



NEWS RELEASE

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WISE & Healthy Aging's "Care Connect" Team will Put Seniors in Touch with Essential Area Services with One Call or Visit

Santa Monica (Sept. 7, 2011) Seniors in the City or County of Los Angeles soon will have a new way to learn about and access virtually any health, social service or community resource they need through a program initiative of WISE & Healthy Aging, funded in part by a grant from The Ahmanson Foundation.

When completed, WISE & Healthy Aging's "Care Connect" project will provide expanded one-to-one personal attention, available by phone or walk-in, and a vast database and network surpassing traditional information and referral services. Care Connect team members will guide seniors to programs and services available through WISE & Healthy Aging or elsewhere in the community.

"We want seniors to know they can count on us to be their trusted source for information and timely access to programs and services, whether these are services we provide or someone else provides," said Grace Cheng Braun, president and CEO of WISE & Healthy Aging. "Many seniors are unable to access the services and support they need to optimize their independence, health and quality of life, often because they are unsure of who to call, where to turn for help and what services can be made available to them. The Care Connect team, specifically trained and experienced in assessing needs, will help them surmount the seemingly insurmountable."

According to Cheng Braun, WISE & Healthy Aging responded last year to more than 2,000 calls from people seeking information and referrals – a number that is growing at about 10 percent per year and is likely to jump if the economic situation worsens and seniors find themselves in greater need of assistance. To continue to be able to respond and to improve the quality of the response, the Care Connect program is being designed according to standards of practice established by the Alliance of Information and Referral Systems (AIRS).

AIRS is a national, professional membership association that provides specialized training, offers an accreditation program to measure an agency's ability to meet high standards, and has a certification program that evaluates the competence of individual information and referral specialists. AIRS is a leader in the "211" movement, an information and referral phone system that has transformed access to human services. The AIRS protocol is utilized by the County of Los Angeles in their administering of the "211" system for Los Angeles.

Developed and supervised by a specially trained and AIRS-certified professional staff member, WISE & Healthy Aging's Care Connect team will include highly trained volunteers and support from Care Management program staff.

"This truly will be a team approach. There are many members of the baby boom generation entering into retirement who have a lot to give. Recruiting these high-quality volunteers to enhance our team allows us to deliver more service at lower cost. When the Care Connect program is fully built out, a team member will be able to speak by phone or sit in a private area with a senior and access a comprehensive database. The ability to refer that person to services that are available, or guide the individual to other programs comes very close to one-stop shopping. After evaluating a client's needs, we may involve members of our Care Management program to provide even more intensive assistance and service coordination," Michelle Quiroga-Diaz, director of In-Home Care Management Services at WISE & Healthy Aging, said.

The number of services available at WISE & Healthy Aging increased significantly this year when the agency received a \$130,000 National Council on Aging grant to create a Los Angeles County Benefits Enrollment Center, the first in California. Through this center, eligible seniors may enroll in Medicare savings programs, Medi-Cal, CalFresh (formerly Food Stamps) and Home Energy Assistance programs. With its new responsibility, the Care Connect team will be available to address the additional requests for information and referral assistance by individuals accessing the Benefits Enrollment Center.

Additionally, WISE & Healthy Aging provides: a Long-Term Care Ombudsman Program to protect the rights of seniors and dependent adults in more than 1,800 licensed skilled and assisted living facilities throughout LA County; an Adult Day Service Center for isolated and frail elderly, including supportive services for caregivers; an In-Home Services/Care Management Program for elderly or disabled adults experiencing difficulty in daily activities; a Mental Health Services Program with individual and group therapy, physician-supervised medication and senior-to-senior peer counseling; a Nutrition Services Program that serves hot meals through five congregate meal sites and delivers meals to seniors in their homes; a Financial Services Program that provides education, counseling and tax preparation; and a Transportation & Mobility Program offering information, education, driver safety classes and transportation services.

WISE & Healthy Aging's existing information and referral service will continue to be available as the Care Connect project is "under construction" in the coming months.

"Building a program that is AIRS accredited is an investment and it takes time. It requires specialized software, building out a dedicated database, developing comprehensive training modules and recruiting team members," Quiroga-Diaz said. "But going through the process elevates the quality of the service and of those who have the responsibility of assisting our clients."

The Ahmanson Foundation grant will be applied toward the Care Connect's estimated project cost of \$130,000. The Ahmanson Foundation serves Los Angeles County by funding cultural projects in the arts and humanities, education at all levels, health care, programs related to homelessness and underserved populations as well as a wide range of human resources. By supporting non-profit organizations that demonstrate sound fiscal management, efficient operation, and program integrity, the Foundation strives to enhance the quality of life and cultural legacy of the Los Angeles community.

WISE & Healthy Aging is the product of the 2007 merger of WISE Senior Services and the Center for Healthy Aging. With a combined 70 years' experience serving older adults, the nonprofit organization brings together a synergy of services, information, programs and support for seniors, those who care for them and the professionals who work with them. For media information and to arrange interviews, please call 800-396-1002.

