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## PRESS RELEASE

### California Commission on Aging

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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### California Commission on Aging Launches Statewide Awareness Initiative on Older Adult Behavioral Health

**Sacramento, CA** — The California Commission on Aging (Commission) today announced a new statewide awareness and advocacy initiative to protect and strengthen behavioral health services for older adults. The initiative comes in response to the implementation of Proposition 1 (2024), including the Behavioral Health Services Act (BHSA), which significantly restructures how behavioral health services are funded and delivered across California.

As part of this initiative, two new informational publications have been released, highlighting urgent needs, service gaps, and policy impacts. Both publications are now available on the Commission website. They are intended for policymakers, service providers, advocates, and the public:

- [California's Behavioral Health Services Act & Its Impact on Older Adults – A Call to ACTION!](#)
- [Understanding Behavioral Health Needs in Older Adults: Facts and Service Gaps](#)

“These materials are a call to action,” said the Commission’s Behavioral Health Committee Chair, Janet Frank. “As counties implement major system changes, we must ensure older adults are not left behind in behavioral health planning, funding, and services.”



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## Key Concerns Highlighted

The new publications emphasize several critical issues:

- **Reduced Local Resources:** In many cases, counties will be operating programs with fewer resources, resulting in program cuts.
- **Service Gaps for Older Adults:** Despite growing need, older adults currently receive a disproportionately small share of behavioral health services.
- **Shifting Priorities:** Changes in funding allocations and program structures may unintentionally reduce access to prevention and early intervention programs that are vital for aging populations.
- **Access Barriers:** Stigma, cost, transportation, and system complexity continue to prevent many older adults from receiving care.

The Commission highlights concerning long-term trends:

- Only a small percentage of public behavioral health services currently reach older adults.
- Roughly 1 in 9 older adults need substance use treatment annually, yet fewer than one-third receive it.
- More than 12% of older adults experience mental illness each year, with significant disparities in treatment access.
- Older adults often experience worse health outcomes and higher healthcare costs when behavioral health needs go unmet.

## Call to Action

As counties develop their required Integrated Plans under BHSa, the Commission is urging policymakers, providers, advocates, and community members to:

- Ensure meaningful inclusion of older adults in planning processes
- Protect funding for prevention and early intervention programs
- Expand equitable access to mental health and substance use services
- Address systemic barriers that disproportionately affect older populations



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“Older Californians are at a critical intersection of health, aging, and equity,” the Commission Chair Dr. David Lindeman stated. “We cannot afford to reduce services at a time when need is growing.”

The awareness campaign encourages stakeholders across California to “Get Loud” about protecting behavioral health services for older adults. The Commission is working with local partners, counties, and advocacy organizations to elevate this issue statewide.

As the state’s principal advocacy body for older adults, the California Commission on Aging advises state leaders, legislators, and governmental agencies on policies and programs that promote fairness, autonomy, choice, and dignity for all older Californians.