

Principles for an Equitable, Comprehensive Master Plan on Aging for all Californians

In Governor Newsom's January State of the State address, he called for the development of California's first ever Master Plan on Aging. This call has been matched by activity in the California legislature, where several legislators have introduced bills also calling for a Master Plan on Aging. California's population of older adults is expected to almost double over the next twenty years from 5.4 million to 10.3 million and will become a larger share of the total population by 2030 than children under age 18. The renewed commitment to preparing for our state's aging population is a welcome recognition that bold action is needed now to ensure dignity and justice for all Californians as we age.

In order to be effective and truly meet the needs of California's aging population, it is critical that the Master Plan on Aging be informed by several key principles outlined below.

Economic Security

One in five seniors in California is living at or below poverty – the highest rate in the country. An additional 775,000 seniors have incomes above the poverty limit, but do not have enough income to meet their basic needs. Older adults are the fastest growing demographic experiencing homelessness, often for the first time, after the age of 50. California's Master Plan on Aging must include goals and strategies for increasing the economic security of all seniors to both decrease the current number of seniors living in poverty and prevent future seniors from aging into poverty.

Equity

Certain communities are at an increased risk of aging into poverty because of systemic inequities they confront throughout their lives. Inequities and resulting disparities arise based on race, gender, sexual identity, disability, immigration status, and the environment in which people live. Older women, for example, are forty percent more likely to live in poverty than men, and Black and Hispanic older adults experience poverty at rates more than two times higher than white older adults. Older women are more likely to be targeted for financial exploitation and abuse. California's Master Plan on Aging must be centered on equity and must put forth policy solutions that address the fact that not all individuals age the same.

Intergenerational

Aging is an issue that impacts every generation. Older adults are important members of our families, and their aging effects the health and economic security of the whole family. In addition, while policymakers tend to think of aging issues as impacting primarily the Silent Generation and Boomers, our aging population will include members of Generation X starting in 2030 and Millennials starting in 2046. California's Master Plan on Aging must approach aging as an intergenerational issue and must prepare for this generation of older adults and for future generations as well.

Comprehensive & Intersectional

All policy is aging policy. Aging touches all aspects of life, intersecting with housing, immigration, health care, long-term care, civil rights, workforce, criminal justice, and more. California's Master Plan on Aging therefore must incorporate the needs of older adults into all levels of state planning and policy development.

Person-Centered Long-Term Services and Supports

A robust long-term services and supports (LTSS) infrastructure is critical to ensuring that seniors and people with disabilities can age in dignity and in their communities. The LTSS infrastructure, therefore, has to be person-centered, inclusive and equitable, empower and honor choice, and deliver services in home and community-based settings. A robust LTSS system must include strategies for the provision of health and long-term care services as well as family caregiver supports, transportation services, nutrition assistance, legal services, and more. California's Master Plan on Aging must include ways to better organize current programs and services and fund, expand, and develop new programs to meet current and future needs of the aging and disability populations.

With our rapidly aging population and high rates of senior poverty, it is imperative that California's leaders take swift, bold action on a Master Plan that will enable all of us to age in justice and dignity. California can lead the way and serve as an example for the rest of the nation on how aging policy can be used to improve lives and support families and communities.