



NATIONAL
COMMUNITY
REINVESTMENT
COALITION

NCRC National Neighbors Silver

National Neighbors Silver is a multi-year campaign to empower and support economically vulnerable older adults. Combining organizing, advocacy, and direct service, National Neighbors Silver will promote housing options and responsible banking services for low-to-moderate-income elders. Working with national allies and community partners, National Neighbors Silver will identify policy and program solutions to build economic security and preserve wealth for older adults.

National Neighbors Silver seeks to:

- Organize and empower economically vulnerable seniors;
- Bridge distinct networks in housing, banking and aging;
- Enhance banking services and products for older adults; and
- Promote fair, accessible and affordable housing for elders.

NCRC Commits to Empowering Older Adults in Ten Communities

NCRC seeks to train and educate seniors on how to be their own best advocates.

Through grants to community-based organizations, NCRC is supporting local organizers who, in turn, are designating local leaders as National Neighbors Silver Ambassadors. These organizing networks are advising local organizations and practitioners on the most severe financial stressors facing low- and middle-income seniors. At the same time, Ambassadors are creating opportunities for older adults to take direct action. Examples of direct action include door-to-door outreach with isolated older adults, financial literacy trainings at senior centers, town hall meetings designed to demand accountability from local slumlords, participation in advocacy rallies and events, and more.

NCRC is proud to support ten community-based organizations in efforts to engage older adults in direct action to improve their financial circumstances and enhance their communities:

- **Empowering and Strengthening Ohio's People (ESOP):** Cleveland, OH
- **United Neighbors:** Davenport, IA

- **Faith Action for Community Equity (FACE):** Honolulu, HI
- **Causa Justa: Just Cause (CJJC):** Oakland, CA
- **Jewish Community Action (JCA):** Minneapolis, MN
- **California Coalition for Rural Housing:** Sacramento, CA
- **New York Statewide Senior Action Council, Inc:** Buffalo, NY
- **Western Maine Community Action:** East Wilton, ME
- **South Suburban Action Conference & Pilsen Neighbors Community Council:** Chicago, IL
- **RISE Foundation:** Memphis, TN

Read more for 2011 highlights from National Neighbors Silver and find out what's to come in 2012.



NCRC Weighs In. What Does the Great Recession Mean for Older Americans?

At a [hearing on October 18, 2011](#), the U.S. Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions (HELP) Subcommittee on Primary Health and Aging unveiled a commissioned report by the Government Accountability Office (GAO) on how older adults are faring in the aftermath of the Great Recession. The [report](#) concludes that our nation's seniors experienced significant loss in wealth from 2007-2009 and that the older population is disproportionately disadvantaged in today's tough job market.

Chair of the Subcommittee on Primary Health and Aging, Senator Bernie Sanders (VT) invited the National Council on Aging, Institute for Women's Policy Research and Social Security Works to weigh in on the report findings at a Subcommittee hearing. NCRC joined this distinguished group by submitting testimony for consideration. John Taylor, NCRC President and CEO, provided commentary on the silent housing crisis plaguing our aging communities. Mr. Taylor offered details on the stark circumstances facing older adults after the crash of the housing market. Read the [full testimony](#) on the NCRC website.

Today's older homeowners face a doubly harsh reality from lost wealth and diminished incomes. Homeowners of all ages are underwater in their homes, including many older Americans. These individuals are unable to take advantage of their primary asset, whether for a reverse mortgage or to sell,

in the event of a catastrophic health event or to supplement diminished retirement incomes. In addition, high housing costs lead many to make difficult sacrifices, choosing among basic needs such as nutritious food, transportation, heating and cooling bills and out-of-pocket medical expenses. For homeowners still paying a mortgage, older adults with lost wealth and high costs are at increased risk of foreclosure or delinquency. And even for those who own a home free and clear of a mortgage the cost of utilities, taxes and maintenance can overwhelm fixed incomes.

Older renters face similar challenges. High housing costs lead to untenable choices – to pay the rent or to pay for essential medications? High-cost rents are often the only option available to older renters given the lack of affordable rental housing. This reality is likely to be exacerbated by recent Congressional action that zeroed out funds for new affordable housing construction in the Section 202 Housing for the Elderly program (Section 202). Section 202 is one of five assisted housing programs designated for older adults and provides the largest share of housing available to this population through the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). Over two million low- and middle-income seniors rely on subsidized housing programs, but the need far exceeds the demand. About 10 older adults are on waiting lists for every single unit of housing that becomes available through the Section 202 program.

Through National Neighbors Silver, NCRC seeks to shine a spotlight on the intersection of housing, banking, and economic security for older adults. NCRC believes that access to affordable, accessible, and fair housing and quality banking is fundamental to allowing older adults to age in place. In 2012, NCRC will work with national allies and community-based partners to develop a comprehensive national policy agenda focused on increasing affordable, accessible and fair housing options and basic banking services for vulnerable older adults.

Our work thus far has led us to conclude that there must be a strong, coordinated, and collaborative movement to give voice to the housing crisis facing today's older adults and future retirees. This movement must involve advocates and providers from the housing, aging, and banking worlds. To this end, we are looking at options to enhance Community Reinvestment Act (CRA) credits for banks that invest in affordable senior housing. We are working to sustain and improve the housing counseling services that prevent foreclosure and help older adults navigate a complicated reverse mortgage market. We know that empowering older adults to identify targeted scams and predatory practices that undermine their economic security must be a part of our agenda. And as National Neighbors Silver unfolds, we expect to uncover additional policy and program solutions.

Our members will be an important part of this process. We want to hear your input on the economic realities facing older adults in your community. To be a part of developing NCRC's aging agenda contact Stacy Sanders, Director of National Neighbors Silver, at ssanders@ncrc.org or **202-393-8305**.



Cleaning Up Vacant Properties in a Cleveland Community

As one of our National Neighbors Silver (NNS) partners,

Empowering and Strengthening Ohio's People (ESOP) is building community wealth by taking on vacant buildings in Cleveland. Working with its network of Ambassadors, ESOP is holding landowners accountable for the condition of vacant buildings.

Much of this effort is focused in Ward 4 – a predominantly African American neighborhood in the city. NNS Ambassadors Betty Ewing and Mother Carter researched vacant and abandoned buildings in Ward 4 and secured a meeting with the city of Cleveland Department of Building and Housing. As a result, the city demolished over 20 of the identified vacant buildings. In addition to working with local government, Ambassadors are calling on Cleveland landowners to do their part.

Many of the Cleveland Ambassadors live in Mt. Pleasant – a Ward 4 community ravaged by vacant buildings and slumlords. Mt. Pleasant's seniors see vacancies as the cause of much of the neighborhood's

crime and drug use. Several of these vacant homes are being purchased by banks and lenders looking to “flip” the properties cheaply. The residents of Mt. Pleasant express a growing concern that this practice will make these homes unaffordable and push long-time residents out of the community.

In response, older residents of Mt. Pleasant are banding together to confront local slumlords, particularly those who refuse to renovate dilapidated and condemned properties. This August, over 60 community residents participated in a town hall calling on one such landowner to rehab residential units or donate those properties to the local land bank. As a result, this landowner dedicated \$30,000 to rehab a vacant residential unit. And the property is now close to livable. The landowner also promised to donate one unsafe property to the land bank for demolition. This action by Mt. Pleasant residents was featured in the *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, the city's newspaper. Read the [full story](#) online.

Ms. Stewart Stands Up to Capital One

NCRC's national campaign to shed light on the Capital One house of cards was one of our proudest accomplishments in 2011. NCRC members, community-based groups and individuals across the country testified against the creation of yet another too-big-to-fail financial institution through the proposed acquisition of ING Direct by Capital One.

NCRC was successful in securing public hearings by the Federal Reserve Board on the subject of the acquisition. As a result, over 100 community-based organizations testified with personal stories of economic struggle and outlined risks to the community presented by the potential growth of Capital One. National Neighbors Silver partners joined this effort to ensure older voices were a part of this national dialogue.

Velva Stewart, the National Neighbors Silver community organizer for Jewish Community Action (JCA) and an older adult herself, testified before the Federal Reserve Board at the Chicago hearing opposing the acquisition of ING by Capital One. Ms. Stewart spoke of losing her home of 35 years to a foreclosure rescue scam. This experience led Ms. Stewart to JCA, through which she is now responsible for organizing older adults in Minneapolis on a comprehensive agenda to build retirement security. An excerpt of Ms. Stewart's testimony is included below:

“I purchased my home in Harrison neighborhood in North Minneapolis in 1970 with my husband. We lived in the home 35 years and raised our family there... In 2005, the city told me that there were necessary repairs even though they knew there was not a bank in the community that

would make a loan I would need to cover the repairs. My home was always beautiful, but codes had changed. I tried US Bank, Wells Fargo, bank after bank, but no one was interested in helping... I worked my whole life and my mortgage was paid off entirely. It didn't matter. I was becoming desperate, and getting calls to short sell and from all sorts of strange programs. Eventually, I got an offer from someone who said they'd buy my home and allow me to rent from them in exchange for equity. This turned out to be a foreclosure rescue scam... and I was evicted from my home of 35 years. This all happened because I could not get a traditional loan through a bank. This experience led me to work to ensure that this wouldn't happen to other people without putting up a fight.”

NCRC urges its members to stay tuned for action opportunities on Capital One and more.

NCRC Sparking Seeds of Innovation: Low- and No-Interest Home Modification Loans for the Quad Cities

Unaffordable home rehab and maintenance needs are a growing concern among older homeowners living on fixed incomes. Safety and accessibility are critical to allowing low- and middle-income seniors to age in place. This issue is of particular concern to our National Neighbors Silver partner in Davenport, Iowa, United Neighbors.

Among its many programs, United Neighbors operates a home rehab program that includes lead-based paint reduction and accessibility rehab through the installation of ramps, grab bars, benches, and so forth. Older adults comprise the bulk of the program's clients; each year, United Neighbors serves 35 homes. Many of the program's older clients experience deferred maintenance due to health care issues, expenses, or both.

To address the issue of rehab costs, United Neighbors is in negotiations with a non-profit lender, to establish a low- to no-interest or forgivable loan for low-income seniors who require home maintenance. To supplement monies made available through this grant fund, United Neighbors is looking to local banks to match the loan fund. This unique partnership is just one example of the kinds of innovation that NCRC and its partners plan to foster through National Neighbors Silver.

As the program develops, NCRC will provide additional information on its successes and challenges. Through National Neighbors Silver, NCRC will track best practices by community groups working to preserve wealth for older homeowners. This clearinghouse of innovative partnerships and programs will pave the way for similar efforts.

Do you have a unique program concept or idea to share? Are you an advocate or provider working with local banks and lenders to provide age-friendly products to older adults? If so, contact Stacy Sanders, Director of National Neighbors Silver, at ssanders@ncrc.org or **202-393-8305**.



John Taylor Talks Senior Housing in Hawaii

This November, John Taylor took NCRC's message about senior housing on the road. Mr. Taylor was an invited speaker at the Faith Action and Community Equity (FACE) 2nd Annual Equity Summit. FACE invited over 250 activists, service providers, and advocates to participate in a daylong conversation with national and local experts on topics ranging from immigration reform to job creation.

As part of National Neighbors Silver, John presented to summit participants on senior housing needs and NCRC's national policy goals to promote funding for housing counseling services and subsidized housing. The subject matter of John's talk was featured as an op-ed in the online publication, *Honolulu Civil Beat*. [Read the full op-ed on their website.](#)

Need Help with Housing? Call 1-800-475-NCRC

NCRC operates a national hotline designed to connect older adults and their families to local housing counseling services. Call **1-800-475-NCRC** and speak to someone you can trust. Our Housing Counseling Network assists older adults free of charge with basic money management and debt counseling, foreclosure prevention, and understanding reverse mortgage options. NCRC provides this invaluable resource free of charge. Make sure your organization's staff and members of the community know to call **1-800-475-NCRC** for help with housing needs.

What's to Come! Be a Part of National Neighbors Silver in 2012

Here's a snapshot of what's on the horizon for NCRC and its efforts to build economic security and preserve wealth for older Americans:

- Building aging advocacy networks in up to fifteen communities;
- Identifying a national advisory council on senior housing and banking needs;
- Launching a National Neighbors Silver training series;
- Filming a documentary on seniors' housing struggles;
- Featuring workshops and speakers on aging at the NCRC annual conference;
- And much more!

Contact Stacy Sanders, Director of National Neighbors Silver, at ssanders@ncrc.org or **202-393-8305** to sign up for campaign updates, including training and funding announcements. Become part of a national dialogue to promote affordable, accessible, and fair housing and quality banking services for older Americans by signing up today!