

Dominican granny: "I stay in New York"

Despite how hard it can be for many, the Big Apple is a city with opportunities and resources for seniors



The Dominican Lidia Jiménez, 86 years (left), and her husband for more than 60 years Alcides Jiménez, 88, along with his sister Victoria Navarro, in their Washington Heights apartment.

PHOTO: MARIELA LOMBARD. / THE NEWSPAPER

BY: PEDRO F. FRISNEDAMARCH 19, 2018

"What can I tell you? I love **New York**. Here there are more opportunities for us and that's why I want to stay here." So she responds in a clear, direct, and without leaving any room for doubt, Mrs. **Lidia Jiménez**, when we asked her: Would not you like to be living your ' **golden years** ' in a quieter place, perhaps in your native **Dominican Republic**?

The 86-year-old granny says that in the **Big Apple** there are "more opportunities" for her, because here she has family members, people who take care of her and her husband, as well as the doctors and medicines that help her cope daily and face the challenge of being a person so old and with **multiple chronic diseases**.

"Many old people find it very difficult here because maybe they do not have anyone like me, I have my sister who has helped me a lot," says Mrs. Jiménez, who suffered a **brain injury** almost 10 years ago and is currently struggling to keep **hypertension, high**

cholesterol, osteoporosis and arthritis under control, causing her a lot of pain and difficulty moving around.

"If I did not have these people who take care of me, I would not be anyone; I did not have life," adds the Dominican woman, originally from Valverde Mao.

Her husband for more than 60 years, **Alcides Jiménez**, 88, also suffers from arthritis, high cholesterol and hypertension so they had to operate on the arteries and place a 'bypass'. Added to all this is **Alzheimer's**, which has made him dependent almost entirely on the care of his sister-in-law and the professional services of a home attendant and a nurse with the organization ' **VNSNY CHOICE**'

"When I started working with them in 2008, she could hardly move and we brought her physical therapy to do exercises and we got her a doctor who was nearby in case she needed something. Home care coordination services can help them with everything; to bathe, to go to medical appointments, helps them feed and dresses them," says nurse **Alicia Schwartz, RN, VNSNY CHOICE care coordinator** .

Many Latino elders in the Big Apple are in conditions similar to those of the Jimenez.

According to data from the **Department of Aging of the City of New York (DFTA)**, 22% of the 1.5 million people over 60 in the Big Apple are of Latino origin and many of them suffer from chronic diseases and mental health problems .

"Among the **elderly Latinos** there is a **high rate of dementia and Alzheimer's** is one of the things that suffer the most. They are at greater risk due to the combination of diseases such as high blood pressure, diabetes and cardiovascular problems. Very often we find them with diagnoses of these combined diseases ", explains **Carolina Hoyos, director of the Caregiver Resource Center of the DFTA**.

That is the case of **Mario Ortiz**, 68 years old and originally from **Santo Domingo**, whose hypertension and diabetes have been so severe that it has required multiple operations to repair or replace part of his arteries.

"I have had nine surgeries in the arteries. I have some plastic arteries and others rebuilt them. I've suffered a lot," says Ortiz, a resident of **Washington Heights** for more than 33

years and who has been able to pay for all those medical expenses because he has Medicaid.

Another major health problem faced by the elderly in New York is the high levels of disability when compared to the general population. According to Census figures, **35.5% of elderly New Yorkers are living with a disability**, three times more than the rest of the population.

"I cannot do anything because I get really tired, especially when I'm standing. My legs hurt, but I look for ways to help myself and feel good; I move and do my exercises," says Mrs. Jimenez when referring to her problems with arthritis.

"I follow my treatments, I take my pain pills in my bones and I do everything my doctor sent me to relieve me", adds Jiménez, who also thanks to **Medicaid** can cover all her medical expenses and those of her husband.



Dominican 68-year-old Mario Ortiz has been operated nine times to repair the arteries./ Pedro F. Frisneda.

Loneliness is a problem

Despite all the health problems that afflict them, the Jimenez could be considered lucky people. The **Dominican grandparents**, who have been living in **Washington Heights** for decades, have a family member and a caregiver to look after them.

But not many run with the same luck. According to reports, one of the biggest problems faced by a large number of aging Latinos in New York City is simply not having anyone to help them at such an advanced age that they should be enjoying the benefits of their retirement after having worked so hard for so many years.

"Many who reach their age (los Jiménez), are alone and do not have relatives to help them. It is hard and difficult to live in the US or to reach this country at a much older age from the Dominican Republic or Puerto Rico, for example, and not have anyone," says Schwartz.

"Definitely one of the biggest challenges of aging Latinos in New York City is not having anyone to help them (...) It is very important that they are not alone because **loneliness can cause depression**," the nurse adds.

According to the report ' **Age-friendly NYC. New Commitments for a City for All Ages** ', of the DFTA, 28.9% of the people over 60 in the city of New York live alone (about 424,327 seniors).

According to the same report, loneliness or social isolation is one of the main reasons why many elderly suffer from **mental problems such as depression and anxiety**.

A report published by the **New York City Comptroller's office**, **Scott Stringer**, indicates that "helping older New Yorkers stay healthy is important to build a city in which their citizens age safely."

One of the ways to achieve this, according to the report, is to ensure that all the elderly have access to **preventive health services** every year. This should include routine exams such as blood pressure, diabetes and overweight, as well as assessments of your cognitive and mental health status including Alzheimer's and other types of dementia.

According to DFTA estimates, **in 2040 one in five New Yorkers will be over 60 years old** . This represents 20.5% of the total population or about 1.8 million people.



Dominican grandma Lidia Jiménez reflects on her long life and gives advice to young people / Mariela Lombard.

Desires and desire to live

At first glance, **Lidia Jiménez** seems a very fragile woman. Her advanced age and her many health problems have weakened her physically. The wrinkled and thin hands with which he holds his cane betray the long 86 years of experiences and experiences that this woman has had, almost all in the **city of New York**.

However, it is a very jovial person, full of life, joy and, above all, of an extremely contagious energy.

During her conversation with **EL DIARIO**, the Dominican grandmother said that what kept her going was simply her enormous desire to live. "The most important thing you need in life is the desire and desire to do things, to move forward. When there is desire there is everything," says Jiménez, who adds that he always tries to be an active person.

"I have never been afraid of old age. Sometimes I wake up with my pressure a little high and with a headache, but I set the goal of always trying not to feel sick; Even if I have

pain, I tell myself that it does not hurt and I try not to remember that, because I want to feel strong," says Jiménez.

For younger people, especially those who are approaching their senior years, Jiménez recommends that they not complain so much about life. "Young people now complain too much and that they have more than we had at their age. They complain more than the old ones," reflects the old woman.

"We all have problems, but people have to try to feel good and put aside the bad things that are presented to them in life," advises Jiménez, who reveals that he is distracted watching television and spends his days reading books and books. news something that, he assures, helps with his memory.

Mrs. Lidia immigrated to New York from the Dominican Republic with her husband in the early 1960s. They both have two children, five grandchildren and three great grandchildren.

Tips for healthy aging

The New York City Department of Health suggests several tips for staying healthy during seniors:

- Eat plenty of fruits, vegetables and whole grains.
- Stay physically active
- If you drink alcohol, do it in moderation.
- Do not smoke.
- Keep up with medical screening tests (such as blood pressure tests) and vaccines (such as the flu shot).
- If you have a chronic illness, talk with your doctor about how to control it and lead a healthy life.

- Avoid falls making your home safer. Keep floors and stairs well lit and clear of objects so as not to trip.
- Get eye exams.
- More tips on: nyc.gov/health and nyc.gov/aging .

Do not miss it

This is the first of a **series of special reports** with which **EL DIARIO** will make an x-ray of the current situation faced by the **elderly of Hispanic origin** ; its challenges in areas such as health, economic security, housing, mobility and immigration. By exposing these and other problems, as well as the alternatives and services they have, we seek to inform and educate those who are approaching the elderly - those in their 50s - to have a better life than their predecessors.