



# A focus on smart social care at the Dennis Center for Active Living

The grand opening of the Dennis Center for Active Living (DCAL) on January 24, 2024, highlighted their beautiful new 12,000-square-foot building, complete with a café, fitness studios, a ballroom, a courtyard with indoor/outdoor dining space, a gaming space, and two commercial kitchens. But Brenda Vazquez, Director of the Dennis Senior Center, is especially excited about how the new space will help them implement their service delivery model—what Vazquez calls “smart social care.”

## Designed with intention

“For the last six years, we’ve been building a facility that is aligned with our philosophy,” she says. For Vazquez, a gerontologist, “smart social care” means keeping people healthy, engaged, socialized, and following their care plan for any chronic conditions. It also means addressing social determinants of health. “We feel centers like ours are the future of keeping people healthy. This is where it happens, especially for the older population that’s rapidly growing across our state. We see ourselves as partners with health care, in the sense that we are implementing these health promotion and lifestyle programs.”

## Workshops aimed at keeping people healthy

Vazquez says they offer workshops that are not only fun, but also help people manage chronic illness. “Our programs have been clinically proven to improve health outcomes,” she says. For example, they address movement disorders like Parkinson’s through dance classes, and they offer balance classes that are focused on fall prevention. A supportive day program, the Golden Age Pals (GAP), engages people with dementia socially and creatively, helping family caregivers find time for self-care. Mental health support is provided by certified PEARLS (Program to Encourage Active and Rewarding Lives for Seniors) coaches.

“We’re addressing the most basic things that impact the health outcomes of an individual,” says Vazquez. “When people are more social, eat well, and move more, they’re less likely to be depressed and less likely to let their diabetes or other chronic condition get out of control. There’s a sense of accountability in that social environment.”

## For seniors of all ages and abilities

Vazquez notes the entire space has been designed to be age- and dementia-friendly. She hopes to reach those who have not been to the senior center before. “We’re already seeing a younger cohort of members in their 60s and 70s, which is a good thing because it helps us support the older and more frail population.”



*Our volunteers make the DCAL a home away from home.*



*DCAL volunteers cook lunch for a monthly Vets & Friends Social.*

**We want to hear from you.** How does a local senior center or COA help you and your community? Send an email to [Healthy.Times@bcbsma.com](mailto:Healthy.Times@bcbsma.com). We may feature it in a future issue!

➤➤ To see what services are available in your area, or to become a volunteer, contact your local senior center. Visit [mcoonline.com](http://mcoonline.com) and click on “FindYour COA.”