

**Presentation to Marin County Board of Supervisors
By Kristi Denton Cohen – Chair of Marin County Commission on Aging
Tuesday, June 23, 2026**

Thanks to you and your team, Director Cottrell, for the outstanding work you do on behalf of Marin's older adult residents.

And thanks to all of you for the opportunity to speak with you today.

The Commission on Aging serves not only as an advisor to the Board, but as the eyes and ears of older adults, people with disabilities-- or those aging into them--, unpaid family caregivers, and the many organizations that support them.

Over the past two years, we have listened to residents and community partners about the challenges they face and the support they need.

As one Commissioner said, **“Our work is about planting seeds—ideas, information, and connections that take root and grow into real solutions.”**

Three issues impacting older adults consistently rise to the top: housing and homelessness prevention, social isolation – which is far more prevalent than many of realized--, and financial insecurity, especially for the “missing middle”—people who earn too much to qualify for assistance but who –often on fixed incomes-- still struggle to pay for housing, food and transportation when costs just keep going up - but their incomes don't.

When an unexpected expense occurs -- such as a health crisis – the risk of homelessness can increase dramatically. We need better data and stronger prevention strategies to keep people from reaching this point.

Housing remains a significant challenge. So many times we've heard: **“I don't know where I'd go if I have to move.”**

Many older adults are house-rich but cash-poor, while others simply can't find affordable housing. Shared housing programs like Home Match offer creative solutions by helping homeowners generate income while creating affordable housing opportunities for their housemates,but we still need more affordable housing and prevention-focused supports, such as shallow rent subsidies, that help people remain in their homes.

People want to be housed—not warehoused. They want a home and a sense of belonging.

“I can't get to where I need to go” is another common refrain particularly for those living in areas with limited transit options. Transportation connects people to healthcare, groceries, friends, and independence.

Volunteer driver programs, such as Call A Ride for Sausalito Seniors or CARSS and the Marin Villages programs, are great because they provide both rides and companionship.

Emerging technologies such as self-driving vehicles create new opportunities for older adults to stay connected to their communities. Earlier this year, several Commissioners went on supervised rides in fully self-driving cars and it was eye opening. I recommend you try it.

Caregiving remains an ongoing concern.

Unpaid family caregivers provide extraordinary support, often at significant personal cost. Stress, burnout, and isolation are common.

A study cited in the Journal of the American Geriatrics Society found caregiving can have serious health consequences.

Spouses caring for partners with dementia are six times more likely to face developing dementia themselves, suggesting that caregiving stress may contribute to cognitive decline.

That's where the County ... and the Community step in.

The Three Cheers Respite program opening soon in Mill Valley is an important step forward, and we thank you for supporting this effort. Hopefully, it will serve as a model for future programs throughout the county. **Outreach and community connection** remain powerful antidotes to isolation.

The Commission supports listening sessions, senior fairs, and community forums which improve knowledge, strengthen relationships and inform better policies and services.

The Commission provided input to the Moving Forward Stakeholder group for the new Community Resource Guide, which will soon be in Spanish and available online, making information more accessible to all.

I'd like to go off script for a moment since it's my final week on the Commission.

As stated in the staff report, Equity remains at the core of everything we do.

Last year, our Equity and Inclusion Committee drafted an Ageism Resolution for your consideration. However, it didn't come to fruition because there were concerns it might "water down" the County's anti-racism efforts.

Every one of us, regardless of race, ethnicity, sex, or gender, grows older. Even if some of us really try hard to avoid it.

Yet for centuries, ageism has been one of society's most accepted forms of discrimination. Leading institutions, such as the World Health Organization, recognize that it contributes to poorer health, isolation, and diminished quality of life. The increasing numbers of older adults worldwide is one of the reasons the WHO initiated the Age Friendly movement. Marin has taken meaningful steps against ageism through Age and Disability Friendly initiatives, community programs such as "What About Age?", and County ageism training efforts.

But we need a united call to action -- and your leadership -- to ensure aging is viewed as something to be respected and appreciated no matter who you are or where you live.

As you know, by the end of this decade nearly 40 percent of us will be over 60. As our numbers grow, so do our needs, especially for those over 80.

This is the time to revisit bold ideas so we can prepare for-- rather than react to any crisis. Whether that means elevating Aging and Adult Services within County leadership or strengthening emergency planning for older adults and people with disabilities, we have an opportunity to build systems that will serve all of us.

We don't have all the answers, but we have learned that lasting solutions are built through collaboration across agencies, communities, and generations.

As I close, I'd like to ask you these questions:

- What do you want your lives to look like as you grow older?
- Do you want to remain in Marin? Can you afford to?
- How can we make sure that all of us can age with dignity, independence, purpose, and connection in the communities we love?

Together, we are planting seeds that, with continued care and commitment, will grow into stronger systems of support for all of us.

Thank you.

Kristi Denton Cohen

NOTE: The video of the introduction, presentation, and BOS responses can be viewed at 3:18 at https://marin.granicus.com/player/clip/13163?view_id=33&redirect=true