

## Holocaust Survivors: Still Poor

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The **Harry and Jeanette Weinberg Foundation** recently **announced**[pdf] a \$10M grant for an emergency fund to serve the needs of Holocaust survivors living in North America.

The situation of Holocaust survivors is troubling:

It is estimated that there are more than 500,000 Holocaust survivors worldwide, with more than 144,000 victims living in North America. The remaining Nazi victims live mostly in Israel and the Former Soviet Union. The average age of a Nazi victim is 79 years with nearly one-quarter of victims 85--?years--?old or older. One in four aging survivors lives alone in the U.S. and an estimated 37% live at or below the poverty level, a level that is five times the rate of other senior citizens in the United States.

Not only are Holocaust survivors poorer than their age peer cohort, they also often face distinct challenges in terms of their needs and care. Lucy Steinitz's research on **Psychosocial Effects of the Holocaust on Aging Survivors and Their Families** (1984) noted that even where good quality institutional care is available, those who can prefer to keep their survivor parents out institutions

"because of the parallels—however benign and unintended—between the total institution of a hospital ward or nursing home and that of a concentration camp...a colleague once told me about an elderly survivor in a New York institution who confused the nursing home bathrooms with the gas chambers in Auschwitz."

**Caring for Holocaust Survivors: Rethinking the Paradigms** is a useful resource that includes a brief survey of the history of attitudes towards Holocaust survivors and their needs, from post-war onwards. It tells the story of how those attitudes have shifted while nevertheless continuing to perpetuate important blind spots - as they tend to be more reflective of the needs of the current generation than of the survivor generation.

One program that aims to serve the needs the needs of Holocaust survivors is the Montreal **Cumming's Jewish Centre for Seniors**, whose **Services for Holocaust Survivors** include the centre profiled in **A Drop-In Centre for Holocaust Survivors: Inspiring Hope, Meaning, and Purpose**.

This new grant will be administered by the long established and experienced New York based **Claims Conference**, which already has a structure in place to efficiently distribute the funds to survivors on an emergency basis for needs including medical equipment and medications, dental care, transportation, food, and short--?term home care.

(More information on survivors in Israel - **Health Problems and Socioeconomic Neediness Among Jewish Shoah Survivors in Israel** - and the world Jewish population - **Review of Relevant Demographic Information on World Jewry**).

