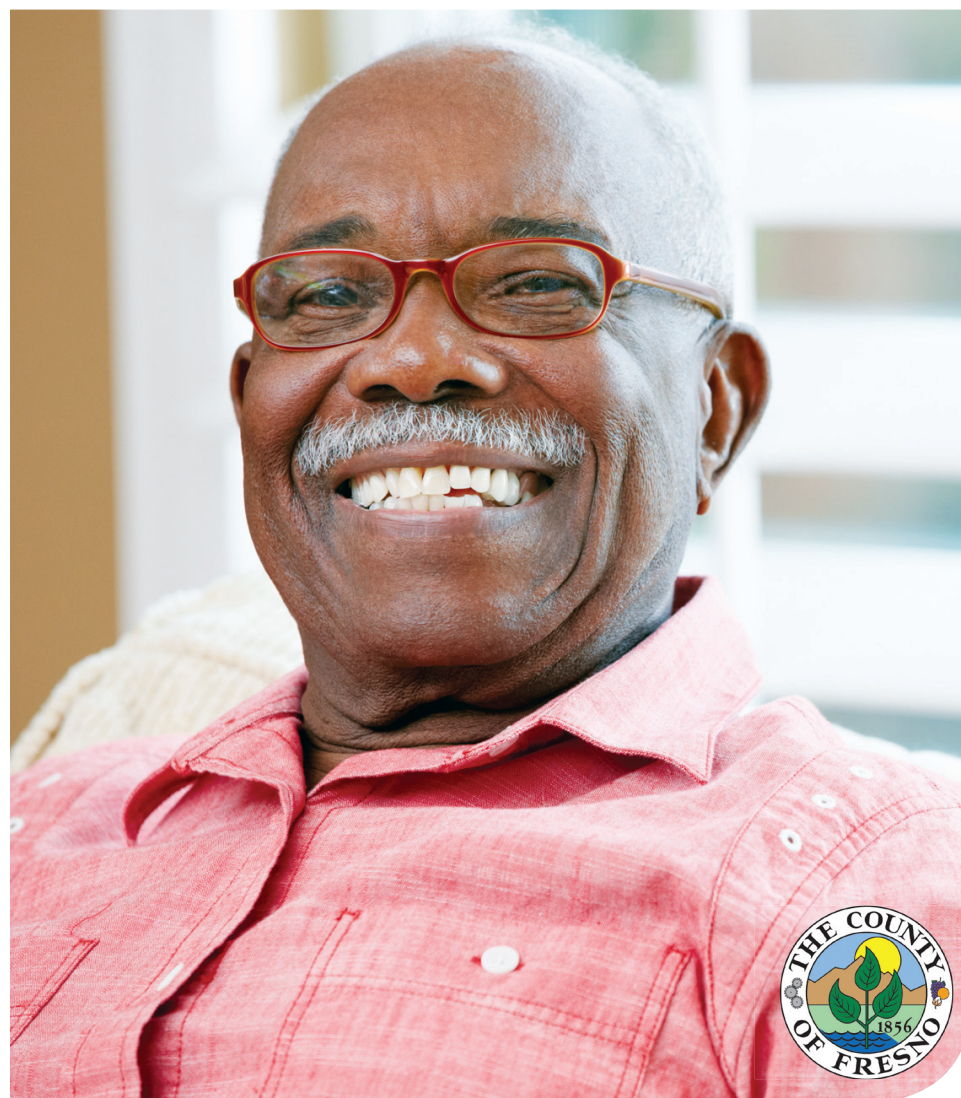




Health and Well-Being

for Elders and Persons with Disabilities

Fresno County Department of Social Services is part of the safety net for older and dependent adults in our community. **SO ARE YOU.** Learn how you can help your loved ones and neighbors maintain their independence.



In the Comfort of Your Own Home

Fresno County Department of Social Services supports independent living for adults

by Matt Jocks



The country is getting older fast — the Baby Boomers are reaching retirement age and medical advances are leading to longer life spans. The over-65 population increased nearly 25 percent between 2003 and 2013. Nationally, this is being called the “Silver Tsunami.”

While having our elders around longer is cause for celebration, it is also cause for concern for those who face challenges. Finding the time and money to help relatives maintain their health and independence affects almost all families.

Fresno County Department of Social Services offers programs to assist families in caring for seniors as well as adults facing physical and mental challenges that require living assistance.

Joel Gurss, Program Manager for In-Home Supportive Services (IHSS), understands the importance of maintaining independence.

“When people are forced to make the kind of changes where they lose the ability to live independently, it affects their well-being,” he says. “It affects them psychologically and emotionally and, eventually, physically.”

Through its many programs, the department supports independent

living by evaluating and authorizing the client’s eligibility needs for IHSS services and helping them link to an approved care provider. The services include connecting clients to medical coverage and nutrition assistance, and serving as a place to report cases of abuse or neglect.

“What we can do is make it possible for their loved ones to keep their independence as long as possible.”

Joel Gurss
Program Manager, In-Home Supportive Services

The Social Services department has felt the first wave of the tsunami. After seeing around 2 percent growth in enrollment for years, the numbers have jumped 14 percent in the past 18 months.

In addition to the raw numbers of seniors, other social changes have

complicated the issue. Families are more likely to be geographically separated, without day-to-day interactions with their loved ones. The economy has required more adult children to work longer, reducing their ability to provide care. Longer lifespans mean that more of the children providing care are seniors themselves, often facing their own health issues.

And there is human nature, the pride that sometimes prevents people from seeking help. This plays out in familiar ways.

“Maybe they can’t get in and out of the bathtub as easily, so their hygiene is affected,” Gurss says. “They have trouble getting to their appointments or to the pharmacy, so they’re not getting the care they need. Maybe it’s hard to stand to cook, so they skip meals.”

Family and friends can see these signs, ask the questions and find help.

“In IHSS, we tell families we can’t reimburse for everything because families will always go above and beyond for their loved ones,” Gurss says. “But what we can do is make it possible for their loved ones to keep their independence as long as possible.”

We Are DSS: A letter from the director

Throughout the Department of Social Services (DSS) our mission is to assist our clients in accessing the services needed to be safe and healthy. For seniors, and children and adults with disabilities, this also means helping them to be able to continue living in

their own homes with as much independence as possible. We hope the information in these pages will help you connect with services needed by a friend, a family member or neighbor, and also to recognize some of the warning signs that someone needs

help. Some of these folks have difficulty asking for help, so it’s up to others to speak up for them. Also in these pages, you’ll find links to more information on the internet or by phone. We are committed to serving you with excellence, integrity, and quality, and our staff

treat everyone with the dignity and respect we would expect for our own family members.

Joy Cronin, Deputy Director
Fresno County DSS, Adult Services Branch



Teresa White advocates for the health and safety of seniors and dependent adults as a Social Work Practitioner for Fresno County Adult Protective Services.
PHOTO BY CLAIRE TAKAHASHI



Keeping Seniors Safe

Adult Protective Services protects the rights of elder and dependent adults

by Michelle Carl

Each year, there are 120,000 reported cases of elder and dependent abuse in California. Another estimated 600,000 cases go unreported.

Because of mental or physical limitations, many elderly and dependent adults aren't always able to protect their rights. But social workers like Teresa White with Fresno County Adult Protective Services make it their job to advocate for the health and safety of adults.

"We're there for the client to provide them with services, whether it be resources for care providers or resources for assisting with legal action," White says. "We're here to be their advocate through the process. We are their employee."

Abuse can come in many forms: physical, mental, sexual, financial or neglect. White urges anyone involved in an adult's life, whether they are family members, neighbors or caretakers, to call if they have noticed behaviors or signs that could indicate abuse.

"All of our calls are 100 percent confidential," she says. "We don't need them to know the facts, we just need them to have a concern."

APS works with banks, police and hospitals to investigate concerns and then shares what they find with the adult. Her department also works with organizations like IHSS and Aged, Blind and Disabled Medi-Cal to ensure clients are safe and cared for during and after an investigation.

Services are completely voluntary, and White says APS cannot remove an adult from their home, like a child welfare department would.

"We are here to support them in living the best possible life that they can independently."

Teresa White,
Social Work Practitioner, Fresno County Adult Protective Services

"We are working with adults and every adult has the right to make their own decision — good, bad or indifferent. Our role is to say, 'This is what we're seeing, how are you feeling about that?' We let them come up with the ultimate decision and support them through that process."

White describes a recent case where an in-home caregiver was stealing money from a client. Once the abuse was discovered, the caregiver split, leaving the disabled man without care. "He was really adamant that he was going to stay at his home," White recalls. So she checked in with him frequently and worked with the Home Health Agency to find another solution for his care.

In this situation, White was glad she could play a part in ending the abuse and making sure the client could remain independent at home.

"The biggest thing for the community to know is that we are here for them," she says. "We are here to support them in living the best possible life that they can independently."

Spotting the signs of abuse

Physical abuse:

- Bruises on arms or face
- Broken bones
- Strange explanations for injuries

Financial abuse:

- Unexplained credit card charges
- Unpaid bills
- Adding new person to accounts

Emotional abuse:

- Threats
- Withdrawal
- Nervous behavior, especially in caregiver's presence

Elder neglect:

- Soiled diapers
- Weight loss
- Bed sores

Learn how to spot the signs of abuse:

Visit www.ssa.gov/payee/elder_abuse.htm.

To report elder abuse or dependent adult abuse in Fresno County, call 559-600-3383.



In Their Shoes

Ruth Johnson knows how difficult it is to ask for help — it's why she goes above and beyond to help adults apply for assistance

by Matt Jocks

Ruth Johnson sees all kinds of people walk through her door with different stories — some hopeful, some heart-breaking and many that are both.

She sees one other thing: herself.

"You know, I've been on the other side of that table," she says. "That's why I think I can relate to them."

Johnson is an eligibility worker for the Fresno County Department of Social Services. She works primarily with clients seeking financial assistance for food or medical costs through the Aged, Blind and Disabled program, which helps disabled and older adults apply for Medi-Cal and CalFresh.

For those clients, the process of applying for aid can be daunting for a number of reasons. They can be intimidated by the bureaucracy, distrustful of it or simply embarrassed to be asking for help. There can be language or mobility issues.

"It takes a lot of courage and a lot of strength to walk through those doors," Johnson says. "For most of them, we are their last resort."

Johnson often reflects on her own experience when, fresh out of high school, she applied for Medi-Cal. She says she was put in a room with a stack of paperwork and told to bring it back when completed.

Later, when she chose her current career path, she told herself she would not leave clients as intimidated and clueless

as she felt. It's why she goes above and beyond to advocate for her clients.

"I think I can make them comfortable," she says. "We deal with people from different backgrounds, cultures, religions. You have to adjust to each person. A lot of it is just observing and going from there."

Needs vary. For some, it's simply a matter of negotiating the paperwork. Others might need help meeting the financial eligibility requirements. For instance, purchasing a supplemental insurance plan counts against a client's income and can get them under the limit to qualify for full assistance.

Johnson sees housewives who have lost their husbands and weren't involved in the family's financial planning. Dealing with grief, they have no idea what the next step is. Others don't realize they are eligible for assistance. Most are seniors but some are younger adults dealing with medical and financial issues.

Johnson says she has seen some of her clients come out of their shells, empowered by taking the initiative and succeeding. Others benefit from the social interaction.

"For some of these seniors, this might be the only contact they have that day," she says.

And for every story that breaks her heart, there are more that lift it up.

"When they come through that door," Johnson says, "I feel like, 'Thank God I can help them.'"

Ruth Johnson says she knows what it's like to apply for assistance, so she tries to make it as easy as possible for adults to sign up for Medi-Cal and CalFresh.
PHOTO BY CHELSY BOLSER



Health and Nutrition Benefits

The two primary state programs that benefit seniors (adults age 65 and older) and other adults needing assistance are Medi-Cal and CalFresh. In Fresno County, seniors and other adults can access these benefits through the Aged, Blind and Disabled program.

Medi-Cal

What is it? Free or low-cost health coverage

Who is it for? Seniors, low-income adults, blind/disabled individuals and some caretaker parents and relatives

Income levels: Income of 138 percent of the federal poverty level (\$16,643 for a one-person household; increasing with each additional member)

How to apply: In person at the Fresno County Department of Social Services office or by mail or online through the Covered California website, CoveredCA.com

CalFresh

What is it? Nutrition assistance (California's version of the federal food stamp program)

Who is it for? Any qualifying household

Income levels: Gross income of 200 percent of federal poverty level, but the gross income can be reduced by a series of deductions

How to apply: In person or by fax to any of the six Fresno County offices or online at www.mybenefitscalwin.org

The Spirit of Independence

Individuals live how they want thanks to in-home caregivers

by Michelle Carl

Sisters Alexandra and Holly are both pursuing degrees at Fresno State — Holly in mechanical engineering and Alexandra a masters in counseling to go with her B.S. in psychology.

“I knew I loved the brain,” says Alexandra of her college path. “I wanted to be a neurosurgeon originally, but I realized with my physical limitations, I don’t think anyone would want me to be operating on their brain.”

Both Alexandra, 25, and Holly, 22, have muscular dystrophy, which affects the use of muscles around their hips and shoulders.

“Anything that you do for yourself we basically cannot do for ourselves,” Alexandra explains.

But the sisters aren’t letting their condition affect their educational goals. They have help in the form of two caregivers (one a longtime friend, the other their grandmother), who get the women up in the morning, do personal hygiene, meal prep, physical therapy and put together backpacks so they can head off to class by themselves.

IHSS recipients select and hire their own caregivers who must enroll with the IHSS Public Authority. It could be a family member or friend, or someone referred to them. The sisters’ caregivers not only help them retain their independence, but also help provide respite for their grandmother with whom they live.

“Obviously, there’s some physical limitations, but we don’t really let it stop us from doing most things,” says Holly — things like earning their college degrees, but also spending time with their four dogs, playing video games and going to concerts (they’re looking forward to an upcoming Bruno Mars show).

In Command of Life

Irene was a mechanic in the Women’s Army Air Corps during World War II.

“Being a mechanic, I wanted to drive the great big ol’ trucks,” she says. “The only problem was I didn’t know how to drive — never drove a car in my life!”

She eventually married and left the Army

to start a family. Looking back, she calls her years of service enjoyable but “a challenge.”

Her biggest challenge today, at age 99, is arthritis. Irene lives by herself. She’s still able to walk with the aid of “Handy Andy” (her walker) and loves being able to “do what she wants.” Her in-home care provider, Ramona, helps her with the things she can’t do on her own — like laundry, fetching hard-to-reach items or driving to the store for shopping.

“I try to get her down for bingo, but she won’t do it,” Irene says, with a laugh.

Being able to live on her own — not with her adult children or in a nursing home — is important to Irene. She doesn’t want someone telling her what she can and can’t do. Having support from Ramona makes that possible.

“At least I’ve got someone who cares, you know she’s very good that way,” Irene says of her caregiver.

Additional reporting by Claire Takahashi.



At right: Sisters Alexandra and Holly have muscular dystrophy, but haven’t let it stop them from attaining their college degrees. Bottom right: At age 99, Irene is able to live independently thanks to her in-home care provider.

PHOTOS BY CLAIRE TAKAHASHI

Where to find skilled caregivers: Public Authority

Entrusting the care of a family member to a stranger is not a comfortable thing for most people to do.

The Fresno County Public Authority makes it easier to find caregivers for seniors and dependent adults. The PA also provides opportunities for those who want to be caregivers

themselves.

Michael Reiser, manager of the Fresno County PA, says IHSS recipients who do not have a family member to provide caregiving services can hire a screened provider through the Public Authority, which maintains a registry of cleared providers.

Choosing from the PA Registry

gives clients the knowledge that a caregiver has undergone a background check and training that includes CPR and first aid. Clients can also narrow their search to caregivers that match certain criteria, such as available times, non-smokers or those willing to help with bathing.

For help finding a caregiver:

Access the Provider Registry by calling **559-600-5753**.

To apply to be a caregiver:

Call **559-600-5752** or apply in person on the second floor at **2025 E. Dakota Ave.**

Start the Conversation

As our loved ones age, they may be less able to care for themselves.
Here are some ways to assess their health and well-being.

If you're concerned about:

Ask:

Missing appointments or skipping medications



How are you feeling; are you in pain?

Cleanliness in the home



Can I help straighten up around here?

Trouble getting or paying for food



Have you lost a little weight?

Depression



Have you talked to your friends lately?

Falling victim to a scam or ID theft



Are you having any money issues?



Help and Resources for Fresno County Adults

Fresno County Social Services

Adult Protective Services

2135 Fresno St., Ste. 100
Fresno, CA 93721
www.co.fresno.ca.us/APS

In-Home Supportive Services

Sequoia Building
3821 N. Clark St., Fresno
www.co.fresno.ca.us/IHSS
559-600-6666
Provider and Recipient Call Center
559-600-5749

Fresno County Public Authority

2025 E. Dakota Ave., 2nd Floor,
Fresno
www.co.fresno.ca.us/PA
Call center 559-600-5749
Provider Registry 559-600-5753
Provider Enrollments 559-600-5752

Aged, Blind and Disabled program

Senior Resource Center
2025 E. Dakota Ave., Fresno
559-600-5490

CalFresh (food assistance)

559-600-1377 www.Calfresh.ca.gov

Offices to apply for CalFresh:

Coalinga

311 Coalinga Plaza, Coalinga
559-600-6300
Fax application to 559-935-1604

E Street

1209 E St., Fresno
559-600-2650
Fax application (for homeless) to
559-600-6140

Heritage Center

3151 N. Millbrook Ave., Fresno
1-877-600-1377
Fax application to 559-600-7688

Reedley Regional Center

1680 E. Manning Ave., Reedley
559-637-2971
Fax application to 559-600-7747

Selma Regional Center

3800 McCall Ave., Selma
559-600-5205
Fax application to 559-600-5202

Senior Resource Center

2025 E. Dakota Ave., Fresno
559-600-5490
Fax application (for over 60 or
disabled) to 559-600-7658

Medi-Cal questions/applications

CoveredCA.com
800-300-1506

Fresno-Madera Area Agency on Aging

3837 N. Clark St., Fresno
559-600-4405
Fmaaa.org

Adult Protective Services Care Line

2025 E. Dakota Ave., Fresno
559-600-3383

Benefits Check Up

Benefitscheckup.org

Fresno Madera Ombudsman Program

(Report abuse in a
licensed care facility)
559-224-9177