

## Tackling senior healthcare challenges requires deep commitment from stakeholders to create an age friendly California

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By 2030, the United States will have more 65-and-older residents than children for the first time in our nation's history. Simply put, it's imperative that greater emphasis be placed on caring for California's rapidly growing elderly population to ensure healthy aging in the Bay Area. This unprecedented growth indicates a tremendous demand for quality health and supportive services, as prioritized and outlined in



Gov. Gavin Newsom's new Master Plan for Aging. His strong commitment to this cause represents a monumental opportunity to shape how California supports and values aging.

Designed as a blueprint for local communities, businesses and the state government, the governor's master plan is designed to build environments that promote healthy aging — with patient-centered care front and center. The plan highlights key issues such as affordable housing, social isolation and demand for in-home supportive services and transportation. Therefore, it's imperative that key stakeholders develop strategies that influence Newsom's plan, including how to address and solve the widespread challenges that exist for seniors today.

One area requiring considerable immediate attention is senior homelessness, as the Bay Area represents one of the largest such populations in the U.S. New data highlights a significant increase in the number of seniors 50+ who are becoming homeless for the first time in their lives. The senior homeless population also is expected to triple over the next decade. Furthermore, 44 percent of all homeless people over 50 became homeless after turning 50, pointing to an inability to adequately save money and secure plans for retirement. Although many Bay Area counties have passed bond measures to fund more affordable housing, more work is needed to prevent older adults from becoming homeless in the first place. Current priorities include focusing on anti-displacement policies and integrating supportive services into senior housing.

As a society, we also need to place greater attention to create age-friendly and livable communities, which the World Health Organization has deemed a priority initiative. We need to support efforts to create environments which enable older adults to age in place with supportive services that focus on addressing the social determinants of health. Locally, multiple Bay Area cities and counties are taking action to make communities more livable for seniors and residents of all ages. Areas of focus include safe, walkable neighborhoods; broader access to transportation options; high quality senior centers; affordable housing; heightened civic engagement and access to healthy food. Local nonprofits like On Lok and the Center for Elders' Independence are specifically designed to keep seniors living in their homes for as long as possible through an integrated model of care known as PACE (Program of All-inclusive Care for the Elderly) – thus supporting a healthier lifestyle.

We have an opportunity in the Bay Area to work with leadership to our focus efforts on implementing innovative solutions that enable all older adults to lead independent, active lives. Aging experts will address these concerns on Dec. 3 in South San Francisco at the Bay Area Senior Health Policy Forum. Those interested can join this forum to discuss how to tackle senior homelessness, create policy change to support aging in California, why the 2020 census matters and how to make senior housing affordable. It's also important for Bay Area citizens to contact the governor's office and local elected officials to let them know they support making California truly age friendly for everyone.

Together, we can make a difference in Bay Area seniors' lives.

*Linda Trowbridge is the CEO for Oakland-based Center for Elders' Independence, which has been serving seniors for 37 years. Grace Li is the CEO for San Francisco-based On Lok, which has been serving seniors for 48 years. Both Bay Area nonprofit organizations seek to strengthen the safety net for Bay Area seniors.*

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