

JUSTICE IN AGING

FIGHTING SENIOR POVERTY THROUGH LAW

Gavin Newsom
Lieutenant Governor of the State of California
1801 Avenue of the Stars, Suite 720
Los Angeles, CA 90067

Dear Lieutenant Governor Newsom,

Congratulations on being elected as the next Governor of California. As advocates for California's growing population of low-income older adults, we are pleased that you have committed to a master plan for aging, and to fighting poverty among all Californians. We very much look forward to working with you and your administration to bring justice and dignity to low-income older adults in California.

Justice in Aging advocates on behalf of older adults and people with disabilities to increase their economic security and access to quality, affordable health care, particularly for individuals who have historically lacked legal protections including women, people of color, LGBT individuals, and people with limited English proficiency.

California has the highest rate of senior poverty of any state in the nation. One in five older Californians is currently living in poverty – a total of 1.1 million individuals. An additional 775,000 older adults – the “hidden poor” have incomes or resources too high to qualify for public assistance, but lack the resources to meet their most basic needs, including housing, food, and medication. With the ever-increasing housing costs in California, more and more older adults are experiencing homelessness for the first time.

Senior poverty particularly impacts people of color and women. One in four older black and Hispanic Californians lives in poverty. Women represent two-thirds of all individuals 65 and over living in poverty, with black, Hispanic, and Native women experiencing poverty at the highest rates.

The rise in senior poverty is linked to the overall aging of California's population. One thousand individuals turn 65 every day in California and will continue to do so for the next seventeen years. Starting in 2020, the fastest growing segment of the population will be individuals 75 and over, who have higher health care needs and higher out-of-pocket health care costs. As [this recent Los Angeles Times piece](#) makes clear, older adults who rely on fixed incomes and resources will accordingly experience poverty at higher and higher rates as the costs for health care, housing, and other basic needs continue to grow.

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We are pleased that you have committed to a master plan on aging. It is essential, however, that the plan prioritize solving the state’s growing senior poverty challenge and address inequities in how different communities in California experience aging. More than just a reorganization of existing agencies and resources, a progressive, effective plan to address economic inequality and systemic disparities will need to include new investments in the older adults in our communities.

We look forward to working with you on two such investments that would immediately increase the economic security of older adults—both of which have broad support from the aging and disability communities. The first is to restore cuts made during the recession to the state supplementary payment (SSP) for Supplemental Security Income (SSI) recipients. Right now, an older adult relying on SSI/SSP receives just \$910 month – this amount is below the federal poverty level.

The second investment would increase older adults’ access to affordable, quality health care. Today, older adults who need Medi-Cal must meet stricter eligibility income standards than individuals under 65. Most individuals under 65 can have up to \$1,397 in income and remain on free Medi-Cal, while older adults lose free Medi-Cal once they reach \$1,242 a month. Raising the Medi-Cal income limit to match that in the rest of the Medi-Cal program will end this “senior penalty.”

We are excited to engage with you and your administration on these policies and others in the future to ensure that all older adults, regardless of income, can age in dignity.

Sincerely,



Kevin Prindiville
Executive Director