

AGING WELL IN SANTA BARBARA COUNTY

Moving Forward with the California Master Plan for Aging





EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The California Master Plan for Aging (MPA) is underway in Santa Barbara County. Since October 2021, service providers, stakeholders, and local leaders have joined together to forge priorities and recommendations aligned with the MPA vision of building an integrated system of accessible and affordable long-term care for an aging population.

The MPA offers a once-in-a-generation opportunity to address long-standing systemic challenges which have stymied service providers, funders, and policymakers for decades. Addressing issues through a siloed system of care funded through short term budget and grant funding cycles is no longer sufficient to meet the growing needs of a burgeoning aging and more diverse population. By 2030, one in four Californians will be 60 or older, and Santa Barbara County is no exception. Long-term growth forecasts indicate that Santa Barbara County's elderly population will grow by over 118% percent by 2060. The older adult population will be more diverse and an increasing number of older adults will identify as living with a disability.

The time has come to adopt a long-term strategy that will address the inter-related and often complex issues facing older adults, families, and communities.

By this report, the Santa Barbara County Adult & Aging Network (AAN) is calling upon community leaders, county and city planners, and human service and health care providers to take a fundamentally different and comprehensive approach through the California Master Plan for Aging.

The California Master Plan for Aging Opportunity

The Master Plan for Aging offers a paradigm shift away from fragmented programs that target a specific demographic or a specific need toward a more holistic approach that recognizes aging as a multi-faceted journey experienced by everyone. This new mindset places the needs of older adults and people with disabilities into every aspect of planning and policy-making as a means of improving the quality of life for residents of all ages. It requires a shift from the past legacy of short term programs and opportunities to a more comprehensive and sustainable system of integrated services and supports.

This is not a plan simply for today's older adults. Instead, it is a **blueprint for aging across the lifespan**. The Master Plan for Aging calls on all California communities to build a California for All Ages & Abilities: for older Californians currently living through the many different stages of the second half of life; for younger generations who can expect to live longer lives than their elders; for communities of all ages – family, friends, neighbors, coworkers, and caregivers – surrounding older adults and people with disabilities. As Californians, we can create communities where people of all ages and abilities are engaged, valued, and afforded equitable opportunities to thrive as we age, how and where we choose.
— *CA Master Plan for Aging*

The results will benefit not only the burgeoning aging population, but will also alleviate pressure for younger generation family members and communities who are working overtime to fill the gaps in care. Harnessing the MPA vision will support an age-and disability-friendly future for everyone in Santa Barbara County.

Santa Barbara County is well positioned to seize this opportunity and leverage the state resources committed to achieving these ambitious, but necessary, goals. The county has a strong network of providers in health and social services, and government and public leaders are recognizing the need for creating age-and-disability-friendly communities. There is also tremendous potential in the thousands of members of the county's aging adult and disability communities whose voices will undoubtedly provide direction and support for the process.

Local Implementation

In October 2021, AAN invited service providers, stakeholders and local leaders to come together in a countywide forum to launch local MPA planning and prioritization. With broad community discussion and input, two of the MPA's five bold goals were chosen as first priorities for local MPA implementation: 1) *Housing for All Stages & Ages*; and 2) *Caregiving That Works*. A third goal, *Health Reimagined*, was explored at the opening forum and has since emerged as a third priority for implementation.

The launch was followed by research and the development of preliminary recommendations on the priority goals conducted by an AAN MPA Ad Hoc Advisory Committee (Committee) in cooperation with Caring Together Santa Barbara County (CTSBC), a regional collaborative network of health and human service providers.

The Committee and CTSBC also gathered and reviewed data to better understand the experience of aging in Santa Barbara County today. Information was obtained through surveys of local caregivers, a community caregiving solutions pilot, and data research from the 2020 United States census, the California Department of Finance, the California Master Plan for Aging, the Centers for Disease Control & Prevention, the Santa Barbara County Association of Governments, and many other sources. Additionally, interviews and listening sessions were conducted in late 2022 and in 2023 with members of the Committee and with select service providers from the AAN.



A Snapshot of Aging in Santa Barbara County

The data gathering and review process provided a snapshot of some of the pressure points in the current experience of aging in Santa Barbara County. These center around challenges to affording aging and accessing housing and levels of care appropriate to different stages in the aging journey. Older adults and people with disabilities are increasingly living without basic necessities required for healthy aging due to a lack of affordable in-home care and a shortage of home care providers, long waiting lists for affordable housing and senior housing facilities, and increased rental evictions, often leading to homelessness. Behavioral health challenges and a lack of services for older and disabled adults with complex needs were repeatedly raised as concerns that require immediate attention.

Behind this list of issues lie stories of countless individuals, families, and caregivers whose lives, safety, and well-being

are at stake. The data and anecdotal stories reveal that older adults are particularly vulnerable today. Recent hard-hitting challenges - the pandemic and natural disasters, the economy and inflation, the housing crisis and an historic caregiver shortage, the rise in cognitive disability and behavioral health issues, to name a few - have created a vortex of vulnerability and distress for older adults and people with disabilities.

Fortunately, the MPA provides a framework and state support to help meet the challenge. Resources are already flowing into Santa Barbara County through several grants to strengthen home and community-based aging related supports. These include a grant from the California Mental Health Services Oversight and Accountability Commission to address the unmet behavioral and mental health needs of seniors, funding from the Modernization of the Older Americans Act to support home and community-based counseling and case management to seniors, and grants from the California Department of Aging to address isolation through digital connections and to improve infrastructure and financial support for the Senior Nutrition Program.

CenCal Health, Santa Barbara County's Medi-Cal provider, is participating in the California Advancing and Innovating Medi-Cal (CalAIM), a five year systems change initiative to improve care and outcomes for Medi-Cal enrollees, especially those with the most complex needs. CalAIM seeks to reduce patient or short-term nursing home stays through integrated models of "whole person" care and coordinated health and social services.

The MPA vision to achieve a statewide network of Aging and Disability Resource Centers (ADRCs) is taking root in Santa Barbara County. A new ADRC formed jointly with the Central Coast Commission for Senior Citizens (the local Area Agency on Aging) and the Independent Living Resource Center, is providing equitable access to

long-term services and supports for older adults, people with disabilities, caregivers, veterans, and families, regardless of age and ability.

Preparing to leverage and coordinate future MPA resources and initiatives will be an important next step in local MPA planning. It will require dedication from leadership across multiple sectors and engagement with local residents from diverse communities throughout the county. This work will be conducted with the support of a Local Aging & Disability Action Planning Grant provided by the California Department of Aging to facilitate the development of a comprehensive local MPA by March 2025. Another grant, awarded to CTSBC by the California Accountable Communities for Health Initiative (CA-CHI) and funded by the California Department of Public

Health, will support engagement and progress toward one of the MPA goals, *Caregiving that Works*. With this support, Santa Barbara County has the potential to build a model of age- and disability-friendly living that all its residents deserve.

Aging is changing and it's changing California. California's over-60 population is projected to diversify and grow faster than any other age group. By 2030, 10.8 million Californians will be an older adult, making up one-quarter of the state's population.
—CA Master Plan for Aging



NEXT STEP RECOMMENDATIONS

Data Gathering & Community Listening

While the preliminary data review in the first phase of MPA planning provides a snapshot of the status of older adults and people with disabilities, it also points to knowledge gaps. Additional quantitative and qualitative research and analysis is needed to better understand and interpret the complex array of challenges relayed in interviews and discussions with service providers across the spectrum of adult, aging, and disability services and programs. Most importantly, older adults and people living with disabilities need to be given opportunities to speak about their direct experiences and needs in a changed, post-pandemic environment. Special attention must be paid to engaging communities of color, minority groups, and those who have been historically underrepresented and marginalized.

Housing For All Stages & Ages

Older adults have complex and changing needs throughout the stages of aging related to income, mobility, increased disability, transportation, caregiving needs, and healthcare access. The age-related system of care needs a continuum of integrated housing and care options that align with the stages of aging, including affordable in-home supports to prevent premature institutionalization or homelessness.

"Housing that works is housing that takes into account the needs of aging."
— Margot Kushel, MD,
Director Benioff Homelessness
& Housing Initiative

Santa Barbara County has exemplary models of affordable integrated housing programs such as Garden Court, the Golden Inn and Village, and the new Harry's House to help inform a plan for expanded housing options throughout the county. A local MPA must include strategies for expanding on some of the region's successful housing resources to meet the growing need for affordable housing with supports, and draw upon model programs for meeting the rising need for cognitive and memory care.

The next phase of MPA planning should include engagement with developers, realtors, health care providers, and Housing Element planners to ensure integrated planning, policies, and budgeting through the next steps of the Housing Element planning and implementation process.





Caregiving That Works Santa Barbara County has a caregiver shortage resulting in a lack of access to vital caregiving support across all income levels. There are many contributing factors to the caregiver shortage, including an undervalued and underpaid caregiving workforce earning less than half of California’s median annual income and a service delivery gap for middle income seniors who cannot afford the high costs of care.

The shortage of affordable housing also impacts the shortage in the caregiving workforce. Caregivers and family members often cannot afford to live within commuting distance of those who need their care, whether at home or in congregate settings. Even seniors who are well resourced and prepared for aging’s challenges face obstacles to receiving care, including shortages in available private caregivers and a lack of access to assisted living and memory care when needed.

Addressing the caregiving shortage requires a multi-pronged approach. A local MPA must integrate housing and caregiving needs and include strategies for caregiver career path development and support for family caregivers. Specific strategies must address ways to increase support for unpaid family caregivers, ensure liveable wages and career path opportunities for the caregiving workforce, connect families and caregivers to respite and other resources in the community, and address inequities in access to care across income levels.

40% of the requests for private pay caregivers are not fulfilled due to staffing shortages, scheduling, and lack of affordability for private pay care.

—CTSBC 2022 survey



Health Reimagined

The vast majority of adults want to “age in place” – in the comfort of their own home and connected to their communities (AARP 2011). Under the current structure of care, In-Home Supportive Services (IHSS) is only available to those who qualify under Medi-Cal. The MPA redefines traditional supports for older adult health and wellness which was previously focused on the healthcare and managed care systems of support. Health reimagined is designed to ensure that older adults have affordable access to necessary services for living in a home setting of their choice through the different stages of aging.

The snapshot of aging provided in this report points to the need for a robust system of home and community-based supports throughout the county. The next step in MPA planning must include a mapping of existing home and community-based services (HCBS) and gaps in service delivery. Model HCBS programs and funding structures from other counties and jurisdictions should be reviewed and considered for implementation with the goal of designing a comprehensive system of health and social services that will meet the needs of Santa Barbara County residents and their caregivers.

The MPA Vision is “an age and ability friendly California in which the wish of the majority of older adults - to age safely and with dignity at home and as an integral part of their community - becomes an accessible and affordable reality. — CA Master Plan for Aging



CONSIDERATIONS

The MPA challenges communities to embrace the goal of successful aging for all its residents. It lays the foundation for the role of civic leaders, government officials, agency directors, philanthropists, policymakers, and communities to help residents thrive in every life stage. The next phase of the MPA in Santa Barbara County will be to work together to decide the vision, strategies, and sustainability of a comprehensive local MPA with a timeline for implementation. AAN invites countywide participation and support to seize this unique opportunity and explore these core questions in the coming months:

- How can Santa Barbara County best prepare to meet the needs of its rapidly aging population?
 - What services and systems currently exist and what more will be needed by 2030?
 - Are there best practices and programs to adopt and, if so, who will be responsible for adopting and managing them?
 - What county investments can be made to ensure adequate access to housing and caregiving in the short term for older and disabled adults?
 - What kind of leadership and infrastructure is needed to build a fully integrated and well-functioning system of care across sectors?
 - What kind of resources are needed and what state and federal resources and opportunities can be leveraged?
- How can the county ensure equity in access and affordability across all economic groups and communities and in all parts of the county?
 - How can the county mitigate ageism and recognize the great strengths and vibrancy that older adults and people with disabilities bring to the community?

In other words, what would a successful local MPA and its implementation look like in Santa Barbara County?

Answering these questions will require bold commitments of time and focus. It will involve new ways of working together in multi-disciplinary partnerships and across government departments and community sectors. AAN looks forward to partnering with a wide range of stakeholders, leaders, and community members to create an age-friendly county that secures dignity, support, and a thriving personal and community life for all residents.



More attention must be brought to the reality that our population is rapidly aging, that there will soon be as many people over 60 as under 19, and that groundbreaking solutions are needed to ensure that older Californians and persons with disabilities can remain in their communities and thrive.

— *Master Plan for Aging IMPACT Committee Report*





www.sbcaan.org

For more information and to participate in California Master Plan for Aging planning and activities in Santa Barbara County, please contact:

Barbara Finch

Children & Adult Network Director
Santa Barbara County Dept. of Social Services
bfinch@countyofsb.org

