

PERSPECTIVES ON AGING WITH DIGNITY

A Series by The SCAN Foundation

Thinking Strategically, Acting Expediently to Improve LTSS in California



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The time to improve California's long-term services and supports system (LTSS) is now. The state has a growing aging population, opportunities for innovation have emerged through the Affordable Care Act, California's Senate Select Committee on Aging and Long-Term Care will soon make its recommendations to the legislature, and finally, the state is digging out of years of recession. All of these factors show there is movement. We can use this momentum to help direct the path to LTSS transformation.

Bruce Chernof, MD, is President and CEO of The SCAN Foundation, dedicated to creating a society where older adults can access health and supportive services of their choosing to meet their needs. The SCAN Foundation Perspectives Series serves as a venue for opinions and observations about transforming the way in which we age.

Last week, The SCAN Foundation hosted its 4th Annual LTSS Summit to bring together advocates, community-based providers, health plans, and state administrative and legislative staff to build their knowledge and skills for developing a stronger system of person-centered care for all older Californians.

This year's Summit was grounded in California's ranking on the State LTSS Scorecard released by the AARP Policy Institute, with support from the Foundation and The Commonwealth Fund, earlier this year. The state ranked 9th overall with much of its success related to Californians' access to personal care services at home through the In-Home Support Services program. That said, we still have a lot of work to do.

California has a number of strong and innovative programs to serve people in their communities, but how do we make sure people have access to quality services they need, at the right time, in the setting of their choice?

In April, the state launched its Coordinated Care Initiative which changes the way medical care and LTSS systems serve low-income older adults and people with disabilities, integrating the full range of Medicare and Medi-Cal services, including LTSS. The LTSS Summit provided an opportunity to update stakeholders on the progress and challenges of

the Coordinated Care Initiative, and facilitate dialogue about the political, financial, and environmental realities of our state's current systems as well as future potential.

This new model of care requires providers and health plans alike to change how they do business, and develop new skills in order to work together to deliver services that are both person-centered and coordinated. All stakeholders need to develop an understanding of the roles each of us plays in this transformation, and how it affects the individual being served. California can no longer continue to provide services in silos, and must continue to work toward a coordinated system of care. Change can be difficult, but California has a committed group of stakeholders who can help shape this effort.

Federal leadership must also be an active partner to fully develop models that coordinate both medical and LTSS needs to best serve the person at the center of care. The White House Conference on Aging was established to address current trends and issues in aging. Recognizing that system change is not exclusive to Washington, D.C., the White House Conference on Aging leadership is hosting regional listening sessions to gather input from stakeholders around the nation, which we were honored to host at the Summit.

California is off to a good start in developing a coordinated service system that supports the goals and preferences of the individual, yet there is much work that remains to be done:

- Advocates and stakeholders must continue their commitment to breaking down silos and working together to structure a more person-centered system of care.
- The Senate Select Committee on Aging and Long Term Care has traveled the state to meet with stakeholders, asked the right questions, and is moving forward with a blueprint for an improved system of long-term care in California. The committee's tenure expires in November. The legislature should extend the work of this committee to keep long-term care a priority in the state Senate.
- As the state climbs out of its fiscal crisis, it is incumbent upon the legislature to take the work of the Committee and make it actionable from a policy and appropriations perspective, and move towards building a better system of care that values people's dignity, choice and independence. We cannot wait around for another crisis to hit – the time for policy action is now.

The Summit provided the opportunity for stakeholders to take note of where our LTSS system is, and think about our direction for the future. Continuing to advocate in silos, hung up on one issue, can stall transformation. It is time to move from a "Yes, but..." response, to "Yes, and how do we move this complete body of ideas?" All of us as stakeholders can be an influential force if we come together with a clear, consistent and persistent message.