

August 5, 2021

Delivered via electronic mail to Lisa.Driscoll@cao.cccounty.us

Dear Measure X Community Advisory Board Members:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide expert commentary on the needs of seniors in Contra Costa County. We, the leadership of the undersigned nonprofits, whose organizations each have more than fifty years of experience providing essential services to aging adults and adults with disabilities in Contra Costa, would like to draw on our first-hand understanding of needs and gaps to provide you a framework we believe can make transformational and meaningful change for our elders. We envision this investment strategy will help us leverage other funding and ensure our beloved elders have the supports and services they need to age in Contra Costa with choice, dignity, and equity.

It is no surprise to anyone that our largest exponentially growing demographic is older adults. In fact, the population aged 60 years and over is expected to grow more than three times as fast as the total population in California by 2060¹. In Contra Costa County, those aged 60 and over are projected to grow by 191% from 2010 through 2060¹.

In the last century, the average American life expectancy increased by almost thirty years with little to no planning for it – both in our built communities and in service delivery². In Contra Costa County, this means an exacerbation of inequity in access to health care, transportation, housing, food, navigating systems of care, caregiver support, protection from exploitation and abuse, patient/resident advocacy, and so much more. Our frontline staff witness on a daily basis the impact of the lack of service infrastructure: indignities and unnecessary hardship for many of our most vulnerable community members. Add to this the growing diversity of this population and the social determinants of health that play a major role in systemic inequities and

¹ California Department of Finance (2017). Press Release. Retrieved from Population Projections (Baseline 2016): <http://www.dof.ca.gov/Forecasting/Demographics/Projections>

² *Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Health Statistics*. Health, United States, 2004: With chartbook on trends in the health of Americans. Atlanta, GA: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention; 2004. <http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/hus/hus04.pdf>

you have a recipe for what you are seeing here in Contra Costa: an exploding aging homeless population. In fact, this is the largest growing segment of our unhoused community, increasing by 97% over the previous year for those 62 and over in 2018³.

Measure X is coming at a perfect time to prevent the further erosion of our safety net for our older adults. None of us can unsee what happened to our elders during this pandemic. From the soaring death rates to the years of negligence in oversight and care of our elders in skilled nursing facilities, we saw the price they paid for decades of institutionalized ageism. Particularly shocking was death rates of those living in congregate care settings – a staggering 1 in 10 people living in skilled nursing facilities died from COVID-19⁴ and people **85 and older died at 8,700 times the rate** of the 5 - 17 year old age cohort⁵.

So now we ask you, the Measure X Community Advisory Board, to take this opportunity to stop this trend and ensure our Board of Supervisors hear loudly and clearly that investments need to be made in:

- Senior housing: onsite/wrap around support services, access to affordable and low-income housing, and retention
- Senior accessible and affordable transportation
- Community-based senior care management/systems navigation and outreach
- Advocacy and legal support for low-income seniors including in community and congregate living settings
- Home delivered meals and other home/community delivered support services
- Family caregiver supports
- Workforce development and strengthening the long-term care system

These investments can be made in a one-time only disbursement to existing senior service providers to build capacity in the historically underfunded community-based safety net⁶ and an ongoing distribution to meet the needs annually as defined by the Master Plan for Aging and local aging needs assessments. We anticipate the one-time only capacity support to be about \$2 million and the ongoing annual investments to

³ See <https://cchealth.org/h3/coc/pdf/Infographic-2018.pdf>

⁴ <https://covidtracking.com/analysis-updates/what-we-know-about-the-impact-of-the-pandemic-on-our-most-vulnerable-community>

⁵ <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/downloads/covid-data/hospitalization-death-by-age.pdf>

⁶ This one-time allocation could be drawn from the first year (quarter) of sales tax revenue.

be in the \$2 -\$6 million range, recognizing the need for deeper investments in certain parts of the County, like eastern Contra Costa, where we have service delivery deserts.

Now is the time to build on momentum created at the state level with the Master Plan for Aging to ensure we invest in our most vulnerable community members locally.

Each of our organizations is deeply committed to working with Health Services and Aging and Adult Services to ensure we work collaboratively to bring equity, dignity, and access to all our beloved elders in Contra Costa County.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Debbie Toth, Choice in Aging, President & CEO

Nicole Howell, Empowered Aging, Executive Director

Caitlin Sly, Meals on Wheels Diablo Region, Executive Director

Elaine Welch, Mobility Matters, Chief Executive Officer

Jason Schwarz, Contra Costa Senior Legal Services, Executive Director

Jody Iorns, Diablo Valley Foundation for the Aging, Executive Director

Kathleen Kelly, Family Caregiver Alliance, Executive Director