

# For Voters, COVID-19 Brings California's Master Plan for Aging to the Front and Center

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Bruce Chernof, MD, 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 Perspectives Series provides opinions and observations about transforming the way in which we age. Follow Dr. Bruce on Twitter [@DrBruce\\_TSF](#).

California voters have made it resoundingly clear: even in the midst of crisis, the Master Plan for Aging (Master Plan) remains a top priority, offering hope by addressing California's longstanding system challenges so that we can weather future storms with a clear path forward.

A survey of 1,000 California voters conducted this summer found that COVID-19 ranks as the top issue on voters' minds. This finding alone is not surprising. We have all watched the pandemic fundamentally alter our nation's social, demographic, political, economic, and health care landscapes. The real significance of voter sentiment lies in how they perceive the Master Plan during this difficult time. Nearly 70 percent of voters – across party lines – want to see state leaders delivering a Master Plan *this year* with a vision for implementation. Perhaps this finding reflects the fact that adults aged 65 and older – particularly Black, Latinx, and Asian/Pacific Islanders – have been disproportionately affected with 76 percent of COVID-19 deaths coming from these populations.

The Master Plan can help resolve the underlying system shortcomings that have exacerbated challenges and inequities in the time of COVID-19. Well over a majority of voters (62%) feel that the pandemic has made it more urgent for California's leaders to focus on the [Master Plan](#).

- Nearly 60 percent say the state should be held accountable for, and invest in, the Master Plan's goals and priorities.
- In numbers rarely seen in statewide polls, nearly 8 in 10 voters say that it is important to develop a system for aging Californians that is easy to navigate.
- More than 60 percent of voters support a Master Plan that focuses on the needs of California's aging population—particularly in the areas of health care, food security, and housing.

The challenges we face as a state are profound, and are compounded by a substantial budget shortfall. It is too easy to brush off the notion of a Master Plan due to lack of state funding and the urgency to address the crisis at hand. Yet planning is about more than state funds and responding to today's crisis. Accountability for putting the Master Plan into motion relies in great part on strong leadership and vision that stands the test of time – leadership at the gubernatorial level, across state departments – and in partnership with the public and private sectors. A meaningful plan does not need to be and could not be implemented in one year; instead, it sets priorities with a vision for how to build a California for all ages that enables everyone to age with dignity and independence.

We have seen other states, like Massachusetts and Colorado, address these challenges through thoughtful planning and leadership. Focusing on innovation and bringing people to the table who do not typically work in the aging space, Massachusetts has a cross-sector approach that has led to the private sector and business community owning portions of the implementation and moving progress forward without requiring state dollars. Relationships developed as part of the Master Plan process have empowered these states to have collaborative responses to issues raised during COVID-19. Colorado's Strategic Action Planning Group on Aging created a platform for information sharing, questions to be raised, and state departments to report out on COVID-19 related activities.

The pandemic continues to reveal the opportunity in the midst of deep crisis. California voter interest and Master Plan for Aging action by other states show us that we can chart a meaningful path forward for all Californians.