



## NEWS RELEASE

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### **WISE & Healthy Aging Awarded Grant from National Council on Aging to Help Seniors Access Benefits**

**SANTA MONICA (Feb. 23, 2011)** - WISE & Healthy Aging is one of 10 organizations nationally, and the only site in California, to receive a \$130,000 grant from the National Council on Aging (NCOA) to set up a Benefits Enrollment Center, a person-centered, community-based system that helps to identify and enroll as many eligible Los Angeles County seniors as possible into various public benefits programs, helping them to pay for prescription drugs, medical care, food and utilities.

"The economic downturn makes the work of Benefits Enrollment Centers even more important," said Jim Firman, president and CEO of NCOA. "Millions of low-income seniors and adults with disabilities are struggling to meet their basic needs. Many are simply not aware of all the programs available to help them achieve economic security, or they need assistance in applying for them."

"Low income seniors in Los Angeles County face enormous barriers in applying for benefits to which they are entitled," said Grace Cheng Braun, president and CEO of WISE & Healthy Aging. "The system is fragmented, complex and difficult to navigate, and often requires travelling to different offices, making the process overwhelming to seniors."

The Benefits Enrollment Center will make public benefits more accessible to seniors by creating a true one-stop resource which streamlines the process and navigates the fragmented and bureaucratic system of benefits agencies. The approach follows a client from educating and screening him/her on public benefits, to completing the applications, ensuring proper documentation and following up with governmental agencies to troubleshoot any issues.

The screening and enrollment process will be done both on a one-on-one basis at locations throughout Los Angeles County and through a call center. Beginning March 1, the toll-free number for reaching the call center is (855) 6-ENROLL (636-7655).

The center will initially focus on the following benefits programs:

- Medicare Part D Extra Help (Low-Income Subsidy)
- Medicare Savings Program
- Medi-Cal
- Cal-Fresh (called the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program – SNAP – at the federal level), and the
- Low-Income Home Energy Assistance program

Cheng Braun noted that with more than 40 years experience helping seniors live independently, WISE & Healthy Aging is uniquely suited for launching this program. Cynthia Banks, Director of the Los Angeles County Community and Senior Services, and Area Agency on Aging adds, "There is such a need for streamlining the process in which seniors access public benefits throughout Los Angeles County. The County Area Agency on Aging is proud to collaborate with WISE & Healthy Aging on this Benefits Enrollment Center initiative."

WISE & Healthy Aging's Benefits Enrollment Center will be working with governmental and nonprofit partners that include:

- Bet Tzedek Legal Services
- Center for Health Care Rights
- City of Los Angeles Department of Aging
- Los Angeles County Department of Public Social Services
- Legal Aid Foundation of Los Angeles
- Los Angeles County Community and Senior Services
- St. Barnabas Senior Services
- Venice Family Clinic

For more information on WISE & Healthy Aging, please call 310-394-9871.

For information about the Benefits Enrollment Center, please call (855) 6-ENROLL (636-7655) starting March 1.

## **About WISE & Healthy Aging**

WISE & Healthy Aging, a non-profit social services organization, enhances the independence, dignity and quality of life of older adults through leadership, advocacy and innovative services. It has been touching the lives of over 30,000 seniors annually for more than 40 years.

## **About NCOA**

The National Council on Aging is a non-profit service and advocacy organization headquartered in Washington, DC. NCOA is a national voice for older Americans - especially those who are vulnerable and disadvantaged - and the community organizations that serve them. It brings together non-profit organizations, businesses and government to develop creative solutions that improve the lives of all older adults. NCOA works with thousands of organizations across the country to help seniors find jobs and benefits improve their health, live independently and remain active in their communities.