

# Town hall focuses on Coordinated Care Initiative

**By Anne Ternus-Bellamy**

From page A1 | January 30, 2015 |

Yolo County is not yet participating in a joint federal-state effort to combine Medicare and Medi-Cal benefits for individuals eligible for both, but local officials want residents and providers to be ready when the time comes.

That's why they held a town hall meeting at the Davis Branch Library on Thursday, where a staff attorney for the National Senior Citizens Law Center explained how the Coordinated Care Initiative works and what Yolo County can do to get ready for its arrival.

Currently, 11 states are moving forward with the plan, which combines Medicare and Medi-Cal benefits through a single managed-care plan. In California, a handful of counties have begun implementing the program in the past year.

California has as many as 1.1 million residents who are dual-eligible beneficiaries, something that can prove challenging because of the need to navigate through two programs offering different benefits. The result can be delayed care and higher costs.

Cal MediConnect — the state's version of coordinated care — is aimed at improving care and outcomes and reducing costs, said senior law attorney Amber Cutler.

"The crux, the goal, is coordinated care," she told an audience of service providers, government officials and consumers at the library on Thursday.

When the program does come to Yolo County, Cutler said, the transition will be easier than in other counties because Medi-Cal recipients here are already enrolled in a single managed-care plan, Partnership Health Plan.

"It's not as big a change as in other other counties," she said.

What will change is the approach to health care. Every member will receive a health assessment that likely will lead to increased referrals to other services like in-home support services and Meals on Wheels, Cutler said. The focus will be on ensuring that seniors are cared for in the least restrictive setting.

Though the timeline for Cal MediConnect's arrival locally is unknown, those eligible will receive a notice when the time comes. That notice will come in the form of passive

enrollment, meaning those who don't wish to participate — and it is not mandatory — must opt out.

Cutler urged those present to continue preparing for the plan's arrival, in part by focusing on building relationships among everyone involved, from Partnership itself to the county, community services providers like Meals on Wheels, ancillary service providers like pharmacists, medical providers, legal advocates and others.

She also urged strong communication with those affected.

Supervisor Jim Provenza, chair of the Yolo Healthy Aging Alliance, which organized the town hall meeting, noted that, "It's very clear in order to make this work right, we have to do it right."

For more information about the Coordinated Care Initiative, visit <http://dualsdemoadvocacy.org> or <http://www.calduals.org>.

For more local information, visit <http://yolohealthyaging.com>.

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