

Building a Better California for All Ages and Abilities

By Kim McCoy Wade

Like elsewhere in communities around the world, California is aging. And with the leadership of Governor Gavin Newsom, it is embracing the opportunity to become the Golden State for the golden years. By 2030, nearly a quarter of California's population will be over the age of 65, exceeding the 18 and under population for the first time. This extraordinary growth and diversity in the older adult population will change everything — the structure of our families, our communities, and our state.

To prepare California for the gifts and challenges of longevity, the governor issued an executive order in June 2019 that set in motion the creation of California's Master Plan for Aging (MPA). *California for All Ages and Abilities* is a blueprint to transform California, ensuring that all residents, families, and communities can thrive as we age. Crafting a blueprint of this magnitude requires the engagement and expertise of residents from across the state, in a range of inclusive and interactive ways. The MPA's development embraced this approach, spanning more than a year of public engagement, stakeholder outreach and work groups, webinars, community roundtables, and alignment with the Governor's Task Force on Alzheimer's Prevention, Preparedness & Path Forward.

While we engaged a broad range of California stakeholders to develop the robust plan, California also drew inspiration from age-friendly communities worldwide. Innovative solutions in Japan, Singapore, and Taiwan to support an aging population influenced many aspects of California's MPA. Japan, known for being the global leader in this area, inspired California with its digital healthcare system which has improved the healthy longevity of its population. Singapore's anti-ageist vision for growth and development, community, and inclusion also had an impact on the development of the plan.

Finally, Taiwan's long-term care system has made a lasting impression on California with its ability to fully support the aging-in-place model by offering both robust home care and social services to those who choose to age at home. Plans are in motion to engage with the Chinese and Japanese consulates in San Francisco to compare innovations and solutions.

In early 2021, California launched its bold 10-year Master Plan for Aging. The Master Plan provides an inclusive and equitable framework for transforming aging for individuals, families, and communities as the changing demographics inevitably shape the future of California.

With the onset of COVID-19, the MPA became even more critical. Older adults experienced unprecedented death rates — particularly among Latino, Black, and Asian Pacific Islander communities and those living in nursing homes. Many have experienced increased feelings of isolation and loneliness, and struggled to access California's essential services.

Five Bold Goals to Build Communities for All Ages and Abilities

California's aging services and supports, like many in the United States, are far behind where they need to be. California's Master Plan for Aging provides a sense of optimism and urgency that will drive California's metamorphosis of services and supports, so Californians can live how and where we choose for the rest of our lives.

The Master Plan for Aging's goals lay the groundwork for all California communities to prepare for the current demographic shift. By prioritizing advances in housing, transportation, healthcare, workforce and volunteer opportunities, caregiver supports, and economic security, communities will be capable of improving the quality of life for Californians of all ages.

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The Master Plan for Aging's five bold goals: housing for all ages and stages; health reimagined; inclusion and equity — not isolation; caregiving that works; and affordable aging are accompanied by 23 strategies, powered by over 100 catalytic and pragmatic two-year initiatives to advance our communities. The MPA addresses the most urgent and critical needs and gaps in systems for building age-friendly communities. But it is just a starting point with the goal that every county and city in California will have its very own Master Plan for Aging. California currently has three counties with their own Master Plans — San Francisco, Los Angeles, and San Diego — and 54 cities and counties are building age-friendly communities partnering with AARP's Network of Age-Friendly States and Communities.

Making Your Community More Age-Friendly

There is a lot to consider when planning for an aging community. The MPA is not only a state-wide blueprint but also includes a local playbook that serves as a resource for local government, communities, and private and philanthropic organizations seeking to transform policies and services to promote age-friendly communities. The playbook outlines how to engage and work collaboratively with California's local aging champions — the county board of supervisors, city councils, university gerontology and aging experts, local aging and disability services, and beyond. It is designed to meet communities where they are and assist in determining the unique aging needs of California's diverse communities.

When building age-friendly communities, there is one remaining critical ingredient that binds it all together: the inclusion of older adults. Without the full participation of our older

Californians to provide their perspective, we would end up with half-baked plans with gaps and flaws in policies, programs, and services. Older adults must be at the table, listened to, and engaged with as the central architects of local aging plans. With aging comes great wisdom, life experience, and perspective that is critical to understanding what needs to change in our communities. To truly build a California for All Ages and Abilities, we must all be present and given the opportunity to contribute.

Looking ahead, we will continue to move our efforts not only locally but globally. California will continue to seek and build partnerships with the boldest and brightest minds around the globe. The stronger our network, the broader our toolkit to serve California's diverse older adults. We have a long way to go, but together we can build age-friendly communities we all deserve. Learn more about California's Master Plan for Aging and see how you can contribute to building age- and ability-friendly communities for all. ●



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