

CALIFORNIA'S MASTER PLAN FOR AGING

Prevent and End Elder Abuse in California

California has committed to developing a [Master Plan for Aging](#) in order to meet the needs of older adults today and for generations to come. The state has outlined four broad goals that the plan should accomplish: Every Californian should be able to 1) continue living in our communities and have the help we need to do so; 2) live in and be engaged in age-friendly communities; 3) maintain our health and well-being as we age; and 4) have economic security and be able to live in safe environments throughout our lives.

Advocates and service providers have broadly supported the state's efforts to develop the Master Plan, developing [principles](#) and [priorities](#) to guide the planning process. This issue brief focuses on elder abuse.

Preventing and ending elder abuse in California requires the state to strengthen current elder abuse prevention systems and utilize new, innovative methods to ensure the protection of all Californians, regardless of background. The following recommendations aim to increase collaboration between members of the aging network to decrease instances of elder abuse and honor the rights of older Californians.

1. FORM A CALIFORNIA ELDER JUSTICE COORDINATING COMMITTEE, MODELED AFTER THE FEDERAL EJCC ESTABLISHED IN THE ELDER JUSTICE ACT

Preventing and ending elder abuse in California requires effective collaboration between all members of the aging network.¹ Currently, there is no statewide hub for elder abuse advocacy. The creation of a state coordinating committee, modeled after the federal EJCC² and operated within the Department of Aging, would centralize research, best practices, and other state work related to elder abuse. The Committee would also be responsible for creating and managing a network of statewide Multidisciplinary Teams (MDT)³. MDTs would act to gather professionals of different disciplines in reviewing elder abuse cases, including representatives from health care, legal aid, prosecutors, Adult Protective Services, police, and ombudsman.

1 A similar committee was recently created in Maine via Executive Order. Governor Janet T. Mills., "An Order Establishing the Elder Justice Coordinating Partnership", (October 23, 2019), available at https://www.maine.gov/governor/mills/sites/maine.gov/governor.mills/files/inline-files/11_FY_19-20_ElderAbuse_%20EO.pdf.

2 Administration for Community Living, "Elder Justice Coordinating Council", December 9, 2019, available at <https://acl.gov/programs/elder-justice/elder-justice-coordinating-council-ejcc>.

3 Victims of Crime Act (VOCA) funds were used in NY State to facilitate coordination of MDT's. LifeSpan Rochester, available at <https://www.lifespan-roch.org/>.

2. LOWER THE THRESHOLD AGE FOR AGE-RELATED SERVICES TO 50 FOR HOMELESS INDIVIDUALS

Medical research shows that homeless individuals experience old age diseases earlier in life, and that they are aging at a faster rate, exacerbated by being unsheltered or living in places not fit for human habitation.⁴ Further, more individuals are experiencing homelessness for the first time in older age because of rising housing costs and cost of living.⁵ Currently, half of all single homeless adults are over 50 years old, but many aged based social services are not available until an individual has reached 60-65 years old.⁶ Age-based services like transportation, nutrition, caregiving, income supports, and case management are integral to keeping people housed. Making these benefits available to a wider group of homeless older adults at a younger age will act to connect them to services when needed and decrease homelessness.

3. TARGET RESOURCES AND RESEARCH FOR ELDER ABUSE PREVENTION AT BOTH THE GENERAL PUBLIC AND DISTINCT COMMUNITIES

Research shows that older adults in communities of color experience abuse in distinctly different ways, but elder abuse among these communities is underreported and under-researched. For example, Black older adults are significantly more likely to be victims of financial exploitation and psychological mistreatment,⁷ while Asian American older adults are more likely to view elder abuse as existing only within the family, making the risk of abuse from outside actors higher.⁸ Elder abuse prevention and research must target not only the general public, but also be tailored to accommodate the different ways abuse manifests among various cultural groups.

Resources, services, and information provided to older Californians must be culturally aware and available in all threshold languages. Language, race, cultural background, or any other designation should not be barriers to ending elder abuse in California.

4. CREATE A STATEWIDE, EASY-TO-ACCESS DATABASE OF ELDER ABUSE INFORMATION

Currently, elder abuse data is stored across state, county, and local entities (police, APS, ombudsman, Dept. of Aging). With information siloed within different levels of government, trends and patterns in abuse are difficult to ascertain. Combining all available information into a statewide database helps

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- 4 Kathryn Doyle, "Homeless people face age-related conditions earlier than people with homes", March 1, 2016, available at <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-homeless-aging/homeless-people-face-age-related-conditions-earlier-than-people-with-homes-idUSKCN0W35KV>.
 - 5 Adam Nagourney, "Old and on the Street: The Graying of America's Homeless", May 31, 2016, available at <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/05/31/us/americas-aging-homeless-old-and-on-the-street.html>.
 - 6 Dr. Margot Kushel, "Aging Among the Homeless Population: Causes, Consequences, and Solutions", October 16, 2019, available at <https://uccs.ucdavis.edu/events/2019-October-16-Kushel>.
 - 7 National Center on Elder Abuse, "Mistreatment of African American Elders", 2016, available at <https://ncea.acl.gov/NCEA/media/Publication/ResearchToPracticeAfAm.pdf>.
 - 8 National Center on Elder Abuse, "Mistreatment of Asian Pacific Islander (API) Elders", available at <https://ncea.acl.gov/NCEA/media/Publication/Mistreatment-of-Asian-Pacific-Islander-API-Elders-2013.pdf>.

alternative safe housing options. Elder abuse shelters can be brick and mortar or ‘virtual’ (i.e. placement in a long-term care facility or motel/hotel).¹³¹⁴

7. INCREASE CONSUMER PROTECTIONS TO END PREDATORY PRACTICES AIMED AT LOW-INCOME OLDER ADULTS

Older adults are often the target of predatory or fraudulent financial products or schemes. For example, Spanish speaking older adults are being targeted for fraud related to the ‘Property Assessed Clean Energy Program’ (PACE).¹⁵ PACE is a federal program that helps fund renewable energy improvements. Often, scammers deceive low-income homeowners into signing up for solar panels without the knowledge that the loan is secured to the home and may dramatically increase property taxes. Increased state consumer protections are needed to combat the increased complexity of scams targeted at older adults. This year, Governor Newsom proposed creating a state consumer protection agency in the state budget.¹⁶ This agency is a step in the right direction towards ending predatory practices aimed at older adults, and we recommend its adoption in the final budget in June.

CONCLUSION

Preventing and ending elder abuse in California is a key component to ensuring the state’s low-income older adults are able to remain housed and meet their basic needs. Through improved data, increased cooperation among governmental entities, easy-to-use advanced planning documents, and robust consumer protections, California can meet the core goals of the Master Plan for Aging: enabling older adults to live in the community with the help we need to do so, live in and be engaged in age-friendly communities, maintain our health and well-being as we age, and have economic security and be able to live in safe environments throughout our lives.

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- 13 Spring Alliance, “Joining the Global Elder Abuse Shelter Movement”, 2019, available at <http://springalliance.staging.wpengine.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/Weinberg-Shelter-FAQ-2019.pdf>.
 - 14 Currently, Sonoma County Adult and Aging Division operates an Elder Abuse shelter. Joy Solomon, Esq, “2018 State of the Spring Alliance”, 2019, available at <http://springalliance.staging.wpengine.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/2019-Symposium-2018-State-of-the-SPRING-Alliance-v3.pdf>.
 - 15 PACE loan contractor prosecuted by LA City Attorney. Case states that contractors sought out Spanish speaking communities. Andrew Khouri, “Homeowners were defrauded through the PACE lending program, L.A.’s city attorney alleges”, April 4, 2019, available at <https://www.latimes.com/business/la-fi-pace-solar-lawsuit-20190404-story.html>.
 - 16 Aarthi Swaminathan, “‘A major, major initiative’: California wants to create its own Consumer Financial Protection Bureau”, February 10, 2020, available at <https://yhoo.it/2TogcNf>.