BY MARGARET CHIN AND KATELYN HOSEY

After almost 50 years of working at the Chinese-American Planning Council Open Door Senior Center, Po-Ling Ng took the stand at the City Council Aging Committee's hearing to share her frustrations about the city's commitment to funding meals for seniors.

While Po-Ling expertly and passionately articulated the varying reimbursement rates for meals that her senior center receives – as low as \$3.92 per meal on weekends – there was a larger story taking place, one about the impacts that these dismal contract rates create.

Po-ling opened up about just what these city funds force her mission-driven, community-rooted program to pay its front line workers: "My kitchen staff gets just \$15 an hour. Someone worked for me for 42 years; they still get \$15 an hour. Do you think that's fair? Do you think that's fair? 42 years!"

The answer to her question is obvious. It's not fair, and it's a challenge that exists for senior centers across the five boroughs.

That's why it's time to make New York a #FairCity4AllAges.

This means ensuring not only that seniors have access to nutritious, quality meals, but that contracts allow for all staff to receive a competitive, livable wage. While the city recently embarked on a "Model Budget" process for senior centers allocating an initial investment of \$10 million in FY18, this process explicitly excluded raises for the cooks responsible for a senior center's core function: nutrition services for an increasingly impoverished older adult population, as mandated by the Older Americans Act.

This means that the cook at Open Door Senior Center and all cooks similarly making minimum wage or slightly above it at Department for the Aging (DFTA)-funded senior center were never even considered as a part of said "Model Budget" process for senior centers. Instead, this core function of senior centers, which has a significant impact on its overall financial stability, is being evaluated separately in a process that is unlikely to lead to investment until FY21 at the earliest.

Given the value of meals to New York's older adults, there is something strikingly



unfair about this decision, no matter its stated rationale.

Resulting from the lack of new investments in meals for seniors, frustration continues to permeate throughout the senior-service community, as highlighted in a recent City Limits article, "Advocates See 'Broken' Budget Process for City's Seniors." Adding salt to the wound, DFTA has been asked to find \$2 million in cuts to its budget as part of the Project to Eliminate the Gap (PEG). At a time when the senior population continues to grow, cuts to DFTA are not a viable outcome to budget negotiations.

Promisingly, a solution does exist: Within a city budget that has now reached 92.2 billion dollars, an additional \$20 million in funding for congregate meals and \$15 million for home-delivered meals must be allocated to address both of these principles of fairness.

At less than one-half of 1 percent of the city's overall budget, DFTA has long struggled to receive the financial support it requires to meet its mission of ensuring the "the dignity and quality of life of diverse older adults." A change to this narrative is both possible and imperative, and that change cannot wait.

For a human services workforce that is made up of predominantly women, people of color, and immigrants, as found by the Human Services Council, change to ensure that Department for the Aging funded services can pay truly competitive salaries, ones that do not exacerbate the trending tale of two cities, cannot wait.

For an increasingly diverse senior

population, roughly 50 percent of which are immigrants, as reported by the Center for an Urban Future, change to ensure that providers are funded to serve culturally competent meals cannot wait.

For a rapidly increasing senior population that overwhelmingly wishes to age in place, as reported by AARP New York, change to ensure access to community-based services or home-delivered meals cannot wait.

Yes, budget challenges exist, but the need is far greater. If the city makes the proper investments today, New York will not only stand to save hundreds of millions of dollars in future healthcare costs, but all New Yorkers will be healthier and better able to thrive in their later years.

It's time to make New York a #FairCity4AllAges – for seniors, for caregivers, for human service professionals, for grandparents raising grandchildren – and we ask that Mayor de Blasio and all of the City Council join us in making this a reality.

Margaret Chin is a Democratic City Councilmember and Katelyn Hosey is the director of public policy for LiveOn NY.

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