



2020 Census: A Complete Count Will Be Critical, Key Challenges Faced by Seniors Must Be Addressed

By Grace Li/CEO of On Lok, Inc. and Anni Chung/President & CEO of Self-Help for the Elderly

SAN FRANCISCO (March 10, 2020) - Every decade, the U.S. Census is conducted to count everyone living in the country. Participation is key to successfully completing the constitutional mandate to accurately count every resident. Undercounting translates into a loss of **\$2,000 per person annually in San Francisco** – over the course of the next 10 years. Although the Census contains a mere nine questions, it's incredibly important because it determines both congressional representation and government funding for hospitals, transportation, schools, libraries, first responders and other critical programs. During FY2015, 132 programs used Census Bureau data to distribute \$675+ billion in federal funds.

The California Legislative Analyst's office reports that while the 2000 and 2010 Censuses were more accurate, there was a significant undercount in 1990. California's population was undercounted by about 835,000, which meant California gained one fewer seat in Congress than it was entitled to receive and was estimated to have lost more than \$200 million in federal funds in a single fiscal year. In fact, three out of four Californians belong to groups that are difficult to count. This includes LGBTQ persons, low-income individuals, those living in multi-generational households, people with disabilities, those with limited English proficiency and renters.

Why is it particularly important to represent seniors accurately in the 2020 Census? Within the next 20 years, the number of older adults living in the U.S. is projected to be greater than the number of children for the first time in history. With this swelling number of older adults, the country will recognize greater demands for healthcare, in-home caregiving and assisted living facilities – all of which need funding. Additionally, an underfunded, poorly executed U.S. Census could severely impact a diverse range of communities – including seniors – leaving them underrepresented in Congress and with cuts to federal funding for critical programs, such as Medicaid, the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (known as CalFresh in California), Medicare Part B and Section 8 housing. Furthermore, an accurate count will ensure ongoing federal funding for important programs and services that allow seniors to stay in their homes and communities.

Beginning in mid-March, each household will receive 2020 Census information via U.S. Mail. In addition to submission details, people will be encouraged to respond online (in one of 13 languages), by phone (14 languages) or by mail (2 languages: English and Spanish). The 2020 Census will be the first allowing households to respond online, an efficient method for many which should increase participation and limit costs, but one that could present limitations for others. For example, minority groups, low-income residents and seniors tend to have low internet access rates -- and are oftentimes without computers/mobile devices. Additionally, when taking into account the differences in internet availability and access between metropolitan and rural areas, these factors are likely to widen the gap in response rates.

Everyone in the U.S. will be impacted by 2020 Census results, so it behooves the public to stay informed and take an active role in the process. And for seniors in particular, it's critical to educate this rapidly growing population on the need for their participation. As a community, we can improve the lives of seniors by making sure they are accurately represented.



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