

As Chair of the Healthy Living Committee of the Riverside County Advisory Council of the Office on Aging, I want to describe a nationally recognized program that will benefit valley residents age 55 and older who are in need of nursing home care. The comprehensive plan is called The Program of All-Inclusive Care for the Elderly (PACE)—it integrates primary and specialty medical care, acute care, social services, rehabilitative therapy, adult day care, home care/home health, and long-term care into one program. Care for seniors is managed by an interdisciplinary team of professionals that develop customized treatment plans for each individual. Typically there are no out of pocket costs for any of the services provided by PACE because for most individuals, the total cost is covered by Medicare and Medi-Cal.

The program has been in existence since the 1970's. Today, there are 72 PACE programs' operating in 31 states, with many more in development. PACE enjoys widespread support among policymakers and is a permanent Medicare benefit.

The program is modeled after a highly successful system of acute and long term care services developed by On Lok in San Francisco which allows frail seniors to continue living in their homes and avoid unnecessary or premature institutionalization. PACE has been shown to significantly lower the rate of hospitalization and readmissions among those it serves. Currently there are five programs serving California communities including: On Lok in San Francisco, the Centers for Elders Independence in Oakland, Alta Med Senior Buena Care in East Los Angeles, Sutter Senior Care in Sacramento, and St. Paul's PACE in San Diego.

On December 15, 2009, a community stakeholder meeting called "Growing PACE" was facilitated by the Office on Aging and On Lok as part of a statewide rural/semi-rural project funded by the SCAN Foundation to explore bringing the PACE model of care to the Coachella Valley. The stakeholder meeting was attended by more than 25 community members—most of whom represented local senior service providers. After hearing several presentations about PACE, the attendees brainstormed who would most benefit in the community, where an initial PACE site might be located, and discussed possible barriers to developing PACE in the valley. Overall, meeting attendees indicated that a PACE site would meet a significant need in the Coachella Valley and be highly successful. A local physician group with a strong presence in the Coachella Valley has expressed interest in developing a local PACE site.

I have been fortunate to visit in St Paul's PACE in San Diego, and can report that their program, although only being operational for less than three years, is already successful. In the next few weeks, Office on Aging staff and I will visit another PACE site, the Alta Med Senior Buena Care in East Los Angeles.

Those of us who reside in the Coachella Valley should be pleased that our area has been selected as one of three regions in California that are designated to explore the development of a PACE program. Please join me in supporting PACE which for many valley seniors will receive PACE services and remain in their home at no out of pocket cost.

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