



Legal Assistance for Seniors

2020–2021 Annual Report

Dear Friends,

While the community-at-large has struggled with the human impact of COVID-19, disenfranchised communities and communities of color have borne a disproportionate share of the burden. Isolation, the lack of access to services and the digital divide have made the pandemic even worse for many older adults.

Given these circumstances, LAS sought new methods in the last year to reach out to the seniors of Alameda County. We shifted additional resources to our housing and elder abuse programs to ensure that all inquiries would be met with response and that we handled as many cases as possible. Our agency pivoted to the use of webinars and video conferencing in the absence of traditional in-person formats. LAS partnered with other non-profit organizations to share information about financial scams with their older adult clients.

Our agency is currently reviewing our client data to eliminate equity gaps in service delivery and ensure that the groups of seniors most impacted by COVID-19 are prioritized in our response. We are undertaking a detailed analysis of the demographic data we collect on each housing case to ensure that we are reaching the most underserved and vulnerable older adults in our community.

LAS is committed to equity and inclusion within our own organization. We are focused on increasing diversity with our Board of Directors when new members are recruited. Our agency is analyzing internal procedures in order to promote a more diverse leadership team of employees. LAS is now part of a working group designed to pair larger nonprofits with smaller, culturally-oriented nonprofits in the Bay Area that support one another.

LAS recently joined the Board of "American Nonprofits", which is focused on assisting small nonprofit organizations located throughout the Bay Area. We believe that in working with this organization, it will enable LAS to help BIPOC-led nonprofits grow their capabilities to make further impacts in the community. LAS has also joined a statewide task force on elder abuse called the California Elder Justice Coalition that is focused on the prevention and support of victims of elder abuse. This group is working at the state level to implement changes in the response to elder abuse with equity and restorative justice at its center.

Legal Assistance for Seniors is searching for every avenue possible to reach out to those who might otherwise go unnoticed. Equity and economic inclusion continue to be a central priority for LAS at all levels. We continue to strive to create a more equitable agency, both internally and in service of the community. The needs of low-income older adults from communities of color that have been marginalized so often cannot be ignored.

James Treggiari
Executive Director



Legal Assistance for Seniors



Legal Services Cases.....	1,238
Elder Abuse.....	373
Guardianship.....	163
Public Benefits.....	99
Health Law.....	117
Naturalization.....	40
Housing.....	201
General Legal Services.....	4
Conservatorship.....	232
Limited Conservatorships.....	9
HICAP.....	1,539
Community Education...	5,032
Total People Served.....	7,809

Legal Assistance for Seniors' services have been a critical part of the system of care for Alameda County older adults for over 45 years. LAS provides free legal services, ranging from full representation to counsel and advice, to older adults in Alameda County, plus community education and health insurance counseling.

LAS primarily serves clients who are elderly, overwhelmingly low-income, and from communities of color. Our services are both unique and vital to improving and sustaining the stability of the most marginalized communities in Alameda County.

Figures FY 2020-21.

Legal Services Clients

Women.....	65%
Age 65 or Older.....	74%
Persons of Color.....	55%
Non-Native English Speaker.....	12%
Low Income Residents.....	74%
Below Poverty Level.....	50%
Disabled.....	51%



The mission of Legal Assistance for Seniors (LAS) is to ensure the independence and dignity of seniors by protecting their legal rights through education, counseling and advocacy. Our vision is that all seniors will be able to live safely, with dignity, and the greatest possible independence regardless of their economic, social or health circumstances.

Figures FY 2020-21.



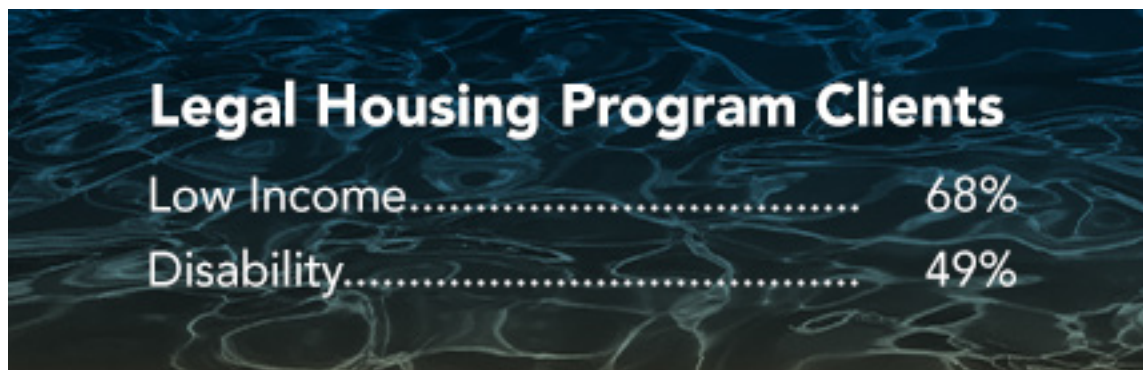
Legal Assistance for Seniors

Client Stories:

Helping Older Adults with Housing



Legal Assistance for Seniors (LAS) represented Oakland residents John and Patricia Sala after they had been informed of their landlord's intention to sell the single family home in which the Salas were tenants. To ensure their rights as tenants were not being violated, the Salas asked for help from LAS in dealing and negotiating with their landlord. LAS attorney Christine Sung succeeded in procuring a higher buy-out of their contract than they would otherwise have been entitled to under current law and city ordinances. The Salas were also accepted into an affordable senior housing unit around the time of this settlement, ensuring they would be able to relocate to a suitable residence within their means.



LAS operates three core programs: legal services, the Health Insurance Counseling and Advocacy Program (HICAP), and community education. Due to COVID-19, LAS is currently providing most of these services remotely through phone appointments, video conferencing, and email. However, once safe to do so, LAS will resume providing all its core programs not only at LAS' Oakland office, but also within the community at locations accessible to older adults, including senior housing facilities, senior centers, community centers, and in clients' homes.

Figures FY 2020-21.

Legal Services

During fiscal year 2020-21, LAS served 1,238 clients across its housing, elder abuse, guardianship, public benefits, health law, and naturalization programs.

Elder Abuse: LAS represents victims of physical, emotional, and financial elder abuse, typically seeking restraining orders against their abusers. LAS receives elder abuse referrals from Adult Protective Services, the District Attorney's Office and the Court. Older adults also contact us directly for assistance.

Guardianship of Minor Children: When parents are unable to care for their children, seniors often step forward to provide these children with a safe, stable home. LAS provides seniors with information about guardianship and represents seniors in guardianship cases. We also provide pro per assistance to low income litigants through a California State Bar partnership program.

Public Benefits: Seniors on fixed incomes are especially vulnerable to reductions in their public benefits. LAS protects seniors' public benefits including Social Security and Supplemental Security Income (SSI) through direct advocacy and representation at hearings.

Health Law: LAS' health law program is a voice for seniors who have fallen through the cracks in the complex Medicare and Medi-Cal systems. The health law team works closely with HICAP counselors and provides legal support when counselors have exhausted other avenues of assistance. Issues range from resolving enrollment and premium disputes to appealing Medicare denials for medications and treatment.

Naturalization: United States citizenship provides access to public benefits for basic living expenses and peace of mind that the senior can remain in their community. However, seniors often need assistance with filing citizenship applications, including applying for fee waivers and disability accommodations. LAS also prepares clients for their hearings and represents them at the hearings.

Housing: LAS provides advice and representation to senior tenants at risk of losing their housing due to issues like habitability, reasonable accommodations, rent increases, unlawful detainers and other matters that affect their ability to live safely in their community.

Conservatorship: LAS represents proposed conservatees in Alameda County, advocating to ensure that their dignity and independence are maintained during conservatorship proceedings. LAS does not take conservatorship cases from the public, only representing clients when appointed by the court.

Limited Conservatorships: LAS assists litigants in pro per who are petitioning for limited conservatorship of the person. A limited conservatorship of the person allows someone to make personal, educational and health care decisions for persons with developmental disabilities.

General Legal Services: Even when a senior comes to LAS with an issue that is not within our practice areas, we still try to use our community connections to link the senior to the service provider that will best fit their needs.



Health Insurance Counseling and Advocacy Program (HICAP)



HICAP is the only resource in the county providing free, unbiased information and assistance to Medicare beneficiaries. Highly trained and state-registered volunteer HICAP Counselors are supported by six HICAP staff and provide individualized counseling to Medicare beneficiaries of any age. They discuss Medicare benefits and enrollment periods, explain supplemental coverage plan options and beneficiary rights, provide information and application assistance on ways to save money on Medicare costs, review and compare long-term care insurance policies, and screen for denials of coverage that may be appealed. Certain cases may be referred to our legal team for representation. LAS served **1,539** HICAP clients during fiscal year 2020-21.

After an initial 50 hour training course and minimum ten hour internship, each HICAP Counselor must complete at least twelve hours of continuing education each year. Several choose to complete additional training requirements to become registered Long Term Care Counselors and Community Educators. The thirty plus HICAP volunteers contributed **3,310** hours of their time in fiscal year 2020-21.

LAS is always looking for new volunteer counselors to assist Medicare recipients with their benefits and related health insurance issues as part of our HICAP program. Through one-on-one counseling and informal advocacy, HICAP Volunteer Counselors support the independence of people making choices that affect their health and financial well-being. If you are interested in assisting the HICAP program, please take a look at the requirements and qualifications for volunteers on our website and consider filling out an application: <https://www.lashicap.org/volunteer/>

If you would like an appointment with a HICAP counselor, please fill out a request form here: <https://www.lashicap.org/request-a-hicap-counseling-appointment/>

Community Education



LAS' Community Education program arms seniors with the knowledge they need to successfully navigate the complex systems they rely on to thrive in their community. The program provides hundreds of free presentations across Alameda County on a variety of topics, including Medicare coverage and plan options, low-income assistance for health care costs, public benefits, advance health care directives, and long-term care insurance. During the pandemic, our Community Education team was able to quickly pivot from our normal in-person presentations to webinars. They also worked closely with food delivery agencies throughout the county to bridge the digital divide, by including flyers with essential educational materials to meal deliveries to homebound seniors. Last fiscal year, LAS was still able to provide **113** group presentations to **5,032** individuals during fiscal year 2020-21.

LAS is currently providing one presentation to older adults called "Basic Housing Rights for Seniors" that covers basic housing laws for tenants and provides an overview of the responsibilities of landlords and tenants. It highlights common housing issues including habitability issues, rent increases, and security deposits.



Legal Assistance for Seniors

Client Stories:

Keeping Families Together



Photo for illustrative purposes only. Not actual client image.

Legal Assistance for Seniors recently represented Ms. EMaia, an Oakland resident and senior, as she petitioned to obtain guardianship of her teenaged grandson, Jonathan. Jonathan had lived most of his life with both his grandmother and father. After his father had passed away, Jonathan's future was in doubt.

With the assistance of LAS attorney Mariel Kusano, Ms. EMaia filed for temporary and general guardianship of Jonathan. Although her petition was initially objected to by another family member, all objections were later dropped when it became clear that Ms. EMaia had no intention of standing in the way of Jonathan's developing relationships with other family members.

With legal guardianship now granted by the Court, Ms. EMaia has the authority to care for all of Jonathan's physical, emotional and educational needs. She can also ensure that he remains in her home, honoring her son's memory by doing her best to raise Jonathan as he would have wanted. Remarking upon the experience, Ms. EMaia said, "It's peace of mind for both of us."

Other LAS Programs and Initiatives

Home Safe

LAS launched case management services through a program called “Home Safe” that is a California Department of Social Services pilot program designed to stabilize housing for older adults and prevent homelessness. The intent is to catch older adults facing housing instability at the point at which they are interacting with Adult Protective Services (APS), either due to abuse, neglect or self-neglect. APS identifies an older adult as facing housing instability or homelessness and refers them to LAS for legal, case management and/or housing navigation services.

There are a broad range of services available to the client once in the “Home Safe” program. These include: arranging for short-term or long-term shelter; applying for benefits; assisting with the selection of in-home care providers; working with vendors to improve the conditions of residence; or facilitating a relocation.

Our case manager has built relationships with property managers and affordable board and care homes, as well as many other service providers and vendors. With additional funding through the Senior Assistance Foundation of the Eastbay (“SAFE”), LAS is expanding the number of clients receiving case management services in support of legal clients that we are already serving.

Policy Advocacy

The policy and advocacy work around the housing crisis has only intensified due to the pressures that COVID-19 has created. This has focused the agency on advocating for eviction moratorium policies at the city, county and state levels. Our housing attorneys have submitted written statements and attended numerous hearings to educate and encourage lawmakers to protect older adults, tenants and homeowners through the crisis.

LAS has become the lead for the Housing Work Group of the Alameda County Council for Age Friendly Communities and has focused the group on advocating for and implementing policies that would protect and create older adult housing options. At the state level, LAS is engaged in the Master Plan on Aging process and ensuring the recommendations are implemented effectively.

Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Initiative

In the last few years, LAS has launched an Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) initiative, with the mission to drive LAS’ organizational culture and determine inclusive policies and procedures for internal practices and the delivery of agency services. Last year, LAS formed an EDI committee, entitled the EDI Council. The Council is comprised of six staff, who meet on a regular basis to work on issues like recruitment and retention, language access for clients, and ongoing staff training. The agency has also launched a Client Data Workgroup that is delving into our client demographic data in the different programs to better understand any potential gaps in our services. We are working on targeted outreach, internal adjustments, and collaborative strategies to respond to the identified gaps.



Revenue

Government Contracts.....	\$1,763,090
Foundations.....	\$335,294
Individual and Corporate.....	\$171,013
Fees for Service.....	\$163,708
In-Kind.....	\$44,913

Expenditures

Program Expenses.....	\$1,912,801
Administrative.....	\$477,605
Fundraising.....	\$82,704

Figures FY 2020-21.

Thank You to Our Donors

All gifts made in support of LAS, its staff and our programs are of great value. Each gift is appreciated and has deep meaning. Behind every gift is a person with their own story about how they have been helped by our organization or someone who understands the benefits we have brought to our community by assisting others in need.

We would like to take this opportunity to thank the many donors who have supported our nonprofit along the way. Particularly during the challenges of the last year, your generosity has made a lasting impact upon the people who call Alameda County home.

To review the names of organizations and individuals who have donated to LAS over the last year, please visit our website at: <https://www.lashicap.org/about/donors-2021/>

Support the Mission and Work of LAS

Please consider a donation to LAS to help us to continue to improve upon our services and fulfill our mission of ensuring the independence and dignity of seniors, regardless of their race, gender or economic status. All contributions to LAS are tax-deductible as LAS is a 501(c)(3) charitable organization. To donate, please call our office at 510-832-3040 or donate online below:

<https://www.lashicap.org/donate/>



Legal Assistance for Seniors

In Memoriam



Katy Brady – Community Education Coordinator

Earlier this year, Legal Assistance for Seniors unexpectedly lost one of our long-time employees, Katy Brady, who passed away on May 27 from an aggressive form of cancer. Katy was our Community Education Coordinator, who many of you knew and collaborated with over the years. Katy was an amazing colleague and friend who always worked with great enthusiasm and compassion for the older adults in our community. Katy was always willing to go the extra mile to help others and never missed an opportunity to make new friends and share her smile and positive energy. LAS mourns the death of our dear friend and sends our love to her family. Katy was one of a kind!

This report is dedicated to the memory of our dear friend, Katy Brady.

In the words of Katy, "Go team go!"