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Commissioner

**Department for
the Aging**

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City's First LGBT Senior Center Opens

—One of eight new Innovative Senior Centers launched as national model in providing services that are sensitive to the needs of older LGBT adults, many of whom face social isolation and emotional burdens—

NEW YORK, NY – March 1, 2012 – Department for the Aging Commissioner Lilliam Barrios-Paoli and Services and Advocacy for GLBT Elders (SAGE) Executive Director Michael Adams today unveiled the city's first senior center to provide congregate and social services to lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender seniors. The new SAGE Innovative Senior Center—located in a brand-new facility at 305 7th Avenue on the 15th Floor—will offer culturally sensitive programs geared to the special needs of LGBT individuals, who oftentimes feel socially isolated from their peers. A key resource for these seniors will be mental health programming to help ensure their emotional well-being. Other programming at the new Center will include nutritional meals, fitness classes, health and wellness seminars, arts and culture outings, technology classes, social events and volunteer opportunities. City Council Speaker Christine Quinn joined the Commissioner.

“In August 2009, Mayor Bloomberg outlined a bold vision for an Age-friendly NYC, one that would ensure not only a strong future for aging services but more opportunities and resources for seniors,” said Deputy Mayor for Health and Human Services Linda I. Gibbs. “The launch of SAGE's LGBT senior center marks another milestone in addressing the needs of City's 1.3 million older New Yorkers.”

“LGBT seniors often do not feel comfortable in a traditional senior center setting and this launch of a LGBT senior center is another important step in making New York accessible and more age-friendly for all New Yorkers,” said DFTA Commissioner Barrios-Paoli. “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 lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender seniors. SAGE is a pioneer in addressing the needs of LGBT older New Yorkers, and I am confident that their robust programs will serve as a model for senior centers across the country.”

“Opening The SAGE Center has been a dream for LGBT older people for many years,” said SAGE Executive Director Michael Adams. “SAGE is thrilled to partner with New York City's Department for the Aging to create more innovative programs that address the changing needs of LGBT older people. Through this initiative, we are committed to building program models that can be replicated in New York City and nationwide.”

New York is home to the largest urban population of individuals who identify as lesbian, gay, or bisexual in the United States. Nevertheless, many LGBT New Yorkers report discrimination by peers and professional staff that makes them wary of participating in the City's services for older adults. They are confronted with the untenable choice of living openly but fearfully, or contending with the social isolation and emotional burden of hiding their identities. These older adults are particularly vulnerable because many lack caregivers and have no children, partners or friends to call upon for assistance in an emergency. To help LGBT individuals feel more comfortable accessing City services, the City is facilitating LGBT cultural competency trainings targeting senior centers, home and community-based caregivers, and residential facilities including assisted living and nursing home settings.

According to a March 2010 report sponsored in part by SAGE and the LGBT Movement Advancement Project (MAP), University of California, Los Angeles's Williams Institute on Sexual Orientation and the Law estimates that 4.1% of American adults identify themselves as lesbian, gay or bisexual—whether they are open or closeted in the larger society. The study estimated that lesbian, gay and bisexual people age 65 or older number 1.5 million today and will grow to nearly 3 million by 2030. Lesbians will likely be over-represented in these numbers, reflecting both general population trends and the decimation wrought by HIV/AIDS, which disproportionately affected gay men.

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. Like other centers, the Innovative Senior Centers will provide meals and opportunities for seniors to socialize with their peers. However, they will also be held accountable for producing vibrant programs, high participation rates and better health outcomes for older New Yorkers. For example, Innovative Senior Centers will obtain baseline health information from members upon enrollment so that they can develop suitable programming that produces measurable health outcomes over time. They will also support healthy lifestyles by educating older adults on topics such as nutrition and methods for managing chronic diseases.

Additional innovations at the Innovative Senior Centers include flexible and expanded hours. 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. 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. Other enriched programming being made available by individual centers include fully equipped and staffed fitness centers – one center boasts an Olympic-size swimming pool – rooftop gardening, brain exercises, depression screening and participation in a wide variety of programs in the community.

In addition to the SAGE senior center, 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, Visions, the first center in the nation to serve a blind and visually impaired 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.

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