Solving the Economic Security Gap for California's Older Adults

May 2020

based on the

Elder Economic Forum: Political, Economic, and Demographic Impacts on Retirement

November 19, 2019

CCoA

California Commission on Aging

Healthy and Purposeful Longevity
For All Californians

CALIFORNIA WOMEN'S LAW CENTER

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Acknowledgments

Author

Lei Chen (MA, MSP), Doctoral Student of Social Welfare, UCLA Center for Health Policy Research, University of California, Los Angeles

Collaborators on the *Economic Security for Older Adults in California* Policy Brief

Steve Wallace, Center for Health Policy Research, University of California, Los Angeles

Speakers at the *Elder Economic Forum*

Michael Adams, SAGE
Betsy Butler, California Women's Law Center
Sarah Dusseault, Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority
Adriene Hill, KPCC
Lorri L. Jean, Los Angeles LGBT Center
Jaime Levine, Elder Law and Advocacy Kevin Prindiville, Justice in Aging
Nari Rhee, University of California, Berkeley, Center for Labor Research and Education
Michael Soloff, Santa Monica Housing Commission
Kim McCoy Wade, California Department of Aging
Steve Wallace, Center for Health Policy Research, University of California, Los Angeles

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Executive Summary

Over the next 15 years, the number of Californians aged 65 and older will grow by almost four million.[1] Nearly half of California's older adults who live alone are financially insecure and many are one unexpected expense away from poverty and homelessness.

This white paper describes the current economic situation of older adults in California. It provides a summary of information presented at a statewide forum organized by the California Commission on Aging (CCoA) that was convened on November 19, 2019 in Los Angeles entitled, *Elder Economic Forum: Political, Economic, and Demographic Impacts on Retirement*. The paper includes trends in population growth, diversity and inequity in economic status, vulnerability in using technology, lack of retirement resources, and the lack of affordable housing that is experienced by many older adults.

The forum highlighted two innovative senior housing programs in California: Santa Monica's "Preserving Our Diversity" (POD) program and the Los Angeles LGBT Center's Affordable Senior Housing program, which serves individuals who are lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT). These examples may inspire local leaders to think creatively about addressing elder economic insecurity in other areas of California.

The final section of the paper reflects policy changes and recommendations that were contributed by researchers, community and organization leaders, and policymakers who participated in the CCoA forum. Recommendations address the areas of policy and regulation, research, senior housing, technology security, and future events to address public concerns for older Californians who face poverty.

"The Master Plan is not only for older adults but also for people of all ages. People need to think about economic inequality at any age."

— Director Kim McCoy Wade, California Department of Aging

Elder Economic Insecurity in California

1. The state is becoming older

In California, the number of older adults who are 65 years or older will double from 2010 (4.3 million) to 2030 (9 million) and will triple by 2060 (13.5 million). The percent of older adults in the total population will increase from 11.5% in 2010 to 26.4% in 2060 [Figure 1].[1] Public policy experts note that the greatest need for services and supports are for those age 85 and over. The Public Policy Institute of California (PPIC) describes the aging of the elderly population in the state and the need to address public policy in that context. While in 2030, most of California's older adult population will be between age 65 and 75, beginning in 2020 the fastest growth will occur among seniors age 75 and older. By 2030, the over-85 population will see the most rapid growth, with an increase of approximately 61% from 2012.[2]

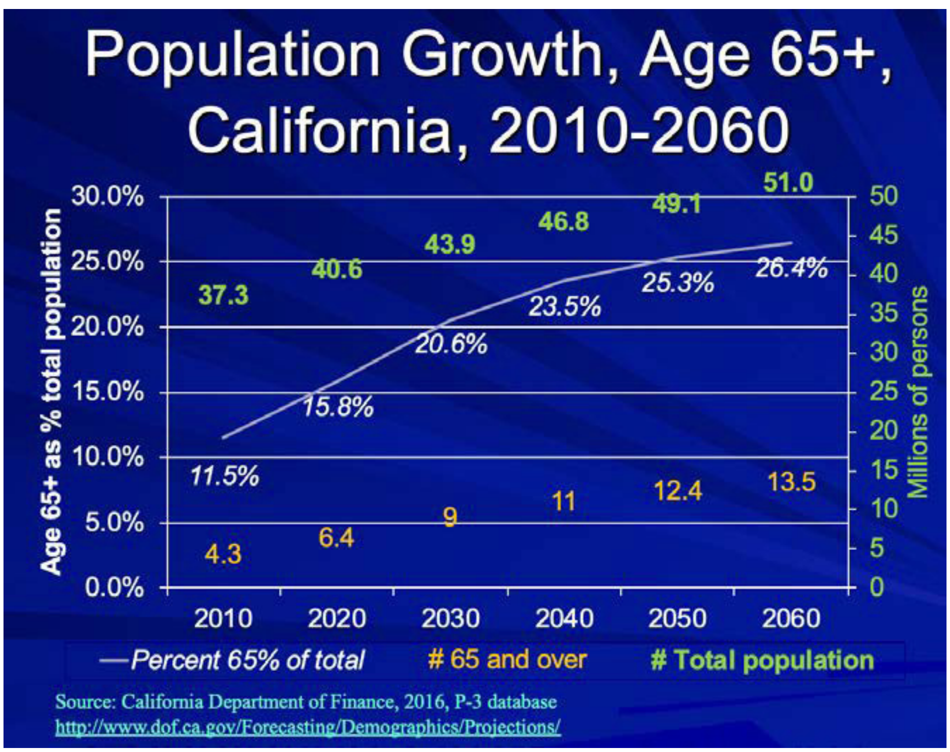

Figure 1

Race & ethnicity

Older adults of color are more likely to experience poverty.[3] By the late 1990's, people of racial and ethnic minority groups became the majority of California's overall population. Despite this, California's older adult population remained largely white. That situation is about to dramatically change.[2] California's older adults are becoming more ethnically diverse, with the largest growth expected from 2010 to 2060 in the Latino (around million), Asian (around 1.82 million) and African American populations (around 0.48 million) [Figure 2].[4]

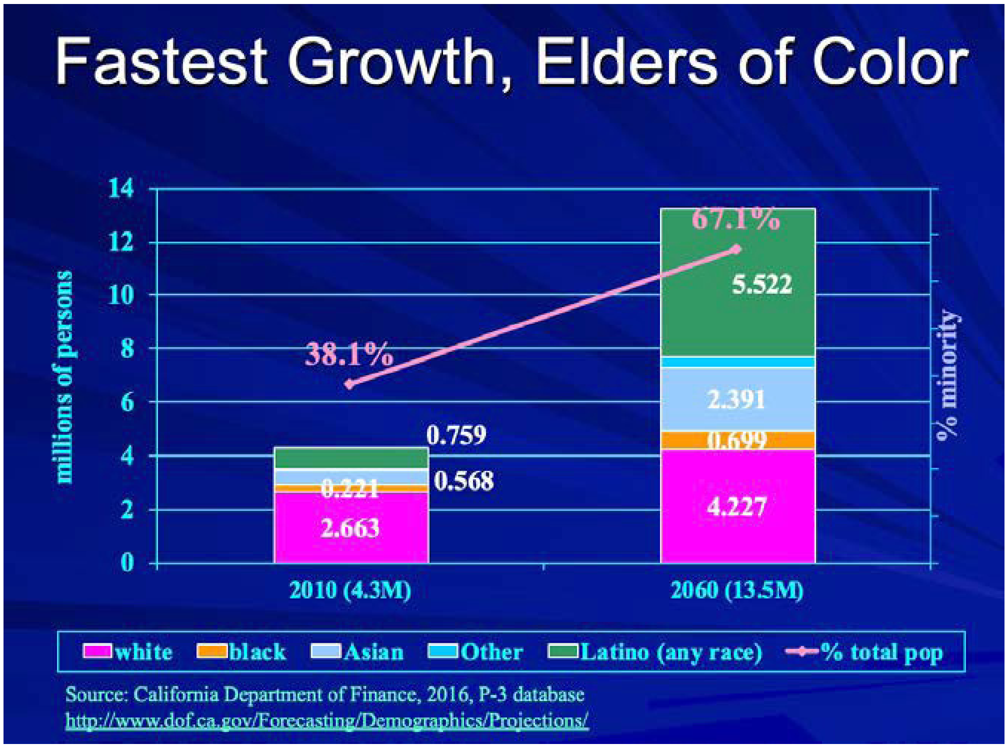

Figure 2

2. Older adults often face economic insecurity

In 2018, 10.2% of older Californians had incomes that fell under the federal poverty line (FPL), which was lower than that of nonelderly adults (11.0%) and children (17.6%). However, there are also large numbers of older adults with incomes hovering just above the federal poverty guideline. Additionally, older adults of color are more likely than non-Latino whites to both live below the poverty line or to be above the poverty line but still under 200% FPL. African American older adults are the most likely (22.9%) to have incomes under the federal poverty threshold, while Latino older adults are the most likely (30.3%) to have incomes between 100-199% of the federal poverty threshold [Figure 3].[5]

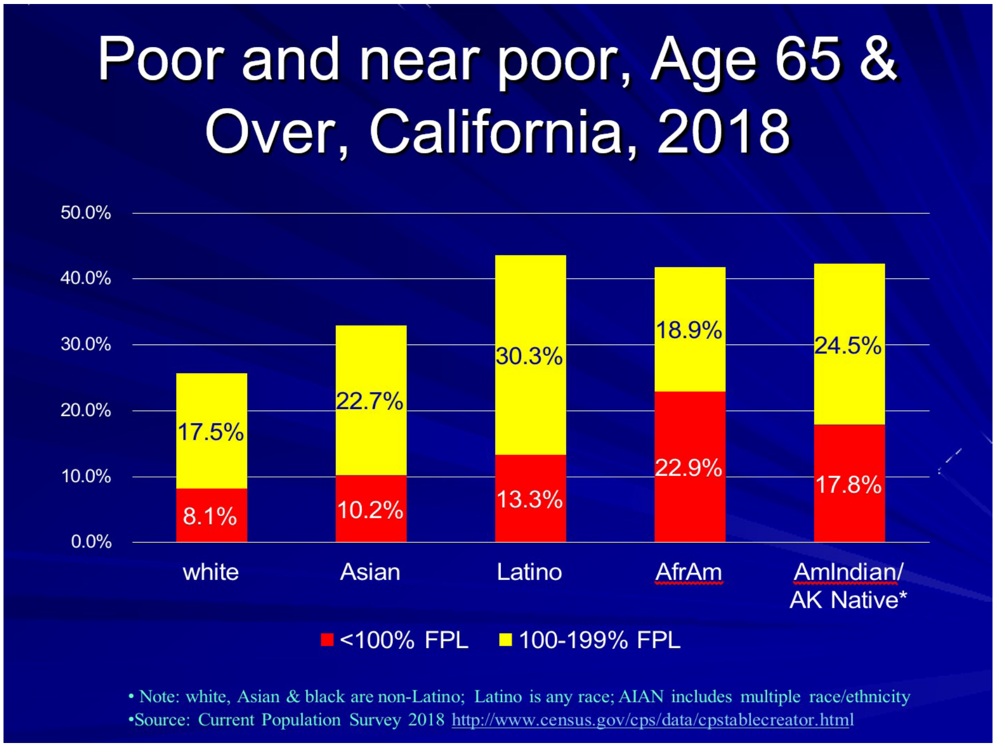

Figure 3

The federal poverty threshold, also referred to as federal poverty level, is typically used to measure poverty in the United States. However, the current FPL is outdated and has been widely considered to be inaccurate and inadequate to reflect the full picture of poverty.[6] The FPL is based on assumptions from over 60 years ago. Since that time, there have been marked changes in the nation's economy and individual incomes, including a rising standard of living, rapid increases in out-of-pocket health care costs, and increased and varying costs for housing. The application of the FPL index is the same for every region of the country, despite the dramatic variation in housing costs across the nation and even within local communities.

California has applied an alternative measure, the *Elder Economic Security Standard Index (Elder Index)*, which accounts for the contemporary and local situation of older adults. It was developed to provide an evidence-based indicator of the actual basic costs faced by older adults (ages 65 and over) including housing, food, transportation, health care, and other costs.[7] It is a more accurate measure of poverty, using widely accepted and credible national and state data sources such as the U.S. Census and the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. The Elder Index permits policymakers and planners to understand how much income is needed to meet basic needs and to adjust policy guidelines based on locality-specific measures of the actual cost of living. The Elder Index has been adapted by UCLA to address California's unique and changing demographics and enable public policy to reflect real need.[8]

While the data on the "near-poor" over age 65 is roughly similar to the Elder Index findings, a deeper dive reveals the variations depend on location and specific housing situations. A comparison between Los Angeles City and Humboldt County provides one example. Older adults who owned their own homes and had no mortgage who lived in Humboldt County needed more for basic standard of living than similar older adults in Los Angeles City due to higher out-of-pocket health care costs in Humboldt County in 2017. For renters, the significantly higher rental costs in the City of Los Angeles compared to Humboldt County more than compensated for lower out-of-pocket health care costs, resulting in a higher Elder Index for older renters in Los Angeles City [Table 1].[9]

Elder Standard Index 2017
LA City & Humboldt County (FPL=$12,060)

	Los Angeles City		Humboldt County	
Monthly Expenses	Owner w/o Mortgage	Renter, One Bedroom	Owner w/o Mortgage	Renter, One Bedroom
Housing	$600	$1,177	$377	$769
Food	266	266	259	259
Transportation	222	222	222	222
Health Care=Good	168	168	446	446
Miscellaneous	250	250	259	259
Elder Index /Month	$1,506	$2,083	$1,563	$1,955
Elder Index Per Year	$18,072	$24,996	$18,756	$23,460

Table 1

In addition to income, financial assets are an important determinant of economic security, especially as a person ages. According to four different nonpartisan reports[a] describing baby boomers' retirement security, wealth disparities continue as people age and the financial asset ownership gap among boomers is growing. Financial assets include equity in a home, savings accounts, retirement savings like 401k retirement accounts, stocks, bonds, and other investments. While the share of financial assets owned by the top 25% of boomer households grew from 86% in 2004 to 91% in 2016, the share owned by the bottom 50% shrank from 3% to under 2%. Also, affordability of rental housing is a significant concern among boomers.

[a] The reports come from the U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO), the National Institute on Retirement Security, the St. Louis's Fed's Center for Household Financial Stability, and the Harvard Joint Center for Housing Studies.

According to the Harvard report, in 2016 the median homeowner age 65 and over had home equity of $143,500 and total net wealth of $319,200. The total net wealth of renters at that age was just $6,700. And among those age 50 to 64, homeowners had a total net wealth of $292,000 versus $5,000 for renters.[10]

As the number of people over age 65 increases in California, the State will see growing numbers of older adults with inadequate incomes and barriers to employment that can result in daily living challenges and insecurity about how they will pay for basic needs. Adding to their challenges is the insidiousness of ageism. Age discrimination is well documented in the United States and despite laws against age discrimination in employment, older adults experience increased difficulty in obtaining job offers, compounding the precariousness of their economic situation.[11] Women, people of color, immigrants, people who speak English as a second language, and LGBT persons are disproportionately vulnerable to the complexities of economic insecurity, especially when they become older. As the State becomes more diverse in race, ethnicity, gender, legal status, and other dimensions, the impact of inequities becomes a high priority and urgent state policy matter.

Gender

Gender inequity in economic status grows as people age. Women especially can face multiple changes in financial status as they get older and as life circumstances change. First, due to wage disparities, women accumulate fewer retirement benefits during their working years. Women traditionally have lower incomes than men, due in part to the types of jobs they are able to access. Wage inequities result in women earning less than men who are doing similar work during their lifetimes.[12] Lower earnings mean less opportunity to accrue personal savings, lower contributions to employer-sponsored retirement plans and lower Social Security benefit levels.[13] Although there is parity in workplace retirement plan access for women, their lower average salaries lead to lower retirement benefits. The disparity is compounded when women's careers, more than men's careers, are interrupted and shortened by unpaid caregiving for children or other family members. Since Social Security payments are based only on earned income, time away from the workplace results in lower Social Security retirement payments.[12]

Secondly, older women face unique economic barriers. The average older woman draws half as much as an older man in retirement ($15,500 to $31,000, respectively),[14] and older women have lower labor force participation rates (15.7 %) than men (23.9 %). Further, older adults with earned income after retirement generally have higher total incomes than those without.[15] Since women have a longer life expectancy than men, they are disproportionately widowed or live alone in later years. The loss of a spouse's full retirement benefits can change the financial situation from having enough to make ends meet to one of economic insecurity. Longer lives also expose women to longer periods of rising out-of-pocket health care costs. Almost 60% of Americans aged 60 and over are concerned that health care costs are outpacing their retirement savings, and 43% are concerned that prescription drug costs are also rising faster than their incomes.[16] Women are at higher risk of having cognitive impairment creating costly needs for long-term services and supports (LTSS) and at a time when women are more likely to be living alone.[17] All of these factors make women more likely to face financial hardships as they age.

Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender (LGBT)

While specific information on the number of older LGBT Californians is not readily available, based on national estimates, the California Department of Aging (CDA) projects there are approximately 276,000 to 552,000 older Californians self-identifying as LGBT. The CDA predicts that by 2030 this number will nearly double.[12] Thanks to California's Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Disparities Reduction Act (Assembly Bill 959 (Chiu), CH 565, 2015 Statutes), which requires the CDA (and other departments) to collect sexual orientation and gender data, more will be learned about the expressed needs of LGBT older adults and how best to support LGBT- inclusive aging services across the state.

LGBT older adults face unique challenges to successful aging in the United States. Some experience the cumulative effects of a lifetime of discrimination and consequently, are at greater risk for social isolation. According to several population-based studies, LGBT older adults tend to have more limited family ties, are less likely to be married, less likely to have a child, and more likely to live alone.[18–19] Among older same-sex couples, 48% face discrimination when applying for senior rental housing. The observed discrimination ranges from differences in availability, pricing, fees and costs, incentives to rent, amenities available, and application requirements.[20] A growing body of research has documented mental and physical health disparities among LGBT older adults compared with older adults in the general population.[18–19, 21, 22] On average, transgender older adults report 11 incidents of lifetime discrimination and victimization and LGB older adults report six incidents.[18] LGBT older adults and their sub-groups are also more likely to encounter financial hardships while aging (as shown in Table 2).

For LGBT older adults of color, layers of discrimination result in reduced lifelong earnings, retirement savings, and Social Security payment levels. African American and Hispanic adults in same-sex couples reported higher rates of poverty than their non-Hispanic White counterparts.[23] Discrimination and stigma, including stigma associated with racial or ethnic status for LGBT elders of color, often exacerbate cultural and social isolation and lack of social support.[24] Some studies suggest that heightened levels of heterosexism and homophobia in communities of color as well as racism in LGBT communities[25] may contribute to the lack of social support available to LGBT older adults of color. Further compounding these challenges, LGBT older adults lack access to culturally competent services and supports. More can be done to ensure that the aging network is using all of the tools at its disposal to meet the needs of LGBT older adults in communities across the state.

Table 2. Financial hardship of sub-groups of LGBT older adults

Sub-groups of LGBT older adults	Financial insecurity
Single gay and bisexual men	- On average, earn 10%-32% less than heterosexual men.
Older lesbian couples	- 10-20% less likely to have retirement income and are much more likely to receive public assistance. - More likely to live in poverty than heterosexual couples and male same-sex couples.[26]
Transgender older adults	- More likely to face unemployment and more likely to have lower household income. - 40% of transgender older adults fear accessing health services outside of the LGBT community.

Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV)

Nearly four decades ago, people who were diagnosed with HIV could expect to live only one to two years after their diagnosis. As a result, people living with HIV during the early years of the disease did not prioritize or prepare for life as an older adult. Doctors, care providers, or government programs serving them also did not plan for the aging of those affected by HIV. Today, older adults (age 50+) living with HIV are a growing population with pronounced needs.

According to the 2017 Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) Surveillance Report, nearly 50% of people living with HIV in the United States are 50 years of age or older. People over 50 also accounted for 17% of new HIV diagnoses. They are more likely than younger Americans to be diagnosed with HIV late in the course of their disease, meaning they are more likely to be dually diagnosed with HIV and Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome (AIDS), have poorer prognoses, and shorter survival rates.[27] The Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) also reports that those living with HIV for many years exhibit many clinical characteristics commonly observed in aging, including multiple chronic diseases or conditions, the use of multiple medications, changes in physical and cognitive abilities, and increased vulnerability to stressors.[28] On top of these already difficult challenges, many with HIV live in cities with skyrocketing housing and living costs. Long-term survivors report feeling culturally and socially isolated, lacking the support networks that become even more critical as people age.

3. Changing technologies make older adults vulnerable to financial scams

According to the data from the Federal Trade Commission, there are 3.4 billion scam emails sent every day. Around 30% of the malicious emails are opened, and 12% of the attachments in those emails are opened. While older and younger adults are both targeted by financial predators, older adults may be less familiar with technology or with trending scams. This lack of expertise places them at greater risk of exploitation, often with much greater financial consequences. Millennials report being involved in more scams, but older adults report greater losses per scam—2019 median losses were around $400 for younger adults versus $1,600 for those age 80 and over.[29] Scams frequently target seniors to exploit and to gain access their money. The most common scams older adults may encounter use the familiar names of government programs such as Social Security, Medi-Cal, Medicare, and the Internal Revenue Service in order to gain entry to a victim's confidence. Scammers claiming to represent a government agency will ask for personal information with the intent of stealing a person's identity or demand money to settle fictitious infractions. In 2019, 20,671 people age 80 and over filed reports about scammers claiming to work for government agencies to trick consumers to send money or reveal information. Of those reports, 2.7% indicated that they lost money. These reports added up to $11,933,058 in total losses, with an individual median loss of $3,000.[30]

In contrast, more than 40% of the fraud against older adults is committed by family members. For example, a child who wants to take an older parent's house may pressure them to sign documents that seem legitimate but are in fact transfers of ownership. Older adults are often reluctant to report fraud because they feel too embarrassed to report and are afraid of appearing incompetent and losing their rights to make decisions for themselves. These patterns are exacerbated by the percent of older adults who actually do have cognitive impairments. Among persons age 65-74, about 3% have a diagnosis of Alzheimer's disease and related dementias (ADRD), increasing to 13% with ADRD at ages 75-84 and then to 34% with ADRD over 85 years old.[31]

4. Older adults face a variety of challenges with retirement resources

Usual retirement resources

The primary income sources for older adults include Social Security, employer-funded pensions that guarantee workers monthly retirement income based on years of service, and private savings.[32] About half of households age 55 and older have no retirement savings (such as in a 401(k) plan or an Individual Retirement Account (IRA)), and Social Security alone provides most of the income for about half of households age 65 and older.[33]

In December 2018, the average Social Security benefit for older adults in California was $16,859 per year (or $1,405 per month)[34] with many Californians having negligible additional retirement savings. Though the senior labor force participation is increasing, employment for older adults is bifurcated between elite professional jobs and low-wage service jobs, with few in between. There is also a downward pressure on the wages of older adults, which means that older adults often face circumstances such as age discrimination or reduced ability to travel for work, which may force older workers to accept lower wages than they had earlier in life. Moreover, job seekers ages 55 and older are more likely than younger job seekers to be long- term unemployed (29.5% versus 19.1%), and find themselves looking for work for 27 weeks or more.[15] These factors increase the risk of reduced economic status for retiring middle-class workers, declining homeownership, and more mortgage-related debt rates among older adults.

Patterns of retirement resources in California

According to research from the UC Berkeley Center for Labor Research and Education (CLRE), 61% of California's private sector employees between the ages of 25 and 64 are without access to employer-sponsored retirement plans, leaving retirement planning to an individual's motivation or ability to save. Availability of employer-sponsored retirement options dropped by 11% between 2007 and 2017 for private sector employees under age 65. This lack of access to private employer-sponsored retirement plans affects all workers and retirees. Among private sector employees ages 25-64, three out of four Latino workers (74%) and three out of five African American workers (62%) do not own a retirement savings account or participate in a pension, compared with two out of five white workers (37%) [Figure 4].[35] The CLRE research found that fewer than half of all private sector employees had retirement savings accounts or pensions. A majority of private sector employees under age 65 fell into this category in 2014, making no contributions toward retirement savings of any type [Figure 5]. Additionally, retirement asset ownership is markedly concentrated among high-earning workers. The vast majority (94%) of the highest-earning 20% of private sector workers age 25-64, and a large majority (70%) of the next highest 20%, owned retirement assets in 2014. In contrast, three- quarters (76%) of the lowest-earning 40%, and half (50%) of the middle 20%, had no accumulated retirement assets, whether through an IRA, 401(k), or pension from a current or previous employer [Figure 6].[35] Poor preparation for retirement is also reflected by a lack of household assets, according to the CLRE, with many falling short in both home equity and assets accrued. Working-age families typically have insufficient incomes to meet their own eventual retirement needs. The research found that in 2014 a conservative retirement savings goal for individuals without a pension was seven times their annual earnings, yet typical savings for families nearing retirement (between ages 55 and 64) equaled 3.6 years' income [Figure 7].[35]

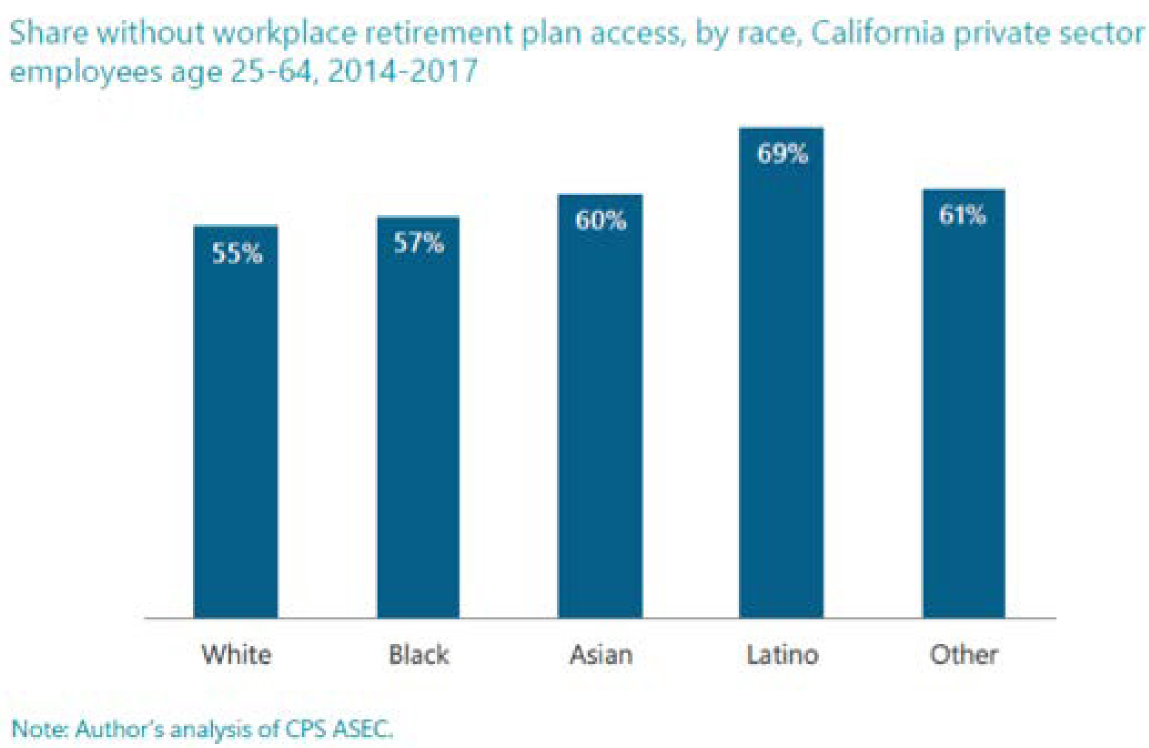

Figure 4

Retirement asset ownership, California private sector workers age 25-64, 2014

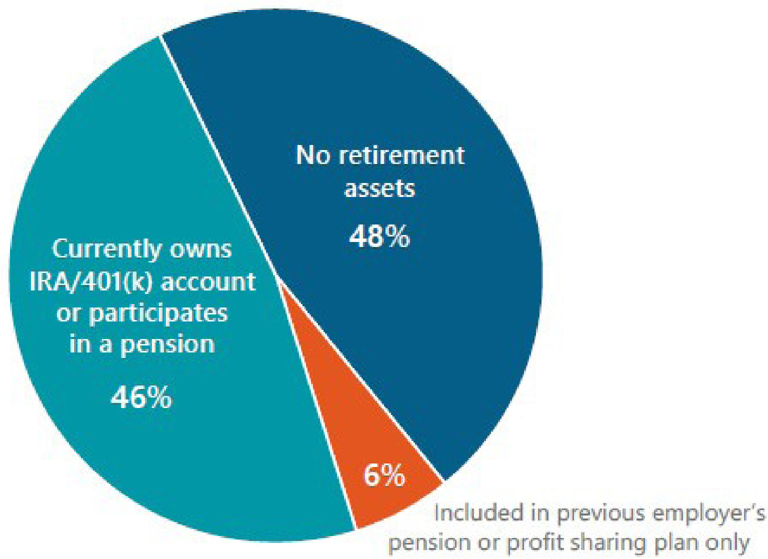

Figure 5

Share of workers with no IRA/401(k) ownership or accrued pension benefits by earnings category, California private sector employees age 25-64, 2014

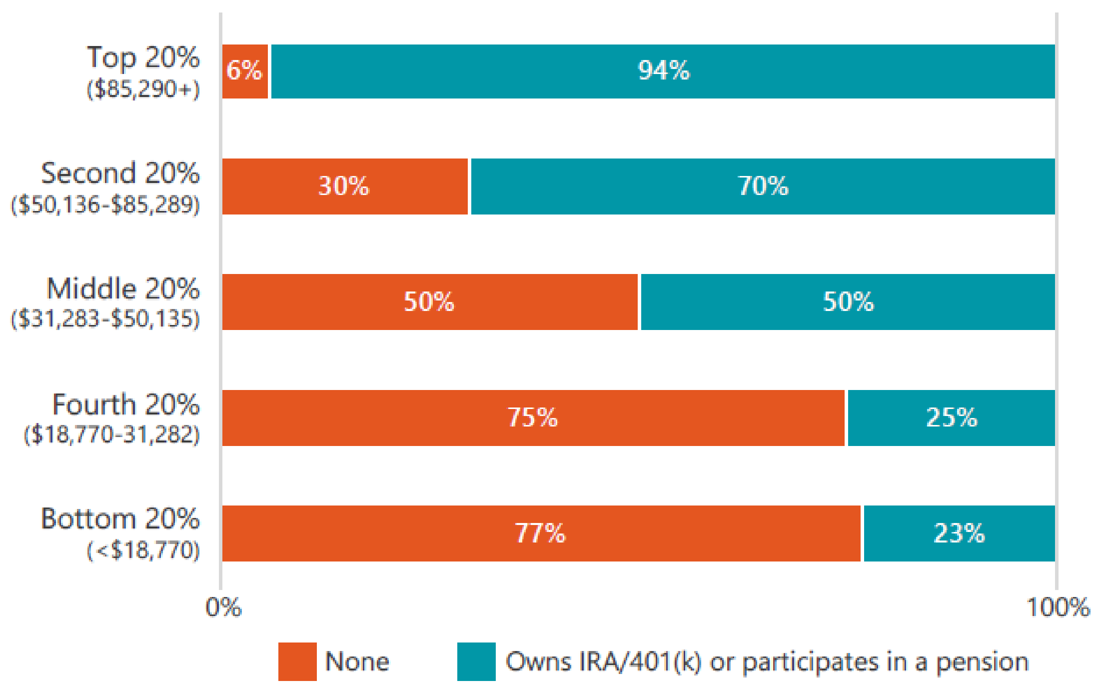

Figure 6

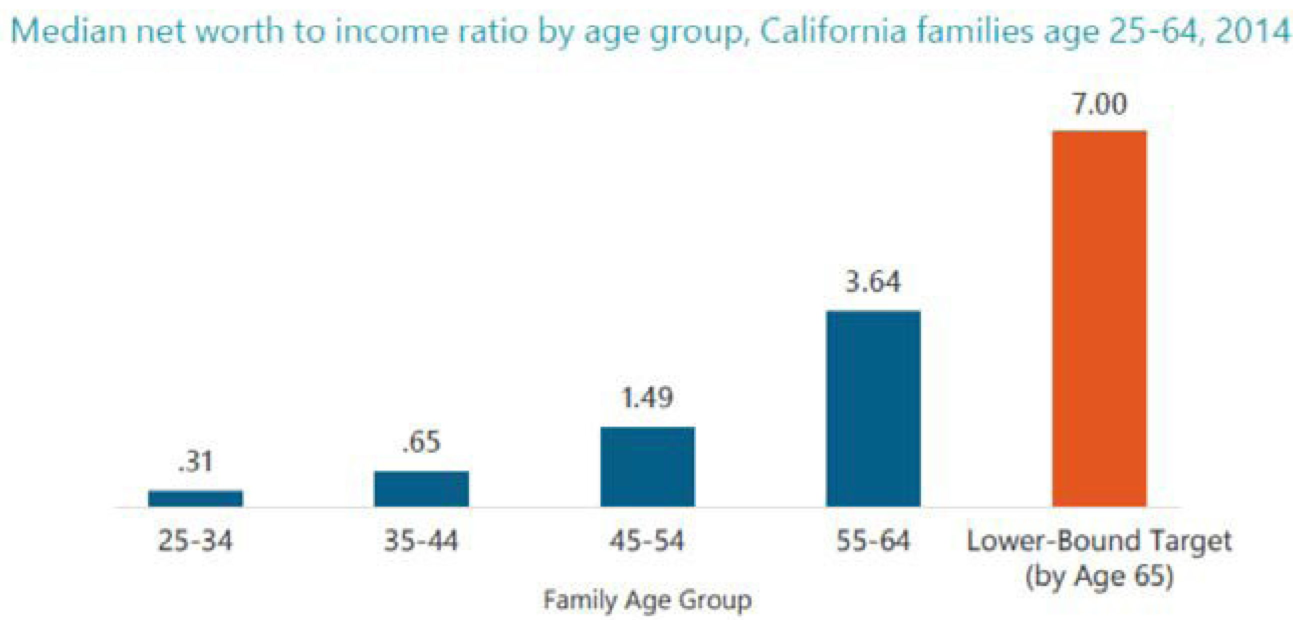

Figure 7

5. Housing problems are serious for older adults

Elder economic insecurity is caused in part by housing problems

Older adults' economic insecurity is, in large part, caused by and contributes to issues related to housing. Housing is the largest expenditure on average for older adults, and it comprises a larger share of personal spending than it does for younger adults. In addition, older adults have higher out-of-pocket health care costs, which is also a higher proportion of their incomes on average than younger adults [Figure 8].[36]

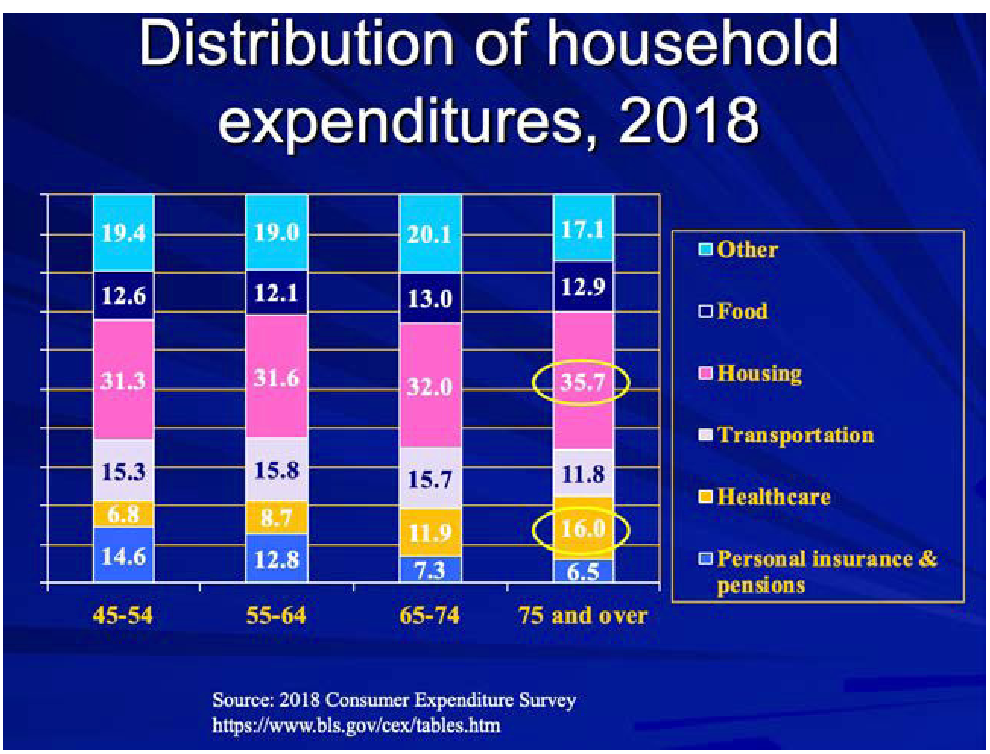

Figure 8

Aging in place

Almost half of all low-income seniors are renters, placing them in the least stable housing situation. [Figure 9].[37] They have little control over the costs of housing compared to homeowners. If rents go up substantially, older adults on fixed incomes are likely forced to move. The consequences of a forced move include weakened social networks, disrupted relationships between older adults and their health care providers, and a possible decline in access to community services, all of which are harmful to older adults' physical and mental health.

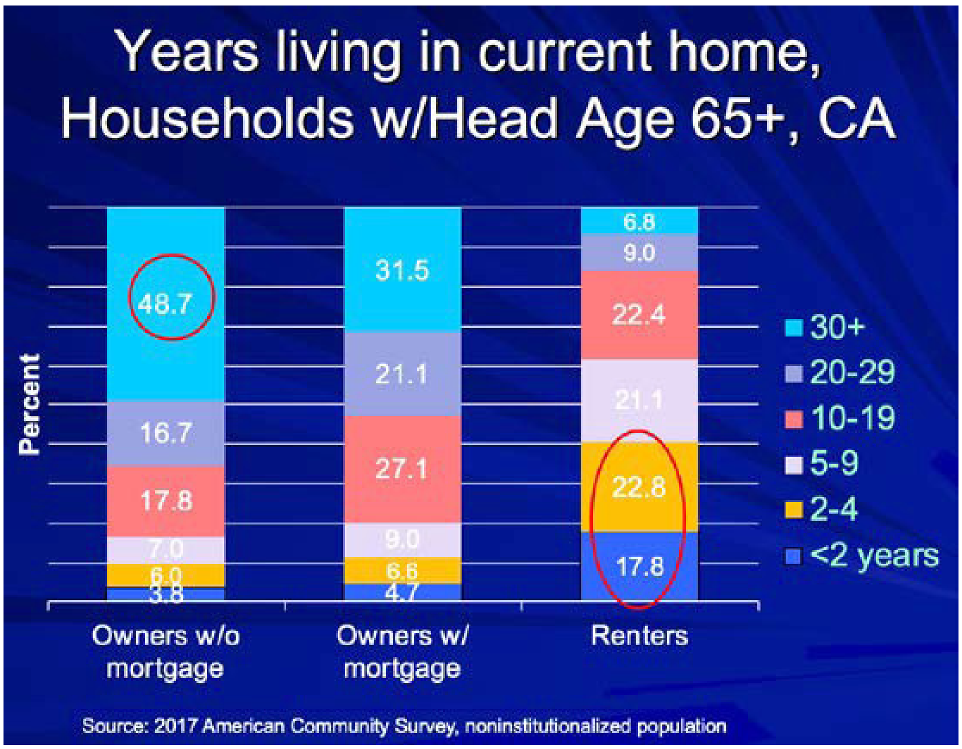

Figure 9

The affordable housing crisis

Los Angeles is the least affordable housing market in the United States according to studies comparing housing costs to incomes.[38] In California, 80% of all lower-income renter households are rent-burdened (spending more than 30% of their income on housing) and about half of all lower-income renter households are *severely* rent-burdened (paying more than half of their total income for rent) [Table 3]. As income declines (from low-income to very low-income to extremely low-income) the rent burden increases dramatically, with over three-quarters of the lowest income renters of all ages being extremely rent-burdened. Higher income households (above moderate-income) rarely experience a severe rent burden (less than 1%). Local efforts are underway to address California's affordable housing shortage, but much work remains.

Percentage of California's Renter Households Experiencing Rent Burden by Income

Income	Total Renter Households (million)	% Rent Burdened	% Severely Rent Burdened
Extremely Low-Income or Below Poverty Line	1.41	90.2%	76.9%
Very Low-Income	.82	85.4%	47.4%
Low-Income	1.13	64.6%	16.9%
All Lower-Income Renter Households (80% AMI and below) Subtotal of above	3.36	80.4%	49.5%
Moderate-Income	.59	41.5%	5.3%
Above Moderate-Income	2.03	12%	0.9%
All Renter Households Total	5.97	53.4%	28.7%

Source: 2017 National Low-Income Housing Coalition tabulations of 2015 American Community Survey Public Use Microdata Sample (PUMS) housing file.

Table 3

The affordable housing crisis is driving a regional increase in homelessness. Rising homelessness is a statewide challenge with a 35% increase in the number of homeless individuals over the past year.[39] According to the Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority, more people than ever are being housed, yet there is a net rise in homelessness among all groups, including older adults. Senior homelessness increased by 8% from 2018 to 2019 [Figure 10]. Key actions in Los Angeles to deal with senior homelessness include:

- Forming a workgroup of government agencies and community partners to strengthen Los Angeles County's response for seniors;
- Outreach at senior centers and senior meal sites;
- Legal assistance and temporary rental subsidies to help seniors stay in their homes; Partnering with Adult Protective Services, a program that investigates reports of abuse involving older (ages 65 or older) and dependent adults (ages 18 to 64) who have physical and mental impairments, except for those instances that occur in hospitals or developmental centers or long-term care facilities; and
- 150 new older adult interim housing beds for the homeless in Los Angeles County.

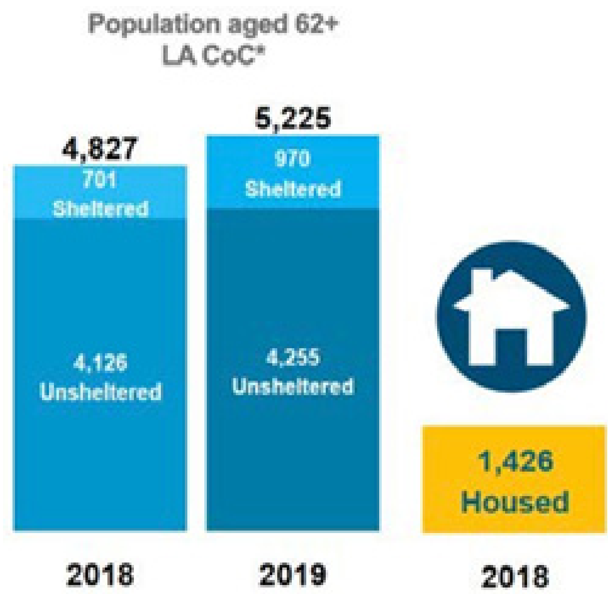

Figure 10

Innovations to Address Housing for Low-Income Older Adults

Two recent programs in California are innovative examples of efforts to address housing problems for older adults. They are Santa Monica's "Preserving Our Diversity" (POD) program and the Los Angeles LGBT Center's Affordable Senior Housing program.

1. Santa Monica's "Preserving Our Diversity" (POD) Program

Santa Monica's program is a rent subsidy/basic income pilot program for very low-income older adults funded by the City of Santa Monica and its affordable housing trust fund. The purpose of the program is to assist older low-income Santa Monica residents to remain in long- occupied, rent-controlled homes and preserving their dignity as valued members of the local community. To accomplish this goal, the POD program pays a subsidy to each participating household equal to the amount required to assure that the household has enough income after rent to meet basic needs.

The program is open to Santa Monica residents: (1) who are age 65 or older, (2) whose household income is either "extremely low" (below FPL or 30% of median family income) or "very low" (below 50% of median family income) per HUD/HCD[40], and (3) who have lived in their current rent-controlled apartment since January 1, 2000.[41] The POD program provided assistance from November 2017 until December 2019. Building off of the

* Los Angeles Continuum of Care (CoC) area for homeless populations excludes the cities of Glendale, Pasadena, and Long Beach.

success of the POD pilot program, the monthly POD II (POD Pilot 2) subsidy for each participating household will be set at the amount necessary for that household to have enough after-rent income to meet its other needs pursuant to a modified UCLA Elder Index budget for the City of Los Angeles (which surrounds Santa Monica on three sides [Table 4]). POD II, which applies the triage principle to determine eligibility and maximum subsidies, began accepting applications in November 2019.[42]

POD PILOT 2 AFTER-RENT BASIC NEEDS BUDGET		
Expense	PILOT 2	
	1-person HH	2-person HH
Food	$269	$499
Healthcare	$162	$324
Transportation	$52	$103
Utilities	$44	$63
Miscellaneous	$220	$317
Total Monthly POD After-Rent Basic Needs Budget	**$747**	**$1,306**

Table 4

In contrast to other affordable housing programs, POD provides funds to fill gaps between costs and needs, rather than subsidize rent based solely on income like most federal housing programs, making it more resident-centered and person-specific. In addition, the wait lists for federal Section 8 and 202 housing subsidies are very long, making this immediate local assistance even more valuable. By aiming to help older adults remain in low-cost rent- controlled units, POD is designed to preserve low-cost housing stock at a fraction of the price of building new affordable housing units. The POD II subsidy budget of $2 million per year is expected to assist at least 434 single seniors or 248 couples (496 seniors total).[42]

The POD program still faces funding challenges. Local revenue measures are not a satisfactory substitute for statewide funding. Given that the housing affordability crisis among low-income older adults in California is a statewide concern, local advocates suggest state-level discussions regarding the severity of the housing affordability crisis be matched by a State commitment of resources and the State's recognition that preservation of low-income seniors' existing housing (in addition to building new affordable senior housing) is a vital part of the solution. Additionally, the POD program is challenged by preserving participant eligibility for other benefit programs, such as Supplemental Security Income/State Supplemental Payment (SSI/SSP), Medi-Cal, and Cal-Fresh, which could count the additional subsidies as income and reduce other benefits such that they weaken the impact of the local subsidy.

2. Los Angeles LGBT Center's programs

The Los Angeles LGBT Center has built a safe and intergenerational community for LGBT individuals. It has provided services for older adults for 20 years, primarily those 62 to 85 years old. Different from other centers, the Los Angeles LGBT Center serves members not only in its Hollywood locale, but also at sites around Los Angeles City and County. The Center provides innovative programs for older adults, especially for LGBT seniors who can suffer from social isolation and discrimination. Services provided include food, showers, laundry facilities, and assistance from case managers and peer counselors. In recent years, the Center has added two innovative programs that address employment training and housing issues for LGBT older adults.

Culinary arts training program. The culinary arts training program is an intergenerational program that is designed for both youth clients (ages 18-24) and older adult clients (ages 50+), which allows for generations to interact around a shared experience. A commercial teaching kitchen on site produces fresh and nutritious meals for youth and senior residents and drop-in clients, many of whom are low-income, disconnected, and impacted by homelessness.

Overseen by an executive chef instructor, the kitchen is staffed with youth and older adults who are completing a 300-hour culinary training program. Graduating up to 100 students a year, the program provides the foundation of required culinary skills to secure jobs and pursue meaningful careers throughout the Los Angeles restaurant and hospitality sectors. During their coursework, trainees produce up to 600 meals a day that are served throughout the Center's campus, as well as items for sale in the Center's flagship coffee shop and retail business located on Santa Monica Boulevard. Trainees also have the chance to develop their customer service skills by working at the coffee shop and catered events held on the campus [Flyer one].

Affordable senior housing. Following in the footsteps of San Francisco's Openhouse, the first organization founded in California to build LGBT-friendly elder housing, the Center has raised $4 million to build 98 units of new, affordable low-income senior housing for those age 62 and over in studio and one-bedroom rentals. The new affordable senior housing will be adjacent to the Center's Harry & Jeanette Weinberg Senior Center at the Anita May Rosenstein Campus, allowing residents easy access to programs specializing in HIV+ wellness, gender identity, and LGBT social and cultural support. Other services include meals, case management, employment training, and more than 100 free or low-cost activities monthly. The affordable senior housing is open to all eligible older adults but is expected to attract primarily LGBT seniors. It will create a safe and comfortable place for LGBT seniors to live [Flyer two].

Flyer One

Flyer Two

Policy Advances and Recommendations

"Public policy can help or hurt future cohorts"

1. Recent state policy advances

California has made a number of policy advances in recent years addressing the issue of economic insecurity for older adults as follows:

- In 2018, California reinstated a one-time cost-of-living adjustment (COLA) increase for older and disabled recipients of Supplemental Security Income/State Supplementary Payment (SSI/SSP) benefits following the 2009 elimination of the annual COLA during the state's economic recession.
- Cal-Fresh (food stamp) benefits were extended to SSI/SSP beneficiaries for the first time in 2019.
- Medi-Cal's "senior penalty," which applied different income thresholds for older adults than for younger adults, was eliminated, effectively increasing the Medi-Cal income eligibility level for older adults and people with disabilities so that more are able to get health and LTSS.
- California's Earned Income Tax Credit (CalEITC) was extended to low-income adults ages 65 and older. California is only the 2nd state in the country to include older adults in their state EITC programs that provide refundable tax credits to low-income wage earners.
- A 7% cut in In-home Support Service (IHSS) hours was temporarily restored.
- The CalSavers program[43] was implemented, providing a retirement contribution option for workers who do not receive those benefits from their employers.[44]

2. Recommendations for future policies

The following recommendations to address the issue of elder economic insecurity were put forward by researchers, community and organization leaders, and policymakers who participated in the *Elder Economic Forum: Political, Economic, and Demographic Impacts on Retirement*, sponsored by the California Commission on Aging in partnership with the California Women's Law Center.

Policy/Regulation

- Continue boosting retirement income
    - o Restore the cut to SSI/SSP benefits for older and disabled individuals.
    - o Increase cash assistance significantly for low-income older adults who are dependent on SSI/SSP and the CalEITC.Educate retirees about the individual pros and cons of when to draw Social Security benefits; e.g., an individual will earn approximately 68% less at age 62 than at the full retirement age of 67 and approximately 25% more if delaying Social Security until age 70.
    - o Continue the statewide and national conversation on improving retirement income security through expanding pension coverage and strengthening and increasing Social Security income.
    - o Promote the CalSavers program for future retirees, which will mostly benefit current young and mid-career workers in the private sector when they retire.
- Provide a long-term care financing benefit (such as Washington State's social insurance model of LTSS assistance) or other means to provide high quality LTSS that is accessible to low- and middle-income older adults.
- Build a safety net for immigrants and undocumented older adults who lack access to Social Security and other programs.
- Designate older people living with HIV as a greatest social need population.
- For LGBT older adults
    - o Help the state effectively implement AB 2719, which designates LGBT older adults as a Greatest Social Need Population in the state, by supporting efforts to develop LGBT-inclusive area plans and encouraging the representation of LGBT older adults on planning councils and advisory committees.
    - o Expand LGBT discrimination testing and enforcement to make it easier for LGBT older adults to find needed housing and employment.
    - o Issue a report based on California's Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Disparities Reduction Act, which requires the CDA (and other departments) to collect sexual orientation and gender identity (SOGI) data.
    - o Mandate cultural competency training for home and community-based services as a compliment to the training that is required for long-term care and residential institutions.

Research

- Conduct additional data driven research and analyze data that currently exists related to elder economic insecurity.
- Conduct more research related to California homeless older adults, gaps in Medi-Cal, LTSS, and other service needs.

Senior housing

- Provide more affordable housing for seniors and diverse sub-groups of seniors with regards to their race/ ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, and similar disadvantaged statuses (Good example: Los Angeles LGBT Center's Affordable Senior Housing Program).
- Create or expand innovative housing programs (Good example: Santa Monica's "Preserving Our Diversity" (POD) Program).

Technology

- Develop safe interactive technology and Internet for older adults to use.
- Establish laws that protect older consumers' personal information and data.

Events

- Encourage more events such as the Elder Economic Forum: Political, Economic, and Demographic Impacts on Retirement to provide more opportunities for policy makers, community and organization leaders, and researchers to communicate with each other and build partnerships with potential collaborators to find solutions to address elder economic insecurity.

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California Commission on Aging

1300 National Drive, #173
Sacramento, CA 95834

www.ccoa.ca.gov