

Making The Difference – Community Supports and Health for Older Adults in Alameda County
Wednesday, November 12, 2014

WENDY PETERSON'S OPENING REMARKS

Good Morning. My name is Wendy Peterson and I'm the Director of the Senior Services Coalition of Alameda County. On behalf of our Coalition members and Steering Committee, I'd like to welcome you all here today.

So... How can we make a difference in the lives of seniors in Alameda County?

The reason for this convening springs from a recognition of the fundamental role that community supports play in health outcomes for seniors.... From a growing urgency that community-based service providers are feeling as we see an aging population that is increasing in number, economic insecurity, and poor health status... And from a sober acknowledgement that no one sector or silo alone can address this phenomenon.

It also comes at a moment of synchronicity. Alameda County is about to embark on an aging services planning initiative that will bridge agencies and has the potential to bridge/coordinate sectors, an initiative backed by the Board of Supervisors and embraced by both health care and social services agencies. You'll hear more about that today.

We realize that we need to bridge silos, and to do so, we need to shift our collective discussions to find a conceptual common ground. We think that the social determinants of health represents common ground where people from different disciplines can come together to talk about how we move the dial and improve outcomes for seniors.

In putting this conference together, I've begun to understand just how different perspectives are from one silo to the next. And I've also heard fascinating points and counterpoints about how the many social and physical conditions in our environment affect us as we live, work and age, and which of these many factors may become significant in affecting health outcomes in older adults. These different perspectives and disciplines are our strength; and the act of translating between sectors and disciplines is, in itself, a valuable process. So, I recommend you all give it the benefit of the doubt, and accept the discomfort that might come from stepping outside your own domain. Today is a day to change lenses, be solution focused, think about what works and how you can be involved.

Let me give you a brief Overview of the day. We'll start with four speakers who will introduce different lenses, different perspectives on the social determinants of health for older adults, and content that is especially relevant to the discussion of how we improve outcomes for seniors.

Next we'll get really local, with a discussion of what policy developments, financing opportunities and promising practices are relevant here in Alameda County. That will begin with a panel of "thought leaders" and then open up the floor for discussion.

Then we'll finish with lunchtime conversations that I hope will be informed and inspired by this morning's discussions.

And now it's my pleasure to introduce our plenary speakers...