

Commission on Aging

2025 Leadership Accountability Report

July 14, 2026

Joe Stephenshaw, Director
California Department of Finance
915 L Street
Sacramento, CA 95814

Dear Director Joe Stephenshaw,

In accordance with the State Leadership Accountability Act (Leadership Accountability), the Commission on Aging submits this report on the review of our internal control and monitoring systems for the biennial period ending December 31, 2025.

Should you have any questions please contact Karol Swartzlander, Executive Director, at (916) 419-7591, Karol.Swartzlander@CCoA.ca.gov.

GOVERNANCE

Mission and Strategic Plan

The California Commission on Aging's (CCoA) advises the Governor, Legislature, and state and local agencies on issues affecting older adults to support aging with dignity and respect in the setting of their choice. CCoA uses internal and external resources to gather information, advise policy recommendations, and propose legislation, with the goal of improving access to and delivery of programs for older adults, adults with disabilities and caregivers.

Vision

All Californians can age with dignity, security, and purpose.

Mission

To serve as the principal advocacy body for older Californians and a catalyst for change that supports Californians as they age.

Core Values

The Commission's work is guided by five core values that shape every policy position, recommendation, and partnership:

- Fairness, Equity & Inclusion: Every Californian, regardless of age, race, income, geography, ability, or identity, deserves equitable access to services, opportunities, and representation.
- Autonomy & Choice: Older adults have the right to make meaningful choices about

their own lives, care, and communities.

- **Respect & Integrity:** The Commission conducts its work with honesty, transparency, and deep respect for the people it serves.
- **Collaboration & Partnership:** Systemic change requires working together, across agencies, organizations, and communities to achieve shared goals.
- **Evidence-Based Recommendations:** Policy positions are grounded in rigorous research, high-quality data, and the lived experiences of older adults, adults with disabilities and caregivers.

Goals

1. Advocate on issues affecting older adults, individuals with disabilities, and caregivers.
2. Advance issues that affect older adults and their families (and families of choice) with a fair and representative perspective on aging that reflects and supports the diverse experiences of older adults.
3. Advise the Governor, state legislators, government officials and interested parties on policies and programs that affect older Californians, individuals with disabilities, and caregivers.
4. Ensure that the State Plan on Aging reflects emerging and critical issues affecting older adults, individuals with disabilities, and their caregivers.
5. Advance a positive, stigma-free, bold vision of aging across the lifespan.
6. Educate older adults, the public, policymakers and key partners.
7. Champion increased program support and student engagement in geriatrics and gerontology education programs in higher education; develop a workforce reflective of California's communities, including but not limited to ethnic and racial minorities and special populations (e.g. LGBTQ+), first-to-college. etc. to broaden representation in the aging services workforce; support older adult workers by educating employers about the benefits of a multigenerational workforce and normalize lifespan aging in curricula for primary, secondary and higher education institutions.

Control Environment

CCoA's Executive Director is responsible for establishing and maintaining the internal control and monitoring systems of the CCoA. CCoA's staff demonstrates, values, and communicates the importance of upholding a high standard of integrity and ethics through core values that include open communication, teamwork and coordination, problem solving, respect, honesty, and expertise. These core values are well established in CCoA's day-to-day operations, modeled by the Executive Director and implemented by staff, using consistent operating

procedures and practices. Whether working on-site or remotely, staff routinely discuss work projects, priorities, and timelines, and proactively remediate potential problems or conflicts. For example, in support of these professional activities, the Director and staff have attended and participated in trainings and meetings to support professional growth and development, as well as advancing advocacy for older adults.

Management develops detailed work plans and timelines in coordination with staff to prioritize workloads, establish shared responsibilities, maintain staff accountability, and promote increased work/life balance and job satisfaction. Routine monitoring of workplans and deliverables identify potential obstacles or issues of concern, then are discussed for prospective solutions and ultimately, prevention of said obstacles. These workplans are updated weekly and maintained on a shared drive for accessibility and tracking by all staff members. Workload and projects are divided between staff, as needed, to allow for execution of their strengths. Workloads are adjusted accordingly. The Executive Director maintains an "all hands-on deck" approach, sharing in planning and development of work projects, offering constructive feedback and guidance on work in progress, and establishing clear standards and timelines for project completion. Workplans include anticipated completion dates or clear deadlines, as appropriate. As time permits, work is circulated between staff for edits, proofing, and accessibility, ensuring that written materials and projects reflect the quality and integrity expected from the CCoA.

The Executive Director and Supervisor II/Legislative Director work closely with staff to facilitate an open and supportive environment through maintaining open communications and coordinating efforts around scheduling, meeting coverage, and workload assignments. Weekly staff meetings and one-on-one meetings provide direction and allow discussion of priority projects, workplan tracking and progress, while devoting time to each staff to strengthen their professional goals. Additionally, the Executive Director has an open-door policy and encourages open dialogue with staff to express concerns regarding procedures, workload or specific assignments, and engages in active listening so each staff member feels acknowledged and respected.

Regular meetings with the CCoA's Chair and Executive Committee allow the Executive Director to keep abreast of CCoA priorities and permit the reallocation of staffing/resources, as necessary. These meetings also help the Commissioners stay informed about staffing commitments and workload to assure reasonable expectations. Annual updates to the CCoA's Operational Plan, year in review, progress reports, and documents distributed during General Meetings provide Commissioners with current information on work to support CCoA policy objectives.

CCoA's staff have a strong commitment to the CCoA and its vision. Each staff member brings professional and practical knowledge and expertise, a dedicated and motivated mindset,

and a diverse set of skills. The Executive Director has an established leadership record with the State, and an extensive background in aging policy and programs. The Supervisor II/Legislative Director has a proven track record of successful legislative activities. Combined, this leadership team, with its established network and proven effectiveness, fueled by passion and resolve to further the goals of the CCoA, and a steady increase of engagement and commitment of the appointed Commissioners, has amplified the visibility of the Commission among stakeholders, Administration officials, and the Legislature. Analytical staff conduct research and prepare policy memos, briefs, reports, online content, presentations, and other materials in alignment with CCoA priorities. 2025 priorities included addressing homelessness and social isolation; expanding the workforce serving older adults, increasing workforce development opportunities for older adults, and improving behavioral health services for older adults. Collectively, these complimentary skillsets produce a well-rounded team of professionals.

Information and Communication

The CCoA's direction is set annually by the Chairperson and Commissioners in response to social and policy trends affecting California's older adult population. Staff track these trends through statewide coalitions, task forces, advisory boards, and councils composed of aging and disability advocates, service providers, consumers, and academics. Programmatic and policy information gathered through this engagement, research and tracking news publications is compiled by staff and brought to the full Commission at standing committee (Executive, Legislative Advocacy, Research and Policy Development) and regular public meetings, where it informs decisions on legislative positions, advocacy priorities, and program direction. Financial and operational information is tracked through the state's Fi\$Cal system and reviewed by the Executive Director on a quarterly basis.

Internal: The Executive Director communicates with Commissioners through regular briefings and public Commission meetings, and with staff through direct supervision and regular check-ins given the Commission's small size. This structure allows information to move quickly between frontline staff work and Commission-level decision-making.

Across organizational lines: CCoA coordinates with CDA on state administrative and policy matters, collaborates with partner advocacy organizations and coalitions in the fields of aging and disability to align messaging, share policy intelligence, and coordinate joint advocacy efforts.

External stakeholders: The Commission communicates with the public and the aging services community through its AgeWatch publication, an expanded social media presence across Instagram, LinkedIn, and Facebook, press releases, and public Commission meetings that are open for stakeholder input and testimony.

Employees may raise concerns about inefficiencies or inappropriate actions directly with the Executive Director or, where the concern involves the Executive Director, with the Commission Chairperson. As a state entity, CCoA staff also have access to the State Auditor's Whistleblower Hotline and employs an Equal Employment Opportunity Officer to ensure additional avenues of reporting for staff who believe they are experiencing or witnessing unfair employment practices.

MONITORING

The information included here discusses the entity-wide, continuous process to ensure internal control systems are working as intended. The role of the executive monitoring sponsor includes facilitating and verifying that the Commission on Aging monitoring practices are implemented and functioning. The responsibilities as the executive monitoring sponsor(s) have been given to: Karol Swartzlander, Executive Director.

Workplans, projects, and reports are updated regularly by meeting with staff. Progress on projects or tasks, and the ability to identify and develop solutions to workload or procedural issues, is implemented on a recurring basis. Because many CCoA operations are handled through an interagency agreement with the California Department of Aging (CDA), both regular and ad hoc meetings are held between CCoA management and CDA's budget, accounting, information technology, human resources, and business services units to evaluate budgetary and personnel needs, and to discuss opportunities for process changes, improvements or concerns.

By re-evaluating priorities and shifting workloads, CCoA works cohesively to address deadlines and unanticipated projects. The Executive Director discusses workload priorities and assigns each staff member tasks for specific outcomes, highlighting strengths that staff member possesses for the best possible outcome. Progress is reported during weekly communications, administrative, legislative and full-staff meetings. Evaluation of project completions and target deadlines are documented on weekly work plans and reviewed at regular team meetings.

RISK ASSESSMENT PROCESS

The following personnel were involved in the Commission on Aging risk assessment process: executive management, middle management, and staff.

The following methods were used to identify risks: brainstorming meetings, ongoing monitoring activities, audit/review results, other/prior risk assessments, external stakeholders, and consideration of potential fraud.

The following criteria were used to rank risks: likelihood of occurrence, potential impact to mission/goals/objectives, timing of potential event, potential impact of remediation efforts, and tolerance level for the type of risk.

The CCoA Executive Director and staff use regular staff meetings to identify and discuss known or potential risks, such as changes in workload resulting from training and reporting requirements, FI\$CAL changes, budget threats, state mandated changes or updates and changes in CCoA-directed priorities. These sessions are used to develop strategies to avoid or minimize risks.

The CCoA Chair and Executive Committee members help staff identify and evaluate issues of concern. Involving Commissioners in this process also helps them understand the administrative and operational obligations of staff.

RISKS AND CONTROLS

Risk: Understaffing

The loss of three staff in 2025 (Retired Annuitant, Analyst II and Supervisor II) and delays in recruitment to fill the two vacant full-time staff positions left CCoA understaffed for most of 2025, impacting operations and delaying progress on legislative functions and outreach and education activities. The Administration Analyst II position was filled in December 2025, leaving one Analyst II Legislative and Policy Analyst II position open.

Additionally, a byproduct of CCoA's increased and growing social media and public engagement is a growth in the number and frequency of requests for Commissioners and commission staff to attend, present at or participate in meetings, conferences and events. This increased engagement has resulted in additional workload.

Control: Fill vacant Analyst II position/seek reinstatement of the Retired Annuitant position

CCoA will work with CDA Human Resources to recruit for the Analyst II position and submit a request to reinstate the Retired Annuitant position.

Risk: Strategic Plan

Historically, the CCoA has relied on an Operational Planning Framework, rather than a formally adopted strategic plan, to guide its statutory mission under the Mello-Granlund Older Californians Act. The goals within this framework were broad in scope, requiring the Commission to establish annual priorities on an ad hoc basis rather than pursue a multi-year framework with defined goals, objectives, and success indicators.

Without a current strategic plan, the Commission faced several risks to its mission and operations: priorities were subject to shift from year to year without a consistent throughline, new Commissioners and staff lacked a clear reference point for onboarding to the organization's direction, and progress toward long-term goals was difficult to track or report to oversight bodies.

Control: Board-Adopted Strategic Plan

CCoA Executive Director will convene a Strategic Planning subcommittee to draft a three-year CCoA strategic plan for adoption by the full Commission in August 2026.

CONCLUSION

The Commission on Aging strives to reduce the risks inherent in our work and accepts the responsibility to continuously improve by addressing newly recognized risks and revising risk mitigation strategies as appropriate. I certify our internal control and monitoring systems are adequate to identify and address current and potential risks facing the organization.

Karol Swartzlander, Executive Director

CC: California Legislature [Senate, Assembly]
California State Auditor
California State Library
California State Controller
Director of California Department of Finance
Secretary of California Government Operations Agency