

Newly formed alliance focuses on Yolo seniors



Meals on Wheels volunteer Cincin Young sets out a home-delivered lunch for Herbert Bauer. Sue Cockrell/Enterprise photo

By Anne Ternus-Bellamy

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Details

What: Yolo Healthy Aging Alliance town hall meeting

When: 3-5 p.m. Monday

Where: Blanchard Room, Stephens Branch Library, 315 E 14th St., Davis

Topic: Patients who are dual-enrolled in Medicare and Medi-Cal are being moved to coordinated care: What does it mean for consumers and providers in Yolo County?

Panelists: Supervisor Jim Provenza, chairman of the Yolo Healthy Aging Alliance; Assemblywoman Mariko Yamada, D-Davis, chairwoman of the Assembly Long-Term Care Committee; David MacCallum and Dr. Richard Fleming of Partnership Advantage; and Kim Suderman, director of Yolo County's Department of Alcohol, Drug and Mental Health Services

Info: Sheila Allen, YHAA executive director, 530-757-5583 or sheila.allen@yolocounty.org

Advocates for the elderly have seen it coming for quite a while — the “silver tsunami,” a wave of aging baby boomers whose need for everything from Social Security to health care to basic safety net services would strain already depleted government budgets.

And as those budgets were cut across the board in recent years, affecting everything from in-home support services to mental health care, the impact on seniors hasn't always been immediately clear, says Yolo County Supervisor Jim Provenza of Davis.

But just as children as a group require a unique set of services, so, too, do the elderly, he said.

So taking a page from the very successful Yolo County Children's Alliance — which pulls together a wide assortment of public and nonprofit agencies to address issues of concern to children — the county has created the Yolo Healthy Aging Alliance, to do much the same for seniors.

Chaired by Provenza, the alliance will focus on advocacy, collaboration and education with a focus on community-based services.

On Monday, the alliance will hold a town hall meeting focused on one particular concern among seniors — the plan to move all consumers who are dual-enrolled in both Medicare and Medi-Cal into a managed care program.

Sheila Allen, executive director of the alliance, noted that Medi-Cal recipients already have moved into the Partnership Advantage program “and word has it people are pretty happy.”

“We're hoping if it's properly implemented, it will save money and help people stay in their homes,” she added.

But that doesn't mean seniors still facing the switch don't have questions and concerns.

“So to be proactive,” Allen said, “we decided to have this town hall meeting.”

Educating seniors, caregivers and service providers will be a key component of the alliance's work, which is likely to also include an upcoming summit on federal health care reform, a spring health fair for seniors, and more.

Meanwhile, the alliance's efforts to improve collaboration among service providers already has shown positive results, Allen said.

The key has been creation of a single universal form for front-line service providers to refer seniors to other providers.

“Say I'm a Meals on Wheels worker and I have a concern about one of the seniors I work with,” Allen said. “I check off a box and fax it to (that) provider.”

Whether it's a referral to the Odd Fellows, whose members might be willing to build a wheelchair ramp so a senior can stay in her home, or one to veterans services about a senior

not receiving benefits to which he is entitled, all providers listed on the form have agreed to respond to all referrals within five days, Allen said.

And since the new system was created, she added, “referrals have significantly increased.”

Some of the most common referrals have been for veterans benefits and legal services, Allen said.

The alliance is planning a countywide needs assessment to determine what other gaps in services might exist for seniors and what can be done to close those gaps. Already they know of unmet needs when it comes to transportation for Yolo County seniors as well as affordable caregivers for middle-income families who don't qualify for assistance but struggle to pay for it.

Provenza also would like to see more education for county residents who expect to become caregivers for their elderly parents. He said small lunchtime gatherings that were offered to county employees in the past year proved very popular.

For more information about the alliance, contact Allen at 530-757-5583 or sheila.allen@yolocounty.org.

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