

California Governor's Executive Order to Improve Seniors' Lives

The state of California has taken a major step forward in improving life for its aging population.

Earlier in June, Governor Gavin Newsom signed an executive order (<https://bit.ly/31tkTsf>) that creates the California Master Plan for Aging. In addition, he directed the Secretary of the California Health and Human Services Agency to organize a cabinet-level Workgroup for Aging.

It and its subcommittees will examine the hurdles aging adults face in the state and develop a master plan by October 2020 to address those challenges.

During his State of the State address in February, Newsom signaled his plan by saying, "It's time for a new Master Plan on Aging. It must address person-centered care; the patchwork of public services, social isolation, and bed-locked seniors in need of transportation; the nursing shortage; and demand for in-home supportive services that far outpaces its capacity."

Newsom talked about his own experience with his father's dementia, saying how lucky he was to have a pension and supportive friends and family before he died in December. But even with all those advantages, it was a daily challenge to meet his needs, live in place, and maintain a good quality of life.

"Millions of Californians share a similar story, and the numbers will only grow," he said.

It's one reason an aging plan is considered critical. In addition, the state's aged 65-plus population is expected to grow to 8.6 million by 2030, which represents an increase of four million older residents.

The master plan will address the full range of issues that can improve seniors' quality of life as they age.

That includes figuring out ways to allow people age in their communities; providing resources for health, homecare, food and nutrition, housing and transportation, and caregiving; and developing policies that allow older adults to contribute to the social, economic and civic fabric of society.

Listen to a senior, combat loneliness

Senior loneliness is pervasive around the globe and a condition that can affect people's physical and mental health. And though most boomers and seniors want to stay in their home to age, it often can be a lonely endeavor.

Even in neighborhoods that are full of people, seniors often look outside and see no one.

Kids are busy with activities and school, parents are working and running the kids around, and there's often little time or opportunity to get to know neighbors.

In a New York Times essay (<https://nyti.ms/2Zzl6rd>), Spencer Morgan talks about his experience of a chance meeting with a senior in his neighborhood.

Morgan was approached by an 88-year-old man who chatted him up and then ended the conversation by saying, "But before I let you go ... you seem like a nice young man ... and well, this is a nice block, but it's changed a lot. And mainly people just keep to themselves, and, well, my wife and I, most of our friends have died, and, well, oftentimes we feel lonely."

Morgan invited the man and his wife to their Easter brunch. They accepted.

"We can do better," writes Morgan.

Yes, we can. His solution is dead simple.

"Next time you're out for a walk in your neighborhood and you spot an elder man or woman, introduce yourself. The task is simple: begin a conversation, tell something about yourself, listen for any interests they share with you so you can engage them in a meaningful way next time you see each other," he writes.

Finding a better life with dementia

NPR's Fresh Air host, Terry Gross, dove into the complex world of dementia with her guest Tia Powell, a bioethicist and author of *Dementia Reimagined Building a Life of Joy and Dignity from Beginning to End*.

Powell and Gross (<https://n.pr/2KWBC1t>) covered the wide range of challenges and complications – physical, financial, emotional – that accompany dementia.

Powell has firsthand experience with dementia, having watched her mom and grandmother suffer from the disease. She discussed whether those with dementia can get respite from its misery and enjoy a better quality of life and even find a bit of happiness.

She thinks that part of that entails planning and thinking about the small things that bring pleasure – whether it's being in a garden, listening to music, or spending time with animals – and creating advanced directives that incorporate those things. If music is a source of joy, consider making a playlist of your favorite songs, for instance.

That directive also can include wishes about medical intervention and what you consider too much. Powell pointed out that it's hard to predict the medical advances that will be made and said, "I wouldn't get too caught up in the specific interventions. I'd focus on what it is that you're hoping to accomplish. The best directive is the one that focuses on the goals. What is it that you're hoping us to use the tools of medicine to get to?"

Having a conversation about such issues with loved ones also is important, and Powell acknowledges that it's a hard conversation to have. "But it's actually a lot harder not to have it. You're much more likely to get the end that you would prefer than if you pretend it's not coming and let somebody else set things up," she said.

Aging-in-place upgrades

If you're among those aren't planning to downsize and want to stay in your current home, consider focusing on making age-friendly changes.

The National Association of Homebuilders' *What Home Buyers Really Want*, identifies the most common aging-in-place remodeling (<https://bit.ly/31yYKch>) projects.

