

Presentation for the 2011 Older American's Act Re-Authorization

March 3, 2010

Hello, I am Christin Hemann, Public Policy Analyst for Aging Services of California, a statewide affiliate of the American Association of Homes and Services for the Aging. On behalf of our 400 not-for-profit providers of long-term care and services in California, I thank you for the opportunity to submit these recommendations to be considered for inclusion in the Older Americans Act Re-authorization in 2011.

Our Home and Community-Based Services members are able to provide affordable housing with services, adult day services, in-home services, and transportation services thanks to their collaborative partnerships with local area agencies on aging.

Over two million low-and modest-income older adults live in publicly subsidized housing and the median age of residents in HUD senior housing is 74 years old, and 30% of them are age 80 and older. Studies show that subsidized senior renters experience more chronic health conditions and non-subsidized renters and homeowners. In addition to these chronic health conditions, many of these residents struggle with some form of dementia, and/or mental illness. Adults age 65 and older have the highest suicide rate of all age groups. In fact, the Administration on Aging estimates that only half of all older adults who acknowledge having mental health problems are actually treated.

Currently, the AAAs are not funded to implement Older Americans Act mental health requirements. In response to the increasing need for mental health services, the Older Americans Act must provide additional resources to the aging network so that they may implement the Older American's Act requirements for mental health services.

Second, Aging Services has always supported innovative ways to integrate assisted living into publicly-funded housing. In 2006 the Assisted Living Waiver was created to bring assisted living services to eligible residents in publicly-funded housing programs. The waiver project is funded under a mandate to link residents with supportive services in the community, and has just been expanded to accommodate two more counties.

In order to support innovative programs like these, we recommend that the Older Americans Act provide additional resources to the AAAs to assure that older adults have access to appropriate long-term services and support options to help them remain in their communities for as long as possible.

Third, Technological innovations continue to improve the way many aging services providers deliver care. Funding for demonstration projects that promote the use of best practices in medication management, preventing falls, and prolonging safety, health and wellness in senior centers and senior housing developments should be made part of Title 4 of the Older American's Act.

In closing, I would just like to comment that although the economic downturn has severely strained California's long-term care safety-net, efforts should be made to EXPAND our state's capacity to address the critical needs of California's growing aging population.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit these recommendations.