

MAKING THE DIFFERENCE TOGETHER

Taking Stock of the Aging Policy Landscape for 2021

Action Conversation

Basic Needs – Coordinate to deliver Food, Housing, Healthcare, and Support

We are especially grateful to Supervisor Miley and SSA Finance Director Pete Coletto for joining us in this session. The following captures the conversation the group had and ideas that were elevated in response to a series of questions:

What are your “ah-ha” moments and take-aways from this morning’s presentations as they relate to ensuring that older people get the food, housing, healthcare and support they need?

- More attention needs to be paid to East County residents. Services are focused on the more populated parts of the county and services don’t make it out there. There are people who are African American, Latinx, people with disabilities, and we need to address their issues of isolation, vaccine availability, food distribution and housing insecurity.
- Need to address food insecurity and a sustainable model for continued access.
- How the Master Plan for Aging 5 bold goals fit so well what we need to work on locally: Housing for All Stages & Ages, Health Reimagined, Inclusion & Equity, Not Isolation, Caregiving That Works, Affording Aging
- I like the idea of integrating PACE in intake & assessment as PACE is all about coordinating care to deliver basic needs. PACE=Program of All-Inclusive Care for Elderly for dual eligible Medi-Cal/Medicare
- There are so many older people who are low income, very often people of color, live in their homes, and are unable to afford maintaining their homes. They need roof repair, window repair, etc., and there are few resources and little attention to their needs. They are forgotten and ignored. This needs to be part of our equity discussions.

What concerns do you have that you think we should all be mindful of? What outstanding questions do you have?

- So many seniors are asking my staff for information how to access vaccine and at the present time it seems there are no good answers for those who don’t have an advocate that’s tech savvy. It’s frustrating and we need better answers for those we serve.
- Adults and seniors of color with disabilities face various inequities in health and social care. Although this article focuses on children, the issues are the same <https://www.dailydemocrat.com/2020/11/17/black-latinx-children-with-disabilities-face-various-inequities-in-health-and-social-care/>
- I’m very concerned about getting the vaccine to elders as quickly as possible.

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- Digital inclusion is a big issue especially now. Telehealth is necessary but for those who haven't been using the internet or don't have someone to help them this is a huge challenge and a barrier to access to health care.
- Digital inclusion is a big concern, for people who are isolated and don't have access to information about services. Access to socialization is also so critically needed.
- So many people with disabilities are older, and there needs to be greater collaboration between the senior and disability advocates, and the five objectives of the Master Plan for Aging are crosscutting and support both populations. There must be a call for reform and increased access to services. We don't want to get back to normal, we want to get back to better. I'm hoping that we learn and grow from the pandemic experience and that we have a better health and human services system as a result.

How can we coordinate to deliver Food, Housing, Healthcare, and Supportive Services that address the unique needs of seniors? What is needed to get this done? What policy or budget priorities will help?

- Use the Age-Friendly Council to coordinate these needs. And perhaps we need one in every city.
- This is a big question, too big. To focus in: Services could be coordinated for the thousands of seniors in Housing Authority housing to make sure that they get what they need.
- What will happen to seniors who are in jeopardy of losing their homes when the eviction moratorium ends, and this needs a concerted effort in order to address what is a very time-sensitive concern.
- We need to get Medi-Cal to pay for technology (connection, device and training/support) – this would have a huge impact on bridging the digital divide.
- We need a Hub or shared resource line, coordinated workgroup
- Volunteerism is a great way, although this is challenging now when many retired people who would normally volunteer are most at risk.
- Aging & Disability Resource Center/Connection is supposed to be one-stop shop.
- People really need assistance with navigating the system of services.
- We have to rethink our expectation that people will come to us to get services, or to get help navigating services. We have to go out into the community and engage people, and work with non-traditional players (ie libraries, etc.) to help with that.
- We need to adequately address our “funding divide.” We still have different funding streams that go to food, housing, healthcare, supportive services – and those siloes dictate who gets the assistance and who is eligible, and who is left out. How are we streamlining that – from a budget perspective and a policy perspective – to make it easier for us (the different services) to work together? The ADRC has potential to to make things more

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universal rather than based on narrow eligibility criteria, but are we really working in a coordinated way to make this happen?

- Pete Coletto echoes that: Most of funding is state and federal, with stringent and differing requirements attached to it. Our challenge is to line it all up so that we can use it to serve people. It's really important to advocate for policy that gives local government more flexibility to meet local needs is key. Our needs for older adults in Alameda County are different than those in Stanislaw County, we have different challenges. Our housing situation is different, but this is not taken into account in the eligibility requirements attached to some federal funding. The federal requirements that are pinned to a percentage of the Federal Poverty Level, for instance, have far different implications in Alameda County than in a county in another part of the country. Our county works through it's advocacy entities (like California State Association of Counties), but we need you all as partners. You all can help us by having these conversations when you have the ear of legislators in Sacramento and Washington. You are totally right that with all the strings attached to funding, it throws up roadblocks to what we are trying to accomplish – to help older adults have proper nutrition, housing, etc.
- When we talk about coordinated care, we have to talk about the funding streams that are attached to them. This shows up when people are referred to a program that they should be eligible for, but it turns out they're not.
- It costs money to help people navigate – often a tremendous amount of time to assist someone just to assess their needs and document that they are eligible for a given service. We have a contract to get paid for the service, but all the navigation assistance time isn't covered. Nonprofit organizations should be funded to do this work because it's more cost effective than having county or city government do it, but the cost of navigation and eligibility determination should be funded as well.
- A great resource to bridge digital divide at <https://www.sftechcouncil.org/resources/>
- All low-income seniors on Medi-Cal or SSI should be enrolled in CalFresh as well. We need a policy for dual simplified enrollment.
- The County can stop many seniors from losing their homes by simply funding home repair for low income elders who own their homes but can't afford to fix them and keep them safe. Losing a home can lead to homelessness, and also loses the asset for the next generation, continuing the cycle of poverty.
- Funding the needs assessment and application assistance for Measure AA home repair and modification (something that CBOs could do but is so time consuming it is a barrier) will make a big difference.
- Back in the day Alameda County piloted "One E App" with a focus on no "Wrong Door"...the way this worked is smart online application who suggest other resources as fields got filled

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out by a county worker...thereby helping with linkage to other resources the client may be eligible for or utilize...could be brought back

- People are still using the yellow pages. This is a channel that should not be discounted.
- During the pandemic the income requirements that are used to assess eligibility for Meals On Wheels have been relaxed and the programs are accepting all older adults age 60+. Keeping this in place post-pandemic, and thus having a larger portion of MOW clients who can pay full donations, could help support the programs into the future.
- The need for healthy groceries is growing and we can expect this new level of need to be with us for the long term, so need to keep Mercy Brown Bag and other food resources funded.
- SDACTION is SF based whoever we are expanding our reach into the East Bay. Any suggestions/resources would be helpful contact me at: regina@sdaction.org

What does equity look like and feel like in relation to delivering services?

- So many of the programs that are government funded are for low income communities. Therefore, if we want to serve communities equitably, we need to think about the people who are eligible and their circumstances. We have to be sure we don't put additional burdens on them, causing them to waste their time. We have to make it easier for them to actually access services, and that is done through direct services and time spent with people on the phone and in the community. And that needs to get funded.
- Equity needs to be all-encompassing to embrace diversity - race, gender, economic class, language, immigration status, etc. We need progressive policies to include all.
- Keynes used economic policies to close inequality
<https://www.businessinsider.com/john-maynard-keynes-lessons-timely-with-authoritarianism-on-the-rise-2020-8>
- We can leverage community volunteers to help each other; these can be people who were helped by a program and now help others get access as promotoras and system navigators. This is an untapped resource, and perhaps needs a few centralized entities to do this.