



Ageing Initiative Labor Force Survey II: Community Based Services for Older Adults

<http://calswec.berkeley.edu/>

Labor Force Research Group: Ailee Moon, Ph.D., Steve Wilson Ph.D.,
Catherine Goodman, DSW, and JoAnn Damron-Rodriguez, Ph.D.
Research Assistants: Kayoko Nakao, MSG, MSW, and Nancy Takahashi, MPH

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Background: California has the largest population of persons over 65 years of age, over 3.9 million persons, and the largest population of ethnic elders in the nation. In 2004, the **California Social Work Education Center (CalSWEC)**, which has served since 1990 as a catalyst to increase the number and quality of social workers in California, created an **Ageing Initiative (AI)**. CalSWEC is composed of 18 schools of social work, the California County Welfare Directors (CWDA) and the California Mental Health Directors Association. The AI was formed with an overarching mission to develop a competent social work workforce to meet the needs of aging Californians and their families. Social workers provide services to individuals, families and communities that optimize elders' independence and well-being. **Purpose:** In 2005, the **Archstone Foundation** provided support for geriatric AI labor force development projects. Acknowledging the lack of professional training of persons delivering services to older persons, the **CalSWEC Ageing Services Labor Force Survey** was conducted from 2006 to 2008. It aimed to describe current aging service workers in community based organizations and their clients, project future growth in numbers of older clients and workers, and identify the skills required for staff as well as barriers to hiring and retaining qualified aging service workers needed to meet current and potential demand for social workers with geriatric competence. This is the second of two labor force reports: the first focused on public services for older adults.

Methods: The survey instrument was developed by the research team for use by both public and community-based organizations. Input was elicited from community-based service organizations (CBOs), specifically the Area Agencies on Aging (AAA), their subcontractors, and adult day health care agencies (ADHC). The survey instrument was field tested by representatives from various AAA programs, subcontractors, and adult day health care agencies. Data were collected primarily online, but hard copies were also available. There were 12 AAAs, 38 AAA subcontractors, and 40 ADHCs that completed the survey.

Findings: **Clients Served:** Agencies varied widely in size reflecting the diversity of the programs. The number of older clients served ranged from 9 to 56,000, possibly including communities using information and referral services. Clients 85 years old or older were typically 28% of all older clients. On average, for all types of programs, 42% were white, 19% Asian/Pacific Islander, 17% Latino, and 14% African American. Of the responding programs, on average, 33% of the older clients had limited or no English skills, with a high of 48% in ADHC programs. Most agencies (79%) reported addressing the language needs of their clients. **Staff Characteristics:** Many aging service workers are 50 years old or over (40% on average), suggesting that a loss of skilled employees due to retirement will occur within the next five to ten years. This was particularly true in AAAs, where over half were age 50 or over (52%). On average, 47% of the aging service workers were white, 20% Asian/Pacific Islander, 17% Latino, and 12% African American. **Staffing Current and Past Fiscal Year:** Almost half of all programs (46%) maintained the same number of current aging service staff as the past fiscal year, some programs declined in staff number (8%), while others increased (46%), demonstrating some growth in staff size overall. The overall growth rate based on changes in numbers of staff was 15.1% for the total sample (AAAs reported the highest growth rate, 30.1%). **Estimated Staff Turnover:** During the last fiscal year, an average of almost one in every five aging service workers left the organization, although one-quarter of the total programs did not lose any workers. The turnover rate varied from 8% for AAAs to 14% for ADHCs and the highest 29% for AAA subcontractors. **Job Positions and Social Work:** BSW level workers were frequently specified in the job descriptions for aging service workers within ADHCs (81%), in AAAs (50%) and in position descriptions for AAA subcontractors (29%). MSWs were specified

in position descriptions for all (100%) ADHCs, and in AAAs (55%) and AAA subcontractors (29%). Overall, an MSW degree was specified in job descriptions more (63%) than job descriptions specifying a BSW degree (48%).

Salary Ranges: The salary range for MSWs specified in the job description was typically between \$25,000 and \$50,000 for all three types of agencies; MSWs specified in the job description showed modal salary levels at \$50,000 to \$60,000, with higher salaries in AAAs.

Education in Gerontology/Geriatrics: Of the total sample combined, 61% of the agencies reported zero staff with formal training in geriatrics or gerontology (AAA 55%, AAA subcontractors 65%, ADHCs 59%). A similar result was reported for staff with MSW/BSW education, but an even larger percent of AAA subcontractors reported zero training in geriatrics or gerontology for MSW/BSW staff (74%). Most programs in the total sample (72%) provided in-service trainings in gerontology and geriatrics.

Caseload: In most cases, optimal caseload (under favorable staffing) was a lower number than current caseload, with optimal at 83% of current caseload size for the total sample. Optimal compared to current caseload showed some differences in size and proportion among the programs: On average, AAA programs reported 48 optimal or 83% of 60 current; AAA subcontractors reported 68 optimal or 71% of 143 current; and ADHCs reported 31 optimal or 92% of 37 current for caseload size.

Skills for Aging Service Staff: The most important skills for aging service staff were judged to be establishing rapport and maintaining effective relationships, client advocacy, and timely and appropriate service plans (89.5%, 77.0%, and 77.6% judged “very” important respectively). In comparison, 86.7%, 69.1% and 57.3% of the programs judged that “most” of their staff possessed these skills respectively. In contrast, geriatric assessment was viewed as very important by 73.6% and only 56.7% were indicated most of their staff had this skill. Even fewer agencies reported that most staff had skills in identifying service gaps (44.7%) and evaluation of practice (43.2%).

Client Projections: With exception of one, all programs projected more (61%) or the same number (38%) of young old clients in the upcoming three years (by the year 2010). Again, in the combined sample, 48% predicted more old old clients and 45% projected numbers would be about the same. Over a third of the total group of programs (37%) projected an increase in clients with little or no English skills. Expected extent of growth was on average 21% for young and 17% for old old populations and 21% for clients with little or no English skills.

Projected Hiring: Increases in future hiring was projected by 46% of the programs responding, with 51% projecting no change and a small proportion projecting reduced staff (3%). In terms of hiring MSW/BSWs, new hiring was seen as likely by 30% and no change by 69% of the agencies, with 1% predicting a decline in hiring MSW/BSWs.

Barriers to Hiring and Retaining Qualified Staff: Barriers to hiring/retaining qualified aging service workers were primarily low salaries in most programs (75% AAAs, 86% AAA subcontractors, 87% ADHCs). ADHCs also found lack of experienced applicants, and lack of minority applicants to be barriers for 80% or more agencies. In terms of hiring MSW/BSWs, lack of applicants was an important barrier for ADHCs (86%), but not a barrier for either AAAs or AAA subcontractors (55% not a barrier). Different barriers were considered for hiring MSW/BSWs than other degreed workers by over half of ADHCs reporting (57%) and respondents mentioned the need for higher salaries, more bilingual applicants, more experienced applicants, and improved benefits. In contrast, most AAA and AAA subcontractors thought the barriers were the same for MSW/BSWs and other degreed workers. Low salaries were mentioned, but a substantial group of AAA subcontractors expressed little need to hire MSW/BSW workers.

Conclusions and Implications: Community based organizations reflect some of the same themes as public agencies. The majority of the agencies in both sectors do not have any staff with formal education in aging. Low salaries were reported barriers for the majority of all agencies. Positive themes were high skill estimates for building working relationships with clients, although a third or more of the agencies said their staff had only some or few of the skills needed for high quality services. Positive was the ethnic representation in aging service staff, corresponding fairly well to client ethnic characteristics. Projections for increases in clients also were fairly close to projections for increases in staff, although more agencies expected increases in young old clients than thought increases in staff to be likely. The optimal caseload for most agencies was typically lower than current caseload. Results suggest overload for many agencies, while some agencies fare better in terms of caseload. The staff characteristics suggest many will retire over the next decade. Across the state a high proportion of staff come to the agency with no formal training in geriatrics or gerontology.