



Commission on Aging

SENIOR UPDATE
AREA AGENCY ON AGING
ADVISORY COMMISSION ON AGING
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January/February/March 2019

Senior Update

...The Eyes and Ears of Alameda County Seniors

Happy New Year!

Jose Villafior, Area Agency on Aging

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Happy New Year to all of you!! 2019

Take time to reflect, take time to reassess areas of your life, take time to enjoy every moment you have with yourself and others. What is essential here for you is your health and well-being, and to take time for you.

Get outdoors, learn something new, reacquaint yourself with someone from your past. Focus on reconnecting with those in your life who bring you motivation, positivity, and energy!

Do your best to live without regret. It's one life that we have, so take advantage of every day as much as possible. Your future grandchildren will cherish you more for it as you will have a wealth of experiences and knowledge to share with them.

Thank you for your continued support of Older Adults in Alameda County! May the new year bring change, moments of clarity, and even more reasons to be in the Thankful!



No-Stress 2019: Stay Active/ Participate in a Fall Prevention Class & Join Medication Safety!

Joey Tchang, Senior Support Program of the Tri-Valley, Fall Prevention Coordinator,

Marjory Tilley, Medication Safety Program Manager

New Year

As we stand at the crossroads of a new beginning, 2019, many may feel the need to make New Year Resolutions. Research shows that many of these well intended New Year Resolutions fail by February. To avoid the remorse of disappointment, remember that it is OK to wait until you are ready to commit to your goal.

Resolutions do not have to begin on 1 January (you could use your birthday). Improve your well-being by channeling energy into just one goal you want to achieve and remember to be specific, so you will enjoy a No-Stress 2019 New Year!

As humans we have an innate desire “to improve”. Resolving to do something good for ourselves in the upcoming year involves both external and personal motivation. The single most important thing that can boost emotions, motivation, and perceptions is making progress by meaningful actions (work).

Being resolute to improve in the coming year will make a positive change in your life. Consider improving your well-being by investing in yourself, you are worth it. Older Adults in Alameda County have a great opportunity to impact their lives in 2019 by participating in a Fall Prevention Program / Staying Active and by Joining a Medication Safety Program! These practical, well-paired evidence-based programs are available to older adults throughout Alameda County.

New Year's Planning for Falls Prevention

If health conditions during the past year brought challenges to your balance and overall state of mind, then opportunities in the new year can help to reverse or at a minimum mitigate the risk for a serious fall which could potentially change the outcome of your future!

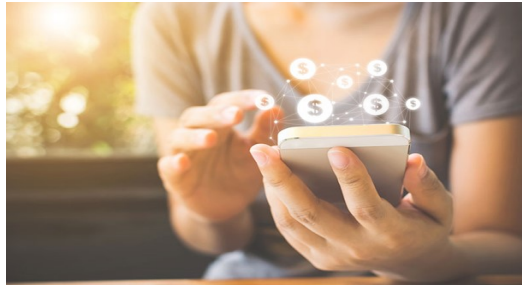
Some health conditions, medications and footwear can affect your ability to stay steady on your feet. You might not notice your health changing as it can happen gradually, so it's important to have regular check-ups so any issues can be picked up before they cause a fall.

Stay active

We've all heard about the importance of regular exercise for general health. As we get older, our muscle strength, bone density and balance decreases, which can lead to a fall. Exercises designed to improve muscle strength and balance can reduce your risk of a fall by maintaining strong muscles and bones, which in turn will help your balance. There are exercises for older people which can be undertaken in the home – including exercising when seated and other exercises to improve balance, flexibility and strength. Consult your primary physician for resources. Start a routine and have simple realistic goals that you can commit to and attain. Depending on your functional fitness level, join an exercise class to meet others who have similar

Social Security Benefits to Increase in 2019

Sarah Kim-Lee, Social Security Regional Public Affairs Specialist



Each year we announce the annual cost-of-living adjustment (COLA, for Social Security Benefits). Usually, there is an increase in the Social Security and Supplemental Security Income (SSI) benefit amount people receive each month, starting in January. Law requires that federal benefit rates increase when the cost of living rises, as measured by the Department of Labor's Consumer Price Index for Urban Wage Earners and Clerical Workers (CPI-W).

The CPI-W rises when prices increase for the things the average consumer buys. This means that when prices for goods and services we purchase become more expensive, on average, the COLA increases benefits and helps beneficiaries keep up with the changing cost of living.

More than 67 million Americans will see a 2.8 percent increase in their Social Security and SSI benefits in 2019.

January 2019 marks other changes based on the increase in the national average wage index. For example, the maximum amount of earnings subject to Social Security payroll tax, as well as the retirement earnings test exempt amount, will change in 2019.

Want to know your new benefit amount as soon as possible? In December 2018, we will post Social Security COLA notices online for retirement, survivors, and disability beneficiaries who have a *my Social Security* account. You will be able to view and save these COLA notices securely via the Message Center inside *my Social Security*.

Be the first to know! Sign up for or log in to your personal *my Social Security* account today at www.socialsecurity.gov/myaccount. Choose email or text under "Message Center Preferences" to receive courtesy notifications so you won't miss your electronic COLA notice!

This year, even if you access your COLA notice online, you will still receive your COLA notice by mail. In the future, you will be able to choose whether you receive your notice online instead of on paper. Online notices will not be available to representative payees, individuals with foreign mailing addresses, or those who pay higher Medicare premiums due to their income. We plan to expand the availability of COLA notices to additional online customers in the future.

More information about the 2019 COLA is available at www.socialsecurity.gov/cola. You can also read our publication about the annual cost-of-living adjustment at www.socialsecurity.gov/pubs/EN-05-10526.pdf.

Get Prepared! Start the New Year Right

Mary Louise Zernicke, Area Agency on Aging, Senior Nutritionist

The sad fact of the Camp Fire is that many older adults did not make it out safely. Older Adults must plan ahead and be ready for emergencies. In a crisis setting we cannot expect emergency responders to assist individuals. They will have their hands full.

What is the most important preparation for an emergency?

It is to make sure you are not alone and that someone else will check on you and assist if necessary. **Develop a "buddy" system** with family, friends, neighbors, or co-workers. Plan how you will help each other in an emergency. Someone who can check in following an emergency will become an important ally in alleviating emergency-induced stress. Seniors may want individuals who form their personal support network to:

What else should you do in advance?

- Check on them immediately after an emergency (earthquake, fire, etc.) and offer personal assistance as needed.

- Have a spare copy of important keys.

- Know where emergency supplies are kept.

- Have copies of relevant emergency documents that specify medication, special equipment, and other life support needs.

- Have an agreed upon communications system regarding how to contact each other in an emergency. This plan should account for the fact that telephones may not work after a major earthquake.

Alameda County Long Term Care Ombudsman

Denyse McCowan, Regional Program Coordinator

The Alameda County Long Term Care Ombudsman Program is looking for volunteers. If you are passionate about advocating for residents of long-term care facilities, are observant, reliable, and can use your interpersonal skills to help resolve issues, you may want to consider joining the Ombudsman team.

You and other volunteers will participate in a 36 hour volunteer training program and then spend a few hours a week helping people in need by responding to and investigating complaints.

For more information, please contact Denyse McCowan or Andrea Hall at ombuds@acgov.org, or Phone (510) 638-6878.

Upcoming training dates to be determined for March 2019.

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Mary Louise Zernicke, Area Agency on Aging, Senior Nutritionist

Prepare an emergency go kit that you could grab and take with you if there is a need to evacuate. Include necessary medications, basic toiletries, any special sanitary aids, and whom to contact in emergencies.

Make a list of your medications, allergies, special equipment, doctor's number, and whom to contact in emergencies. People who have difficulty with communication should have important information written out, such as special toileting needs or how to lift or move them. Give a copy to each buddy, keep a copy with you, and put a copy in your go kit (above).

Make a plan with your personal care attendant. If you use an attendant from an agency, see if the agency has special provisions for emergencies.

Determine at least two usable exits from each room and from your building.

Pick one out-of-state and one local friend or relative for family and others to call if separated. Identify a location where you can reunite with family/friends.

As aging may limit certain self-sufficiency skills, what contingencies should older adults prepare for regarding emergencies?

Evaluate your capabilities, limitations and needs, as well as your surroundings, to determine what type of help your personal support network may need to provide in an emergency.

Will you be able to independently shut off the necessary utilities (gas, water, electricity)?

Can you operate a fire extinguisher?

Do you have an evacuation kit that you can quickly grab and carry if you must leave your home?

Have you moved or secured large objects that might block your escape path?

Write instructions for the following (keep a copy with you and share with your personal support network)

How to turn off utilities

How to operate and safely move any essential equipment you have

How to safely transport you if you need to be carried

How to provide personal assistance services

How you will evacuate and where you will go



Loneliness and the Holidays

Rezsín Gonzalez, Program Specialist, Division of Adult Protection, Department of Adult and Aging Services

Turning the corner of the skilled nursing facility, Mrs. McCowan, Social Services Ombudsman, would hear Mr. Jones call her name as his feet worked double time to manipulate his wheelchair down the hallway in order to greet her. Mr. Jones was placed into a skilled nursing facility still cognizant of his surroundings, but no longer in control of his home, which had been turned into a rental property by a “friend.” As an advocate for those whose voices can be lost, Mrs. McCowan’s visits became a lifeline and symbol of hope for Mr. Jones, as she advocated for his needs and rights at the skilled nursing facility, and assisted in ensuring that his property was returned to him. Mr. Jones’ determination to get down the hallway to see Mrs. McCowan, combined with the complexity of his situation, is an excellent illustration of the value of the Long Term Care Ombudsman Program.

Ombudsman staff and volunteers are advocates for residents of licensed care facilities. They investigate and resolve complaints, misunderstandings and grievances made by, or on behalf of, individual residents in licensed long term care facilities. These facilities include nursing homes, board and care homes and assisted living facilities. Ombudsmen address resident-to-resident conflicts (ranging from miscommunication to physical assaults) as well as caregiver neglect, poor facility management, and financial and physical abuse. Alameda County Ombudsmen and volunteers advocate on behalf of residents in 75 skilled nursing homes and multiple assisted living facilities throughout the county. The program investigated more than 1250 cases in the last twelve months. In addition, there are an average of 450 oversight and referral activities each month that include discharge monitoring, information and referral, and clarification of resident rights. Ombudsmen are vital to the well-being and protection of older adult residents in care homes because so many do not have family members in a position to recognize abuse or effectively advocate for them.

An effective Ombudsman requires the commitment of individuals possessing unique qualities. As Jennifer Stephens-Pierre, Alameda County’s Director of the Area Agency on Aging, notes, “An Ombudsman needs to be able to have a heart and respect for our older adults and dependent adult population, be able to listen, observe, advocate, and maintain professional relationships with facility staff and the residents.” The number of reports and complaints made to Community Care Licensing has a direct correlation to the number of Ombudsman visits that are made. More visits to a facility translates to the fewer complaints regarding lackluster care, neglect, and resident-to-resident conflicts. Ombudsmen receive extensive training and a State of California certification, providing both confidence and practical knowledge for the work.

For more information on volunteering with the Ombudsman Program, please call the Alameda County Long-Term Care Ombudsman Program at 510-638-6878 or e-mail ombuds@acgov.org.

To report a concern/complaint: Alameda County Long-Term Care Ombudsman Program 510-638-6878 or After Hours Crisis Line 1-800-231-4024.



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interests to obtain mutual support and motivation. Visit your local senior center to find out what classes are available to meet your needs and can accommodate any physical limitations.

Take care of your eyes and hearing

Get your eyes and glasses checked regularly, at least every two years. This will detect any vision problems early before they cause you to lose your balance and coordination.

Problems with your ears can severely affect your balance and the risk of hearing loss increases with age. Talk with your General Practitioner if you notice hearing changes are affecting your day-to-day living or social life. The problem may be something easily treated, such as a build-up of ear wax or an ear infection.

Combined sight and hearing problems can make it difficult to maintain your balance.

Contact your local adult social services department to explain how your vision or hearing difficulties, or both, are affecting your day-to-day life. They will arrange an assessment and specialist staff will explain the help available to make daily tasks easier.

Join Medication Safety!

Medication-related problems and errors endanger the lives and well-being of a high percentage of community-dwelling older adults. As we age, changes in our body can affect the way medications are absorbed and utilized. These age-related changes in a drugs disposition (absorption, distribution, metabolism, and excretion) within the body can increase older adult falls. We become more sensitive to medications and we are more likely to experience side effects, drug interactions and other adverse reactions. The normal aging process can change the way medications are absorbed, metabolized, distributed and removed from the body, causing side effects to become more pronounced.

Enrolling in an evidence-based medication safety program supports wellness in the home, serves as a vital medication safety check and provides older adults with strategies to manage their medications. The program is beneficial for some who see multiple doctors, have had a fall or dizziness recently, take blood thinners or diabetes medication, or have had a recent hospital visit.

The benefits and unique features of this free, confidential, individualized medication review include: education on medication compliance, a medication interaction report, assistive devices, including a pill box and a personal medication record. The comprehensive in-home assessment uses software to screen medications of potentially harmful problems and can include a review by an independent pharmacist. Medication Safety Programs are available through community-based organizations throughout Alameda County.

No-Stress 2019

By thinking small and being specific you can make a positive change in 2019. Your firm decision to do something “to improve” your well-being will contribute to furthering your happiness, vitality, calmness, purpose, self-worth, optimism, significance and awareness.

Consider channeling your time and energy into “specific aspects” of your well-being this New Year.

Stay Active & Participate in a Fall Prevention Program

Take care of your eyes and hearing,

Join a Medication Safety Program!

To locate a Fall Prevention Program or Medication Safety Program near you, Older Adults in Alameda County can contact Carol Powers, Senior Injury Prevention Coordinator, EMS, (510) 667-2050.



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Senior Information

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We're On The Web!

http://www.alamedasocialservices.org/public/services/elders_and_disabled_adults/aaa.cfm

Senior Update Editorial Board: Helen Buckholz, Donna Ireland, Sarah Kim-Lee, Delbert Walker, Jose Villaflor

Dates to Remember:

New Years Day– January 1

Martin Luther King Jr. Day– January 19

Lincoln's Birthday– February 12

Valentine's Day– February 14

St. Patrick's Day– March 17

First Day of Spring– March 20

Upcoming Meetings:

ACA Meeting– January 14, 2019

ACA Meeting– February 11, 2019

ACA Meeting– March 11, 2019