

California's Budget: Are Older Adults a Priority?

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A state's budget tells a story of priorities. Last week, Governor Brown released the proposed 2018-2019 budget, which outlined modest adjustments to programs impacting older adults and people with disabilities. While the Governor's budget focuses on building the financial stability of the state, paying off debt and strengthening elements of our infrastructure, it fails to outline solutions to the challenges facing California's older adults and people with disabilities.

It is widely known that our state's population is aging, carrying with it a ripple effect on system financing, service delivery, and the long-term services and supports (LTSS) infrastructure. Almost every major state agency or department plays a role in the service delivery system: health, social services, aging, transportation, housing, veterans affairs, education, and even public safety. Yet we have no articulated vision and no clear master plan outlining the system goals and priorities, providing little leadership for reform and leaving us with a piecemeal approach to change.

California is awash in one-off programs; many have long waiting listings, and few communicate with one another effectively. And a number of important large-scale pilots face uncertain, ill-defined futures. For example, California's [Coordinated Care Initiative](#) is slated to sunset at the end of 2019. What will become of the Cal MediConnect program that serves over 115,000 Medicare and Medi-Cal dual eligibles and the more than 900,000 individuals who are enrolled in the managed LTSS delivery system? To date state officials have yet to outline a clear commitment and pathway to integrated care beyond 2019, leaving little opportunity to develop the systems needed to serve individuals in a coordinated, person-centered fashion.

Without a vision and master plan, California will just continue to offer fragmented services that may mean well but are ultimately not responsive to the needs of consumers and families. Every day, we hear stories of families struggling to weave services together and finance care in the hopes of keeping their loved ones at home. Families don't know where to turn for help or how to pay for these services. When help is finally found, many individuals are bounced between programs with little assurance that their needs will be met. California can do better, as many other states have.

According to the [LTSS State Scorecard](#), the highest-performing states all have one thing in common: a commitment to a clear and strategic plan that guides thoughtful investments as part of an integrated and responsive approach to serving older adults and people with disabilities. As examples, Connecticut, Washington, and Minnesota have outlined clear strategies with a broad framework for LTSS systems improvement. Policymakers and elected officials in these states have collaborated in developing a vision with specific benchmarks and goals that serve as the foundation for achieving broad transformation. These efforts share three characteristics:

1. Leadership — legislators and policymakers willing to stand up for systems change;
2. Political will — leaders at the legislative and state level willing to identify this as a priority and commit to doing what it takes to address challenges and achieve our true potential; and
3. Time — as we saw with Connecticut's decade-long, systems transformation effort spearheaded by a core group of committed state staff.


It can be done, but many fear that a master plan process will be another bureaucratic exercise, resulting only in a few hundred copies of a report that few choose to read. The [2003 Strategic Plan for an Aging California Population](#), while a tremendous repository of information, had no specific goals and offered only recommendations for systems change that were not officially endorsed.

Yet, there are examples where California achieved success through systems planning. Since 1960, the [California Master Plan for Higher Education](#) has forged the state's colleges and universities into a coordinated system based on core principles with clear goals. This has guided the state through decades of intense demand for college education. And the [closure of California's developmental centers](#) is an example of how systems planning guided the allocation of resources, identification of goals, and benchmarks for new options in home- and community-based, integrated service delivery.

Now more than ever, California requires a vision and master plan for our aging future—particularly to clarify funding priorities and create stability when we face difficult budgetary challenges. Californians deserve a clear commitment and well-articulated path so that we can all grow older with dignity, choice, and independence.



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