

State urged to unravel 'confusing maze' of programs for seniors, disabled

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Published: Saturday, Apr. 30, 2011 - 12:00 am | Page 3A

California's system for providing care to the aged and disabled is fragmented, confusing and "woefully unprepared" to handle a future [tsunami](#) of seniors from the [baby boom generation](#), a new report concludes.

Services provided through dozens of programs scattered across seven departments are so uncoordinated that the state has no reliable means of gauging what clients need, how much each service costs and which programs work best, according to the Little Hoover Commission, a bipartisan government watchdog agency.

The commission called for the system to be consolidated and managed under a new "care coordinator" within the Health and Human Services Agency. The "care champion" would streamline and manage programs and money that currently serves more than a million low-income seniors at a cost to the state of more than \$7 billion.

State and Sacramento County human services officials said they had yet to read the report and declined to comment on it.

The commission's proposed new alignment should "ensure that a senior or person with disabilities receives the right care at the right time in the right setting," according to the report. Now, "clients have no path or system to follow to understand their care options, while state leaders have no overall understanding" of the system and how it is used.

Long-term care will become an even more critical issue as the massive baby boom generation converges on the system, the report points out. During the next two decades the number of seniors in California is projected to nearly double.

Legal mandates require the state to offer programs, such as [In-Home Supportive Services](#) and adult [day care](#), that help keep low-income people out of [nursing homes](#) and other institutions.

In addition to dealing with economic stress and budget cuts, the report says, the long-term care system is plagued by inefficiencies that waste money, such as duplication of services and overuse of nursing home and emergency room care.

Administrative bureaucracy and rigid funding rules at the state level discourage counties and nonprofit agencies from trying new and creative approaches to providing care, the report says.

Under the current system, clients are evaluated in piecemeal fashion, with different eligibility requirements and separate assessments for each program. No central database is available to help coordinate an individual client's care and avoid overlapping or duplicating services. It all adds up to a "confusing maze" that is frustrating to clients, says the report.

The commission recommends that the governor and Legislature consolidate all long-term care programs and funding into a single entity and appoint a "czar" to oversee it.

That person, it says, should design a system that gives eligible people coordinated "wraparound" services, offers local programs flexibility, demands accountability from those programs, and "fosters a culture that regards seniors and people with disabilities as community assets."