



March 15th, 2022

The Honorable Gavin Newsom
Governor of California
State Capitol
Sacramento, CA 95814

Assembly Budget Chair Phillip Ting
Senate Budget Chair Nancy Skinner

California Budget Requests for the 2022-2023 Budget

Dear Governor Newsom, Budget Chairs Skinner and Ting

We are writing on behalf of the California Alliance for Retired Americans (CARA) to express our specific requests for this year's budget. We are heartened and appreciative of California's growing commitment to improving the lives of older adults and people with disabilities. California's strong fiscal outlook provides an unprecedented opportunity to invest in programs that further the work of the Governor's Master Plan for Aging and in helping to remedy longstanding inequities in our systems of caring for older adults and people with disabilities.

We support and appreciate some of the investments listed in the Governor's budget proposal such as continued funding for housing and homelessness; an extension of COVID paid sick leave benefits; critical expansions of Medi-Cal coverage and affordability; investments in the care economy workforce; making the IHSS provider back-up system permanent; implementation of the CalAIM program; and funding to support the Master Plan for Aging Data Dashboard.

These investments in the Governor's Budget Proposal represent important and positive steps forward. However, CARA believes greater investments are needed. Some of these investments that are at the top of our agenda include:

SSI/SSP: We believe the budget projections for the 22-23 fiscal year provide an opportunity for California to fully restore SSP funding equivalent to the 2008 levels, with the appropriate cost of living adjustments. About half of the grant was restored in this year's budget proposal with the rest scheduled for 2024. Given the unprecedented challenges that the pandemic has brought, and the difficulties our lowest income elders and people with disabilities face, **we propose a full reinstatement of the SSP grant this year.**

LTSS: CARA is part of a coalition working to create a universal LTSS (Long Term Supports and Services) benefit. Legislation is planned for this session to get us closer to creating this benefit, but there is still much more research needed on the populations who are not included in those benefit proposals. **We support a budget allocation of \$5 million dollars to study the unmet needs of those who will not be covered by current proposals, and financing mechanisms to meet the LTSS needs of all Californians.**

Older Adult Education Programs: Most of the Older Adult Education programs provided by School districts as well as through our Community College system have been severely cut or abolished. Much of the funding was cut in 2008, but each year we have seen it dwindle. These educational programs are now focused solely on ESL, certificate and training programs for future workers, and a gateway to 4 year colleges. These are important goals. But, if we truly believe in the work of the Master Plan on Aging to create a California where we can all age and engage in our communities as life-long learners and participants, taking away access to programs for the older adult population continues to isolate seniors and people with disabilities and limits our ability to continue to engage, learn and participate in our communities. For many, these classes have been the main avenue for staying engaged and connected. **Therefore, we should re-invest in older adult learning as we once had – and expand it.**

Digital Divide: The pandemic has highlighted the deficiencies in CA’s broadband and internet infrastructure, specifically in rural and working-class, urban, geographic regions. Coupled with the healthcare industry aggressively shifting services to telehealth platforms, which require consumers to have stable internet speeds in addition to computer/technological literacy, many Seniors have struggled to access the services they need. This is particularly troublesome as Seniors and people with disabilities increase their dependence on remote/telehealth services as a safer alternative to in-person visits. We appreciate healthcare providers adopting innovative solutions to serve their regionally diverse consumer base in light of a pandemic-induced labor shortage; however, we must ensure California’s aging population is equipped with the resources and knowledge to comfortably access healthcare services in this evolving industry. Therefore, we suggest additional state investments in the programs listed:

- Additional investments to accelerate the implementation of Executive order N-73-20, establishing “broadband for all” across California; addressing internet access and equity disparities for older adults.
- Additional investments in computer literacy training programs for older adults and people with disabilities.

Climate Justice/Emergency Preparedness: As California continues to adopt policies to mitigate climate change, improve our climate resiliency, and proactively invest in programs/resources to expand natural disaster responsiveness; we strongly urge the state to pay careful consideration to, and make strategic investments for, our most vulnerable populations: seniors and people with disabilities.

The recurrence of wildfires has exposed the limitations of our state’s disaster responsiveness for older adults and people with disabilities, especially for consumers of Home and Community-Based Services (HCBS); often leaving caregivers in fraught situations with limited access to their client and or an inability to provide care altogether. Seniors and people with disabilities have an unassailable right to be rescued in addition to assurances establishing their continuity of care - especially in a natural disaster. **We respectfully urge the State Legislature and Administration to continue investing in service enhancements for Seniors and People with Disabilities in alignment with the State’s emergency preparedness strategy.**

Affordable Housing Expansion: According to the Master Plan for Aging (MPA), in 2021 nearly 30% of older Californians (aged 60 and over) are considered poor or near poor. These economic disparities, specifically housing access and retention, disproportionately impact BIPOC older adults: a byproduct of the structural inequities compounded through generations of wealth inequality. As California's aging population is expected to eclipse 25% of the total statewide population by 2030, we must take decisive action - such as the policies outlined in the MPA - to address these inequities, especially housing, through the lens of intersectional justice. Therefore, we suggest additional state investments and or resource allocation to the programs listed:

- Emergency Rental and Utility Assistance Program (ERAP)

Support ADA Compliance for Small Businesses:

Small Businesses are integral to the health of our local and state economies; however, many have been hurt by the pandemic, and as they reopen, are sometimes subject to lawsuits and or fines claiming that they are not ADA compliant. In many of these cases, the owners of the property refuse to pay for the fixes, shifting the costs to the small business owner. As California prepares to receive a near \$36 billion dollar investment over the next five years from the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act, **CARA asks for a small allocation of these dollars to be made available for small business owners to make their establishments ADA compliant.**

Support for the Administration's proposed Medi-Cal Eligibility expansion:

We unequivocally and without hesitation, support the Administration's budget proposal to expand Medi-Cal eligibility to all income-eligible adults - including the budgetary appropriations for FY 22-23 - beginning January 2024. Medi-Cal has evolved to serve Californian's most vulnerable populations as a quintessential health care resource; it also serves as a symbol of pragmatic, yet transformative, health care innovation. While we applaud the Administration's bold proposal, we hope additional measures are considered to further eliminate barriers to affordable, accessible, health care; including a comprehensive review and analysis of the LTSS programs as expressed in our aforementioned LTSS budget request.

Restoration of the In-Home Supportive Services (IHSS) Public Authority Consumer Advisory Committee/Governing Board Funding:

CARA is proud to join our partners at the CFILC, CICA, and countless IHSS Consumer advocates, **to request the restoration of funding for the IHSS Public Authority Consumer Advisory Committees and Governing Boards.** IHSS affords over 600,000 Californians the ability to receive quality home-based services, affirming their right - and the rights of all Californians - to live with grace, dignity and independence. However, upholding consumer choice is essential to preserve and respect the independence of all consumers. The 2011 cuts to the IHSS Public Authority Consumer Advisory Committees and Governing Boards, reducing annual funding from \$53,000 to \$6,000 for each Advisory Committee, greatly impacted IHSS Consumers' role in the stakeholder oversight and influence within the regional IHSS Public

Authorities. As California prepares for a sweeping demographic shift among older adults over the next decade, in conjunction with the existing IHSS provider workforce shortages, we must collectively identify proactive solutions to combat the forthcoming crises; such as the full restoration of funding to the IHSS Public Authority Advisory Committees and Governing Boards.

There is ample scientific evidence that short-funding the above programs often results in declining health for seniors and, therefore, substantial increased state cost for hospitalizations, skilled nursing facility stays, prescription drugs, and other costs that would not have been necessary had these programs been funded adequately.

Thank you for considering our recommendations for further investment as you all engage and prepare for the May Revision. We stand ready to partner with you to realize our shared vision for a future California where no one is afraid to grow old, and aging is supported and valued—where people of all races and economic means know they can age in dignity and independence.

Sincerely,

Pauline Brooks,
President

Hene Kelly,
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