



SteppingStone Advocacy Efforts 2022

SteppingStone Advocacy Efforts 2022 Update from Daniel Gallagher, Executive Director

SteppingStone has a long history of advocacy on behalf of seniors and adults with disabilities to protect and expand the programs that serve them. As the oldest and largest adult day health care (ADHC) provider in San Francisco, we are well known to policy makers who welcome the information we provide on the needs of the people we serve.

In 2022, the third year of the COVID pandemic, many organizations and systems sought to return to normal operations including adult day health care providers across California. It was expected that a full return to in-center care would take place and remote care programs would end in January, but a winter surge of infections made this impossible. The question of when full congregate services could fully resume and remote services end, dominated policy discussions at the state level for most of 2022.



I serve as President of the Board of Directors of the California Association for Adult Day Services (CAADS) and participated in statewide policy discussions regarding the resumption of services as a member of the Vision Team. The Vision Team, comprised of CAADS, Adult Day Health Care agencies, and California Department of Aging leadership, met frequently on COVID policies and regulations. I also testified before legislative committees about the state response.

Everyone agreed the goal was to return clients to in-Center care as quickly, and safely, as possible while providing support at home until they were able to do so. Part of the challenge were health restrictions to keep participants safe, but this was not the only concern. Our participants were physically weaker and traumatized by the long period of isolation. They had difficulty returning to their Centers for all care days. Many also had difficulty with transportation, a complex system in San Francisco that is itself just returning to normal operations.

At the meetings with policy makers, I relayed what I was hearing from our Centers and their clients, namely that it would take time to complete the full return to congregate services. SteppingStone strongly urged that remote care remain an option for clients who needed it as long as possible and that other steps be taken to help adult day health providers transition back to providing in-Center care.

Over time, there were fewer restrictions on in-Center care and SteppingStone resumed full operations, including meal services, in July. Remote services ended September 30. However, with the expiration of remote care, a change in regulations provided that adult day health care agencies can and should provide remote care in emergency situations.

Allowing ADHC providers to maintain care remotely if a participant has an emergency is a key regulatory change, particularly given the health challenges we are all living through. So far, SteppingStone has implemented this in response to personal emergencies, but it may be utilized for broader public health emergencies as well. This is a key tool for us to maintain uninterrupted care in these uncertain times.

The impact of the COVID pandemic on ADHC providing agencies throughout California has been profound. To help address this, CAADS sought supplemental funding for adult day care agencies, which was approved by the legislature in the form of a \$61.4 million authorization for the Bridge to Recovery Program. The California Department of Aging, through a grant program beginning in 2023, will administer this funding.

Overall, state policy makers in the administration and legislature listened to the concerns of service agencies and our clients on how best to provide adult day health care during this time. This translated into more flexibility and more resources for frontline care providers across California.

At the local level, SteppingStone has been deeply involved in policy issues related to care for older adults and adults with disabilities for decades. Several years ago, as a result of years of work by many organizations, San Francisco voters created the Dignity Fund, a specific program to provide funding to meet the needs of seniors and adults with disabilities. This is not the only mechanism to fund these programs within city government, but it is a key element, and a focus of advocacy efforts.

One group working to increase and improve city support for programs that serve older adults and adults with disabilities is the Coalition of Agencies Serving the Elderly (CASE). I serve as Co-Chair of CASE along with Fiona Hinze, the Director of Public Policy at the Independent Living Resource Center. As the co-chairs of CASE, we also serve as the chairs of the Dignity Fund's Service Providers Working Group, which provides recommendations to the Fund's oversight committee.

The San Francisco Department of Disability and Aging conducts a formal needs assessment every four years, most recently in early 2022. This assessment helps establish the Fund's priorities and identifies gaps in city funding. One of the priorities for CASE, and all the service agencies this year, was to ensure our clients' voices were heard during the needs assessment process. This was challenging because we were trying to reach under-represented populations and that was made even more difficult due to the pandemic. At SteppingStone, because we are in near daily contact with hundreds of participants, we can encourage them and their care providers to be involved in the assessment and many were.

In addition to the work with the Dignity Fund Community Needs Assessment, CASE worked on multiple priority issues in 2022. Notable among these was the effort to increase internet access for seniors and people with disabilities, a long-standing priority. The group was able to secure a \$1.5 million commitment from the city for this effort.

Other priorities for the Coalition in 2022 were support for family caregiving programs, mental health services and respite care as well as improving both transportation and public safety for older adults and adults with disabilities. I am pleased with the work of CAADS and CASE in 2022. We have been able to secure both new flexibility and additional funding for adult service agencies across the state. In San Francisco, the Needs Assessment, a key policy document, was created with strong input from service agencies and our clients.

I don't want to overstate our circumstances; these are difficult times for older adults and people with disabilities and the agencies that serve them. But step-by-step we are strengthening care programs and the agencies that provide them. My hope is that the advocacy work performed this year will improve the quality of life

for our clients and San Francisco's older adults and adults with disabilities in general.

Donate

Contact Us

www.steppingstonehealth.org

SteppingStone Health | 930 Fourth St | San Francisco, CA | 415-974-6784