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## SENATE COMMITTEE ON HUMAN SERVICES

Senator Becker, Chair

2025 - 2026 Regular

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**Bill No:** SB 971  
**Author:** Choi  
**Version:** April 9, 2026  
**Urgency:** No  
**Consultant:** Heather Hopkins  
**Hearing Date:** April 20, 2026  
**Fiscal:** No

**Subject:** Healthy Aging Community Partnerships Program

### SUMMARY

This bill provides that a local health department, area agency on aging, local school district, or other appropriate county department, may establish community-based programs for older adults designed to promote healthy aging, social engagement, and independent living in collaboration with relevant local entities, including school districts, libraries, faith institutions, and community organizations.

### ABSTRACT

#### Existing Law:

- 1) Establishes the Older Americans Act, which promotes the well-being of Americans 60 years old and above through services and programs designed to meet their needs. (*42 United States Code 3001 et seq.*)
- 2) Establishes the Mello-Granlund Older Californians Act, which establishes the California Department of Aging (CDA), and sets forth its duties and powers, including, among other things, entering into a contract for the development of information and materials to educate Californians on the concept of “aging in place.” (*Welfare and Institutions Code (WIC) 9100 et seq.*)
- 3) Requires the Secretary of California Health and Human Services (CalHHS), in coordination with the Director of CDA, to lead the development and implementation of the Master Plan on Aging established pursuant to Executive Order N-14-19. (*WIC 9850*)

#### This Bill:

- 1) Provides that a local health department, area agency on aging, local school district, or other appropriate county department, may establish community-based programs for older adults designed to promote healthy aging, social engagement, and independent living in collaboration with relevant local entities, including school districts, libraries, faith institutions, and community organizations.

- 2) Provides that if a local entity establishes a community-based program, the program activities may include, but are not limited to, technology assistance, physical activity, music or arts programming, cultural programming, language learning opportunities, shared meals, and other community-based enrichment activities that support healthy aging and social connection.
- 3) Defines “older adults” as persons 55 years of age or older.
- 4) Provides that these programs are not mandatory for any local entity or department to implement.
- 5) Provides that implementation is subject to the availability of local resources and partnerships.

### FISCAL IMPACT

This bill has been keyed non-fiscal by Legislative Counsel.

### BACKGROUND AND DISCUSSION

#### **Purpose of the Bill:**

According to the author, “California’s older adult population is growing rapidly, yet no designated public system is responsible for coordinating education and prevention services tailored to their real-life needs. SB 971 addresses this gap by establishing a statutory framework that authorizes counties to deliver older adult education. By partnering with community-based organizations, this approach aims to improve health outcomes, promote independence, and enhance quality of life for Californians age 55 and over.”

#### *Aging Californians*

California is projected to be home to 10.8 million people age 60 and older by 2030. This is nearly twice as many people age 60 and older as there were in 2010. Additionally, by 2030 one out of every four Californians will be older adults. The state is making efforts to meet the needs of this growing population. In January 2021, the Newsom Administration published its Master Plan for Aging, which is intended to be a ten-year blueprint for state government, local government, the private sector, and philanthropy to prepare the state for the coming demographic changes and “continue California’s leadership in aging, disability, and equity.” The five goals of the Master Plan are: housing for all ages and stages; health reimaged; inclusion and equity, not isolation; caregiving that works; and affording aging.

This bill seeks to expand educational opportunities available to older adults. It further provides that program activities may include, but are not limited to, technology assistance, physical activity, music or arts programming, cultural programming, language learning opportunities, shared meals, and other community-based enrichment activities that support healthy aging and social connection. These proposed educational programs could help to achieve the goals in the

Master Plan for Aging by reducing older adult isolation as well as spreading awareness of programs and strategies to help older adults stay healthy and active.

*Area Agencies on Aging (AAA)*

The CDA administers programs serving older adults through contracts with local agencies in 33 locations across the state which provide a wide array of services on a community level to seniors and adults with disabilities. Each county is required to have an AAA to ensure all communities have access to local aging programs and to provide information and services for older adults. Some AAAs serve multiple counties at once. For example, one AAA serves Lassen, Modoc, Shasta, Siskiyou and Trinity counties. AAA programs often include long-term care ombudsman services, nutrition services, caregiver support and respite, Medicare counseling, legal referrals, transportation, and case management.

*Older Adult Education*

Older adult education is noncredit courses offered to promote lifelong learning. Previously, older adult education programs were overseen by local school districts, with funding provided to those school districts to provide services to older adults. After the Great Recession of 2008, older adult education was consolidated into the community college system. This consolidation effectively eliminated older adult specific education as a distinct public service. California's older adult education is now done primarily through the California Adult Education Program which offers free, noncredit, flexible courses on topics such as digital literacy and health.

This bill seeks to fill the gap of direct older adult education caused by the post-recession consolidation. It allows local entities to partner with county departments to establish older adult education programs.

**Related/Prior Legislation:**

***SB 1249 (Roth, Chapter 337, Statutes of 2024)***, among other provisions, requires CDA, by September 30, 2026, to take various actions, including, among others, identify the core programs and services to be provided to older adults and family caregivers, and develop a statewide consumer engagement plan. Requires CDA to develop regulations that address specified topics related to AAA designations.

***AB 3207 (Patterson of 2024)*** would have required the CDSS to establish and administer a toll-free hotline to assist all Californians dealing with scams. This bill would have required CDSS to ensure that the program and its staff are equipped to meet the needs of individuals who are 60 years of age and older. AB 3207 was held on the Assembly Appropriations Committee suspense file.

***SB 228 (Jackson, Chapter 742, Statutes of 2019)*** requires the Secretary of CalHHS, in coordination with the Director of CDA, to lead the development and implementation of the Master Plan on Aging.

***AB 2800 (Granlund, Chapter 1097, Statutes of 1996)*** amended the Older Californians Act by establishing new programs and making structural changes to service delivery.

**COMMENTS**

This bill seeks to fill the gap of direct older adult education caused by the post-recession consolidation that eliminated older adult education as a distinct public service. This bill allows local entities to collaborate to establish community-based programs for older adults. It is unclear if the local entities identified in this bill would have the funding or capacity to add such programs. Additionally, the topics listed are duplicative of many existing programs within these local entities, specifically the AAAs. If funding is not available and local entities choose not to enter into these partnerships, the bill does not seem to advance the goals of improving educational opportunities available to older adults. Further, it is unclear if such local entities need the authorization in this bill to pursue such educational programs, or if they already have the ability to start these programs.

**PRIOR VOTES**

Senate Health Committee:

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**POSITIONS****Support:**

LeadingAge California

**Oppose:**

None Received

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