

OPENING REMARKS at MAKING THE DIFFERENCE

by Wendy Peterson, Director, Senior Services Coalition of Alameda County

Before we dive into the program I'd like to frame the day for you; and say a couple of things.

First. While we moved the conference date into December to allow for breathing room after the election, we didn't anticipate just how much the policy landscape would be shifting under our feet. We have not radically reorganized the program in light of the federal election results. But we will spend some time in the second panel and in the Discussion Cafes talking about this, and I want you to feel free to voice your questions and concerns during Q & A and discussion. The Senior Services Coalition will stay on top of policy issues affecting seniors, and we'll be informing and engaging you as the new year unfolds. I will say this: We are all still here; and we still have a lot of work to do to improve outcomes for older adults in our county.

Alameda County's aging population is increasing in number, economic insecurity, and poor health status... and we all recognized that no one sector or silo alone can address this phenomenon.

It's the third year for this conference. Each year we've used the convening to bring our silos together to talk about how we can make a difference in the lives of seniors in Alameda County.

This year multiple county systems that touch the lives of older adults are beginning or in the midst of a process of transformation ... some of these systems are in the medical, health and social service realms. Today we're going to learn about those initiatives, and spend some time exploring the intersection of health care and community-based supports.

It occurred to me as I was putting this program together, that it is exactly times like this – when big systems are being redesigned – that it's easy to forget the reality of the people who the systems are intended to serve. It's commonplace to take consumers for granted along with their lived experience, and to wind up with systems that are anything but friendly, and just as difficult to navigate as the old systems.

So I'm glad that we have so many older adults from the community here with us today, representatives from the Pool of Consumer Champions and from United Seniors of Oakland and Alameda County. I know that they will help us remind ourselves that their experience is what counts when we talk about care delivery and systems transformation.

This morning we're going to hear about a multi-year study of homeless older adults in Oakland. These are older adults who have already fallen through the safety net. Many of us in senior

services are concerned that these homeless seniors are a portent – much like the leading wave of a tsunami is a sign of the larger wave to come.

Across the economic spectrum older adults are challenged mightily: From the homeless senior living on the streets or couch surfing, to the older adult facing the loss of her housing as rents increase, to the senior living in low-income senior housing, juggling resources to comply with doctor's orders, to the senior struggling with mental health challenges and complex medical needs, to the older adult living in her own home on a fixed income that barely covers basics....

Throughout Alameda County older adults are living on the edge. We need to be thinking about them all as we work together to develop systems not silos.

Now, let me give you a brief Overview of the day. We'll start with a keynote from Dr. Margot Kushel. Next, we'll hear from a silo--bridging panel that will explore the territory where health care and community-based services intersect.

Next we'll learn about the systems transformations that are underway in Alameda County... including the local implementation of the Whole Person Care Pilot and Health Homes, the initiatives underway within Alameda Health System, and the County's Older Adult Plan.

After the plenary we'll break into small group discussions for a working lunch designed to help you synthesize the morning's information, and to capture your insights and ideas.

You may leave here informed, motivated, alarmed, and inspired in equal parts. And if that's the case, we've done our job.