

AoA Listening Forum Presentation  
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Our organization, Planning for Elders, is built on a model of self-advocacy, helping people help themselves. For 20 years we have been training, educating, and empowering adults with disabilities, seniors, and caregivers, promoting and supporting their leadership, creating an environment in which people who are oftentimes made invisible are recognized as full, contributing members of society. We believe that elders need to actively participate in formulating the policies that affect their well-being.

In California, we find that this is a time of great “social insecurity” among seniors and people with disabilities, especially among immigrants and those who live in low-income communities. Many no longer live on a fixed income, but a shrinking one, as SSI income has been reduced to \$845 a month. Many of the programs that have kept people living safely at home and participating in the life of their communities are on the chopping block. In-Home Supportive Services (IHSS), SSI/SSP, Adult Day Health Care, Medi-Cal, and CAPI (Cash Assistance Program for Immigrants) are facing cuts or complete elimination. People with disabilities and seniors have fought for decades to shift the paradigm away from institutionalization and towards support for living independently at home. These proposed cuts could reverse those hard-fought-for gains and turn back the clock 30 years.

Many seniors whose social security benefits and meager pensions put them above the poverty level are also being squeezed. They earn too much to qualify for certain programs like IHSS, but they don't have enough income to pay the cost of services that would keep them safely at home. There are policy solutions that could ease some of this pressure. We highly recommend that there be no means test for participation in meal sites so that any senior or person with a disability who faced food insecurity would have access to adequate nutrition.

We need to reaffirm the notion that supporting seniors and people with disabilities is a social responsibility, not solely the responsibility of the individual or their family. The fact that our world is characterized by an increasing number of elders means that we have to expand, not shrink, the possibilities for them to be integrated into society if they are to live in dignity. It takes a village to raise a child; it also takes a village to support our elders. This is fundamentally a question of social justice and equity, a question of how we build the kind of world we want to live in.