

Report #1008

## County Elder Services Facing Life Support

Going...Going...Going...

**TO: Contra Costa County Board of Supervisors**

### SUMMARY

The Contra Costa County Employment and Human Services (EHS) Department's Aging and Adult Services Bureau (AAS) is responsible for providing protective and supportive services to the elderly. In December 2008 the County significantly reduced funding to the Aging and Adult Services Bureau, decimating services to elder citizens. For those in need of protective or support services traditionally supplied by the County, timely access is now delayed and future availability is uncertain. Additional staff cuts and reductions in service are imminent.

The Governor is recommending the elimination of all State funds from the In Home Supportive Services (IHSS) program. This 60% funding loss combined with the cuts already made to elder services by the County constitutes a truly cataclysmic event. Eliminating State funds could also prevent the receipt of Federal funds to IHSS.

A plan for offsetting the reductions in service must include an aggressive volunteer **recruitment effort**. The County must also develop a contingency plan before State funding is eliminated.

### BACKGROUND

In August 2009, the Grand Jury began an investigation into the reduction of County services to the elderly (adults 60 years and older). The investigation included interviews with County staff, and review and validation of data from newspaper articles and financial reports. The Grand Jury wanted to determine how reductions were affecting this portion of the population.

**Elders are the fastest growing segment of the Contra Costa County population.** This group relies heavily on fixed income sources (e.g. Social Security and retirement pensions) or at-risk investments. In order to obtain Federal and State funds the County is required to match certain amounts of dollars or provide in-kind services. Prior to 2009,

the County provided additional (overmatch) funds to certain programs of the Aging and Adult Services Bureau. The County overmatch funds were pulled in December 2008 resulting in significant service cuts to the elderly.

Funding for AAS comes from Federal, State and County sources in varying formulas for specific services and must be accounted for separately. To make it easier for those seeking help, the County has created a single entry point. Once an individual's needs are identified, the County directs the person to the appropriate service(s). This works well when there is **adequate staff to answer the phone**. However, currently an individual seeking assistance may need to leave a voice message and wait for a return call.

## **NARRATIVE**

The following descriptions detail the specific programs of each agency as well as service level changes:

**Aging and Adult Services Bureau (AAS)** is the administrative umbrella for all services **described below**. It assists older adults to maximize their self-sufficiency, safety and independence. AAS receives funding from the County, State and Federal governments. Due to the interdependence of all services under AAS, cuts to one agency may result in service reductions to other agencies.

- **Adult Protective Services (APS)** is available to provide assistance 24 hours a day to elderly and dependent individuals who are victims of physical, emotional or financial harm or abuse. The County funding reductions in December 2008 reduced APS staff from 17 to 6 full-time workers.

### **APS provides:**

- Social worker assessments, responses, investigations, reassessments
- Investigation of reports of physical abuse, financial abuse, neglect, exploitation
- Needs assessment of those eligible for IHSS and provider matching

### **Since reductions in APS staff:**

- There is no face-to-face contact
  - Assessments are conducted only by telephone
  - The lag time from first assessment to the start of an investigation has doubled to ten days or more.
- **Area Agency on Aging (AAA)** was formed to develop a system of care and support for adults aged 60 and older and adults with disabilities to lead independent, dignified lives in their own homes for as long as possible. Reductions in County funding have cut AAA staff from 6 to 4.

**AAA provides:**

- Information and Assistance
  - Long-term Care Ombudsman
  - Adult Day Care
  - Meal Programs
  - Friendly Visitors
  - Assisted Transportation
  - Family Care-giver Provider Program
  - In-Home Registry
- **Information and Assistance (I & A)** provides information and referrals to appropriate resources. It is the entry point for services to dependent adults age 18 and older and seniors age 60 and older.

**I & A provides:**

- Direction to proper resources
- Comprehensive assessments for callers with difficult or complex situations
- Referrals to care management
- Screening and intake for Adult Protective Services
- Referrals such as transportation, meals, In-Home Supportive Services

The County funding reductions in December 2008 cut I & A staff from 6 to 3. Currently, many elders do not receive immediate responses to their concerns. Often a caller can only leave a message and frequently may have a long wait for a return call.

- **In-Home Supportive Services (IHSS)** provides assistance to eligible aged, blind and disabled individuals who are unable to remain safely in their homes without this service. IHSS is an alternative to more costly out-of-home care. The approximate current funding is 40% Federal, 59% State and 1% County.

The Governor is attempting to eliminate the State's IHSS funding. Elimination of State funds may result in the loss of Federal funding, leaving the program with only its 1% County share. The governor's plan is currently being challenged in court. If the state prevails in these lawsuits, approximately 87% or 6,400 clients will be eliminated from the program. A significant number of worker/providers will be out of work. Until these lawsuits are settled, IHSS will continue to receive State funds.

**Summary of major service changes:**

<b>Service</b>	<b>Staff 2008</b>	<b>Staff 2009</b>	<b>Response Time 2008</b>	<b>Response Time 2009</b>	<b>Comments</b>
<b>Adult Protective Services</b>	17	6	Less than 5 days	Ten days	Only one social worker; no face to face contact
<b>Area Agency on Aging</b>	6	4	N/A	N/A	County's overmatch funding was removed
<b>Information and Assistance</b>	6	3	Usually immediate response	Not immediate	Caller often leaves a phone message. Return call can take a long time based on volume of calls.

**FINDINGS**

1. Information & Assistance staff reductions have caused delays in elders receiving immediate responses to their concerns.
2. Staffing cuts to any one adult services program ultimately result in reduced services throughout the Aging and Adult Services Bureau.
3. Adult Protective Service staff reductions have eliminated face-to-face case work assessments. Case assessments and reassessments are now handled by phone.

**Recommendation:**

The County shall initiate a volunteer program to supplement staffing. Volunteers shall be recruited immediately for Information and Assistance and for Adult Protective Services.

4. In-Home Supportive Services is a “train wreck” waiting to happen if the State eliminates its funding.

**Recommendation:**

The County shall develop a contingency plan for funding the IHSS program.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

The elder population in the United States has increased 16.3% since 2002 and will represent 25% of the population by the end of 2010. Contra Costa County's elder population mirrors these numbers. As the elder population continues to grow, funding **concurrently erodes**. Unless the County steps up to its responsibilities to this growing and vulnerable population, Adult Services will exist in name only.

## **REQUIRED RESPONSES**

### **Findings and Recommendations**

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