

Valley Voice: HARC provides the data to make a case for grants

Written by Ginny Foat Special to The Desert Sun
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Greater Palm Springs is internationally known as a resort and retirement community. Yet, there is another, lesser-known story.

Data from the 2010 Census show Palm Springs has a population of 44,552. More than 44 percent of this population is over 55 years of age with more than 26 percent of the total population over age 65 and more than 12.5 percent over age 75. The percentage of individuals over age 65 is 2 1/2 times the statewide percentage. There is a growing avalanche of older adults in our area and this will only increase as the baby boomers continue to age.

In Palm Springs alone, our population of individuals over age 65 is currently more than two times the statewide percentage and is expected to be over four times that percentage in just seven years. Many of these older adults, especially those over age 75, live at or below the federal poverty level.

One of the challenges that faces Mizell Senior Center and other nonprofit organizations is making the case to funders from outside the area that there is a real need for services to the older, lower-income residents. These funders see our beautiful golf courses on television, and remember us as the “playground of stars and presidents.” Developing a compelling story that will get the attention of foundations that are unfamiliar with our area requires that we use real data that is specific to our needs rather than overall national trends.

The Health Assessment Resource Center (HARC) is the perfect resource for this “real world” information. Because the data collected by HARC are specific to our area and can be broken down into specific age groups it is an invaluable resource not only in determining the needs of seniors in our area, but in making the case to funders that those needs should be met.

A sobering statistic from a statewide study by the James Irvine Foundation found that the Inland Empire of which the Coachella Valley is a part receives significantly less in foundation funding than other parts of California. In fact, the Inland Empire was the lowest in per capita giving from every other region in the state. In the report, our area received \$16 per capita in foundation funding compared to \$108 in Los Angeles and a whopping \$678 per capita in San Francisco.

The information provided by HARC is a critical component in making a compelling case for funding and to show the real need among seniors and older adults in our valley for Mizell Senior Center and other organizations serving seniors.

HARC was formed in 2006 by a consortium of more than 35 public and private health care agencies led by the Desert Healthcare District, which recognized the need for local reliable data. HARC conducts confidential community health status assessments in eastern Riverside County and the Coachella Valley every three years to identify major health and quality-of-life issues. The research material is an invaluable tool in assisting health providers and nonprofits to develop programs and services for the needs in the community. A telephone survey sponsored by HARC is being conducted by researchers from Kent State University. Please be sure to take the call and become an integral part of this important research.

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