

CCoA  
California Commission on Aging

## AGEWATCH

## HHS releases first Medicare rule covering same-sex couples

The Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) issued a memo in August clarifying that all beneficiaries in private Medicare plans have access to equal coverage when it comes to care in a nursing home where their spouse lives. This is the first guidance issued by HHS in response to the recent Supreme Court ruling which held section 3 of the Defense of Marriage Act unconstitutional.

“HHS is working swiftly to implement the Supreme Court’s decision and maximize federal recognition of same-sex spouses in HHS programs,” said HHS Secretary Kathleen Sebelius. “Today’s announcement is the first of many steps that we will be taking over the coming months to clarify the effects of the Supreme Court’s decision and to ensure that gay and lesbian married couples are treated equally under the law.”

“Today, Medicare is ensuring that all beneficiaries will have equal access to coverage in a nursing home where their spouse lives, regardless of their sexual orientation,” said Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) Administrator Marilyn Tavenner. “Prior to this, a beneficiary in a same-sex marriage enrolled in a Medicare Advantage plan did not have equal access to such coverage and, as a result, could have faced time away from his or her spouse or higher costs because of the way that marriage was defined for this purpose.”



Under current law, Medicare beneficiaries enrolled in a Medicare Advantage plan are entitled to care in, among certain other skilled nursing facilities (SNFs), the SNF where their spouse resides (assuming that they have met the conditions for SNF coverage in the first place, and the SNF has agreed to the payment amounts and other terms that apply to a plan network SNF). Seniors with Medicare Advantage previously may have faced the choice of receiving coverage in a nursing home away from their same-sex spouse, or disenrolling from the Medicare Advantage plan which would have meant paying more out-of-pocket for care in the same nursing home as their same-sex spouse.

*Reprinted from August 29, 2013 HHS News Release, HHS announces first guidance implementing Supreme Court’s decision on the Defense of Marriage Act*

AGEWATCH is an occasional publication of the California Commission on Aging (CCoA) intended to inform, educate, and advocate. The CCoA is an independent state agency established in 1973 to serve as the principal state advocate on behalf of older Californians. The CCoA office is located at 1300 National Drive, Suite 173, Sacramento, CA 95834.

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## Study explores California's readiness to provide long-term care

New research from the California Health Care Foundation explores California's readiness to meet the needs of a ballooning population of elderly residents.

The report, [Long Term Care in California: Ready for Tomorrow's Seniors?](#), released along with a fact sheet on long-term care [Long Term Care Facts and Figures, 2009](#), examines the state's supply of long-term care services, usage of those services, public spending involved, as well as oversight and regulation.

The research found:

- **"Use of all long term care services has increased in California, with the largest growth occurring in home- and community-based services.**
- **"Medicare and Medicaid beneficiaries in California used long term care services at a rate that was lower than the nation's, with the exception of Medicaid patients' use of personal care services, which was nearly four times higher in California than the U.S.**
- **"California's per-capita supply of residential care beds for the elderly was larger than the nation's. The state's supply, however, has not kept pace with population growth since 2004.**
- **"California's performance on care quality in nursing facilities and for home health services was mixed, with top-of-the-nation performance on a some measures (e.g., nursing facility residents losing too much weight) and bottom-of-the-nation performance on others (e.g., home health care patients able to feed themselves).**
- **"Gross revenues for California's freestanding nursing facilities grew over 50% between 2003 and 2010. One-third of these facilities had profit margins of 9% or higher in 2010.**
- **"Medicare and Medicaid are important payers for all long term care services. Spending per beneficiary has increased for all long term care services in the state."**

To read more: <http://www.chcf.org/publications/2013/08/long-term-care#ixzz2dUP3wdCq>

Excerpted in part from California Health Care Foundation, *Long Term Care in California: Ready for Tomorrow's Seniors?*

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## Los Angeles City Council responds to federal cuts to senior nutrition programs

Responding to federal sequestration cuts that have slashed funds to aging programs nationwide, the Los Angeles City Council last Friday approved a resolution urging an end to federal cuts that could leave seniors without meals and nutrition services.



LA Department of Aging funds meal programs such as lunch at St. Barnabas Senior Services

An across-the-board budget cut under the federal government's sequestration program left the Los Angeles Department of Aging short of about \$1.6 million in federal funding earlier this year, threatening both congregate and home-delivered meals for thousands of seniors in Los Angeles.

City officials eventually found temporary funds in Los Angeles' budget to continue its meals program, but Councilman Paul Koretz, who introduced the resolution in May, said the federal money should be restored "because that's what our seniors and this nation deserve."

Under the resolution, the city went on record in support of any legislation that would restore federal funding provided under the 1965 Older Americans Act, including S.1028, authored by Sen. Bernie Sanders of Vermont, that seeks to re-authorize the act through 2017-18.

## Older adult quality of life depends on connections with community and family, new survey reports

The latest edition of *The United States of Aging Survey* by the National Council on Aging (NCOA), United Healthcare and USA TODAY finds that adults over 60 place more value on their relationships with friends and family than on their financial concerns. According to NCOA, “The survey finds that seniors are driven by a desire for connectedness. More than half of seniors (53 percent) nationally indicate that being close to friends and family is important and only 15 percent report occasional feelings of isolation. Eighty-four percent of seniors nationally cite technology as important to their ability to connect with the world around them.” The survey also found that isolation gives older adults a less optimistic view of their future health and quality of life than the older adult population in general.



Released during the National Association of Area Agencies' on Aging Annual Conference, the survey included responses from 4000 adults nationwide, along with a representative sampling of adults age 18-59 to provide broader perspectives on aging.

To read the full study results, visit <http://www.ncoa.org/improve-health/community-education/united-states-of-aging/usa-survey-2013.html>

Information from NCOA, *Connections with Community and Family—Not Money—Most Important for Seniors' Quality of Life*, July 30, 2013

## NCOA announces 2013 Fall Prevention Awareness Day



The National Council on Aging has posted informational materials to help aging service organizations prepare for the 6th annual National Falls Prevention Awareness Day (FPAD). FPAD will be observed on the first day of Fall (Sept. 22) this year, to promote and increase public awareness about how to prevent and reduce falls among older adults.

**This year's theme, *Preventing Falls—One Step at a Time***, seeks to unite professionals, older adults, caregivers, and family members to play a part in raising awareness and preventing falls. In 2012, communities in 46 states participated in Falls Prevention Awareness Day. NCOA hopes to include all states in the observance in 2013.

### Planning for 2013

Among the materials NCOA provides is [Take Control of Your Health: 6 Steps to Prevent a Fall](http://www.ncoa.org/improve-health/center-for-healthy-aging/), a new infographic for 2013. Other offerings include a webinar on innovative approaches to fall prevention, a media toolkit, press releases and a fact sheet. To see more, visit the NCOA Center for Health Aging at <http://www.ncoa.org/improve-health/center-for-healthy-aging/>.

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**Triple-A Council of California elects new officers**

The Triple-A Council of California (TACC) elected new officers in August, re-electing Antonio (Tony) Rodella from Orange County to serve as President for the 2012- 2013 fiscal year. Marti Overfield from Kern County was elected Vice President.

TACC is an information-sharing and educational organization composed of the elected leaders of the state's 33 Area Agency on Aging Advisory Councils. The group is administered by the California Commission on Aging.



Antonio "Tony" Rodella

**September is National Senior Center Month**

Senior Centers throughout California will be celebrating National Senior Center Month this September. The national recognition was established by the National Council on Aging National Institute of Senior Centers.



Gardeners at San Marcos Senior Center Intergenerational Garden.

Throughout September, senior centers across California will showcase the programs and services that make them a critical part of the senior service network.

California is home to more than 500 multi-service senior centers and over 200 senior nutrition sites, scattered from the population centers on the coast to the smallest communities of the Sierra Nevada Mountains.

**56% of California's centers are operated by local governments**, while the remaining centers are predominately non-profit organizations. Despite funding shortfalls and staffing reductions, these facilities continue to provide services that are meaningful and appropriate for their clientele.

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***Upcoming Events***

September 25-26, California Commission on Aging, Sacramento [www.ccoa.ca.gov](http://www.ccoa.ca.gov)  
October 7-8, Congress of California Seniors, Sacramento [www.seniors.org](http://www.seniors.org) for information  
October 2-4, 2013, County Welfare Directors Association 2013 Conference, Sacramento [www.cwda.org](http://www.cwda.org) or 800-344-4321

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