

THIRD READING

Bill No: SB 971
Author: Choi (R), et al.
Amended: 4/9/26
Vote: 21

SENATE HEALTH COMMITTEE: 11-0, 3/25/26

AYES: Weber Pierson, Valladares, Caballero, Durazo, Gonzalez, Grove,
Menjivar, Padilla, Pérez, Rubio, Smallwood-Cuevas

SENATE HUMAN SERVICES COMMITTEE: 4-0, 4/20/26

AYES: Becker, Niello, Laird, Weber Pierson

NO VOTE RECORDED: Pérez

SUBJECT: Healthy Aging Community Partnerships Program

SOURCE: Author

DIGEST: 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.

ANALYSIS:

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.

Comments

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 California Department of Social Services (CDSS) to establish and administer a toll-free hotline to assist all Californians dealing with scams. The 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.

FISCAL EFFECT: Appropriation: No Fiscal Com.: No Local: No

SUPPORT: (Verified 04/22/2026)

LeadingAge California

OPPOSITION: (Verified 04/22/2026)

None received

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