



SteppingStone Advocacy Efforts - A Long History of Fighting for Clients' Concerns



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As one of the oldest adult day health care (ADHC) agencies in California, SteppingStone has long been involved in advocacy. There are two reasons for this work: to address issues that directly affect our clients and to provide policy makers with information and perspective from a frontline service agency.

We are always speaking up for our program participants and their families, seeking to make sure their needs are not lost among larger issues. These efforts can be local or statewide, depending on the issue. Our advocacy efforts are always taken in coalition with other agencies and SteppingStone's Executive Director, Daniel Gallagher, serves on the Board of the California Association of Adult Day Services (CAADS) and as co-chair of the SF Coalition of Agencies Serving the Elderly (CASE).

CASE is a broad coalition of many organizations that serve seniors and provides a mechanism to prioritize issues and advocate to policy makers with a united voice. For example, the Coalition regularly sends joint letters to the Board of Supervisors urging budget priorities for programs needed by San Francisco's senior populations.

For a number of years one such priority for CASE has been increasing city funding for transit programs used by elders and adults with disabilities. This is important to SteppingStone and other adult day health programs as nearly all our clients use public transit to attend our programs.

With the advent of the COVID pandemic, new policy issues have emerged, particularly around the remote delivery of services. Many of the elders that SteppingStone serves do not have internet access much less familiarity with ZOOM to be able to take online classes. This "digital divide" affecting seniors and adults with disabilities was well known before COVID, but has become a priority issue for SteppingStone because digital access is essential for most people sheltering in their homes. Working with other agencies, SteppingStone urged the City to increase funding to help seniors and adults with disabilities get online. This effort has already had success as more resources are becoming available to our partner agencies, as well as SteppingStone, in providing digital services to seniors.



Many issues are larger, and some have involved existential threats to adult day health care programs writ-large and the services provided to thousands of frail elders and adults with disabilities. Over SteppingStone's 38 years of existence, changes in how ADHC programs are structured and funded have been repeatedly proposed. SteppingStone has responded at both the state and local levels in coalition with other service agencies and with the active involvement of clients and their families.

"SteppingStone was one of the first ADHCs in the state and has been involved through its state association in every major advocacy effort, from working to advance legislation, supporting budget requests for grants or Medi-Cal rate increases to defending against elimination of ADHC as a Medi-Cal benefit - twice! - and succeeding." Lydia Missaelides, Alliance for Leadership and Education (former Executive

Funding is an ongoing issue given the ever-increasing cost of providing health care in an expensive city like San Francisco. In 2011, for example, California reduced the fee paid for adult day health care by 10%. SteppingStone's then Executive Director, Moli Steinert, organized with other SF adult day health care agencies and in 2013, the coalition was able to get the reduction reversed. Continuing the coalition efforts, Steinert was deeply involved in the birth of the Dignity Fund that was created when San Francisco voters approved ongoing city funding for programs serving seniors and adults with disabilities. In 2017, SteppingStone's then Executive Director, Mollie Tobias, secured an increase in fees paid for adult day health care, successfully making the case that fees had remained flat for over a decade even though the cost of providing the service had risen over 40%.

In 2020 with the onslaught of the COVID pandemic, SteppingStone was confronted with a sudden proposal to end all funding for adult day health care in California. This was part of an emergency budget revision made in response to the pandemic, adult day health care agencies like SteppingStone had only a few weeks to organize before it took effect.

SteppingStone immediately informed clients and their families of the danger and they responded by contacting their elected officials. SteppingStone joined with SF ADHC partner agencies Bayview Senior Services, Jewish Family and Children Services, and Self-Help for Elderly to appeal to local leaders for support. Across the state, the California Association of Adult Day Services coordinated local efforts and carried the message in Sacramento that ending adult day health care would be a disaster for tens of thousands of seniors and adults with disabilities. This position prevailed in the last weeks of the budget process.

"What worried me was the consequence to our clients and ADHC clients across the state if the cuts happened. It was already extremely difficult for them because of the pandemic, but if care programs like SteppingStone's had ceased to exist, it would have been disastrous.

"I don't think the people who proposed the budget cuts understood that this



action would end adult day health care and the essential services our agencies provide. Our job was to educate policy makers and ask them to find other ways to address the budget concerns. This was difficult in the chaos caused by the pandemic, but we simply organized at every level to reach them, as did many agencies across the state. We are fortunate that many SF elected officials know this issue well and are already our champions. The challenge last year was supporting them and getting the governor to withdraw his proposal which we achieved.” Daniel Gallagher, SteppingStone Executive Director

The larger issues of this year will no doubt relate to the resumption of in-Center care activities as the pandemic winds down. As this take place, SteppingStone will seek to be part of this process to inform the discussion and represent our clients and their families.

“I think SteppingStone has a responsibility as the oldest and largest provider of adult day health care to inform policy makers about the challenges and successes of providing care for frail elders and adults with disabilities. This agency has a long history of speaking up for the people we serve and will continue to do so, working in coalition with many other organizations in San Francisco and beyond.” Daniel Gallagher, SteppingStone Executive Director

Photos: **(Masthead)** 2011 rally at SF City Hall organized by coalition of groups to retain funding for adult day health care. SteppingStone was one of the organizing groups and ED Moli Steinert spoke.

(Top) Presentation Center participant protesting proposed budget cuts in 2020.

(Middle) SteppingStone Executive Director Daniel Gallagher.

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