



COUNTY OF SANTA CRUZ

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NEWS RELEASE



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SANTA CRUZ COUNTY EARNS AGE-FRIENDLY DESIGNATION

Follows millions in safety net investments; presentation to Board on August 8

In line with State and local efforts to develop a statewide [Master Plan for Aging](#), the County of Santa Cruz is pleased to announce the County has been designated an “Age-Friendly Community” by the American Association of Retired Persons (AARP).

The County’s Human Services Department sought the designation earlier this year, and will make an August 8 presentation to the Board of Supervisors to discuss the designation and ongoing efforts to develop a Master Plan for Aging (“MPA”), in partnership with the Seniors Council of Santa Cruz and San Benito Counties and each local city, to help create an age-friendly community that meets the needs of an aging population. The public is invited to view the presentation online or in person.

“As our population ages, we must meet the needs of our aging residents,” County Administrative Officer Carlos Palacios said.. “Joining AARP’s Network of Age-Friendly Communities and creating a Master Plan for Aging will allow us to be consistent and thoughtful while focusing on equity and opportunity as we expand our safety net and address our community’s needs.”

While the population of Santa Cruz County residents ages 60 and older has increased by nearly 50 percent since 2010, the County has met the demand for services by increasing the budgets for In-Home Supportive Services (“IHSS”) and Adult Protective Services by 60 percent in the last five years alone, and recently expanded funding for senior services through the Collective of Results and Evidence-based (CORE) Investments program. By 2030, the percentage of residents 60 and older is expected to reach approximately 30 percent of the total population.

“The safety net for older adults and people with disabilities is a blending of County administered programs, health care services, City services, and non-profit programs which together provide a network of essential services,” Human Services Director Randy Morris said. “While the safety net needs to be strengthened as we prepare

locally to meet our aging community's needs, significant expansion and investment has already been made locally and at the State level."

With most funding for senior services available through State and federal sources, the County is positioning itself to play a leadership role in how those funds are allocated. Morris co-chairs the California Welfare Directors Association's statewide Adult and Aging committee, and Board Chair Zach Friend chairs the Health and Human Services committee for the California State Association of Counties, which helps shape critical State policies. County Director for Adult & Long Term Care ("ALTC") Alicia Morales serves on the California Elder and Disability Justice Coordinating Council, which is linked to the California Master Plan for Aging efforts.

Through County-administered programs such as IHSS, the County not only supports aging residents by providing for critical needs and allowing them to stay in their homes, these staff also help clients during times of crisis, including during last winter's floods. While State and federal regulations mandate that most safety net programs be administered by County staff, County leadership is committed to supplementing these critical programs with community-based service contracts.

Over five years, the County has more than quadrupled its contract funding commitment with community-based organizations who serve older adults and people with disabilities. The increase from just shy of \$200,000 in 2019 to nearly \$900,000 in proposed contracts serving this population this coming fiscal year is funded through the County's ALTC Division, which also delivers \$93 million in direct safety net services to the community annually, through IHSS and Adult Protective Services. Furthermore, the County's CORE Investments program recently increased grant funding to serve older adults by \$250,000 compared to the prior funding cycle, to \$1.4 million. Through CORE, for example, The Teen Kitchen Project will now provide chronically ill older adults in Santa Cruz County with home-delivered, medically-tailored free or low-cost meals.

These funds are in addition to approximately \$2 million administered by the Seniors Council, the local Area Agency on Aging, to serve Santa Cruz and San Benito counties through the federal Older Americans Act.

To learn more about the County's ongoing collaborative efforts to support older and disabled adults, the community is invited to the August 8 presentation to the Board of Supervisors. Further details will be provided here once the meeting agenda is published: <https://www.co.santa-cruz.ca.us/Government/BoardofSupervisors.aspx>. People may also learn more about the Master Plan for Aging by emailing: SCCMPA@santacruzcounty.us.