



## **Council of Senior Centers & Services of NYC, Inc.**

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**“IT’S BROKEN, FIX IT”**

### **A RENOVATION STUDY OF NEW YORK CITY SENIOR CENTERS**

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## **HIGHLIGHTS OF SURVEY FINDINGS, ‘IT’S BROKEN, FIX IT:**

### **BRICKS AND MORTAR WITH A HUMAN FACE**

*Why are senior centers still important 35 years after they were established?* Senior centers – the home away from home for generations of older New Yorkers. The majority of senior centers in NYC opened in the 1970’s when federal Older Americans Act funding flowed into local communities throughout the nation. Hundreds of senior centers were started in churches and synagogues – where free or inexpensive space could be found. Many were also established in NYC Housing Authority buildings (NYCHA). In 2007, thousands of older New Yorkers each day attend these same senior centers – almost 300,000 older New Yorkers utilize senior centers each year. *Yet, as a city, the physical plant of senior centers has been neglected.*

*Who uses senior center?* Older New Yorkers attend senior centers of their own free will. They find a space where older adults are respected, their needs responded to, and a community of peers. They are between the ages of 60-100+, represent every ethnic and cultural segment of NYC’s diverse population, are hardy and frail, and include all income levels. What they have in common is the human need to eat a nutritious meal in company, participate in meaningful activities in company, and stay engaged in life.

Mrs. S., age 83, just lost her husband of 55 years. In order not to be alone and isolated, she decides to visit the local senior center. She walks through the door and hears the buzzing of human activity. However, she also sees how poorly the center looks – it needs a paint job, the furniture is old, the bathroom doesn’t work properly, the lighting is dim, and there doesn’t seem to be enough space for everyone to participate in classes and activities. It just doesn’t look attractive to her and she is disappointed.

Mr. R., age 72, just retired and is looking for something to do with his time during the day. An accident on the job has made it difficult for him to climb steps and walk – he uses a cane. He walks through the door of the local senior center – which is easy to enter - hears the buzzing of human activity, and sees how attractive the place is. The lighting is good and there are rooms for the different classes. The food smells good. He feels good, uplifted – the city really cares about us older people.

*This is the connection between addressing the renovation needs of senior centers and attending to the human needs of the participants. It is bricks and mortar with a human face.* Mayor Michael Bloomberg’s PlanNYC 2030 projects a 44% increase in the 65+ population by 2030 and states there will be a need for more senior centers. It is the responsibility of government and community providers to ensure that seniors can attend attractive, accessible senior centers no matter what neighborhood they live in NYC.

In September, 2007, Council of Senior Centers and Services disseminated a renovation needs survey to senior centers citywide. The survey, “It’s Broken, Fix It: A Survey of the Renovation and Repair Needs of NYC Senior Centers”, hit a chord with senior centers across the city - 160 out of the 325 senior centers, from every City Council district, responded from all five boroughs. At the top of the list of discussions regarding the “modernization” of aging services, needs to be the physical plant of senior centers. This is the environment both seniors and staff have to be in every day.

**\*PLEASE NOTE ALL FINDINGS REFLECT THE PERCENTAGE OF SENIOR CENTERS THAT RESPONDED TO THE SURVEY.**

- 160 senior centers throughout the five boroughs indicated a need to renovate their senior centers
- 55 % of responding senior centers are in need of kitchen renovations; an increase from 35% reported three years ago <sup>1</sup>
- 52% of senior centers need their walls to be painted, repaired or both
- 49% of senior centers need their bathrooms renovated
- 12%, slightly more than 1 out of 10, senior centers reported needing a new site due to infrastructure needs that cannot be corrected at the current site or the need for more space
- \_\_\_% handicapped accessibility???
- City rules for accessing capital dollars are leaving senior centers out - \$500,000 minimum for a capital needs project and concerns regarding state/church issues. It is imperative that the city find a way to say “yes” to addressing the renovation needs of senior centers. CSCS recommends a small capital needs program for less than \$500,000.

There are senior centers throughout New York City that do not have reliable heating or air conditioning; or kitchens are too small or have obsolete equipment; plumbing systems are deteriorating; and insufficient space to support the burgeoning senior population. If

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<sup>1</sup> Council of Senior Center and Services, Sackman, Bobbie. . “ More with Less is Impossible” pg 3 (2005)

these were the renovation needs of our homes we would address them promptly. Thousands of seniors consider their center their second home because of the meals, programs and services offered. Senior centers:

- *Should be a safe haven and attractive,*
- *Be handicapped accessible, and*
- *provide sufficient space for recreational activities and modern equipment.*

## SUMMARY OF SURVEY FINDINGS:

### **I. Locations and building type of senior centers**

There are 320 senior centers in New York City. The centers cater to a linguistically, culturally and spiritually diverse population. The senior centers provide meals, health screenings, citizenship classes and entitlement programs in the language of the senior population. Senior centers speak the language of their members; Spanish, English, Mandarin, Cantonese, Korean, Yiddish, Hindi, and Russian. They celebrate traditions and provide meals that are unique to each ethnic and cultural group.

- 34% of senior centers in New York City are NYCHA buildings
- 27% of senior centers are privately owned
- 20% of senior centers are in churches or synagogues
- 85% of senior centers in Staten Island are in NYCHA buildings
- Queens has the highest percentage of privately owned senior centers at 41%
- 31% of church/synagogue owned senior centers are in Brooklyn

### **II. City-owned or city-leased senior centers**

Some senior centers in New York City are in city- owned or city-leased properties. This means that the city agencies are in charge of the maintenance of the senior centers.

- 44% of senior center directors indicated that their senior center is city-owned/leased
- 45% of senior center directors are not in city-owned/leased properties

### **III. More than just a senior center**

Seniors attend senior centers out of their own choice. The centers provide more than just meals, they provide case management, support services for grandparents raising young children, meals-on-wheels, translation, socialization, legal services, adult day services, and counseling. Seniors are among peers when they enter a senior center. This creates a comfortable and reassuring environment to share and discuss personal feelings and needs.

- 39 % of senior centers in New York City offer case management
- 31% of senior centers have a meals-on-wheels program
- 15% of senior centers provide adult day services
- 11% of senior centers provide NORCs
- 100% of senior centers in Staten Island provide case management
- Adult-day services are in 27% of Bronx senior centers
- NORCS are in 19% of senior centers in Manhattan
- Meals-on-wheels are provided by 55% of Queens senior centers

### **IV. Major renovations are needed in New York City senior centers**

One hundred sixty senior centers responded to this survey documenting tremendous need for renovations. The lack of renovations in their facilities truncates their ability to meet the needs of senior participants. Senior center directors throughout all five boroughs checked off kitchen renovation as their greatest need. Kitchen renovation includes expansion of kitchens, modernization of equipment and appealing dining room furniture. The number of seniors in New York City are increasing and so is their level of poverty.

According to a the 2004 Food Bank NYC study: “Hunger Safety Net”, 24% of New York City seniors depend on Emergency Food Programs to survive and 38% of seniors have used Emergency Food Programs for more than two years.<sup>2</sup> Most of the elderly that visit EFP are women, immigrants and people of color<sup>3</sup>. A senior should not have to worry about their next meal, finding a place to sit or worry that he or she may fall because the floor is uneven. To renovate these senior centers is an economic and human right.

- 55% of senior centers throughout New York City need kitchen renovations that is an increase from 35% reported in 2005<sup>4</sup>
- 52% of senior centers in all five borough need their walls painted and/or repaired that is an increase from 37% reported in 2005<sup>5</sup>
- 56% of senior centers in Brooklyn need their bathrooms renovated
- 60% of senior centers in Manhattan need to renovate their kitchens
- 54% of senior centers in the Bronx need new floors
- 57% of senior centers in Staten Island need new plumbing systems
- 20% of young seniors, aged 60-64 feel food insecure without hunger<sup>6</sup>
- 33% of Blacks, and 32% of Hispanics seniors fear running out of food before they received their next check<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Food Bank for New York City, Hunger : An Aging Issue. Division of Government Relations, Policy and Research, (New York, New York 2004)

<sup>3</sup>Hunger Hurts: A Study of Hunger Among New York City’s Elderly. Sackman , Bobbie ( New York, New York, 2007)

<sup>4</sup> More with Less is Impossible: No New Money=Less Capacity to Serve Seniors. Sackman, Bobbie, Zvarych, Kathleen. (New York, New York 2005)

<sup>5</sup> More with Less is Impossible: No New Money=Less Capacity to Serve Seniors. Sackman, Bobbie, Zvarych, Kathleen. (New York, New York 2005)

<sup>6</sup> Hunger Hurts: A Study of Hunger Among New York City’s Elderly. Sackman , Bobbie ( New York, New York, 2007)

<sup>7</sup> Hunger Hurts: A Study of Hunger Among New York City’s Elderly. Sackman , Bobbie ( New York, New York, 2007)

## **V. Senior Center equipment needs to be replaced with new and durable equipment**

In order for senior centers to attract new seniors or to augment programs and services, new, durable and modern equipment is needed to make the senior center attractive and inviting. Equipment that is used in the kitchen needs to be adequate to provide meals to the center members. Furniture and other equipment used by seniors need to be upgraded and modernized instead of the institutional style tables and chairs. Ripped, dirty, and old furniture sends a message to seniors; their health and well being are not important. Seniors want to walk through the doors of welcoming, attractive and safe centers. The city and community providers should work together to make this happen.

- 47 % of senior centers city –wide need new furniture
- 38% of senior centers city-wide need new freezers
- 37% of senior centers are in need of new stoves
- New stoves are needed in 43% of Bronx senior centers
- 66% of Staten Island senior centers need new refrigerators
- New furniture is desperately needed in 59% of Manhattan senior centers.
- New refrigerators are needed in 48% of Brooklyn senior centers
- 66% of senior centers in Staten Island need new steam tables

## **VI. Senior centers need more funds**

Senior Centers citywide are in need of more funding. The funding isn't sufficient to keep up with rising cost of food, heating, rent and maintenance. It needs additional funds to continue providing meals and services. Additional funding by city government allows senior centers to hire more staff, expand educational and recreational programs and serve more seniors in need of meals, counseling, translation, and entitlement services.

Additional funding also provides for the renovations needed in senior centers. With additional funds senior center directors could repair equipment used by seniors, expand physical space in the senior center, and modernize their center to make it more appealing, safer, and comfortable for seniors to enter.

- 56% of senior centers asked DFTA for funding for renovations
- 43% of senior centers did not receive a response from DFTA
- 27% of senior centers are negotiating with DFTA for funding.

- 85% of Staten Island senior centers requested additional funds from DFTA; unfortunately 16% receive some funding, while 83% never received a response.
- 59% of Bronx senior centers also requested additional funds from DFTA; sadly 42% are negotiating with DFTA while 50% haven't had a response from DFTA.

Senior centers should not have to wait for additional funding. Waiting for additional funds or not knowing whether a request was approved is counterproductive to helping and providing services for seniors who are in most need.

- 35% of senior centers in New York City are in NYCHA sites
- Senior centers located in NYCHA sites also asked NYCHA for financial assistance after being directed by DFTA to do so. For those that applied to NYCHA for financial assistance 24% did not receive a response. 39% of senior centers were notified that their problems would be resolved, unfortunately things were not fixed as promised.
- 50% of Staten Island senior centers were not given a response to their financial request
- In Manhattan, 66 % of senior centers were promised their renovation problems would be resolved, disturbingly many are still waiting.
- 66% of senior centers in Queens did have their renovation problems fixed, but the same problems keep reoccurring.

The lacks of renovations of senior centers pose a very serious risk to the senior members and their staff. Some senior center directors throughout the five boroughs indicated that their senior centers have poorly functioning fire alarms, others, no sprinkler system, some noted no ventilation in the bathrooms, and others requested the need for additional space. These are not cosmetic renovations; they are health and safety renovations. Failure to correct these problems will result in a major tragedy.

- 71% of senior centers in Staten Island indicated problems with pest control
- 11% of senior centers in the Bronx reported the need for sprinkler systems
- 22% of senior centers in Manhattan documented a need for fire alarms

## VII. Requesting additional monies, capital-city funds

In addition to asking DFTA or NYCHA for funds, senior center agencies and directors also turn to their City Council Member, Borough President, and DFTA for city capital funds. City capital funds are monies that are used for major renovation needs that exceed 500,000. In order to qualify for city capital funds a senior center needs to have a long term lease or be the owner of the center, in addition the renovation needs for the senior center to exceed \$500, 000. There are several challenges to qualify for city capital funds, first the senior center must be city-owned, most senior centers are not city or privately owned, secondly the amount needed to qualify is exuberant and thirdly, the owner must have a long term lease on the property, some centers have been at their site for a very long time and do not have the lease available and lastly to finally obtain the funds could take up to 2 years.

- 44% of senior centers are not on city-owned/leased properties
- 32% of senior centers applied for city capital funds
- 68% of senior centers did **not** apply for city capital funds
- 47% of senior centers agencies requested city capital funds from their City Council Member
- 32% of senior center agencies requested city capital funds from their Borough President
- 28% of senior center agencies requested DFTA for city capital funds
- 30% of the senior center agencies received city capital funds compared to 60% that were denied funds
- Of those that were not approved for city capital funds, 15% were denied because their senior center is in non city-owned property.
- 12% of senior center agencies were denied because their renovation needs fell below \$500,000
- 36% were awarded city capital funds but were waiting to receive it.

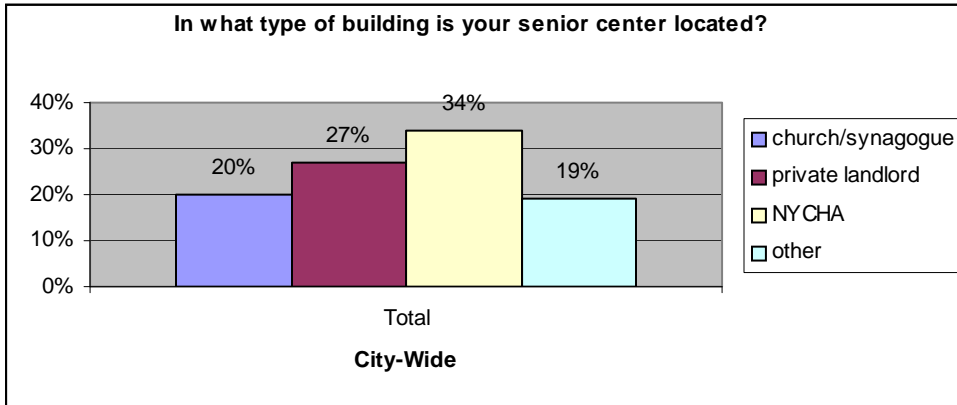
### **VIII. Concerns Reported by Senior Centers**

- “ This whole center has to be redone, this center is very dangerous”  
“NYCHA just comes in and takes pictures but does nothing about it”-  
Bronx senior center
- Getting housing to see what is wrong, not getting cooperation from all sides and lack of communication is very frustrating”- Brooklyn senior center
- “ In spite the fact that we were promised that they would have the architectural plans drawn up when we had raised most the money, they have not done this. Without the plans we cannot get foundation funds. And without a lease, which we have not had for 22 years, we cannot get foundation funds and we are having trouble accessing the NYS money for the equipment and furniture upstairs”- Manhattan senior center
- “I am a firm believer that a room that is clean and fresh makes people feel better. We are limited in our resources because we share our facility with housing. We get our seniors involved in decorating and making the place look nice”- Staten Island senior center
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**1. In what type of building is your senior center located? (check all that apply)**

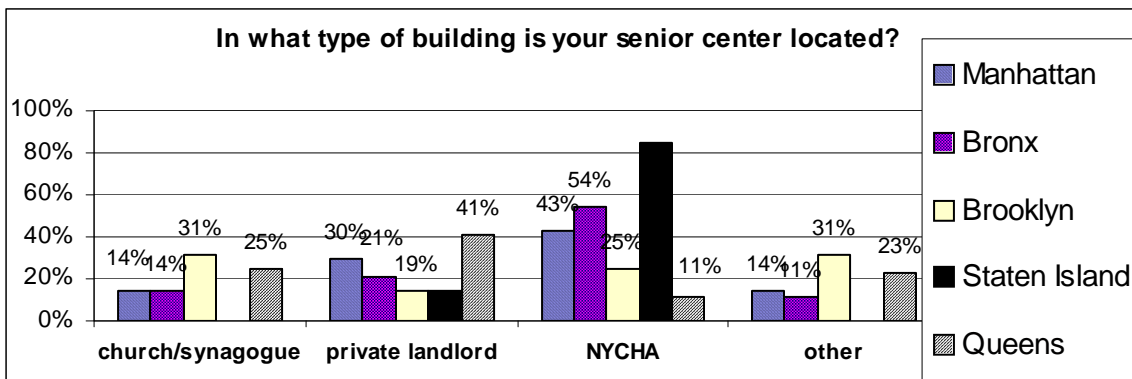
- church/synagogue \_\_\_
- private landlord \_\_\_
- NYCHA building \_\_\_
- Other \_\_\_

**Citywide results:**



**Results by Borough:**

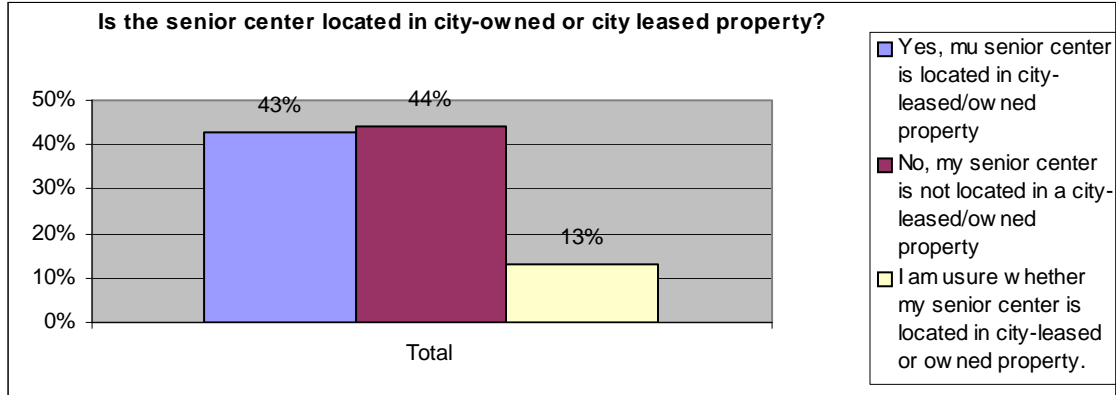
In what type of building is your senior center located ?	44 Manhattan	28 Bronx	36 Brooklyn	7 Staten Island	44 Queens
church/synagogue	14%	14%	31%	0%	25%
private landlord	30%	21%	14%	14%	41%
NYCHA	43%	54%	25%	85%	11%
other	14%	11%	31%	0%	23%



## 2. Is the senior center located on city-owned or city-leased property?

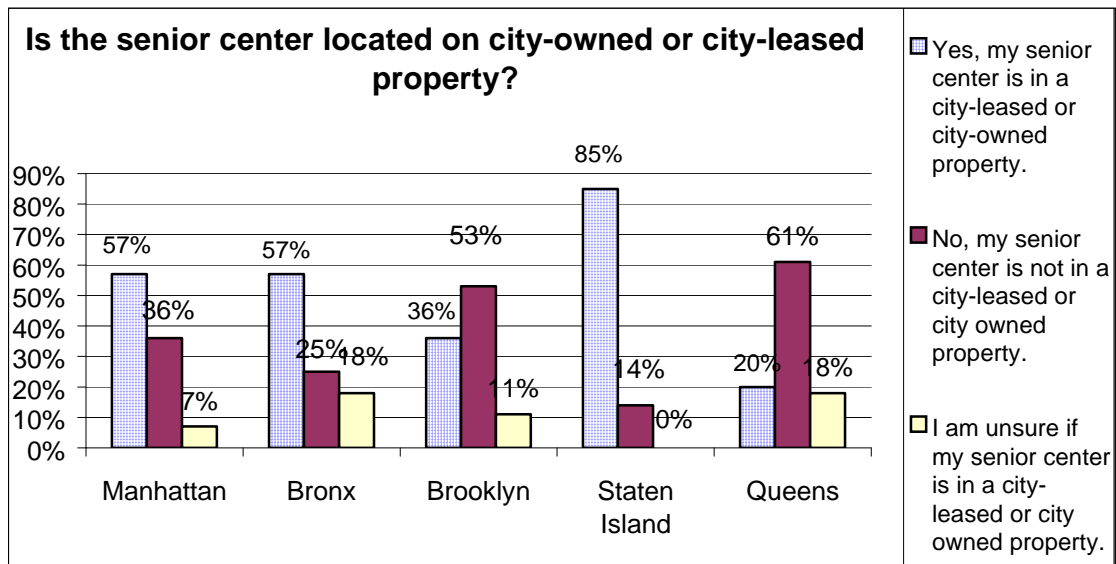
\_\_\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_\_\_ no \_\_\_\_\_ don't know

### Citywide results:



### Results by Borough:

Is the senior center located in city-leased or city owned property?	Manhattan	Bronx	Brooklyn	Staten Island	Queens
	44	28	36	7	44
Yes, my senior center is in a city-leased or city-owned property.	57%	57%	36%	85%	20%
No, my senior center is not in a city-leased or city owned property.	36%	25%	53%	14%	61%
I am unsure if my senior center is in a city-leased or city owned property.	7%	18%	11%	0%	18%

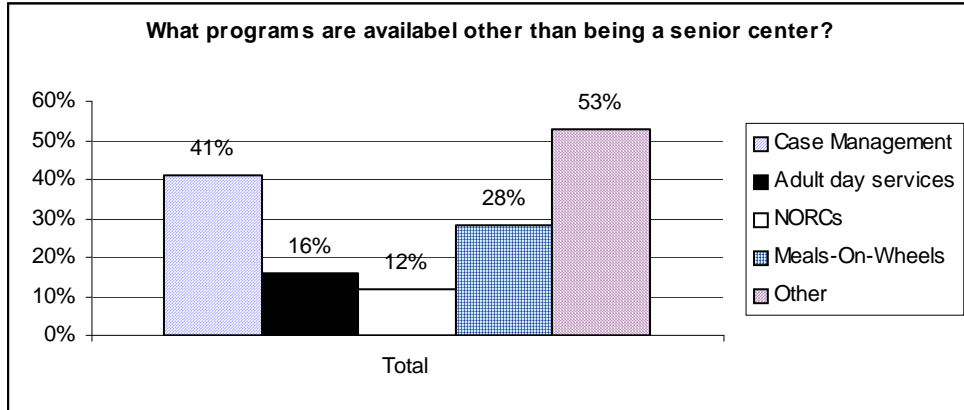


**3. Programs other than senior centers:**

**Type of program:**

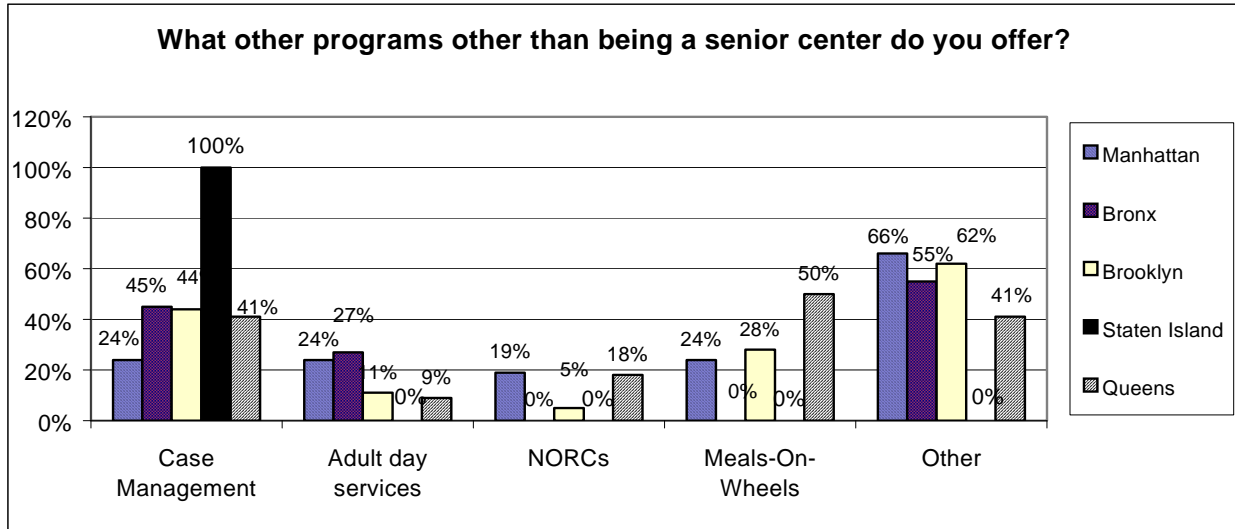
- Case management
- Adult day services
- NORCs
- Meals-on-Wheels (not located in senior center)
- other (specify)

**Citywide results:**



**Results by Borough:**

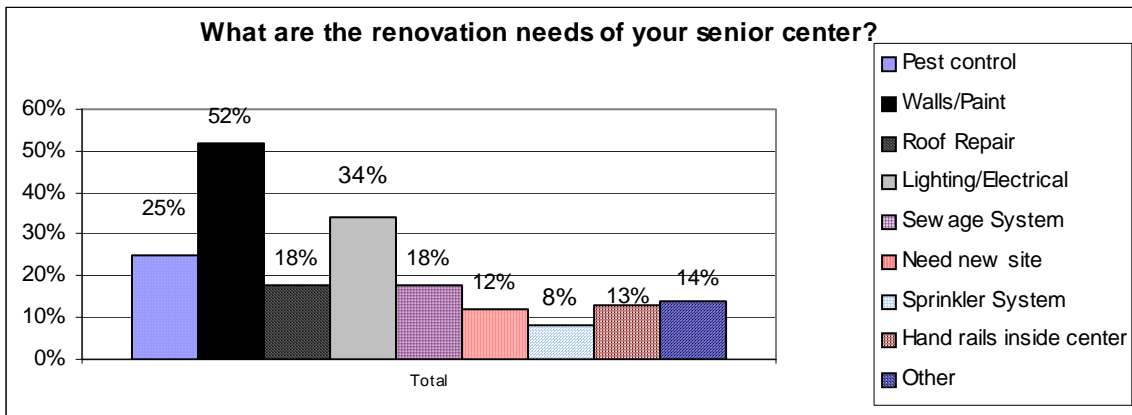
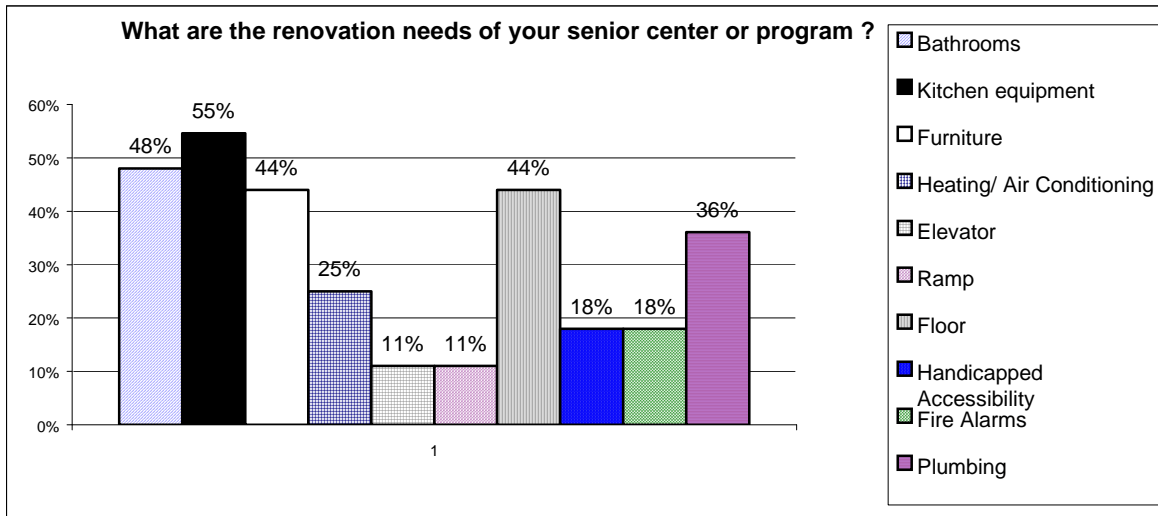
What other programs other than being a senior centers do you offer?	Total				
	Manhattan	Bronx	Brooklyn	Staten Island	Queens
		11	18	7	22
Case Management	24%	45%	44%	100%	41%
Adult day services	24%	27%	11%	0%	9%
NORCs	19%	0%	5%	0%	18%
Meals-On-Wheels	24%	0%	28%	0%	50%
Other	66%	55%	62%	0%	41%



**4. What are the renovation needs of your senior center or program? (check all that apply)**

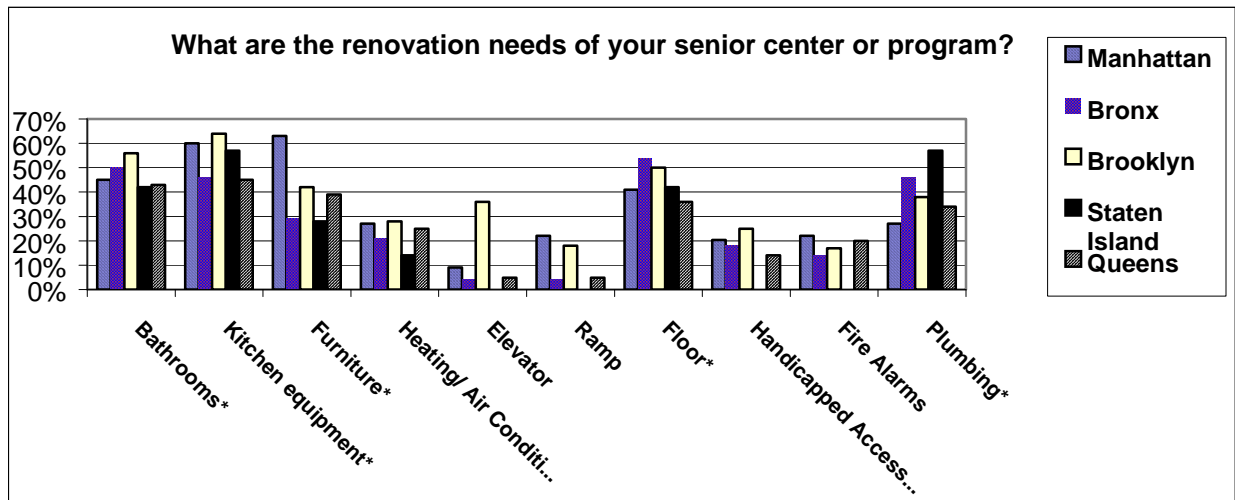
- |                                |                                 |
|--------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| Bathrooms _____                | Handicapped Accessibility _____ |
| Kitchen Equipment _____        | Fire Alarms _____               |
| Furniture _____                | Plumbing _____                  |
| Heating/Air Conditioning _____ | Pest Control _____              |
| Elevator _____                 | Walls/Paint _____               |
| Ramp _____                     | Roof Repair _____               |
| Floor _____                    | Lighting/Electrical _____       |
| Sewage System _____            | Hand rails inside center _____  |
| Need new site _____            | Other (specify) _____           |
| Sprinkler system _____         |                                 |

**Citywide results:**



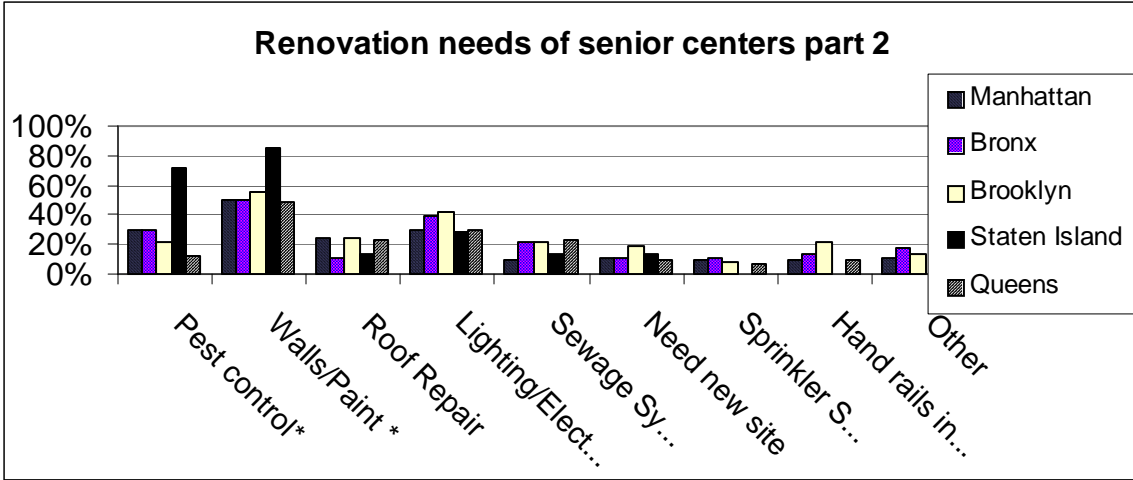
### Renovation Needs by Borough:

What are the renovation needs of your senior center ?	28 Manhattan	36 Bronx	36 Brooklyn	7 Staten Island	44 Queens
Bathrooms	45%	50%	56%	42%	43%
Kitchen equipment	60%	46%	64%	57%	45%
Furniture	63%	29%	42%	28%	39%
Heating/ Air Conditioning	27%	21%	28%	14%	25%
Elevator	9%	4%	36%	0%	5%
Ramp	22%	4%	18%	0%	5%
Floor	41%	54%	50%	42%	36%
Handicapped Accessibility	20%	18%	25%	0%	14%
Fire Alarms	22%	14%	17%	0%	20%
Plumbing	27%	46%	38%	57%	34%



- Bathrooms, kitchen equipment, furniture, floors and plumbing have the greatest need for renovation in all five boroughs.

What are the renovation needs of your senior center ?	28 Manhattan	36 Bronx	36 Brooklyn	7 Staten Island	44 Queens
Pest control	30%	29%	22%	71%	12%
Walls/Paint	50%	50%	55%	85%	48%
Roof Repair	25%	11%	25%	14%	23%
Lighting/Electrical	30%	39%	42%	28%	30%
Sewage System	9%	21%	22%	14%	23%
Need new site	11%	11%	19%	14%	9%
Sprinkler System	9%	11%	8%	0%	7%
Hand rails inside center	9%	14%	22%	0%	9%
Other	11%	18%	14%	0%	16%



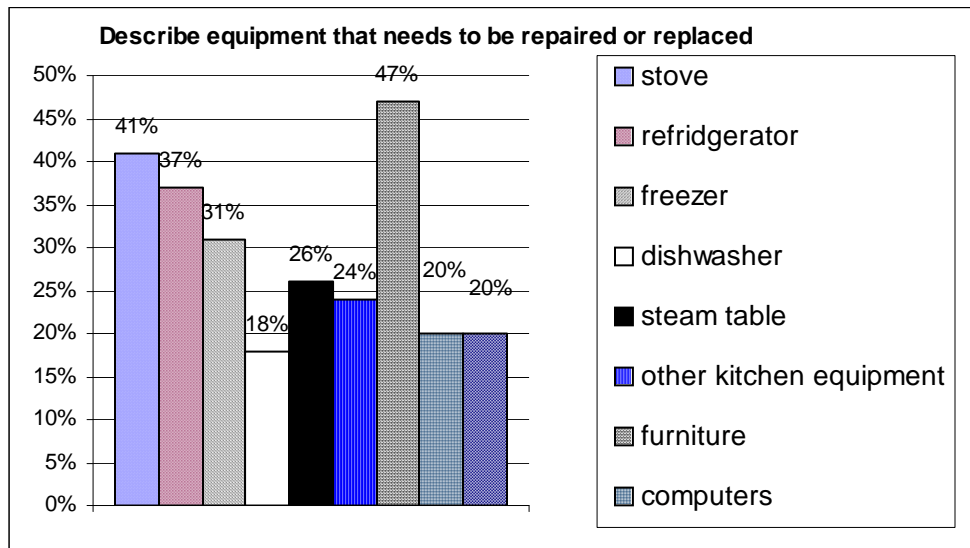
- The senior centers in all five boroughs indicated a strong need in pest control, walls/paint and lighting electrical.

5. Describe equipment that needs repair or replacement:

- \_\_\_ stove
- \_\_\_ refrigerator
- \_\_\_ freezer
- \_\_\_ dishwasher
- \_\_\_ steam table
- \_\_\_ (other kitchen equipment – please specify)

- 
- \_\_\_ furniture
  - \_\_\_ computers
  - \_\_\_ other equipment in the senior center (please specify)
- 

**Citywide Results:**



**Results by Borough:**

Describe equipment that needs repaired or replacement?	Manhattan	Bronx	Brooklyn	Staten Island	Queens
		23	31	7	31
Stove	48%	43%	35%	33%	35%
Refrigerator	34%	35%	48%	66%	26%
Freezer	34%	43%	48%	66%	27%
Dishwasher	17%	22%	19%	66%	19%
Steam table	24%	30%	35%	33%	35%
Other kitchen equipment	24%	22%	42%	0%	32%
Furniture	58%	30%	48%	50%	42%
Computers	29%	22%	26%	66%	23%
Other equipment for the senior center	29%	22%	16%	0%	13%

