



NEWS RELEASE

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WISE & HEALTHY AGING AWARDED CULTURAL COMPETENCE GRANT *UniHealth Foundation Awards \$190,000 to Support Benefits Enrollment Center's Expansion to Communities with a High Concentration of Spanish-Speaking Seniors*

SANTA MONICA (May 15, 2013) – After two years of successful operation during which it has helped more than 500 Los Angeles-area low-income seniors to access public benefit programs, the **WISE & Healthy Aging Benefits Enrollment Center** is ready to expand services in two directions: to the east and south of downtown Los Angeles, and into the northern San Fernando Valley. Crucial to the Benefits Enrollment Center's expansion in these predominantly Hispanic communities will be the ability to provide service not only in Spanish, but in a manner that respects cultural values, customs and life experiences.

In recognition of this need, the **UniHealth Foundation**, a non-profit organization whose mission is to support and facilitate activities that significantly improve the health and wellbeing of individuals and communities within its service area, has awarded WISE & Healthy Aging a \$190,000 grant titled "**Cultural Competence in Assisting Seniors in Accessing Public Benefits**," announced WISE & Healthy Aging President and CEO Grace Cheng Braun.

"Low income seniors in Los Angeles County face enormous barriers in applying for benefits to which they are entitled. The system is fragmented, complex and difficult to navigate, and having the additional barrier of language and culture makes it that much more difficult," Cheng Braun said. "So we are extremely pleased to have the UniHealth Foundation's support for this outreach into the Hispanic community."

The person-centered, community-based Benefits Enrollment Center, established in 2011 with a grant from the National Council on Aging, is one of only 20 in the nation and the first in California. It now also becomes the first to create a culturally competent intervention model targeting Hispanic seniors, according to Cheng Braun — a model whose need was clearly established in the Benefits Enrollment Center's first two years, during which 40 percent of the clients were low-income Hispanic seniors.

Over a two-year period, the UniHealth Foundation grant will make possible the training of program staff and volunteers and the establishment of partnerships with community-based organizations in Los Angeles and the San Fernando Valley — a key to assisting these low-income seniors access benefits such as the Medicare Savings Program, Medicare Low Income Subsidy, Medi-Cal, utility discounts and CalFresh (food stamps).

A hybrid approach is being taken, with a call-in center as well as in-person assistance at the partnering agencies located in the communities. Implementation steps include: adding a staff person who is bi-lingual in Spanish and English; recruiting lead volunteers who are local residents with contacts in the community's civic, social service and religious organizations; creating partnerships with medical facilities, social service agencies, civic and faith-based organizations in the community (five in Year 1, seven in Year 2); preparing brochures and flyers in easily understood Spanish; outreaching in a way that is sensitive to people who may have lived with racial or ethnic discrimination; and recognizing the importance of the family as a source of strength and guidance and involving clients' family members in the benefits enrollment process.

“The WISE & Healthy Aging mission is to support older adults who wish to remain in their home by enhancing their independence, dignity and quality of life through leadership, advocacy and innovative services. The generous grant from the UniHealth Foundation is making it possible for us to do just that for Hispanic seniors in Los Angeles and the San Fernando Valley, and we are very grateful,” Cheng Braun said.

For more information about the Benefits Enrollment Center and the many other services that WISE & Healthy Aging provides, please call Rudy Zamora, Community Benefits Manager, at (310) 394-9871, ext. 423, or go to www.wiseandhealthyaging.org.

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WISE & Healthy Aging is the result of the 2007 merger of WISE Senior Services and Center for Healthy Aging. With a combined 70 years' experience serving older adults, the nonprofit, social services organization brings together a synergy of services, information, programs and support for older adults, caregivers of the elderly and the professionals who work with them. For more information, call (310) 394-9871 or visit www.wiseandhealthyaging.org