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## St. Paul's PACE helps seniors stay independent

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Nearly 65 years after the end of World War II, the Baby Boomer generation has entered its silver years and not all is golden. In the United States, about 3 million people work in direct-care jobs, mainly with the elderly, as nursing assistances, home health aides and personal care aides. San Diego county has more than 330,000 individuals who are 65 years of age and older. Within the next 20 years, that number, according to SANDAG, is expected to grow to about 741,362 individuals, a growth of 125 percent.

"Seniors long for independence," said Carol J. Hubbard, executive director of St Paul's Program of All-Inclusive Care for the Elderly (PACE) program in San Diego. "Even as they become frail and require greater health care services, many choose to stay in their homes, facing the risk of becoming isolated and having increased challenges with nutrition, general health care needs and socialization. That's where the PACE program becomes a vital and integral resource for these individuals."

St. Paul's PACE, a nonprofit organization, is a health plan for seniors age 55 and older who prefer not to move into a nursing home, but whose medical problems make it impossible for them to stay at home without help from doctors, nurses, social workers and other caregivers. PACE is designed specifically to offer an alternative to institutional living for seniors who live in San Diego and are eligible for nursing home placement.

"The philosophy of PACE," said Hubbard, "is to enhance the quality of life and independence for frail, older adults by providing services that help them stay at home and in the community. Our goal is to maximize dignity and respect while preserving and supporting the family."

"The model fits snugly into the concept of health care reform as produced by President Obama and supported by Congress," Hubbard said.

Supported in California by Medi-CAL and Medicare, PACE provides a full array of health and social services with medical help around the clock, seven days a week. PACE accepts Medi-CAL, a combination of Medi-CAL and Medicare or private payments.

"Instead of working with many different providers, participants have an interdisciplinary team that arranges all services including primary care and social services," Hubbard said. She noted that PACE practitioners include a primary care physician, registered nurses, social workers, physical and occupational therapists, dietitians and home care coordinators. PACE Services include psychology; dentistry, podiatry and optometry; auditory; prescription drug coverage (no co-pays); adult day care; medical equipment/supplies home care, and nutritious meals and is the only Medi-CAL program that continues to provide many of the services cut for those over 65 such as dentistry and podiatry

"What we offer at PACE is special, and we make it as easy as possible for our participants," Hubbard said. "St. Paul's PACE transportation services, for example, pick up from their home and bring them to the PACE center on Elm Street and deliver them home again in the afternoon. And while they are with us, our participants enjoy social and recreational programs designed to stimulate memory and maximize physical ability." Hubbard noted that medications for PACE participants are prescribed by the PACE primary care physician and provided by PACE. In addition, a psychologist visits the PACE center once a week. "We have many other specialists who visit us at PACE monthly," she said, "including a psychiatrist, podiatrist, dentist, optometrist and audiologist -- all services cut by Medi-CAL in July of last year. It is important to us that our participants get all of the medical services they need to thrive." For home-bound participants, St. Paul's PACE provides in-home services. For these individuals, the addition of home care allows them to remain living independently at home. PACE services are based on medical need. In just two and a half years since PACE opened in San Diego, the organization has seen dramatic results in terms of the emotional and, subsequently, physical well being of its participants.

"Individuals have relished the companionship and camaraderie offered by fellow participants, and benefited from the nutritional on-site meals and health care services, including our 24-hour, seven days a week nursing service," Hubbard said. "PACE is a welcome alternative to nursing home care as participants, despite chronic health needs, can remain at home."