



SANTA BARBARA COUNTY
**ADULT &
AGING
NETWORK**

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

AGING WELL IN SANTA BARBARA COUNTY

Moving Forward with the California Master Plan for Aging





This is not a plan simply for today's older adults. Instead, it is a blueprint for aging across the lifespan. The Master Plan for Aging calls on all California communities to build a California for All Ages & Abilities: for older Californians currently living through the many different stages of the second half of life; for younger generations who can expect to live longer lives than their elders; for communities of all ages – family, friends, neighbors, coworkers, and caregivers – surrounding older adults and people with disabilities. As Californians, we can create communities where people of all ages and abilities are engaged, valued, and afforded equitable opportunities to thrive as we age, how and where we choose.

— CA Master Plan for Aging

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The California Master Plan for Aging (MPA), launched in 2021, presents a unique once-in-a-generation opportunity to address long-standing systemic challenges that have hindered service providers, funders, and policymakers for decades.

Relying on a fragmented system of care driven by short-term funding cycles is no longer enough to meet the complex needs of California's rapidly growing, aging, and increasingly diverse population. By 2030, one in four Californians will be aged 60 or older, and Santa Barbara County is no exception. Projections indicate the county's elderly population will increase by more than 32% by 2060. Additionally, the older adult population will become more diverse, with a growing number identifying as living with a disability.

Now is the time to embrace a long-term, sustainable strategy that addresses the interconnected and often complex issues faced by older adults, families, and communities.

By this report, the Santa Barbara County Adult & Aging Network (AAN) calls on community leaders, city and county planners, as well as human service and health care providers to adopt a fundamentally different and more comprehensive approach through the California Master Plan for Aging.

The California Master Plan for Aging Opportunity

The Master Plan for Aging offers a paradigm shift from fragmented programs to a holistic approach that recognizes aging as a multi-faceted journey experienced by everyone. This new mindset places the needs of older adults and people with disabilities into every aspect of planning and policy-making, ultimately enhancing the quality of life for residents of all ages. It requires change from the past legacy of short term programs and opportunities to a more comprehensive and sustainable system of integrated services and supports.

The outcomes will benefit not only the growing aging population but also relieve the burden on younger family members and communities who are currently stretched thin, trying to fill the systemic gaps in care. Harnessing the MPA vision will support an age-and disability-friendly future for everyone in Santa Barbara County.

1. State of California Department of Finance Table: P-2B County Population by Age, (Accessed July 2024).

Santa Barbara County is well positioned to seize this opportunity and leverage state resources dedicated to achieving these ambitious, yet necessary, goals. The county

has a strong network of health and social service providers, and there is a growing recognition among government and public leaders of the need to adopt an age- and disability-friendly approach. Moreover, there is tremendous potential in the thousands of members within the county's aging and disability communities. Their voices and experiences will be invaluable in guiding and supporting this transformative process.

Local Implementation

In October 2021, AAN invited service providers, stakeholders and local leaders to come together in a countywide forum to launch local MPA planning and prioritization. Through extensive community discussions and input, two of the MPA's [Five Bold Goals](#) were selected as first priorities for local MPA implementation: *Housing for All Stages & Ages*, and *Caregiving That Works*. Additionally, *Health Reimagined*, another MPA goal, was explored during the forum and has since emerged as a third priority for local implementation.

Following the forum, an AAN MPA Ad Hoc Committee, in collaboration with [Caring Together Santa Barbara County \(CTSBC\)](#), a regional collaborative network of health and human service providers - conducted research and developed preliminary recommendations on these goals. The Committee and CTSBC gathered and reviewed data to gain a deeper understanding of the current aging experience in Santa Barbara County.

Data collection involved surveys of local caregivers, a community caregiving solutions pilot, and research using data from the 2020 United States census, the California Department of Finance, the California Master Plan for Aging, the Centers for Disease Control

& Prevention, the Santa Barbara County Association of Governments, and many other sources. Additionally, interviews and listening sessions were conducted with Committee members and select service providers from AAN in late 2022 and throughout 2023.

A Snapshot of Aging in Santa Barbara County

The data collection and review process offered a revealing snapshot of the current challenges facing older adults in Santa Barbara County. These challenges revolve around the affordability of aging, access to appropriate housing, and the availability of care that meets



the diverse needs at different stages of aging. Older adults and people with disabilities are increasingly living without basic necessities required for healthy aging due to a lack of affordable in-home care and a shortage of home care providers, long waiting lists for affordable housing and senior housing facilities, and increased rental evictions, often leading to homelessness. Behavioral health challenges and a lack of services for older and disabled adults with complex needs were repeatedly raised as concerns that require immediate attention.

Behind this list of issues are stories of countless individuals, families, and caregivers whose lives, safety, and well-being are at stake. Recent hard-hitting challenges — the pandemic and natural disasters, the economy and inflation, the housing crisis, an historic caregiver shortage, as well as the rise in cognitive disability and behavioral health issues — have created a vortex of vulnerability and distress for older adults and people with disabilities.

Fortunately, the MPA provides a framework and state support to help meet the challenge. State resources have begun flowing

into Santa Barbara County through several MPA-related grants to strengthen home and community-based aging related supports. These include:

- A grant from the California Mental Health Services Oversight and Accountability Commission to address unmet behavioral and mental health needs of seniors.
- Funding from the Modernization of the Older Americans Act to support home and community-based counseling and case management for seniors.
- Grants from the California Department of Aging to address isolation through digital connections and to improve infrastructure and financial support for the Senior Nutrition Program.

Moreover through CenCal Health, Santa Barbara County's Medi-Cal provider, the county is participating in [California Advancing and Innovating Medi-Cal \(CalAIM\)](#). This five-year systems change project aims to improve care and outcomes for Medi-Cal enrollees, particularly those with complex needs. CalAIM seeks to reduce hospital or short-term nursing home stays through integrated models of "whole person" care and coordinated health and social services.

The MPA vision to achieve a statewide network of [Aging and Disability Resource Centers](#) (ADRCs) is also taking root in Santa Barbara County. A new ADRC, led by the [Independent Living Resource Center \(ILRC\)](#) in partnership with the [Central Coast Commission for Senior Citizens](#) (the local Area Agency on Aging), is providing equitable access to long-term services and supports for older adults, people with disabilities, caregivers, veterans, and families, regardless of age or disability.



Preparing to leverage and coordinate future resources and initiatives will be important for the success of local MPA planning. This effort will require strong leadership across multiple sectors and active engagement with residents from diverse communities throughout the county. Support for this work comes from a [Local Aging & Disability Action Planning Grant](#) provided to ILRC and AAN by the California Department of Aging to facilitate the development of a comprehensive local MPA by June 2025. Another grant, awarded to CTSBC by the [California Accountable Communities for Health Initiative \(CACHI\)](#) and funded by the California Department of Public Health, will support engagement and progress toward one of the MPA goals, *Caregiving That Works*. With this support, Santa Barbara County has the potential to build a successful model of age- and disability-friendly living.

Aging is changing and it's changing California. California's over-60 population is projected to diversify and grow faster than any other age group. By 2030, 10.8 million Californians will be an older adult, making up one-quarter of the state's population.

—CA Master Plan for Aging



NEXT STEP RECOMMENDATIONS

Data Gathering & Community Listening

While the data review in the first phase of MPA planning provides a snapshot of the status of older adults and people with disabilities, it also points to knowledge gaps. Additional quantitative and qualitative research and analysis is needed to better understand and interpret the complex array of challenges relayed in interviews and discussions with service providers across the spectrum of adult, aging, and disability services and programs. Most importantly, older adults and people living with disabilities need to be given opportunities to speak about their direct experiences and needs in a changed, post-pandemic environment. Special attention should be given to engaging communities of color, minority groups, and those who have historically been underrepresented and marginalized.

Housing For All Stages & Ages

Older adults have complex and changing needs throughout the stages of aging related to income, mobility, increased disability, transportation, caregiving needs, and healthcare access. To address these evolving needs, the age-related system of care requires a continuum of integrated

housing and care options that align with each stage of aging, including affordable in-home and community supports that prevent premature institutionalization or homelessness.

Santa Barbara County already has exemplary models of affordable integrated housing programs such as Garden Court, the Golden Inn and Village, and the new Harry's House that can help inform a plan for expanded housing options throughout the county.

A local MPA must include strategies for expanding some of the region's successful housing resources to meet the growing need for affordable housing with age-related supports and to meet the rising need for cognitive and memory care.

The next phase of MPA planning should include engagement with city and county housing planners, developers, realtors, disability advocates, and health care providers to ensure integrated planning and policies that align with these goals.



"Housing that works is housing that takes into account the needs of aging."

— Margot Kushel, MD,
Director, Benioff Homelessness
& Housing Initiative

Caregiving That Works

Santa Barbara County faces a caregiver shortage, resulting in limited access to essential caregiving support across all income levels. This shortage is driven by several factors, including an undervalued and underpaid caregiving workforce, which earns less than half of California’s median annual income, and a service delivery gap for middle-income seniors who struggle to afford the high costs of care. Even seniors who are well resourced and prepared for aging’s challenges face obstacles to receiving care, including shortages in available private caregivers and a lack of access to assisted living and memory care when needed.

The lack of affordable housing also impacts the shortage in the caregiving workforce. Many caregivers and family members cannot

afford to live within a reasonable commuting distance from those who need their care.

Addressing this caregiving shortage requires a comprehensive, multi-pronged approach. **An effective local MPA will integrate housing and caregiving strategies and prioritize the development of career pathways for caregivers while providing robust support for family caregivers.** Specific strategies must address ways to increase support for unpaid family caregivers, ensure livable wages and career path opportunities for the caregiving workforce, connect families and caregivers to respite and other resources in the community, and address inequities in access to care across income levels.

40% of the requests for private pay caregivers are not fulfilled due to staffing shortages, scheduling, and lack of affordability for private pay care.

— *Caring Together Santa Barbara County 2022 Survey*



Health Reimagined

The vast majority of adults wish to “age in place” — in the comfort of their own homes while remaining connected to their communities.² Yet many older adults and people with disabilities experience premature entry into long-term care facilities due to increasing disabilities, a lack of affordable in-home care, and insufficient accessible home modifications that would allow them to safely live at home.

Health Reimagined aims to ensure that older adults have affordable access to the services they need that allow them to live in a home setting of their choice throughout the different stages of aging. The MPA redefines traditional supports for older adult health and wellness

which were traditionally focused on healthcare and managed care systems, by advocating for integrated home and community-based services (HCBS).

The snapshot of aging presented in this report underscores the urgent need for a robust HCBS system across Santa Barbara County. **The next step in MPA planning should include a thorough mapping of existing HCBS, alongside an identification of gaps in service delivery.** Model HCBS programs and funding structures from other counties and jurisdictions should be reviewed and considered for implementation with the aim of designing a comprehensive system of health and social services that fully meet the needs of Santa Barbara County residents and their caregivers.



CommUnify recipient Mary Morales (right)

Community Supports That Work

Cost Savings Through Home Assistance

CommUnify’s Senior Safe at Home program helps to prevent low-income seniors from hospitalization or ending up in a long-term care facility that, according to Medicaid health providers, can cost taxpayers up to \$7,000 per month. Providing preventative safety measures can realize significant cost savings to our public health system. Senior Safe provides energy assistance and home modification that helps older adults and people with disabilities age safely at home by providing minor home repairs as well as installing slip-and-fall prevention devices, energy-efficient appliances and new windows, at no cost to income eligible clients. Services are offered to homeowners and renters alike. Most clients live on an average fixed income of \$1,285 per month, and many live in mobile homes. Close to 70% of Senior Safe clients are female and live alone, 48% are 75 years of age or older, and 51% are disabled.

2. Binette, Joanne, and Fanni Farago. “2021 Home and Community Preference Survey: A National Survey of Adults Age 18-Plus,” Washington, DC: AARP Research, (November 2021).

CONSIDERATIONS

The MPA challenges communities to embrace the goal of successful aging for all. It establishes a framework for civic leaders, government officials, agency directors, philanthropists, policymakers, and communities to collaborate in helping residents thrive at every stage of life. The next phase of the MPA in Santa Barbara County involves working together to define the vision, strategies, and sustainability of a comprehensive local MPA, with a clear timeline for implementation. AAN invites countywide participation and support to seize this unique opportunity and explore these core questions:

- How can Santa Barbara County best prepare to meet the needs of its rapidly aging population?
- What services and systems are currently in place, and what additional resources will be needed by 2030?
- Are there best practices and successful programs we can adopt, and who will be responsible for their implementation and management?
- What county investments can ensure adequate access to housing and caregiving for older and disabled adults in the short term?
- What kind of leadership and infrastructure are necessary to build a fully integrated, well-functioning system of care across all sectors?
- What resources are needed, and how can we leverage state and federal opportunities to meet these needs?
- How can the county mitigate ageism and celebrate the strengths, contributions, and vibrancy that older adults and people with disabilities bring to the community?

In essence, what would a successful local MPA and its implementation look like in Santa Barbara County?

Answering these questions will require bold commitments of time and focus. It will also necessitate new approaches to collaboration, fostering multi-disciplinary partnerships across government departments and community sectors.

AAN looks forward to partnering with a wide range of stakeholders, leaders, and community members to create an age-friendly county that secures a dignified, supported, and thriving personal and community life for all residents.



“It’s time to forge bold solutions to the challenges facing older adults and to be well prepared for the complex needs of an aging population. The results will benefit us all. I know we can do this!”

**— Joan Hartmann, 3rd District Supervisor,
Santa Barbara County**



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For more information and to participate in California Master Plan for Aging planning and activities in Santa Barbara County, please contact:

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