



Lilliam Barrios-Paoli
Commissioner

**Department for
the Aging**

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MEDIA CONTACT

Christopher Miller/Jeanette Reed
(212) 442-1111
cmiller@aging.nyc.gov
jereed@aging.nyc.gov

DFTA, VISIONS Launch First Innovative Senior Center in the Nation for Blind and Visually Impaired Older New Yorkers

— New senior center to offer adaptive computer technology, health literature in Braille, education programs, and accessible fitness classes —

NEW YORK, NY – January 3, 2012 – Department for the Aging Commissioner Lilliam Barrios-Paoli and Nancy D. Miller, Executive Director and CEO of VISIONS/Services for the Blind and Visually Impaired, today announced the opening of the City’s newest Innovative Senior Center and the first senior center in the nation for the blind or visually impaired older adults. The new center will offer an array of leading-edge programs, including adaptive computer technology, health literature in Braille and various accessible programs including fitness, quilting, photography and yoga classes. The center will also offer significant health and wellness programming focused specifically on issues of concern to visually impaired seniors such as diabetes and the unavailability of health information in Braille, audiotape or even large print format. VISIONS is one of the City’s eight new Innovative Senior Centers announced in October 2010 by Mayor Michael R. Bloomberg as part of the Age-friendly NYC effort. The Commissioner was joined by Congressman Jerrold Nadler, Congresswoman Carolyn Maloney, Manhattan Borough President Scott Stringer, Council Member and Chair for the Committee on Aging Jessica Lappin, Council Member Gail Brewer, the Mayor’s Office for People with Disabilities Acting Commissioner/General Counsel Jason Mischel, Andrew Fisher of the Lavelle Fund for the Blind and Susan Olivo of Readers Digest Partners for Sight at VISIONS at Selis Manor in Manhattan, the site of the new center.

“In August 2009, Mayor Bloomberg laid out his vision for an age-friendly city, and today we see the cornerstone of that vision come to fruition with the launch of the VISIONS Innovative Senior Center,” said Deputy Mayor for Health and Human Services Linda I. Gibbs. “Today is the culmination of years of work and collaboration with the senior center network so that NYC’s 1.3 million seniors can live healthier lives enhanced by the senior center system.”

“We are grateful for the Mayor’s support of the innovative senior centers and very excited to launch the first innovative senior center in the nation for the blind and visually impaired,” said DFTA Commissioner Barrios-Paoli. “VISIONS is a pioneer in addressing the needs of older New Yorkers who are blind or visually impaired, and I am confident that their robust programs will set a new standard of services for seniors.”

“Growing old is different for everyone, and innovative senior centers recognize that,” said Council Member and Chair of the Committee on Aging Lappin. “Our city is leading the nation in providing new services for the elderly.”

Enhancing senior centers to better serve a larger, more active and diverse senior population is a cornerstone of the City’s Age-friendly NYC initiative. While still providing meals and opportunities for seniors to socialize with their peers, the Innovative Senior Centers are being held accountable for producing vibrant programs, high participation rates and better health outcomes for older New Yorkers. Innovative Senior Centers, conceived in partnership with the Council of Senior Centers and Services, will be working with individual center members to obtain their baseline health information upon enrollment and measure critical health outcomes over time. Innovative Senior Centers, conceived in partnership with the Council of Senior Centers and Services, will be gathering basic health information from members when they enroll. The centers will then use the information to develop health programming aimed at improving the general health of the participants.

“We are grateful to the City for their confidence in our ability to create programs specific to the needs of blind or visually impaired seniors, who are particularly vulnerable to isolation, limited exercise and lack of information access,” said VISIONS Executive Director and CEO Miller “We embrace this opportunity wholeheartedly and look forward to creating a senior center model for the city and nation.”

“My office has had a long-standing and fruitful relationship with VISIONS, and I am excited that VISIONS has applied its wealth of expertise and knowledge to the Innovative Senior Center program,” said MOPD Acting Commissioner/General Counsel Mischel. “I would like to thank and congratulate Commissioner Barrios-Paoli and Nancy Miller for their dedication to people with disabilities and look forward to continuing our partnership with, and contributions to, the Age-friendly NYC initiative.

The Innovative Senior Centers will support preventative health efforts by educating older adults on topics such as nutrition and methods for managing chronic diseases. These Centers will offer flexible and expanded hours and additional transportation options that will better allow seniors of all ages to access their facilities. To meet the individual needs of the communities they serve, some centers will offer dinner meals, evening and weekend hours, and café-style flexible meal times to provide their members greater flexibility. Innovative centers in Queens and Staten Island will provide additional transportation services to allow additional seniors from neighboring communities to access their center’s programming. Unique and specialized services made available by individual centers will include organic meals, rooftop gardens, nutrition programs, mental health programs such as depression screenings, and a fully equipped and staffed fitness center. One center boasts an Olympic-size swimming pool.

In addition to VISIONS, the other Innovative Senior Centers are Lenox Hill and YM & YWHA in Manhattan; Bronxworks in the Bronx; Selfhelp Benjamin Rosenthal and SNAP in Queens; JCC of Staten Island; and, SAGE, the first center in the nation to serve an LGBT senior population.

The Innovative Senior Centers are one of the 59 public initiatives announced by Mayor Bloomberg in August 2009 as part of Age-friendly NYC, a partnership among the Mayor’s Office, the New York City Council, and the New York Academy of Medicine to make New York City more livable for the City’s growing population of older adults. The City’s senior population—today at 1.3 million older New Yorkers—is expected to grow by 46 percent in the next 25 years. Age-friendly NYC is focused on four areas: community and civic participation; housing; public spaces and transportation; and health and social services.

Media Contact: Christopher Miller/Jeanette Reed (212) 442-1111