

Education is key to San Diego Senior Alliance's aging initiative

"We're lucky [that] California [has] placed a premium on aging, focusing on it through the Master Plan initiative," said Deborah Martin, Chair of [San Diego Senior Alliance \(SDSA\)](#) and CEO of ElderHelp of San Diego.

SDSA formed in 2009 to bring together San Diego County organizations working on behalf of older adults and people with disabilities. Alliance members, which include nonprofit and for-profit organizations as well as government agencies and elected officials, share strategies and expertise to provide the best possible social and support services to the county's older adults and people with disabilities.

SDSA's current efforts center on advocacy, education, and advancing common legislative goals, such as California's Master Plan for Aging (MPA). Every SDSA meeting features dedicated information on the MPA: "Collectively, we're all working toward Master Plan initiatives, and we're really trying to understand how we as a community can come together to achieve these goals," said Martin.

The Alliance held a breakfast event highlighting the MPA as well as other legislative priorities last December, and California Department of Aging Director Susan DeMarois gave the keynote speech. It was SDSA's first in-person event since the pandemic—a welcome change of pace for SDSA members. Another legislative breakfast to be cohosted by SDSA member St. Paul's Senior Services is scheduled for February 24, 2023.

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—Deborah Martin, Chair of San Diego Senior Alliance and CEO of ElderHelp of San Diego

don't think about it until it's upon them," Martin said. "We're trying to move that education up earlier and earlier so that by the time they need to figure out how they're going to stay in their home, or navigate health care, or live off Social Security, they've thought about it before they're thrust into the situation. That's a lot of the education we're putting out there."

This education naturally ties to the state housing and caregiver shortages, issues that SDSA is also working to address. Funding is a huge concern, Martin said. Despite the long-term savings and benefits these programs can provide, the high upfront costs and results that take time can often erode public support. "It costs \$300 a month to provide caregiving services and transportation to a client," Martin said, citing ElderHelp's numbers. "And you think, well, that's almost \$4,000 a year. But these clients stay in their homes eight years longer than the average San Diego senior; that's a savings of over \$432,000 in expenses compared to transferring into a facility. We're

really trying to educate people that this is money well spent."

Diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) are also baked into all SDSA efforts. The Alliance recently recognized Rep. Raul Ruiz, D-Calif. 36th District, for his role in co-sponsoring legislation that will help provide early cancer detection in marginalized populations. "It primarily creates more outreach to help low-income individuals and people of color get better access to early testing, diagnosis, and treatment," Martin said.

SDSA also has great diversity in its membership, and many of these member organizations are also taking intentional steps to advance DEI within their own ranks. "Holistically, everything we do is pretty inclusive because we're often dealing with low-income, marginalized older members of society," Martin said. "Based on our mission and efforts, it's organic that most of our advocacy and work will be targeted toward persons of color who are disadvantaged by the inequities of the system in terms of access to care."



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