

USING THE ELDER INDEX: CALIFORNIA AREA AGENCIES ON AGING

SURVEY EXECUTIVE SUMMARY MAY 2010

In partnership with the Insight Center for Community Economic Development, members of the Women's Policy Institute Elder Issues Team¹ conducted a survey of Area Agencies on Aging (AAA's) in California to investigate whether they use the Elder Economic Security Index (EESI), their attitudes toward the tool and its impact on their work. The survey was conducted in February of 2010 and 28 of California's 33 AAA's responded.

Key findings:

- 27 of 28 responding AAA's have heard of the Elder Index, and 17 report that they use it in some way. AAAs reported using the tool for one or more of the following purposes: planning processes (5), internal and external education (8), and advocacy efforts (7) to support their programs.
- AAA's generally reported that the Elder Index provides a more accurate picture of the needs in their community, that it has been a useful educational tool when approaching funders, and that it has been helpful in advocating for support for services.
- Five AAA's reported that using the Elder Index has saved them time that they would have spent conducting surveys or identifying other data sources to understand the costs and economic needs in their communities. No AAA's reported that using the tool has caused them to incur additional costs.
- The most commonly cited obstacle to using the Elder Index was that it is not endorsed or mandated by the California Department of Aging or other state agencies. Several AAA's indicated that they are waiting for such guidance before implementing the tool.

Survey respondents reported:

- *"We use the Elder Index for the education of elected officials as they evaluate the impact of service cuts to seniors."*
- *"The Elder Index simply provides a more realistic framework for understanding the size of the low-income population in San Francisco. It is a better reflection of the high cost of living here than the Federal Poverty Line."*
- *"Across the board, the Elder Index has been a very important educational tool when speaking to the community, funders and service agencies about the economic situation facing our older adults."*

¹ A program of the Women's Foundation of California, the Women's Policy Institute Elder Issues Team included: Julia Tal Caplan, California Senior Leaders Alliance, Berkeley; Elvira Castillo, Los Angeles County Community and Senior Services; Brooke Hollister, University of California, San Francisco; Saima Husain, South Asian Network, Artesia; Jessica Jew, Los Angeles County Department of Public Health ; and Leane Marchese ElderHelp, San Diego

- *“We use the Elder Index for education of policymakers locally, advocacy efforts of the Commission on Aging, and to promote more focus on nutrition services.”*
- *“We are planning to use it in helping low-income senior access benefits.”*
- *“It helps to frame the discussion regarding the "hidden" needs of seniors, many of whom are too proud to admit that they are struggling, and certainly do not want to be seen as being on ‘welfare’.”*
- *“Without legislation on the use of the Elder Index as a basis for looking at the number of people who fall into poverty, places like Marin will always look like we have very few people who are financially insecure. Marin is one of the most expensive counties to live in across the state. Use of FPL versus EI also puts our county at a disadvantage for funding—so long as the FPL is used to gauge poverty.”*

17 Area Agencies on Aging

Use the Elder Index for their Planning and Service Areas (PSAs)

[PSA 1:](#) (Del Norte and Humboldt Counties)

[PSA 17:](#) (Santa Barbara and San Luis Obispo Counties)

[PSA 4:](#) (Placer, Sacramento, Sierra, Sutter, Yuba, Yolo and Nevada Counties)

[PSA 18:](#) (Ventura County)

[PSA 19:](#) (Los Angeles County)

[PSA 5:](#) (Marin County)

[PSA 22:](#) (Orange County)

[PSA 6:](#) (City and County of San Francisco)

[PSA 23:](#) (San Diego County)

[PSA 8:](#) (San Mateo County)

[PSA 25:](#) (City of Los Angeles)

[PSA 9:](#) (Alameda County)

[PSA 26:](#) (Lake and Mendocino County)

[PSA 11:](#) (San Joaquin County)

[PSA 28:](#) (Napa and Solano Counties)

[PSA 14:](#) (Fresno and Madera Counties)

[PSA 29:](#) (El Dorado County)