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A Call to Action – Year Two

The Growth & Health Costs Of The Senior Population

Throughout the United States, seniors over 60 represent the fastest growing age group in the country. In California, over 1,000 Californians are turning 65 every day, and will continue to do so for the next fifteen years. Statewide, the *population of all ages is projected to grow at a rate of 4.7%, however, seniors age 85+ are growing more than twice that fast (9.8%)*. The 65-74 range group is growing even faster, with a 26.5% growth projection¹.

Facts about Santa Cruz County's senior population:

- The 60+ population has increased by 37% since 2011.
- Over 7,500 of the County's 61,000 seniors are eligible for Medi-Cal
- The Over-60 Medi-Cal Eligible population grew 61% since 2011².
- 8% of the population consumes 75% of the health care costs, with the vast majority being seniors with chronic conditions³.
- 94 seniors per week turn 60 in Santa Cruz County,
- 28 Medi-Cal eligible County residents turn 60 every week, a 375% increase over the previous 12 months
- ***40% of all older Santa Cruzans (age 65+) do not have enough income to meet their basic needs⁴.***

Status Of Senior Service Organizations In Santa Cruz County

Health Care providers and experts in the field of aging have identified long term services and supports (LTSS) as the most effective strategy for maintaining the health, independence and quality of life of seniors. Santa Cruz County's LTSS network continues to provide high-quality, effective services. The cost of long term hospital care is lower here than anywhere else in the United States. Despite these successes, many organizations are cutting back their hours of service, have waiting lists, and are struggling to operate. Funding is shrinking; reporting

¹ Governor's Budget Summary Demographics 2014-15.

² California Department of Aging Intrastate Funding Formula Data

³ Central California Alliance for Health Dec. 2014

⁴ Elder Economic Security Index, UCLA, & Insight Foundation

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requirements are increasing, and the complexity of and demand for the delivery services continues to grow. Meanwhile:

- Funding for Older Americans Act programs is at 1984-85 levels.
- State funding for Older Californians Act Programs has been eliminated.
- Successful programs such as Linkages have been closed due to elimination of funding

What are our local seniors saying? (Anonymous comments from the last Senior Needs Assessment)

"I am my wife's caregiver, if something were to happen to me, my wife would be in trouble."

"I can't afford to pay for basic things. I have to sit to buy food."

"Social Security doesn't cover property taxes, homeowner insurance, utilities, put food on my table, clothes on my back, shoes on my feet, vehicle maintenance, home health care and some prescriptions. These are necessities, not a want."

"I need foot care, these services have been stopped!"

"I have too much income to receive program benefits, but not enough to manage."

"Metro Paracruz costs \$4 each way. I don't often have that much money to spend. Why can't we have passes?" (Note: Metro Paracruz rates have since increased to between \$4 to \$8 each way)

Call For Action

California's 65-74 age group is growing at a rate five times faster than the rest of the state. The cost of care for unhealthy seniors is far greater than that of any other populations. Despite that, Santa Cruz County has not identified senior services as a funding priority for 2015-16, or for 2016-2017. The Santa Cruz County Regional Transportation Commission is promoting a new transportation tax, and is highlighting senior services as part of the tax, yet less than one cent of every dollar collected will go towards new services for seniors.

A variety of programs proven to keep seniors healthy and living independently exist in Santa Cruz County. Unfortunately, the capacity of these programs is shrinking at the same time the demand for their services grows.

The County of Santa Cruz must make senior services a funding priority for 2017-18, and should engage senior service organizations now to identify critical needs and effective strategies for investing in the delivery of services to our aging population.

Solutions exist; the time to act is now.