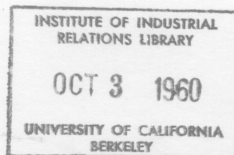


AGING —

PUBLIC WELFARE'S ROLE



AMERICAN PUBLIC WELFARE ASSOCIATION



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Social Service Needs of Older People
and the
Role of Public Welfare in Meeting These Needs ,

A policy statement of the American Public Welfare Association, developed by its Committee on Aging and adopted by its Board of Directors in February 1960.

1960.

PREFACE

The complex problems which many of our aging population face has brought into sharp focus the challenge to public welfare in working toward better solutions to help the older person achieve a more satisfying life. There has been considerable interest in urging agencies and communities to improve and extend activities to insure that joint and individual planning will result in responsible cohesive action.

This statement is directed to the needs of older persons and defines the role of public welfare in assuring recognition of needed services and the necessity of cooperative community planning by all governmental and voluntary groups. It is being presented as a working document with the hope that it may serve as a guide for state and local public welfare agencies, schools of social work, boards, legislators and others, especially for use by local communities and state commissions as they prepare for and implement the 1961 White House Conference on Aging.

The American Public Welfare Association's Committee on Aging is responsible for the preparation of this document which is the result of two years' consideration by various regional groups. It has been approved by the Board of Directors as an official policy statement of the Association.

This is one of a series of publications sponsored by the American Public Welfare Association Project on Aging, inaugurated in August 1959 with funds provided by the Ford Foundation "to help state and local public welfare agencies to establish and operate or expand and improve programs designed to meet the social, economic and health needs of the aging."

Jay L. Roney, Director
Public Welfare Project on Aging

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Social Service Needs of Older People and the Role of Public Welfare in Meeting These Needs

Social service requirements of older people and the concern of public welfare for meeting these requirements are direct outgrowths of significant changes in society which demand, and are now beginning to receive, serious attention.

Public welfare, as a major repository of society's concern for the general welfare of its members, must now plan definitively for the needs of the older population in the same way that it has planned for the needs of children.

I. FACTORS BEHIND THE GROWING NEEDS OF OLDER PERSONS

Changes in society, in the recent past, have had significant impact on the older person, his role in his family, and his place in the community. These changes underlie the needs of older persons and the services essential to meet them.

A. Cultural Factors

The rapid changes in society have left families, older persons themselves, and society generally, in conflict as to the value and role of older persons in the culture. This has often led to inadequate or absence of constructive approaches and measures to meet the needs of older persons that are commensurate with responsibilities society has assumed with respect to other age groups.

The newness of the nation, the fairly recent closure of the frontier, rapid industrialization and accompanying concepts of "rugged individualism" have all contributed to youth orientation. This phenomenon which has yet to be studied extensively by anthropologists and sociologists reflects itself in family living, in the employment opportunities, and in the general paucity of facilities for health, recreation, education, social, and other needs of older persons. In a similar way, orientation toward youth has affected professional and sub-professional training programs. This has resulted in the development of relatively few persons with knowledges and skills essential to meet the needs of the older population.

B. Population Changes and Movement

In the past 50 years, the rate of increase of the number of persons 65 years and older has been twice that of the population as a whole. Sheer increase in numbers is forcing society to take a long look at meeting the needs that accompany old age.

<u>Year</u>	<u>Persons 65 Years 1/</u> <u>and Older</u>	<u>Per Cent of 1/</u> <u>Population</u>
1900	3,080,000	4.1
1958	15,041,000	8.6
1975 (Estimated)	21,872,000	9.3

Already a dozen states in the country have concentrations of over 10 percent of their population in the older age groups. The maximum con-

1/ 1900 data from Bureau of Census, U.S. Census of Population: 1950, Vol. II, Characteristics of the People, Part I, U.S. Summary, pp.1 to 93, Table 39
 1958 data from Bureau of Census, Current Population Reports, Population Estimates Series P-25, No. 193, p.9
 1975 data from U. S. Bureau of the Census, Current Population Reports, Population Estimates, Series P-25, No. 187, pp. 16, 17.

centration of older people is in the New England states, the Great Plains states, and Florida.

A century ago, 80 percent of the country's population lived on farms; now, the same proportion lives in cities. With the smaller urban accommodations for housing, there is less opportunity for older persons to live with their children. Populations have become increasingly mobile, with improved transportation and communication technologies. These population shifts bring in their wake family break-ups and social dislocation. Two wars and a major depression have further contributed to the scattering of families and family groups.

C. Increased Life Span for More People

Advances in the general standard of living, in the field of medicine, and in social services, have brought about a longer span of life for a greater number of persons. At the turn of the century, an average life span of about 48 years could be expected for men, and 51 for women. By 1954, those figures rose to 67 and 73, respectively. For those who have already reached the age of 65, further lengthening of the average life span may be anticipated.

D. Economic Factors

Although society has provided basic income protection through social insurances and pension programs, the increased life span places an increasing economic burden on each wage earner. He must provide not only for his family during his earning years, but also for himself and his wife after his retirement, and for the later years of his wife, who will probably outlive him. Arbitrary retirement practices based only on chronological age and not related to work ability of the individual

result in a longer period of later life on reduced income. Moreover, the present economic situation of a slight but steady inflationary trend, places at a disadvantage retired persons and others living on a fixed income. Medical costs are a large factor in the older person's budget, and frequently must be met at a time when income from employment has ceased. Increased costs of living and reliance on a total money economy seriously limit ability of children to make substantial financial contributions to their aged parents.

II. NEEDS OF OLDER PERSONS

The human family is composed of individuals at all stages of the aging process. Each stage has its unique attributes and makes its particular contribution to the continuing development of each individual from birth until death. The human family is dependent upon the fullest realization of the roles of each of its members, and upon the fullest reciprocity between them. Society has partially recognized this through its attention to the special needs of certain of its members. It is important now that more attention should be directed to the problems of the aging in order to keep in balance the planning and services needed by all age groups. Like younger persons, older individuals vary greatly in health, vigor and personal resources. Some individuals who live to 90 and beyond are able to live in their own homes, manage their own affairs and enjoy living. Others at much younger ages require specific aids, services, or protection.

Aging is a biological, psychological and social process which brings about changes in the individual and also affects the situation in which he lives. These changes include retirement from work, lack of or reduced income, varying degrees of dependency on adult children and others, modifica-

tion of family and community roles, decline of biological functioning, loss of spouse and other loved ones, separation from loved ones and familiar surroundings, changes in housing and living arrangements and reduced activity. Older persons and their families must make adjustments to these changes. The kind of adjustment the older person makes to the changes is dependent upon his own personality and experience, upon the attitudes of his family and society in general and upon the opportunities made available. To be truly effective, community services must take into account these individual differences and preferences and provide full opportunity for direct participation on the part of older people themselves in any decisions affecting their welfare.

While all age groups have the same basic needs, certain facets have special implications for older persons; particularly since so many are lone persons who have outlived their families. These needs and their implications are as follows:

A. The Need for Adequate Income

Adequate income is not only essential for daily maintenance needs, but is a pervasive factor in satisfying most other needs. In addition to the usual considerations of food, shelter and clothing, daily maintenance includes such items as special diets, special living arrangements, special services in the home, transportation and recreational and spiritual activities.

Many older people did not realize that they would outlive their own financial resources. Men and women in their 70's and 80's thought that they had made adequate provision for themselves, but now discover that they are in need. The low value of the dollar, high medical costs, the outliving of children or other relatives, may have led to exhaustion of

reserves. Failure of the individual and of society to anticipate and provide the wide variety of services required to meet continuing human needs has accentuated the problem. Old-Age and Survivors Insurance, while available to most retired persons, is in many instances, insufficient to meet basic needs.

B. The Need to Maintain Family and Neighborhood Relationships

The family is a primary factor in the process of adjustment to aging. The meaning of family ties and responsibilities is of major importance to older persons. The relationship of parent to child, where responsibility has rested for many years with the parent, passes through a period of transition whereby the adult child begins to assume responsibility for the parent. The older person often finds this change difficult to accept and needs the continued reality of making a contribution toward the family life, while maintaining maximum independence as long as possible. Frequently, the inability of younger family members to recognize the altered role of parents has impaired satisfactory adjustments. The reciprocity which exists among generations has not been fully recognized, nor has the fact that youth and older persons have valuable contributions to make to each other. Middle-aged family members need to resolve their conflict and find satisfactory solutions to problems engendered by their dual role and responsibilities as parents and children. The opportunity to continue to live in his own home, or in his neighborhood in a suitable family home, has great meaning to most older persons. Wherever the older person may be living, he has an acute need to maintain a satisfying role in his immediate group and in his general community.

C. The Need for Preservation of Health

Good health is necessary to make long life a true blessing. Like adequate income, health is a pervasive factor in total living. Biological changes occur with advancing age, but the impact varies individual by individual. These changes reduce physical capacity and affect physical appearance. For many older persons, these results require adaptations in daily life and in their self-image. Failure to make satisfactory adaptation intensifies physical difficulties and can often lead to emotional disturbance.

Knowledge and experience indicate that impaired physical and mental capabilities are not necessary concomitants of the aging process.

Physical and mental changes may be modified or retarded by appropriate medical and/or social services provided at the proper time.

In order to preserve all strengths, older persons need preventive health services. If these are to be truly effective, the need for health education of older persons must be recognized by family, physicians and the general community. Many older persons need help in locating and using health resources.

Older persons with health problems require no less in terms of medical and nursing care focused on their rehabilitation potentials than anyone else with similar health problems.

D. The Need for Appropriate Housing

Satisfying living arrangements not only represent an urgent need of many older people, but they also have a major kind of personal importance to them as individuals. Thus, good, safe housing, suitably planned and designed in terms of their current and future needs and capacities, is

basic to their well-being. Too many older people are forced by reduced financial circumstances to live in dilapidated quarters under conditions that actually help to generate mental, physical and social ills.

The urgent challenge is for aggressive public and private effort toward the provision of an adequate supply of good standard housing, of differing varieties to permit choices, and low enough in cost to meet housing needs of older people within their means.

As noted above, housing and living arrangements are tied in with the older person's physical and social situation which may require adaptation of living quarters to make them better suited to a person's physical and social situation. The provision of supplementary service, such as visiting nurse, homemakers, home medical care, volunteer services, and casework counseling, may enable a person to remain in his own home.

Some older persons have need for group living arrangements which provide social satisfaction and easing of responsibilities, and enable them to maintain their relationships with family, friends and community.

E. The Need for Continued Usefulness and Meaningful Activity

Older people have both the deep need and the capacity to live usefully, to pursue interests, and to utilize skills. Old age often brings with it inactivity and withdrawal from normal patterns of socialization; continued isolation may lead to serious impairment of function.

On the other hand, the increased freedom from employment and family responsibilities which accompany later years, should provide increased opportunities for usefulness and self-expression to combat loneliness and lack of purpose, the twin vultures of old age.

III. SOCIAL SERVICES ESSENTIAL TO MEET THE NEEDS OF OLDER PEOPLE

While all older people need adequate income, healthy family and neighborhood relationships, proper health services, appropriate housing, meaningful activity, and a sense of continued usefulness, the ways in which these needs are met vary considerably. Traditionally, primary responsibility for meeting these needs has rested with the individual and his family. All community services for older people should be planned and organized to support and strengthen this tradition. Society has established broad measures for helping the individual and his family to carry this primary responsibility, such as social insurance, sanitation codes, building codes, health education and other such programs. There are many older people, however, whose needs cannot be met through their own or family resources, and require a wide range of community services.

Since many of these needs are social in nature, social agencies have a basic responsibility to extend their services to this group. These services are provided through casework, group work and community organization. Good community planning should include not only direct services but also the coordination of existing resources and the stimulation of other community groups to participate in the further enrichment of programs for the aging. These should include the use of the special skills and contributions of volunteer workers as well as those of professional paid staff.

Social services are for remedial and preventive purposes. Social agencies should make available direct services to the older person in order to help him identify his problem and determine a plan of action and to support him in carrying out his plans. Relatives and social agencies should be helped to recognize and understand the problems facing the older person and the

special considerations that may be required to meet these needs. Social agencies also have a primary responsibility through community organization to improve, expand and develop other resources in the community that are needed by older persons and their families.

In planning for services, it must be accepted that work with many older persons will be time-consuming. It is often necessary to reach out to the aged, to help them communicate their problems, fears and what they want for themselves, to give comfort, support and encouragement during periods of difficulty and distress. Services for older people require more extensive collateral activities, particularly in relation to family members. Because of the multiphasic nature of the needs of older people, there is special need for development of effective cooperative working relationships with a variety of community resources. Specifically, the following social services are essential:

A. Services to Meet the Need for Adequate Income

Where income is inadequate or non-existent, assistance should be sufficient to provide basic living needs -- food, clothing, shelter (including home maintenance and repairs), fuel, utilities, personal care and household supplies. Funds for taxes, transportation, newspapers, church attendance, participation in community life and recreation, as well as medical care, should also be included in providing a minimum standard of living which preserves the individual's self-respect as well as his physical well-being.

Meeting the housing and health needs of older people depends directly upon the adequacy of income and the availability of resources. Income also has a direct bearing on the maintenance of family and community relationships, and the extent to which older persons can continue to en-

gage in meaningful activity. Without sufficient financial resources, older persons are seriously limited in the management of their own affairs, in making their own choices and decisions and in maintaining their self-respect.

B. Services to Meet the Need for Appropriate Living Arrangements

Services should be directed toward enabling an older person to remain in his own home. This may require adaptations in the home, special facilities and specific services. In many cases, the provision of a trained homemaker is needed to relieve some stresses of daily management. Volunteer visitors may help in shopping and maintaining community contacts. Meals on wheels (hot meals delivered to homebound persons) may meet the one need of some persons otherwise capable of maintaining their own homes. For many older people plans for temporary care outside their own homes must be made. In such instances, it is especially important to assure the maintenance of the home pending their return. If the time comes when changes in living arrangements must be considered, the older person may be helped in taking the practical steps required in retaining or disposing of his real or personal property, with a full understanding of the emotional significance which his home may have for him.

Counselling may be needed to bring about acceptance of the changed circumstances, both by the older person and his relatives and friends. Help in placement in a nursing or boarding home, or in family care, in accordance with the needs and desires of the individual, is frequently required. Often the best substitute for his own home is provided when an elderly person is located in a carefully selected family home in a familiar neighborhood. Such family homes offer the opportunity for

personal relationships and the maintenance of family and community ties and activities. For persons who want and need the security of group living, homes for the aged and retirement hotels offer varying degrees of overall services and protection.

C. Services to Meet the Need for Preservation of Health

Many of the disabilities which may accompany old age are preventable or postponable. Preventive measures can prolong the period of useful satisfying life. Social casework services may aid the older individual and his family to understand and accept physical care needs, limitations and changing capacities. Such services can help develop responsibility for obtaining regular medical care and developing plans to meet health needs. Casework services may also help the older person to handle his fear about declining capacities and disabling illness. If he can be helped toward a realistic appraisal of his situation, including anticipation of practical alternatives available to him when the need may arise, his current capacity to do for himself can be increased and in some instances actually defer the onset of disability.

As with other areas of need, social agencies should join with medical and health personnel in taking the responsibility for interpreting social implications of the health problems of older people to relatives and the community at large. Particularly, information and suggestions should be made to medical personnel to assist them to serve the aged more effectively. Major emphasis should be placed on joint consideration regarding the physical condition, medical care requirements, and the psycho-social needs of the patient, with alternative ways of providing appropriate care.

A corollary service is cooperative planning to develop, expand, coordinate and adapt a variety of health services designed to meet the health needs of older persons. These services include appropriate clinics, programs of education for prevention of disease, establishment of good nutrition, establishment and maintenance of various home care programs designed to keep people in the community and rehabilitation service, both institutional and otherwise, consonant with modern medical knowledge. To be effective, community planning should receive high priority and take place at the appropriate responsible level.

D. Services for Protective Purposes

Protective services are required for older persons who cannot be fully self-directing and self-determining. An agency may provide substantial supportive service to persons who have difficulties in managing, still respecting the individual and his right to exercise all of his abilities to the fullest extent. The social agency may act as conciliator to ease family friction or disruption in cases of undue pressure on an elderly person in regard to property transfer or similar situation. There may be special problems involved with the small number of older persons who may have formerly been drug addicts, alcoholics or who have otherwise existed on the fringe area of crime. They may be hostile and sometimes may require restraint, custody, or rehabilitation, but not necessarily guardianship. Where a legal guardian is thought necessary, the agency's role and responsibility may be to assess, with the individual's family or interested person, the need for a guardian. In the absence of family or interested person, the agency should initiate the action with the appropriate community resource. Such services may include the following:

1. Help to the older person, family or friend to understand and accept the need for a guardian, to talk through and explain the steps to be taken to initiate the process.
2. Support to the persons involved throughout the proceeding, including the court hearing.
3. Provision to the court of social information and recommendations as to a suitable guardian.
4. Help to the guardian to carry out his responsibility in relation to the personal needs and care of the older person.

E. Services to Maintain Family and Community Relationships

Social services should strive to ease the tension in two or three generation families through interpretation of one generation to another. Adult children may be helped to understand that not only does the older person need to feel he is an integral part of the family -- giving as well as receiving -- but he also needs community contacts to maintain good mental and social health. Older persons may need help in understanding altered roles. If contemporaries are still living, visiting should be encouraged. New friends can be made through volunteer visitors or church attendance. Use should be made of all community resources for group activities. The provision of day care service for the partially disabled or disoriented aged member of a working family may keep the individual within the family circle for a substantial period of time.

F. Services to Meet the Need for Meaningful Activity

In order for older persons to make constructive use of some of the basic services which have already been identified, meaningful activity must

be included in the constellation of services offered. The most satisfying type of activity is that which produces something of significance, and thereby gives the producer a sense of achievement. Many elderly people are still capable of and would prefer working. Services in relation to employment include an evaluation with the client of his employment potentials, including employment in the competitive labor market, possibility of work in sheltered workshops, or employment in his own home. This may be accomplished through agency personnel or through referral to appropriate agencies.

If employment is out of the question or unobtainable, work substitutes such as hobbies and volunteer services often provide absorbing interests. A conveniently located center with available opportunity for group and individual activity provides mental and physical stimulation, social relationships and opportunities to use physical and mental abilities. Multi-service centers are preferable to those restricted to recreational activity. Along with multi-services to the active, alert, older persons, day care also can be given to those aged who need protective and restorative care but wish to remain members of the family household.

Also desirable are improved library facilities and adult educational opportunities specially designed to meet the needs of older people. Volunteer visitors contribute to the enrichment of life for the aged by assisting with hobbies and transportation to church, schools and activity centers. Supervised and organized group services to institutionalized older people may include parties, group discussions, educational or instructive activities.

IV. THE ROLE OF PUBLIC WELFARE

Public welfare has a long history of activities directed toward the needs

of older people. Records of public expenditures from Colonial days to the present reveal the public's concern for the economic and social welfare of older citizens. Recently public welfare agencies with offices in virtually every county in the nation have served millions of older people through public assistance and other programs, and have acquired thereby an awareness and knowledge of the social and economic problems of older people that can be used for their benefit. Some public welfare departments have extended various services to older persons in the community without reference to eligibility for public assistance.

The Role of Public Welfare in Public Assistance Services

The Social Security Act, as amended in 1950, 1956 and 1958, along with similar state legislation, has encouraged state agencies to accept responsibility for providing or securing specific social services required by the needy aged. Through analysis of the needs of older people, the public agency grows in conviction as to the social services it should administer and those it should encourage other community agencies to undertake. However, public welfare staff is in a transition period in carrying out its role. A sound policy and full administrative support for direct services is essential. Public welfare administrators have a unique opportunity and a responsibility to interpret program strengths and weaknesses, and needs and resources to legislatures, boards, and citizen groups. These administrators will be expected by legislatures, boards and citizen groups to facilitate program changes within agencies and to give wise leadership in the use and development of resources, while keeping in balance the services offered to the different age groups. Basic to consideration of providing adequate social services is the matter of assistance grants which make possible a decent level of subsistence.

Staff and Time Needs; Review of Regulations

Public assistance administration must not accept the belief that old people are always self-sufficient, that their needs are simple and static, and that, therefore, they do not need help in resolving social, economic and psychological problems. In planning social services for older persons through the public assistance program it is essential to furnish clear and realistic policies and guides for staff, outlining specific services to be provided or secured. Administrative planning based upon the belief that older persons require little service results in the assignment of high case-loads of older persons to workers with the least training. Often workers have been made to feel that their work was not as important as work with families or children.

Good quality of service for older persons requires professional staffing to carry supervising, consultative and casework functions.

Experience is demonstrating that in general more time is needed in working with older persons than has usually been allotted. Much more thought and study needs to be directed toward the determination of public assistance workloads. As more services are given to older people, new data and criteria should become available to determine allocations of staff time. Emphasis must also be placed on training programs to help staff understand the processes of aging and to improve skills for constructive work with older people.

As public welfare gains experience, it takes on the added responsibility to review the total complex of laws, rules, and regulations regarding the determination of eligibility for public assistance. This review should be directed to maintaining appropriate interpersonal relationships, sustaining individual dignity, and meeting basic human needs. Of particular concern are the items of residence, rigid provisions fixing relatives'

financial responsibility, provision for recovery of grants made, as well as budget items and economic assistance consonant with a decent, healthful standard of living. Public welfare should also promote policies providing for the development, procurement and participation in those social services which enable an older person to remain in his own or in his family's home.

The Role of Public Welfare in Community-Wide Services

Many older persons need but are not eligible for the social services that are now available to public assistance recipients. In the future, public welfare will be increasingly concerned with a large number of people who are not in need of financial assistance, such as beneficiaries of an adequate old age and survivors insurance or private pension benefit.

Public welfare has a responsible role to assume in the provision of services to older people throughout the community having social service needs which may or may not include economic want. At the present time, public welfare should further identify through research and demonstration the areas of need of older persons, the identification of resources to meet those needs, including family and individual strengths as well as agency services, and the ways of mobilizing these resources to bear upon specific needs.

Public welfare has the responsibility to orient administrators, boards, and executives to the needs of older people, particularly as they relate to other individuals and groups, so that they may evaluate and foster coordination of existing services and proceed to develop additional services to meet those needs. It is important that services for older persons are developed within the framework of the total responsibilities facing public welfare boards and departments.

This, in turn, is closely related to the continuing function of inform-

ing the public about the needs of older people and the services required to meet those needs in order to establish a climate of acceptance.

Specific Responsibilities of Public Welfare

Within this framework of acceptance public welfare should take the initiative in developing for the community-at-large of older persons services to encourage independent living, individual counselling, information and referral services, help for the aged mentally ill who return to their communities, help of various kinds with unmet medical and housing needs, and protective services. Public welfare must consider which of these services public welfare departments should and can provide at the present time, and what priorities will be for the addition of new services. Essential, too, is the development of plans for the progressive addition of services in accordance with community assessment and planning. This planning should recognize the need for involving the physical planners as well as social planning groups. The development of new programming can only be considered in conjunction with the strengthening of existing services.

Pilot Projects

Significant contribution can be made by public welfare departments through demonstration or special projects. These may include self-care or social rehabilitation projects, home medical care programs, homemaker service, family care, volunteer services, and special casework programs. When appropriate, cooperation with existing medical programs and voluntary agencies should be undertaken in such demonstrations.

Leadership Role

Finally, public welfare has a duty as well as a continuing responsibility to provide community leadership in concerted action to consolidate all community resources toward an effective operating program for the aged. It

has its basis in law, and in fact in experience and in depth of organization; and in knowledge, understanding, compassion and conviction to support it in carrying out such a role.

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