

Change Well's Rebecca Watson Testifies Before California Senate Budget Subcommittee

Change Well Project Co-Founder and Managing Director Rebecca Watson testified on how expanding CDSS-funded programs like Home Safe and the Housing and Disability Advocacy Program (HDAP) can serve as a vital strategy for preventing and reducing rising homelessness among the state's elderly population.

On March 9, Change Well Project Co-Founder and Managing Director Rebecca Watson testified before California's Senate Budget Subcommittee 3 on how expanding CDSS-funded programs like Home Safe and the Housing and Disability Advocacy Program (HDAP) can serve as a vital strategy for preventing and reducing rising homelessness among the state's elderly population.

Rebecca's testimony highlighted the fact that CDSS programs and funding play a critical role in addressing homelessness among older adults—because they “fill resource gaps that inevitably exist for older adults and individuals with disabilities that have no income or a fixed income source in an ever-increasing housing market.”

“I came to Change Well because I believe deeply in the transformative power that steady income support provides,” Rebecca stated. “I wanted to help grow HDAP programs across the State that are a critical part of ensuring that every individual in California who is entitled to a Social Security benefit receives that benefit.”

As a result of rising housing costs coupled with the realities of financial and medical burdens, older adults have become the fastest growing age group among Californians experiencing homelessness. Black Californians represent a disproportionate percentage of the state's homeless population. State policymakers on the Subcommittee came together to examine the impact of recent investments in CDSS Housing and Homelessness Division-led programs that target housing supports to older adult populations, and how those programs can be used to reduce racial disparities within the homeless population.

Rebecca outlined what Change Well has learned through its extensive work this year providing in-depth technical assistance to 47 California counties and 23 tribal to strengthen systems of care aimed at supporting better housing outcomes for program participants. This work has included helping to design or scale 13 Home Safe programs and 11 HDAP programs.

By focusing on Housing First principles to better understand broader rehousing ecosystems, and by examining relevant data to understand and address any racial disparities that existing within these systems, Change Well is helping CDSS-funded programs more effectively ensure that participants stay housed or are rehoused as quickly as possible. Home Safe and HDAP are particularly important in meeting the specific needs of seniors and older adults. As Rebecca explained:

“HDAP provides benefits advocacy helping folks to obtain income which is a significant gap. With Home Safe, the focus on having highly flexible prevention dollars to keep older adults housed addresses another significant gap.”

Through the state’s investment in CDSS, California counties and tribal communities are seeing progress in implementing and scaling stronger housing programs and systems. Rebecca shared some key, on-the-ground examples of positive impact, including how **Placer County’s HDAP program** has exceptionally strong results in successfully obtaining disability benefits for program participants, leading to more clients obtaining permanent housing. Rebecca shared that the program’s success can be tied to **increased collaboration** with stakeholders like local health providers, the housing authority, and local nonprofits; **strong community awareness** and connection to the program; and the program’s leveraging of other county systems to obtain health and behavioral health care for program participants.

Going forward, Change Well is committed to helping more counties and communities operationalize effective programs, connect them to broader housing ecosystems, and ensure more individuals and families can access the housing services they need. You can read Rebecca’s full testimony here. For more information about our work, visit www.changewellproject.com.