

Services Coalition of Alameda County

AGING IS SOMETHING WE ALL HAVE IN COMMON

December 13, 2019

Secretary Mark Ghaly, MD
California Health and Human Services Agency
1600 Ninth Street, Room 460
Sacramento, California 95814

Dear Secretary Ghaly,

On behalf of the Senior Services Coalition of Alameda County and our 40 member organizations that together provide health and supportive services to over 79,000 older adults in Alameda County, thank you for this opportunity to contribute our recommendations and comments to inform the Master Plan for Aging.

Our coalition fully supports the overarching priorities expressed by Justice In Aging in the September 16, 2019 joint letter addressed to you from Kevin Prindiville, Marty Lynch, and over a hundred organizations throughout the state. Those priorities – that the Master Plan advance economic security and reduce poverty, expand access to home and community-based services, support and optimize choice, develop a new model for financing LTSS coverage, ensure the health care delivery system is dementia-friendly, implement solutions to enable older adults to maintain and secure housing, employ strategies to prevent and address abuse and neglect, and bake these transformations within and across state agencies and local governments – are fundamental to addressing our aging future. Thus the recommendations in this letter focus on concrete, practical innovations and policy changes that support those priorities.

The following strategic recommendations are a synthesis of discussions that SSC conducted with a broad range of community stakeholders – community-based organizations, healthcare and social services providers, public agencies, consumer groups and individual community members. Sessions were conducted at SSC's annual member meeting on April 4; at a July 12 Community Design Workshop in partnership with The SCAN Foundation and Greater Good Studios; and at SSC's November 1 conference. In addition, we have drawn on the local recommendations developed by the Alameda County Council for Age-Friendly Communities, a cross-sector coordinating council of which we are a member. Over 150 stakeholders contributed their ideas to the recommendations in this letter.

We have focused this letter on recommendations that speak to policy or program improvements that the state has responsibility for or can effect. (We also captured a wealth of recommendations that speak to local innovations and improvements in counties or cities, and are happy to share that information upon request.) We have organized our recommendations within the Master Plan Stakeholder Advisory Committee's current draft framework.

Goal 1: Services & Supports. We will live where we choose as we age and have the help we and our families need to do so.

Objective 1 .1: Californians will have access to the help we need to live in the homes and communities we choose as we age.

Strategic Recommendation 1A: Statewide Information & Assistance System

- Include funding ADRCs and the model that features a navigation partner who works with each individual – necessary and effective because the standard I&A model is not adequate for many people who don't know what to ask for or have multiple complex issues.
- Make 211 age-friendly by allowing a search by age, including a focus on social engagement, and allowing 211 providers to partner with local aging services providers who can curate and inform the listings so they are accurate.

Additional Strategic Recommendations:

- Support collaboration across sectors and between service providers and self-organized communities.
- Invest in Older Californians Act Supportive Services statewide to increase local capacity and access to Case Management, Information & Assistance, Visiting, Adult Day Care, Family Caregiver Support and Respite, and Senior Center Activities to older Californians needing assistance to maintain health and economic stability and navigate the challenges of aging. These services are available to people with modest incomes that are not eligible for many other services.

Objective 1.2: Californians of all ages will be prepared for the challenges and rewards of caring for an aging loved-one, with access to the resources and support we need.

Strategic Recommendations:

- Match federal Older Americans Act dollars with state investment in the Family Caregiver Support Program in order to build local capacity to support family caregivers with counseling and navigation, training, support groups, respite and other services that build skills and confidence and prevent caregiver burnout.
- Ensure that adult day care, Adult Day Health Care and other respite models are available, with sliding scale and scholarships to ensure that access for anyone who needs it.

Goal 2: Livable Communities & Purpose. We will live in and be engaged in communities that are age-friendly, dementia-friendly, and disability-friendly.

Objective 2.1: California's neighborhoods will have the built environment to fully and meaningfully include older adults, people with disabilities, and people of all ages.

Strategic Recommendations:

- Allow and encourage state contractors to use state funds to pay for experts on older adults to advise in the development of the new facilities and services.
- Encourage intergenerational housing designed for older adults to live alongside younger people. This could look like senior housing on college campuses, younger individuals or families renting out spare rooms to older adults, or multi-unit apartment buildings for older adults with younger "resident assistants" who provide support and companionship.

Objective 2.2: Californians will age with lifelong opportunities for social and civic engagement, volunteering, learning, and leadership.

Strategic Recommendations:

- Establish a Foster Grandparent Program in communities across the state, with funding for coordination, training, stipends and travel reimbursement.
- Invest in the Senior Employment Program so that programs across the state can increase the number of low-income older Californians served. The community service and work-based job training program serves as a bridge to stable employment for older adults who need to work but encounter barriers. The program has positions for 3,126 participants, down from 3,417 in 2016. Estimates are that over 900,000 people statewide are eligible.
- Discount tuition for college classes for older adults (perhaps in return for volunteer hours that engage them with younger students).
- Establish volunteer opportunities for older adults to assist with ESL learners in schools and colleges.
- Provide policies and resources to help workers who need assistance or technology in order to stay employed at their jobs.
- Promote and enable stepped retirement and mentoring models as ways to honor experienced employees, support intergenerational understanding, and provide options to older workers who want to remain engaged.
- Cultural competence is critical. It is necessary to hear the voices of Literacy-challenged, ESL and Limited English Speakers in the planning process. It is equally necessary to ensure that, going forward, resources and services are offered in the languages and models that are effective for these groups.

Goal 3: Health & Well-being. We will live in communities and have access to services and care that optimize health and quality of life.

Objective 3.1: Californians will live in communities with policies and programs that promote well-being throughout our lifespans.

Strategic Recommendations:

- Support local Rapid Response Teams Serving Older Adults at Risk of Homelessness and Displacement. Homelessness can often be prevented, but this requires professionals who can make home and hospital visits and deploy legal, case management, and flexible cash resources. Many at-risk individuals do not currently fit the criteria to be eligible for homelessness prevention/intervention services; design this program to be available to vulnerable people who may not – for whatever reason – meet existing eligibility requirements for other services.
- Legal protections for older homeowners and tenants at the community level are important to reduce vulnerability to harsh economic conditions, including:

- Establish a property tax deferral program for low-income older and disabled people. Example: Oregon has adopted this and other methods to provide property tax relief to vulnerable seniors.
- Establish just cause eviction ordinances and other tenant protections, with special features that prevent displacement of older adults and people with disabilities.
- Allow applications for IHSS services to proceed for persons who are still experiencing homelessness or are living in a shelter, and adapt IHSS to serve these individuals.
- Replicate the HomeBridge model (San Francisco) as an option for IHSS in other counties. Designed for clients who need extra help managing their services, it uses small care teams comprised of a team lead who provides case management for clients and supports trained caregivers, working closely to build relationships between the client and caregiver and to monitor and track client health and well-being.

Objective 3.2: Californians will have access to quality, affordable, and person-centered health care through delivery systems that are age-friendly, dementia-friendly and disability-friendly.

Strategic Recommendations:

- Field-based services (where the provider comes to the person) are very effective for older adults – not just those who are literally home-bound, but also those with cognitive or mobility issues that make getting to an appointment a challenge. Offer field-based when a person misses more than 2-3 appointments.
- Ensure that homeless older adults being discharged from hospitals receive appropriate temporary housing and medical care to permit them to complete their recovery.
- Provide more medical respite beds for people with high post-acute medical needs who do not require hospitalization or skilled nursing care, and allow for stays exceeding 30 days if needed to complete recovery. Useful local models: Alameda Point Collaborative, BACS medical respite. Consider supplementing existing programs to permit longer stays when needed.
- Currently, there is a shortage of medical respite, board and care, and skilled nursing facilities that will accept people with cognitive impairment of mixed etiology. Provide incentives, funding, Technical Assistance and training to expand the pool.
- Significantly increase the number of Medi-Cal Assisted Living Waiver slots.
- Incentivize health plans and providers to cover and promote Tai Chi, Matter of Balance and other proven fall prevention classes, as well as chronic disease self-management classes.
- Provide (and incentivize) training in the Four M's and/or basic aging sensitivity to all organizations and agencies (commercial, public and nonprofit) that serve older adults either directly or indirectly (ie child and family services providers encounter older adults, as do supportive housing providers, building permit departments, homeless shelters, etc.). Sources of training curriculum include UCSF's Geriatrics Workforce Enhancement Program.

- Include in-home care assignment as part of the curriculum for Social Workers and Nurses in training so that they “get it” and can be better partners with family and paid caregivers.
- Promote low-barrier shelters and shelters better equipped to meet the health needs of an aging population. Examples: In the City of Fremont, a home health agency comes into shelters to help with personal care, and health care providers are supplied by an FQHC. San Francisco has designated shelter beds that are paired with nurses and other care. Episcopal Community Services may have a useful model.
- Support Programs of All-Inclusive Care for the Elderly, and incentivize collaborative models that harness the power of PACE to address the needs of complex populations.

Goal 4: Economic Security and Safety. We will have economic security and be safe from abuse, neglect, exploitation, and natural disasters and emergencies throughout our lives.

Objective 4.1: Californians will be economically secure throughout our life span with access to housing, food, and income as we age.

Strategic Recommendations:

- Raise the grant levels of SSI/State Supplementary Payment to reflect the Supplemental Poverty Level for California, so that aged, blind and disabled Californians have a better chance of covering their basic needs.
- Provide funding for ongoing rent subsidies for low-income older adults. This might be achieved through state or local ballot initiatives to establish a fractional sales tax to fund a rental subsidy pool. Potentially useful models: Section 8 and the Santa Monica subsidy program for low-income older adults.
- Provide support to local intermediary organizations that acquire, develop, and manage properties that house older adults. An entity would be designated to manage many aspects of property acquisition, development, and management, braiding funding from a variety of sources. This can include rapid response when individual housing facilities are threatened, such as when board and care facilities close or there are code violations, with options for both short-term receivership and long-term property management. Flexible funds could be used for repairs, mortgage payments, tax liens, and other purposes. Ideally, these organizations would also promote alternative housing such as family reunification and home sharing. Related models include the work of Brilliant Corners in Los Angeles.
- Change regulations that limit “unrelated persons” from living with an elder who needs in-home care/assistance in multiple types of communities – from senior housing and trailer parks to retirement communities.
- Require developers to set aside a realistic number of units that are designated for people living at 20% or below of Area Median Income. Set that realistic number based on the actual population and needs of an area. Enforce compliance.
- Provide a tax break to workers who have had to give up full time work in order to be caregivers.

- Provide subsidies or tax breaks to people who need in-home services but can't afford them and are not low-income enough to qualify for IHSS.
- Advance policies and funding that builds adequate capacity in programs that provide access to food, healthcare and supportive services that in turn have powerful positive impacts on seniors' economic security.

Objective 4.2: Californians will be protected from abuse, neglect, and exploitation as we age.

Strategic Recommendations:

- Establish and fund the Adult Protective Services Home Safe Program in all counties.
- Support local Independent Living Associations in their efforts to ensure that quality Board & Care options are available, are mental health-competent and have solid grounding in geriatrics.

We know that you share our hope that the Master Plan will address barriers to accessing information, care, services, and supports. It also must be equitable and reflect the socio-economic, racial, gender, sexual orientation, cultural, ethnic, and geographic diversity of communities everywhere in the state. It must also address the high levels of poverty, the prevalence of disabilities, and the growing number of people living alone without familial or community support, some of whom have cognitive impairments. This is a tall order, but it is also imperative.

Thank you for your commitment to listening to and engaging with stakeholders. If you have questions please feel free to contact me at wendy@seniorservicescoalition.org.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Wendy Peterson". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized "W" and "P".

Wendy Peterson, Director, Senior Services Coalition of Alameda County