

JUSTICE IN AGING

FIGHTING SENIOR POVERTY THROUGH LAW

June 17, 2020

The Honorable Gavin Newsom
Governor of the State of California
California State Capitol
Sacramento, CA 95814

RE: Preserve Services for Seniors in Final Budget

Dear Governor Newsom:

Justice in Aging strongly urges you to maintain programs and health care for low-income older adults in the state's final budget. Older Californians age 65 and over account for nearly eighty percent of all COVID-19 deaths with older adults of color dying at rates up to 3 times their percent of the population.¹

The elimination of MSSP and CBAS and the reductions to nearly every program older adults rely on that are proposed in your May Revision of the budget would increase the likelihood that older adults and people with disabilities will be hospitalized, have to seek care in a nursing facility or other congregate setting, where over one fifty percent of all deaths have occurred, or die.

Furthermore, federal relief is likely to include increased funding for Medicaid including an additional targeted increase for home and community based services (HCBS). The HEROES Act passed in the House of Representatives in May includes an across-the-board 7.8% federal medical assistance percentage (FMAP) increase as well as an additional 10% increase specifically for Medicaid HCBS. By cutting or eliminating these programs, California not only places older adults at a higher and unacceptable risk but jeopardizes increased federal funding.

In light of these considerations, Justice in Aging specifically urges the following;

Preserve CBAS and MSSP

Justice in Aging vehemently opposes the elimination of the Community Based Adult Services (CBAS) program and Multi-Purpose Senior Services (MSSP) program.

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Cutting and reducing access to these programs during a pandemic that has ravaged this population is dangerous. The people using these programs either already qualify for nursing facility coverage or will without these services. This means that cutting these programs will inflict maximum harm on older adults without affording savings to the state given that many will need to move to more expensive nursing home care and into a setting in which contracting and dying from COVID-19 is so high.

Maintain IHSS Hours

The budget should maintain In-Home Supportive Services (IHSS) hours at current levels and reject the across the board 7% reduction. A reduction in hours means recipients will have to make hard choices between what care they must give up, like being bathed or getting groceries, leading to increased risk for hospitalization and institutionalization.

Ensure Access to Medi-Cal for Low-Income Seniors

For older adults and people with disabilities, Medi-Cal funds programs that Medicare does not pay for that help individuals remain living in their homes and communities. At this time, it is paramount that these individuals have access to these critical services. This pandemic is affecting people with underlying health conditions more seriously, so it is vitally important that older adults can access the health care and the long-term services and supports they need to stay healthy. Cutting Medi-Cal eligibility and benefits makes it harder for people to do this and puts their well-being and lives at risk.

Accordingly, it is critical that California move forward with the expansion of the Medi-Cal Aged, Blind, and Disabled program to 138% of the federal poverty level set to take effect in August, expansion to undocumented older immigrants, and the implementation of the Medicare Part B disregard rules. The budget should also maintain Medi-Cal dental coverage and other Medi-Cal covered services including audiology, incontinence creams and washes, speech therapy, optician/optical lab, podiatry, acupuncture, optometry, nurse anesthetist services, occupational, and physical therapy.

Lastly, the budget should maintain the Medi-Cal estate recovery rules which have been in place since January 1, 2017. The return to the prior estate recovery rules will only exacerbate existing race and class disparities in intergenerational wealth by targeting people with low incomes and preventing any wealth from being passed down to their families.

Maintain SSI/SSP

The budget should maintain current levels of SSI/SSP. Taking income used for basic needs like housing from these individuals who are already living far below the poverty line would simply put more older adults and people with disabilities at risk and disproportionately impact people of color.

Maintain Senior Programs

Programs operated through the Department of Aging provide meals, provide caregivers the much-needed resources to care for their loved ones, and administer adult protective services. The budget should maintain funding for these services including senior nutrition, caregiver resource centers, long-term care ombudsman, aging and disability resource centers, and Independent Living Centers.

We urge the Governor to enact a budget that is responsive to the incredible risk low-income older adults and particularly older adults of color are facing in this crisis.

Sincerely,



Kevin Prindiville
Executive Director

- CC: Dr. Mark Ghaly, Secretary, California Health and Human Services Agency
- The Honorable Toni Atkins, California Senate President Pro Tempore
- The Honorable Anthony Rendon, California Assembly Speaker
- The Honorable Holly Mitchell, Chair, Senate Committee on Budget and Fiscal Review
- The Honorable Phillip Ting, Chair, Assembly Budget Committee

ⁱ California Department of Public Health, "COVID-19 by the Numbers," available at <https://www.cdph.ca.gov/Programs/CID/DCDC/Pages/Immunization/ncov2019.aspx#COVID-19%20by%20the%20Numbers>