

Interview with Ligia Montano
Organizing and Partnership Director
Senior and Disability Action (SDA) - San Francisco
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When I first met Ligia during online meetings with Ana Malinow's Stop Privatization of Medicare group, I was so impressed with her activist spirit and upbeat, positive attitude. Ligia has achieved so much in promoting and exposing the needs of people who are marginalized by our society.

Q: Ligia, is SDA a new group?

A: No, they've been around for a while. SDA was formed from two other groups that had existed for some 30 years--Senior Action Network and Planning for Elders in the Central City. These groups were more focused on senior issues, but when the two merged, they focused on disability issues also. We now are organizing seniors for direct action.

People with disabilities are a big part of our population. They have been so marginalized we don't even see them. They are more isolated than the general senior population. There are centers and activities that engage seniors, but not that many that include disability in their focus.

And there is a lot of ableism in our society, so people in general tend not to be aware of this issue. That's been a big barrier for people fighting for their rights and equity.

Q: Ligia, how did you get into this work?

A: It started when I got my job at Senior Disability Action. I was aware of the lack of resources and services for seniors because my grandma, who has now passed away, was once very active and then had to struggle to find people to care for her.

Q: What sorts of actions has SDA taken?

A: Once I started working at SDA, it was amazing to learn about all the policies and services available, but also who is left out. We worked on fairness issues related to food stamps. We had big coalition meetings with Californians for SSI in coordination with the California Food Bank, the St. Anthony Foundation, Senior Disability Action, St. Mary's in Oakland, and different centers that help with food and the basics. It was a good fight!

I'm also proud of our successful campaign to provide free access to wheelchairs for disabled persons.

Q: How did you get involved with Stop Privatization of Medicare?

We heard about Ana Malinow from one of our members and invited her to come to our meeting. After her presentation I was, OMG! This is so necessary! We have to do something about this. So, Ana brought some people and we had a big informational session with more than 100 people. After that I started coming to her meetings.

Q: How is stopping Medicare privatization useful to seniors and the disabled?

A: I think it's crucial, not just useful. Crucial because they need the services of Medicare. Privatization is a big, big challenge to getting what we really need. The goal for us is single payer. But we won't be able to realize it if we don't stop privatization.

Q: How can we get more diversity in the single-payer movement?

A: I think first is meeting people where they are. Going to their meetings and doing presentations and asking them to disseminate this information. The problem we have is we don't have big media to communicate our message. But we have something better—we have the community. I believe the only way to bring meaningful social change is through organizing.

Legislative action happens once the community pushes for that change. Without that, we would never have Social Security, Medicare, or Medicaid. It is only through organizing that you can accomplish this. Organizing is basic. Organizing is personal, relational. You have to understand people, their needs, their interests, and how their interests connect with what you're fighting for.

Patty Harvey
HCA – Humboldt