

TARGETING OF SERVICES

"...provide assurance that preference will be given to providing services to older individuals with the greatest economic or social needs, with particular attention to low income minority individuals."

Older Americans Act

Section 305(a)(2)(e)

September 22, 1992

Since its inception, one of the distinguishing features of the Older Americans Act is that all older persons, regardless of income, are eligible to participate in the programs and services funded through the Act. Recognizing as early as 1973 that the Act's funding was inadequate to support a full array of community-based services, the United States Senate Committee on Labor and Public Welfare pointed out that while "programs authorized under the Older Americans Act have never depended upon income as the sole criterion for eligibility...special consideration to the needs of the low-income elderly [should be given]."¹

With each successive reauthorization of the Older Americans Act, targeting services has continued to be an important issue. Over the years, the groups identified for special targeting have frequently changed: rural; frail; vulnerable; socially needy; economically needy; isolated; persons with dementia; developmentally disabled; low vision/blind; limited English speaking. Targeting services to low income minority persons has consistently been a priority and remains in the most recent reauthorization of the Act in September, 1992. At the same time, the Congress has also consistently prohibited the use of means testing on income as a way to target services under the Older Americans Act.

It is the position of the Marin Commission on Aging that, in keeping with the wider intent of the Older Americans Act which emphasizes local responses to locally identified needs, local responsibility for targeting services is essential. It is the responsibility of the locally appointed Commissions on Aging, along with the staff of Area Agencies on Aging, to assure that "services to low income minority individuals [are] in at least the same proportion as the population of low-income minority older individuals bears to the population of older individuals of the area." [OAA 306(a)(5)(A) (ii)(II)]

The Division of Aging & Adult Services has developed a number of targeting strategies to fulfill this responsibility:

1. Contracting with minority service providers;
2. Including language in all subcontracts which requires a service provider to serve minorities in the same proportion as they represent in Marin's older population;
3. Participating in staff trainings to improve sensitivity to, and effectiveness with, targeted elders;

¹ Older Americans Act Reauthorization Issues, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration on Aging, January 1991, p.4.

4. Monitoring programs which provide specialized services and outreach to minority elders, e.g., the Multicultural Outreach Program.

One of the Commission's four-year goals specifically addresses identifying and reaching out to underserved populations in Marin County. This includes the county's growing populations of Hispanic and Asian Americans; the African American community living in Marin City; frail, older adults over the age of seventy-five; and isolated older persons living in rural West Marin. As well, Area Agencies on Aging in California are now required to ensure that gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender older adults and informal/unpaid caregivers are included in their assessment of needs and are adequately serviced. In every case, service providers must be sensitive to the cultural values and special needs of each group.