

March 06, 2024

Joe Stephenshaw, Director
California Department of Finance
915 L Street
Sacramento, CA 95814

Dear Director Joe Stephenshaw,

In accordance with the State Leadership Accountability Act (Leadership Accountability), the Commission on Aging submits this report on the review of our internal control and monitoring systems for the biennial period ending December 31, 2023.

Should you have any questions please contact Karol Swartzlander, Executive Director, at (916) 419-7591, Karol.Swartzlander@CCoA.ca.gov.

GOVERNANCE

Mission and Strategic Plan

The California Commission on Aging's (CCoA) mission is to serve as the principal advocacy body for older Californians and a catalyst for change that supports and celebrates Californians as they age. The CCoA advises the Governor, Legislature, and state and local agencies on issues affecting older adults to support aging with dignity and respect in the setting of their choice, including but not limited to, advisory participation in the consideration of all legislation and regulations made by state and federal departments and agencies relating to programs and services that affect older individuals. Welfare and Institutions Code Section 9200 requires CCoA to among other things, observe, evaluate, research, and gather input on innovative program models, obstacles to service delivery, and needs of older adults. CCoA uses information to advise policy recommendations and proposed legislation with the goal of improving access and delivery of programs for older adults, adults with disabilities and caregivers.

Background

In 1965, the federal Older Americans Act was passed to provide services to older adults at risk of losing their independence. The California Legislature established the CCoA in 1973 and in 1974 the first CCoA meeting was convened. Current demographic trends confirm that California adults 60 and older will make up 25 percent of the State's population by 2030, surpassing the population of individuals 18 years of age and younger for the first time in history. Given these unprecedented changes in California's demographics, services and supports for older adults will require modernization and resources sufficient to address the increasing variety of languages, cultures, ethnicities, behavioral and physical health, and housing and economic disparities experienced by older adults. Recognizing this, in 2019, the Governor announced the need for a strategy to promote the health and well-being of older Californians.

Accordingly, in early January 2021, California released its first Master Plan on Aging (MPA) to prepare the state for the demographic changes and growth in the older adult population. The Plan includes lessons-learned from COVID-19, which highlighted the urgent need for new methods to support older adults, people with disabilities, LGBTQ+, communities of color, and persons in underserved communities.

Even though the CCoA was only supported by a staff of three, including the Executive Director, the CCoA and staff were heavily involved and made valuable contributions to the MPA. Staff monitored all MPA stakeholder and workgroup meetings to support Commissioners appointed to those groups and advised the CCoA on MPA development and recommendations. With the January 2021 MPA release, CCoA was identified as a key stakeholder in the advancement of MPA initiatives and implementation. Commissioners and staff continue to engage in MPA implementation committees and will continue to monitor and offer recommendations with advice from staff throughout the implementation process.

Recognizing the historical understaffing of the CCoA and an increased workload associated with the MPA, the Department of Finance approved two new permanent Associate Governmental Program Analyst (AGPA) positions in FY 2022-23: 1.0 Policy and Research Analyst and 1.0 Outreach and Engagement Analyst. The CCoA responded by immediately filling the positions, and due to increasingly complex workloads and increased staff, upgraded two existing positions, 1.0 Staff Services Analyst to an AGPA and 1.0 AGPA to Staff Services Manager I (SSMI)-Supervisor. Currently, the full-time CCoA staff consists of 1.0 Executive Director/Exempt, 1.0 SSMI Supervisor and 3.0 AGPAs. While the additional staff have been vital in meeting the current analytical needs in the implementation of the MPA and the CCoA Operational Plan, this staffing level is insufficient on an ongoing basis to meet the required administrative duties and functions. Consequently, in addition to performing their normal duties, such as reviewing legislative proposals and public and private initiatives, the analyst staff have been required to also perform a wide variety of administrative duties, such as setting up CCoA meetings as well as processing and monitoring contracts. While the CCoA will be attempting to secure additional administrative support staff (see Risks and Controls), additional important activities continue to be required of the CCoA. For example, the CCoA has developed an Operational Plan and a detailed work plan focused on priorities and growth opportunities through the MPA. The Operational Plan includes, among other things, principal endeavors such as the research and analysis of legislation and initiatives, advancing issues that affect older adults and their families with an inclusive and equitable perspective on aging, and ensuring that the MPA reflects emerging and critical issues affecting older adults, and individuals with disabilities and their caregivers.

Control Environment

CCoA's Executive Director is responsible for establishing and maintaining the internal control and monitoring systems of the CCoA. CCoA's staff demonstrates, values, and communicates the importance of upholding a high standard of integrity and ethics through core values that include open communication, teamwork and coordination, problem solving, respect, honesty, and expertise. These core values are well established in CCoA's day-to-day operations. The

Executive Director models ethical behavior and integrity by promoting CCoA's core values. CCoA's staff demonstrate a commitment to core values by using consistent operating procedures and practices. Whether working on-site or remotely, staff routinely discuss work projects, priorities, and timelines, and proactively remediate potential problems or conflicts. For example, in support of these professional activities, the Executive Director and SSMI Supervisor/Legislative Director attended three leadership trainings to learn about and implement innovative management techniques to maximize team performance and enhance team cohesion.

Management, develops detailed workplans and timelines in coordination with staff to prioritize workloads, establish shared responsibilities, maintain staff accountability, and promote increased work/life balance and job satisfaction. Routine monitoring of workplans and deliverables identify obstacles or issues of concern. These workplans are updated weekly and maintained on a shared drive for accessibility and tracking by all staff members. Workload and projects are divided between staff as needed to allow staff to work to their strengths and adjust workloads as needed. The Executive Director models an "all hands-on deck" approach, sharing in planning and development of work projects, offering constructive feedback and guidance on work in progress, and establishing clear standards and timelines for project completion. Workplans include anticipated completion dates or clear deadlines as appropriate. As time permits, work is circulated between staff for edits, proofing, and accessibility, ensuring that written materials and projects reflect the quality and integrity expected from the CCoA.

The Executive Director and SSMI Supervisor/Legislative Director work closely with staff to facilitate an open and supportive environment through maintaining open communications and coordinating efforts around scheduling, meeting coverage, and workload assignments. Weekly staff meetings and one-on-one meetings provide direction and allow discussion of priority projects, workplan tracking and progress. Additionally, the Executive Director has an open-door policy and encourages open dialogue with staff to express concerns regarding problematic procedures, workload or specific assignments.

Regular meetings with the CCoA's Chair and Executive Committee allow the Executive Director to keep abreast of CCoA priorities and permit the reallocation of staffing/resources, as necessary. These meetings also help the Commissioners stay informed about staffing commitments and workload to assure reasonable expectations. Annual updates to the CCoA's Operational Plan and progress reports during General Meetings provide Commissioners with current information on broad policy objectives and program implementation.

CCoA's staff have a strong commitment to the CCoA and have extensive knowledge of state agency and department procedures and reporting requirements. The Executive Director has an established leadership record with the State, and an extensive background in innovation and implementation of safety net services. The SSMI Supervisor/Legislative Director has a wealth of stakeholder connections and a track record of successful legislative activities. Combined, this leadership team, with its established network and proven effectiveness, fueled by their passion and resolve to further the work of the CCoA has resulted in a renewed interest and increased engagement of the appointed Commissioners. Further, the AGPA staff conduct

research and prepare policy memos, policy briefs, reports, online content, presentations, and other materials in alignment with CCoA priorities. These priorities include, but are not limited to, the following: explore innovative models to increase access to and coordination of long-term services and supports for all Californians, address homelessness and social isolation; expand the workforce serving older adults, increase workforce development opportunities for older adults, and enhance behavioral health services for older adults.

Information and Communication

The general direction of CCoA activities from year to year is determined by the CCoA chairperson and members. Broadly, CCoA activities and initiatives are driven by social and policy trends that affect California's older adult population, such as demographics, program innovations, funding challenges, and opportunities. Awareness of these trends and emerging best practices is made possible, in part, by CCoA staff participating in statewide coalitions, taskforces, advisory boards and councils. These entities are comprised of aging and disability advocates, service providers, consumers, academics, and other stakeholders. Furthermore, active engagement in state sponsored and non-profit advisory groups, in conjunction with the Executive Director and SSMI-Supervisor's regular communication with statewide organizations ensures the CCoA remains focused on current and future relevant trends, opportunities and challenges.

MONITORING

The information included here discusses the entity-wide, continuous process to ensure internal control systems are working as intended. The role of the executive monitoring sponsor includes facilitating and verifying that the Commission on Aging monitoring practices are implemented and functioning. The responsibilities as the executive monitoring sponsor(s) have been given to: Karol Swartzlander, Executive Director.

Staff meetings are held weekly to update workplans, report progress on projects, and to identify and develop solutions to workload issues or procedural problems. Because many CCoA operations are handled through an interagency agreement with the California Department of Aging (CDA), both regular and ad hoc meetings are held between CCoA management and CDA's budget, accounting, information technology, human resources, and business services units to evaluate budgetary and personnel needs and opportunities and address process changes or concerns.

By re-evaluating priorities and shifting workloads, CCoA works to address deadlines and unanticipated projects. The Executive Director discusses workload priorities and then assigns each staff member responsibility for specific outcomes. Progress toward desired outcomes and project resolution is reported during weekly communications, administrative, legislative and full staff meetings. Progress toward and evaluation of project completion and target deadlines are documented on weekly work plans and reviewed at regular team meetings.

RISK ASSESSMENT PROCESS

The following personnel were involved in the Commission on Aging risk assessment process: executive management, and staff.

The following methods were used to identify risks: brainstorming meetings, ongoing monitoring activities, audit/review results, external stakeholders, and other.

The following criteria were used to rank risks: likelihood of occurrence, potential impact to mission/goals/objectives, timing of potential event, potential impact of remediation efforts, and tolerance level for the type of risk.

The CCoA Executive Director and staff use regular staff meetings to identify and discuss known or potential risks, such as changes in workload resulting from training and reporting requirements, FISCAL changes, budget threats and changes in CCoA-directed priorities. These sessions are used to develop strategies to avoid or minimize risks.

Commissioners have participated in risk assessment and reviews to help staff identify and evaluate issues of concern. Involving Commissioners in this process also helps them understand the administrative and operational obligations of staff.

RISKS AND CONTROLS

Risk: CCoA Continues to be Understaffed

On December 31, 2021, CCoA's three-person staff consisted of an Executive Director, one AGPA and one Staff Services Analyst (SSA).

Moving forward, pursuant to the 2022-23 Budget Act, the Executive Director hired a SSML Supervisor—a position that was upgraded from an AGPA to a Supervisor, an AGPA for policy and research, and an AGPA for communications and engagement. However, even with the two additional analyst staff, the CCoA's administrative staffing remains inadequate given the increased workload associated with reconvening in-person meetings, and the ongoing and increasingly complex workload supporting the MPA implementation and initiatives impacting older Californians. Due to the lack of administrative staff, the CCoA's analyst staff must cover administrative activities, which comes at the expense of providing the Commissioners with in-depth, thorough analyses of the many proposed legislative and Administration initiatives impacting older adults, which are focused on homelessness, behavioral health, workforce development, economic security, elder abuse, and more.

Additionally, a byproduct of CCoA's increased and growing social media and public engagement has led to a growth in the number and frequency of requests for Commissioners and commission staff to attend, present at or participate in regional events related to the CCoA's priorities. Additionally, the increased engagement has resulted in a high volume of inquiries from individuals requesting information and referrals, which have been challenging for commission staff to respond to and manage in a timely manner.

Adding administrative staff, an office technician (OT), to the CCoA is necessary to permit analyst staff to advocate on issues affecting older adults, individuals with disabilities, and caregivers; advance issues that affect older adults and their families with an inclusive and equitable perspective on aging; advise the Governor, state legislators, government officials and stakeholders; and, ensure the State Plan on Aging reflects emerging and critical issues affecting older adults, individuals with disabilities and their caregivers. By having an OT to

complete essential administrative activities, such as ordering supplies, completing and tracking invoices, working with control agencies, and arranging for CCoA meetings and travel, the analyst staff will be able to complete the essential and intended activities for which they were hired. Unfortunately, an OT position was not approved in the 2023-24 proposed budget.

Control: Seek Additional Staff Resources

In order to fulfill all statutory responsibilities, effectively contribute to the MPA implementation, comply with mandatory state requirements, and to fulfill the necessary administrative activities, the CCoA will continue to pursue a permanent OT position. To fill the current void, the CCoA will continue to engage the services of a retired annuitant and utilize the expertise of the Commissioners. However, this is not a viable, permanent solution.

Risk: Workforce Retention

In 2018, CCoA underwent a transition with a new executive director for the first time in 14 years. The CCoA struggled to secure a viable candidate who met the qualifications and possessed the knowledge and skills necessary to effectively lead the CCoA. The highly qualified candidate and current executive director consistently demonstrates the leadership skills, knowledge, expertise, passion, integrity, and ethical behavior that is vital to the success of CCoA in its role as a critical stakeholder in support of policies and practices impacting older adults and persons with disabilities. However, the current salary level of the executive director is not commensurate with the duties and responsibilities required of the job and is significantly lower relative to similar executive directors of commissions of comparable size. For example, the top salary range for the CCoA executive director is less than the beginning salary range for executive directors of the following commissions: California Commission on Disability Access, Commission on Asian and Pacific Islander American Affairs, and Commission on Status of Women and Girls. In order to retain quality leadership staff with the necessary background, knowledge, skills, expertise, and management capabilities to meet the challenges, goals, and objectives of the CCoA, the salary level of the CCoA executive director should be evaluated and increased to be commensurate with requirements of the job and to achieve parity with other executive directors of like commissions.

Establishing appropriate salary levels for CCoA staff will provide long-term continuity within the CCoA administration and maintain a high-level of engagement to ensure the needs and services for California's older adults and adults with disabilities are met.

Control: Advocate for Appropriate Staff Salary Levels

The Chair and the Executive Committee of the CCoA will continue to advocate for staff salary levels that are fair and commensurate with the duties and responsibilities of their job duties and responsibilities as well as consistent with other comparable positions in state government.

CONCLUSION

The Commission on Aging strives to reduce the risks inherent in our work and accepts the responsibility to continuously improve by addressing newly recognized risks and revising risk mitigation strategies as appropriate. I certify our internal control and monitoring systems are adequate to identify and address current and potential risks facing the organization.

Karol Swartzlander, Executive Director

CC: California Legislature [Senate, Assembly]
California State Auditor
California State Library
California State Controller
Director of California Department of Finance
Secretary of California Government Operations Agency