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Addressing the Needs of Older Adults in Los Angeles County through

Comprehensive Outreach

Based on the 2022 nationwide census data, more than 17 million older adults aged 65 and older are economically insecure, with incomes below 200% of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL). In Los Angeles County, nearly 15% of older adults aged 65 and older live below the poverty line and 37% of older adults aged 65 and older don't have enough income to meet their basic needs.

Los Angeles County (County) and the State of California offer a variety of safety net programs to help supplement income and grocery bills for the most vulnerable populations, including CalFresh, General Relief (GR), and Cash Assistance Program for Immigrants (CAPI), among others benefits and services. However, there is a significant number of older adults who qualify but do not utilize these benefits. State data reveals that two-thirds of eligible Californians over the age of 60 — roughly 1.5 million people — do not participate in CalFresh, even though they qualify. Recent reports highlight that

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many barriers prevent older adults from enrolling in public benefits, including food assistance benefits like CalFresh. These barriers include misunderstandings about eligibility, concerns about immigration status and public charge, stigma of poverty and government assistance, and the lengthy enrollment process, with forms and processing times, that many older adults find discouraging.

CAPI, which is a 100% state-funded program aimed to provide cash assistance to aged, blind or disabled noncitizens, has less than 8,500 individuals receiving the benefit countywide. In a County that has close to 1.5 million adults over the age of 65, there are strong indicators that the benefit is being significantly underutilized.

While government agencies often depend on local nonprofit organizations to engage in outreach and assist with applications, more needs to be done to ensure that older adults are accessing the services that they need. More specifically, there is a need for countywide outreach, in a linguistically and culturally accessible manner, to inform older adults about what services and benefits they may qualify for. There is also a need for enrollment assistance for those who face physical and mental impairments that might pose a barrier to benefit enrollment.

WE, THEREFORE, MOVE that the Board of Supervisors direct the Department of Public Social Services, in collaboration with the Aging & Disabilities Department, the Office of Immigrant Affairs, and other relevant County departments, to report back, in writing, in 90 days on all countywide benefits and services available to older adults, defined as adults aged 65 and older, in Los Angeles County, including state benefits or services that are run or operated by a County Department. Include, at minimum, the following information for each program:

1. Description of services and/or benefits, including length of services and benefit amount;
2. Summary of eligibility criteria, including financial and noncitizenship eligibility, and application process for each program;
3. Utilization rate for each program; not just how many people are currently using the programs but what is the estimated eligible County population based on census and other reliable studies and data, if available. If utilization rate is not available, also include any current efforts or strategies to gather that data or find out how many eligible residents are not being served;
4. Number of applications, and processing time; number of denials and reason for denials; and
5. Current or past outreach efforts/information campaigns, including language inclusive and culturally competent outreach efforts.

WE, FURTHER, MOVE that the Board of Supervisors direct the Department of Public Social Services, in collaboration with the Aging & Disabilities Department, the Office of Immigrant Affairs, and other relevant County Departments, to develop an outreach plan to increase the utilization of services and benefits catered for older adults. The outreach plan should aim to be as accessible as possible and take into consideration:

1. Language barriers – the information should be available in all 14 threshold languages.
2. Immigration eligibility and public charge – within immigrant communities, there are significant fears and apprehensions over accessing much-needed

benefits due to lack of accessible information about program eligibility, chilling effect of anti-immigrant propaganda and xenophobia, and misinformation about which programs could potentially affect public charge determinations by immigration agencies. The outreach plan, with collaboration of the Office of Immigrant Affairs, needs to consider how to inform and encourage eligible noncitizens to apply for benefits, including, by disseminating and correcting public charge misinformation, as appropriate and relevant, to benefit programs.

3. Mobility barriers – outreach may require meeting people where they are, especially for individuals whose mobility is impaired, at facilities like senior centers, senior residence buildings, nursing homes, community events, etc., to ensure that we are reaching the most vulnerable residents. The outreach plan should also include strategies to create more accessible ways to enroll for different benefit programs and submit required documentation.
4. Technological barriers – while technology has allowed for the swift and efficient dissemination of digital information, there remains a significant number of the population who do not have the skills or the devices to properly access information available on the internet. The outreach plan needs to take into consideration how to reach individuals via multiple means, including non-digital mediums.
5. Stigma – there is significant stigma associated with the use of government benefits and services. This is tied to inaccurate portrayals and misrepresentations throughout history about the groups who benefit from

safety net programs. The outreach plan needs to consider, in its messaging, framework, and proposed training of frontline/call center staff, how to destigmatize and help correct past negative notions associated with the use of public benefits. No one should feel shame in asking for help.

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