

**Published on *SeniorNavigator* (<https://seniornavigator.org>)**

## **Senior Centers**

A Senior Center is a community-based multi-purpose center for people over 50 or 55 years old. Through health education, social and recreation activities, and lifelong learning, Senior Centers strive to help older adults stay independent and connected to their communities. Senior Centers use a preventive approach to reduce isolation, promote wellness and extend independence. Senior Centers are designed for the older adult who is mobile, active and able to perform activities of daily living with relative independence.

### **Services and Activities**

There is something for everyone at a Senior Center. Where else can you find dancing, Internet classes, computer education, tea parties, pool and cribbage, and intergenerational programs all under the same roof?

Recreational activities might include bridge, Mah Jong, T'ai Chi, or aerobics. A center's lifelong learning program could include college-level coursework. Health promotion activities, such as high blood pressure screening, flu shots, and nutrition seminars, are common in Senior Centers. Other activities may include volunteer and civic engagement opportunities as well as access to educational and arts programs. Programs vary from agency to agency.

Senior Centers are becoming a focal point for other community agencies to bring their services directly to older adults. At a Senior Center, you'll often find information about programs that provide: job training, transportation, tax assistance, continuing education, insurance counseling, or mental health services.

The days and hours of operation of Senior Centers vary from agency to agency. Some are open 5 or 6 days per week, 8 hours or more a day. Others operate for limited hours or days each week. Typically, transportation through a door-to-door van service is offered for those members who no longer drive. Most Senior Centers also offer a nutritious mid-day meal each day that they are open.

## Cost

Usually, charges for Senior Center activities and classes are included in an annual membership fee. Membership fees range from \$10 to \$100 a year. Normally, Senior Centers are operated by public or non-profit organizations with a mission to serve anyone desiring service. Therefore, scholarships are often available for those who cannot afford the membership fee.

## Licensure and Accreditation

Senior Centers are not licensed by the state of Virginia. However, there is an accreditation program for Senior Centers. These standards are designed to help centers achieve quality programming through assessment of management, program development, and program quality. The Senior Center standards and accreditation program was implemented in 1999. Accreditation can be expensive and time consuming for smaller agencies. To date, very few Senior Centers in Virginia have achieved accreditation.

## Consumer Tips

- **Senior Centers usually do not offer therapeutic, medical, or caregiver services.** Those types of services typically are offered through adult day services programs. However, some Senior Centers are increasing the level of care for seniors who may need extra attention, yet are still able to perform activities of daily living. This type of program can open up Senior Centers to those frailer individuals whose primary need is socialization. Where these programs exist, it makes Senior Centers an affordable alternative for short periods of respite for caregivers.
- **Often, older adults are hesitant to join Senior Centers because they don't understand them.** One way that Senior Centers attract new members is through volunteer opportunities at the Senior Center itself. Through teaching classes, organizing activities or helping to prepare meals, individuals get to help others while learning how fun a Senior Center can be. Engaging first in volunteerism helps ease anxiety about a new environment.

Senior Centers are located in communities across Virginia. To find a Senior Center near you, go to [SeniorNavigator](#), and search for **senior centers** using your **zip code**.

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