Preparing for the ‘age wave’: a new model builds capacity in San Francisco

The Institute on Aging Senior Campus formally opened in San Francisco, California, in April 2011. Rendering by Clayton Perry
The focus of the new Institute on Aging Senior Campus is to provide everything necessary to enable older adults to maintain their health, well-being, independence and participation in life.1

As with any long-anticipated event, the “age wave”—that demographic phenomenon set to transform society—often seemed slightly unreal and distant over the years. Perhaps that accounts for the late, and in many cases inadequate, planning and preparation this slow-building seismic shift has engendered. But a new report1 from the Washington, DC-based Brookings Institution reinforces the gathering sense that the wave is, indeed, at the shore.

In his report, demographer William H. Frey, a senior fellow at this nonprofit research organization, sees “a clear mes-sage” in the 2010 United States Census: “The older population is growing everywhere.” Frey, also a University of Michigan research professor, notes that the 45-and-older age group grew 18 times faster than its under-45 counterpart in the years 2000–2010.1 Further, Boomers in the 45-and-older age group grew 18 times faster than its under-45 counterpart in the years 2000–2010.1

What about the future? The Association of Bay Area Governments projects that San Francisco’s age 60-plus population will increase from its current level of 148,200 to 174,000 by 2020.3 The proportion of adults ages 85 and older will also rise dramatically—perhaps even doubling by 2030, as predicted by the California Department of Finance.3 And, troublingly, a city report shows that almost one in three adults over 75 lives in poverty.3 So the question becomes how to support this very large and very diverse population in living independently and well.

The Living with Dignity Strategic Plan 2009–2013, published by the San Francisco Department of Aging and Adult Services, presents numerous community-based strategies and objectives from the Long Term Care Coordinating Council. The group’s observations about how to meet the city’s challenges include the following:

“New housing and service models must be developed to take advantage of every opportunity to keep people in their existing housing (e.g., scattered site housing, integration of housing with long-term care services, etc.).”3

The recently unveiled Institute on Aging Senior Campus offers one such model.

An integrated model
A partnership between Institute on Aging (IOA) and BRIDGE Housing Corporation, IOA’s Senior Campus integrates affordable housing with community-based services, including affordable healthcare, to support independent living for Bay Area older adults. This new building also enhances IOA’s capacity to serve an aging San Francisco.

An independent nonprofit organization, “IOA provides a wide variety of community-based healthcare and supportive services to older and disabled adults,” says Director of Communications and Marketing Janet Howell. “These services are designed to help people maintain their ability to live independently—even when quite frail—and avoid institutional care. They include, among others, daytime health center programs with special vans for transportation; home care; help with the household; assistance with financial affairs (for example, balancing the checkbook and paying bills); telephone helpline; emotional support; creative arts; and spiritual care and support groups.” The organization serves clients of all incomes in a variety of settings in San Francisco, Marin County and the San Francisco Peninsula region.

With the completion of the Senior Campus, many of IOA’s programs and services, offices and staff are centralized for the first time in its history, saving the organization nearly one million dollars [US] per year.4 Over its 26-plus years in existence, IOA has used various leased facilities in the Bay Area, explains Howell. These facilities have

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Resources

BRIDGE Housing Corporation
www.bridgehousing.com

Institute on Aging
www.ioaging.org

Institute on Aging: Center for Elders and Youth in the Arts
http://ceya.ioaging.org

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“A long-held dream was for the organization to have a home of its own,” she adds—“a well-designed and conducive setting, where many services could be better integrated.”

As IOA President and CEO David Werdegar, MD, MPH, stated in 2008: “Consolidation of our programs in a single building will have another less tangible, but even more important, benefit for IOA and the 20,000 people we serve annually. Every day we rely on the input of experts from multiple disciplines working in close collaboration to develop effective solutions to the complex needs of the people we serve. The Senior Campus will allow for greater interaction among IOA’s expert staff, which we believe will lead not only to improved care, but also to new innovations in how we deliver services to our clients.”

IOA began to develop this base of operations in 2000. That year, the organization purchased a property and launched an $18-million capital campaign, which has drawn donations totaling $15.7 million to date. In the years of planning that followed, Howell observes, “a unique opportunity became apparent: to locate IOA services together with affordable seniors housing. And so, in collaboration with BRIDGE Housing, a nonprofit affordable housing developer, plans for a Senior Campus gradually unfolded,” she says.

**An holistic approach**

Officially opened on April 2, 2011, IOA’s Senior Campus is a $100-million building located in San Francisco’s Richmond District, “a vibrant central location close to shops, cultural activities and educational institutions,” Howell states, adding that the area is also well-served by local transit. Such lively pedestrian- and transit-oriented neighborhoods encourage older adults to feel a part of, and participate in, the greater community. (Learn more in the article “Shaping vibrant affordable communities: insights, observations and trends” on pages 8–15.)

At 50,000 sq. ft., “the first two floors of the six-story Senior Campus structure—and a sub-lobby level with an auditorium and conference rooms—constitute the new home of IOA,” according to Howell. “The top four floors comprise The Coronet, 150 apartments owned and managed by BRIDGE Housing.” These apartments include 29 studio, 110 one-bedroom and 11 two-bedroom units. “Fifty-three of these apartments are reserved for quite frail older adults,” Howell adds, “who will participate in an all-inclusive healthcare program, known as the Lifeways PACE program.” (Operated by IOA, Lifeways PACE is part of the national PACE program, a US Medicare initiative that provides coordinated care and services for eligible older adults.) Other community residents are expected to benefit from their close proximity by using IOA’s programs and services.

The Coronet incorporates California Mission design elements, and includes landscaped courtyard areas, a community room, a library and a craft room. Photos by Keith Baker. Images courtesy of BRIDGE Housing.
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ages 55 and older with annual incomes ranging from [US]$11,295 to $34,400 for a household of two (15–40% of San Francisco Median Income),” offers a BRIDGE Housing release. “Rents range from $271 to $811 per month, depending on apartment size and resident income.” This housing was substantially funded by the San Francisco Mayor’s Office of Housing, which contributed $24 million toward the project’s costs.

IOA’s floors feature an array of amenities and spaces, including 70 offices, two clinics, and two adult day care centers—an Adult Day Health Center and an Alzheimer’s Day Care Center. The Ruth Ann Rosenberg Adult Day Health Center has felt the impact of recent cuts to California’s Medicaid (MediCal), which funds approximately 70% of the program. Ongoing uncertainty has prompted IOA to restructure the Adult Day Health Center into more of a social day model for now, offering structured activities, intellectual stimulation, socialization and the like for participants, but no health services. The organization has accommodated clients as best possible, and hopes it can continue to evolve services.

Another IOA amenity is the senior fitness and rehabilitation center. This program offers conventional physical therapy and nontraditional approaches, including tailored fitness training, to enhance the physical and mental functioning of clients. In addition, a geriatric consultation clinic will open in 2012, in partnership with the University of California, San Francisco School of Medicine.

IOA’s fully equipped education center features an auditorium and five meeting rooms for professional and community educational events. These spaces “provide educational opportunities for clients, staff, residents and health professionals in the community,” says Howell. For example, professional trainings take place monthly on a wide variety of topics. Examples include:
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San Francisco muralist Neil Seth Levine designed the elaborate “Tree of Life” mosaic in the foyer of the Institute on Aging Senior Campus.
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According to IOA materials, office and activity spaces are designed around a central Garden Court to maximize access to natural sunlight in the building. Walls of windows throughout IOA’s campus showcase private gardens and courtyards, including the Robert and Audrey Sockolov Friendship Courtyard, a peaceful outdoor space intended for relaxation and reflection. The focal point, however, is the central curved staircase, with its clear design allowing visibility to all three floors. Rising next to the three-story staircase is a colorful “Tree of Life” mosaic fashioned by local muralist Neil Seth Levine from over one million ceramic tiles. This inspirational tree motif demonstrates “the natural, beautiful and imperfect phenomenon of aging manifesting nature’s passage of time,” IOA explains, and honors the older adults who pass through the building each day.

A model campus

IOA’s Senior Campus combines affordable independent-living seniors housing with community-based long-term healthcare and supportive services—a unique model nationally, say IOA’s Werdegar and Howell. As Werdegar explains, “The focus of IOA’s new campus is to provide everything necessary to enable older adults in the Bay Area to maintain their health, well-being, independence and participation in life.” This model also offers “research opportunities on the relationships between affordable housing and long-term care services,” Howell adds.

“IOA programs take on added importance in the current economic climate,” Howell believes, “because they point the way to improving the care of older and disabled adults while achieving significant cost savings. The programs enable older adults to ‘age in place,’ to stay in their own homes and avoid costly emergency room visits, hospitalization and nursing home placements. As our population continues to age, the need for the services we offer will increase,” she states. “Our campus can serve as a model on how communities can integrate healthcare and housing for those with modest incomes.”

References


Images courtesy of the Institute on Aging

Institute on Aging mission

Our mission is to enhance the quality of life for adults as they age by enabling them to maintain their health, well-being, independence and participation in the community.

We fulfill this mission for a diverse community by developing and providing innovative programs in health, social service, creative arts, spiritual support, education and research.

Award-winning San Francisco architect Ignatius Tsang created the design for the interior of IOA’s campus. Envisioning the campus “as a vibrant place where older adults come to engage in stimulating activities from arts to exercise to meditation,” Tsang drew from nature, particularly trees and tree rings as metaphors for aging, to infuse natural design elements in the building.

“IOA made certain that the Senior Campus was designed in a way that the façade would mesh well with the surrounding buildings to keep our neighbors happy,” comments Howell. “More importantly, the facility had to be comfortable and functional for our participants—everything from the circular interior shape (representing the “Tree of Life” and allowing participants to find their way back to the center garden courtyard) to the floor patterns and wall coverings (for visual stimulation) were designed with the older adult in mind. We were also very aware of the financial limitations many older adults and their families have,” Howell adds, “therefore a key component was ensuring that we continue to offer affordable services despite the large expense of the project. The Senior Campus Capital Campaign was created for this purpose—I OA will continue to raise funds until our ($18 million) goal is reached.”

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