



# Healthy Aging in Supportive Housing

*Toolkit for service providers, developers & property managers*



September 2016



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### VII. Healthy Aging in Quality Supportive Housing: Community Connections

#### **Building Connections to the Community**

As the population in supportive housing ages, social engagement is critical to ensuring that residents can safely age at home. The ability to connect with people and places is essential to overall wellbeing, and access to social networks and religious institutions help lower the risk of isolation.<sup>1</sup> Robust social programs aimed at decreasing social isolation and malnutrition as well as wellness groups that focus on chronic disease and end of life care issues for aging tenants should be targeted to older residents and sufficiently financed. Supportive housing providers must create a culture of healthy aging among their tenants and help build positive relationships and increased community support.

Older tenants in supportive housing may isolate more than younger residents, often as a means of coping with new or compounded health or ability challenges. Cognitive decline or mobility challenges may bring changes to relationships with friends and relatives that provide support. Quality supportive housing requires taking intentional measures to ensure that residents have opportunities to connect within the residential and to the broader communities.

**Tenant-centered community connections:** Efforts to engage residents in the community should come from an understanding of the tendency for vulnerable elders to isolate due to complex health challenges, transportation issues and the impact of health crises. Simply providing opportunities for social interaction is not enough. Vulnerable elders may need extra encouragement or support to participate in activities. Activities should interest residents and provide value for them. Providers should solicit feedback from residents on the activities they would like to have offered.

**Accessible community connections:** It is important that both internal and external efforts to engage residents in the community are physically accessible and are at convenient hours and locations. Activities provided offsite should have transportation arranged when possible. Activities should also be appropriate for the population and accessible physically and cognitively.

**Coordinated community connections:** Providers should be aware of the local community resources provided to elderly residents, as well as the eligibility requirements, and make efforts to coordinate participation in these programs. These programs include

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<sup>1</sup> [Home to Stay: Quality Supportive Housing for Aging Tenants](#)



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local senior centers, activities at the local library, exercise and wellness classes and classes offered at community recreational centers.

**Integrated community connections:** It is important that planning for community activities is integrated with other housing programming and property management, as some activities may be coordinated by property management staff and others by service program staff. It is also important to have meaningful opportunities for community engagement like leadership opportunities and connecting with cultural centers or family, rather than just social activities.

**Sustainable community connections:** Sustainable community connections are those can be offered in the long term and meet varying tenant needs and interests. Property managers and providers should coordinate with community partners to ensure that onsite and offsite activities are accessible and can be provided long term.

Property managers and/or service providers can provide on-site recreational and social events that older residents would want to participate in: Bingo games, movie afternoons/nights, peer “buddy” programs for new tenants, special interest groups, classes, workshops and community outings. Some communities offer onsite no-cost classes, social activities and community engagement events. For example, EnAGE in Los Angeles, California uses college-level teachers to engage older adults in a number of different classes and courses from wellness to technology and art classes.<sup>2</sup>



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<sup>2</sup> EngAGE program website: <http://www.engagedaging.org/programs>