

## Bay Area tries to pull together to help seniors in need at upcoming health summit

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Advocates for Bay Area seniors this week will convene around a vexing social problem: As the number of elderly living in poverty grows, safety net programs from Meals on Wheels to basic medical coverage continue to shrink.

Wednesday's Bay Area Senior Health Policy Forum will bring a busload of seniors from Santa Clara County together with state legislators and federal officials, Gray Panthers, doctors, affordable housing advocates and social workers.

Among them will be liberals and conservatives who all share a common concern, organizer Bob Edmondson said.

"There's a collision between the funding cuts for seniors and a growing over-65 population," said Edmondson, who runs On Lok Lifeways, a health plan serving seniors from San Jose to San Francisco. "So it's an important time to talk about policy issues."

California's senior population is expected to double in the next 25 years, while studies show the number of elderly struggling to pay for medical bills and other basic needs has reached record levels. According to the UCLA Center for Health Policy Research, 47 percent of state residents 65 and older are unable to cover grocery, health and housing costs. Even in the affluent Silicon Valley, 48 percent of seniors fell below the researchers' survival standard.

Wednesday's forum, to be held at St. Mary's Cathedral in San Francisco, is an attempt to stave off such hardship by bringing together service providers, advocates and policy makers who can compare notes and devise strategies to backfill programs suffering from funding cuts.

Since 2008, California has steadily scaled back core services for low-income seniors, with some programs eliminated altogether and others drastically reduced.

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