



**UNITED
NEIGHBORHOOD
HOUSES**

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**Testimony of United Neighborhood Houses
Before the New York City Council**

**Committee on Aging
Oversight - Social Isolation Among Older New Yorkers
Council Member Crystal Hudson, Chair**

**Submitted by Anita Kwok, Policy Analyst
December 9, 2025**

Thank you for convening today's hearing on social isolation among older New Yorkers. United Neighborhood Houses (UNH) is a policy and social change organization representing neighborhood settlement houses that reach over 825,000 New Yorkers from all walks of life. A progressive leader for more than 100 years, UNH is stewarding a new era for New York's settlement house movement. We mobilize our members and their communities to advocate for good public policies and promote strong organizations and practices that keep neighborhoods resilient and thriving for all New Yorkers. UNH leads advocacy and partners with our members on a broad range of issues including civic and community engagement, neighborhood affordability, healthy aging, early childhood education, adult literacy, and youth development. We also provide customized professional development and peer learning to build the skills and leadership capabilities of settlement house staff at all levels.

UNH members provide a wide variety of services to over 100,000 older New Yorkers each year by operating programs such as older adult centers (OACs), Naturally Occurring Retirement Communities (NORCs), home delivered meal (HDM) programs, Geriatric Mental Health, case management programs, and others, often funded and contracted by NYC Aging and the City Council. UNH and its settlement house members employ the philosophy that older adults are valued members of our neighborhoods, whose wisdom and experience are important to the fabric of our communities.

Twenty years ago, UNH released "[Aging in the Shadows](#)," which highlighted the risk of social isolation among older adult New Yorkers. Since then, UNH has worked to advance policies and funding solutions that address isolation among older New Yorkers. In 2023, the Surgeon General [declared](#) loneliness and social isolation an epidemic, with real public health concerns for older adults including dementia and cognitive decline. As UNH's prior research demonstrated, investing in community-based programs and services are a clear antidote to this epidemic.

Settlement houses and other community-based organizations are ideally suited to identify and support isolated older adults. Their intimate knowledge of their communities, their participation in local networks and associations, and their web of contacts throughout their neighborhoods

make them the optimal places to receive and act on information about older adults in distress. In addition, because these organizations offer a range of services in an integrated setting, they are able to address a multitude of causes of social isolation.

Community-Based Services and Contracts

Unfortunately, the essential services that settlement houses offer are often underfunded by government contracts. For example, older adult centers have not had a rate increase for congregate meal services since the last procurement in 2021, despite several recent years of high inflation. These meals physically bring older adults together – directly combatting social isolation – while also addressing food insecurity. In the FY26 budget, UNH called for a new investment in congregate meals of at least \$57 million just to address inflation, though no new funding for OACs was added. We will be updating this request as the FY27 budget season gets underway.

In addition, a multi-year agreement for the City to fund modest cost of living adjustments (COLAs) is expiring next year. Even with COLAs, staff who support older adult programming are chronically underpaid due to their City contracts, making retention and recruitment of staff an ongoing challenge – and especially so for multi-lingual staff.

As the City moves into a new administration in 2026, it is essential that the City Budget addresses long-standing underfunding of these contracts and include ongoing COLAs and adequate wages for program staff.

NORC in Every Neighborhood

The City must invest in its existing service network so it can sustainably address older adult needs and continue to combat social isolation. At the same time, we must look toward growing the network of these services to support more older adults, especially as the number of older adults in New York City continues to rapidly grow.

One program that is particularly poised for expansion is the NORC program – Naturally Occurring Retirement Communities. NORCs are housing developments or neighborhoods that were not originally designed as senior housing, but have naturally become home to many older adults over time. They play an essential role in combatting social isolation, enabling older New Yorkers to safely age in place. NORCs offer a cost-effective, evidence-based model that provides on-site nursing, healthcare, and social services to older adult residents in the comfort of their homes and neighborhoods. Furthermore, these programs combat the risk of social isolation through volunteer and civic engagement opportunities, as well as intergenerational programming that strengthen older adults' connections with young people in their communities.

In 2026, the City should invest in expanding these programs to ensure there is a NORC in Every Neighborhood.

UNH's 2024 report, [NORCs: An Antidote to Social Isolation](#), analyzed the surge in the older adult population in New York State, their needs, and the challenges they face, and recommended expanding the program statewide. Key findings from the report included:

- There are now *4.7 million older adult New Yorkers, up 26 percent from 3.7 million a decade ago (in 2012)*. Older adults aged 60 and over make up a *quarter of all New Yorkers*, compared to 20 percent a decade ago.
- Over *half (51 percent) of poor older adult New York State residents live alone*, more than triple the share of higher-income older adult New Yorkers.
- As of 2022, an estimated *586,000 older New Yorkers—more than one in every 10—live in poverty*, up from about 409,000 a decade ago.
- Compared to costs of nearly \$160,000 for one older adult in a private room in a nursing home, NORC programs are incredibly cost-efficient: In New York City, the average NORC program costs *\$251,000 and serves 355 older adults a year*.

UNH will soon be releasing a companion analysis of the NORC landscape in New York City, which will show there are over two dozen neighborhoods in New York City that lack a NORC program, despite thousands of older adults living in each of those neighborhoods. We look forward to launching this analysis and budget campaign, which will seek an additional \$10 million in the FY27 budget to create approximately 30 additional NORCs.

Thank you for your time. If you have any questions, please email me at akwok@unhny.org.