

California Commission on Aging

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GAVIN NEWSOM, Governor

Executive Director
Karol Swartzlander

May 22, 2020

The Honorable Richard Pan, MD
Chair, Senate Budget Subcommittee on Health and Human Services
California State Capitol
Sacramento, CA 95814

RE: May Revision Proposals that Impact Low-Income, Vulnerable, Older Adults - OPPOSE

Dear Chairman Pan:

The California Commission on Aging (CCoA), established in the Welfare and Institutions Code as the principal advocate before the Governor, the Legislature and state agencies on behalf of California's older adults, **strongly opposes** May Revision proposals that reduce and eliminate state programs that protect low income, frail older adults, individuals with disabilities, and their caregivers.

CCoA urges the Senate Budget Subcommittee to reject the proposed *complete* elimination of the Community-Based Adult Services (CBAS) and Multipurpose Senior Services Program (MSSP). In total, these programs provide over 45,000 Medi-Cal eligible, frail older adults with services that enable them to live with dignity in their homes as an alternative to nursing facility care. These proposed eliminations, without establishment of an alternative, are a direct violation of the 1999 Supreme Court Olmstead Decision, which affirmed individuals with disabilities of all ages have a right to receive state funded services and supports in the community rather than institutions.

Furthermore, the savings derived from curtailing these programs is far less than the costs the state will bear when these individuals are placed in nursing homes or are hospitalized due to the lack of care at home.

At the onset of the pandemic, the California Department of Public Health (CDPH) identified older adults and those with underlying medical conditions as having a higher risk for serious illness from COVID-19. Given 42% of the COVID-19 deaths in California are related to skilled nursing facilities, maintaining cost-effective, community-based health and social service programs is now more critical than ever. The inability of nursing facilities to manage COVID-19 for residents is a clear indication that the Administration, through stakeholders and the CDPH, must better regulate these facilities.

The Commission also opposes elimination of Medi-Cal Optional benefits, including audiology, incontinence washes, speech therapy, podiatry, occupational therapy, and full Denti-Cal benefits. While the provision of these benefits is deemed optional by the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services, they are not optional for the older adults and people with disabilities who depend on them to stay healthy.

CCoA also urges the rejection of reductions in funding to other essential community-based programs that serve older adults, persons with disabilities and their caregivers: Senior Nutrition, Aging and Disability Resource Connection programs, Independent Living Centers and Caregiver Resource Centers. These programs have long been neglected and only recently were making progress toward meeting community needs.

The cumulative impact of the May Revise proposals will be an increase in hospitalizations, emergency room utilization and nursing facility admissions -- which could literally be a death sentence in the current environment.

Individuals over age 65 account for 79% of total COVID-19 deaths in California. Despite older adults being the most impacted group during the pandemic, the May Revise proposes to slash the programs that serve older Californians in a way that is both ageist and shortsighted. The cognitive dissonance between the Governor's commitment to the Master Plan for Aging and May Revise proposals which decimate programs and services for the most frail, older and disabled Californians, cannot be overstated. The first population Governor Newsom urged to remain home were older adults and individuals with underlying chronic medical conditions. He recently indicated this population will have to remain home for the foreseeable future.

Eliminating and reducing funding for the very programs that support older Californians remaining safely in their homes is not only unacceptable, it is morally bankrupt.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Betsy Butler". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Betsy Butler
Chair

CC: The Honorable Gavin Newsom, Governor of the State of California
The Honorable Toni Atkins, California Senate President Pro Tempore
The Honorable Holly Mitchell, Chair, Senate Committee on Budget and Fiscal Review
The Honorable Anthony Rendon, Speaker of the Assembly
The Honorable Phil Ting, Chair, Assembly Committee on Budget
Dr. Mark Ghaly, Secretary, California Health and Human Services Agency
Dr. Brad Gilbert, Director, Department of Health Care Services
Kim McCoy Wade, Director, California Department of Aging