



COUNTY of VENTURA
Human Services Agency

2022-23 Annual Report

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OVERVIEW

ORGANIZATION

COUNTY OF VENTURA BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

DISTRICT 1
Matt LaVere

DISTRICT 2
Jeff Gorell

DISTRICT 3
Kelly Long

DISTRICT 4
Janice S. Parvin

DISTRICT 5
Vianey Lopez

COUNTY EXECUTIVE OFFICER

Dr. Sevet Johnson

HUMAN SERVICES AGENCY DIRECTOR

Melissa Livingston

2022-23 REVENUE

Federal & State Funds

\$282 M

County Funds

\$40.6 M

Total

\$322.6 M

2022-23 EXPENDITURES

Staff Salaries & Benefits

\$163.6 M

Direct Client Assistance

\$99 M

Services & Supplies

\$60 M

Total

\$322.6 M

2022-23 HIGHLIGHTS

Helped
254,338
clients receive health
care coverage benefits
through Medi-Cal

3,900
job seekers and
other visitors received
services at
America's Job
Center of California

Investigated
2,855
reports of suspected
child abuse or neglect

Helped
76,229
individuals supplement
their diets with
CalFresh benefits

Provided
4,196
services to employers
in manufacturing,
healthcare, agriculture,
construction and more

Helped
601
individuals gain
permanent housing

Helped
8,804
individuals who receive
In-Home Supportive
Services

Filed
6,450
compensation and
pension claims on
behalf of veterans
and their families

Helped
188
families reunify/
remain together

Helped
7,686
individuals meet basic
needs through California
Work Opportunity and
Responsibility to Kids
(CalWORKs)

Responded to
5,416
allegations of
elder abuse

Facilitated
96
child adoptions



AGENCY VALUES

RESPECT FOR COMMUNITY VOICE

We recognize that all communities have unique cultural hallmarks, and we commit to delivering services in a manner that is inclusive, competent and respectful of each community's beliefs, practices and expressions. We further commit to ensuring more equitable opportunities and outcomes through listening and learning from the voice of the community, and respecting individuals' rights, lived experiences and differences while modeling respect and dignity for all.

COLLABORATIVE & INTEGRATED SERVICES

We understand that our systems are complex, and that individuals and families benefit from experiencing "no wrong door" to services. We commit to leveraging a multi-disciplinary team approach to meet the unique and comprehensive needs of individuals and families, centering their voice and engagement in collaboration with our diverse partner network to ensure equitable access, opportunity and outcomes.

EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT

We recognize that our workforce is our most valued asset. We commit to supporting an inclusive and empowered environment where it is safe to share ideas, where all voices are valued and respected, and where everyone feels they belong and can reach their fullest potential.

EQUITABLE SERVICES, POLICIES & PRACTICES

We acknowledge that our institutions are rooted in and/or intersect with systems that tend to produce disparate outcomes for marginalized groups. We commit to ensuring that all services, policies and practices are informed by a thoughtful and intentional commitment to Diversity, Equity and Inclusion. We further commit to striving for equitable access and equitable outcomes for all, both internal to our workforce and external to the community.

HEALING-CENTERED BEST PRACTICE

We acknowledge that adverse experiences, as well as our systems and institutions, can be traumatic. We commit to providing supportive, safe and nurturing environments that are non-judgmental and inclusive in meeting the diverse needs of individuals and families. We further commit to valuing and respecting each person's unique experiences through compassionate, healing-centered care and interventions that build trust, safety and empowerment, and provide for voice and choice, leveraging the strengths of individuals and families as they heal and become more resilient.

CONTINUOUS LEARNING & IMPROVEMENT

We recognize that our services must continuously evolve to meet the needs of our community. We commit to functioning as a continuous learning organization by investing in every employee's development to ensure the highest level of service excellence, and by nurturing an adaptable workforce that seeks to continuously improve efficient, relevant, accountable and fiscally responsible systems.

MOVING FORWARD WITH INCLUSIVE PLANNING

This report is filled with examples of how our good work aligns with the **strategic priorities of the County**, particularly those of maintaining Healthy, Safe and Resilient Communities, Addressing Homelessness and Lifting Up the Most Vulnerable, and building a Diverse and Innovative Workforce Dedicated to Service Excellence.

The Human Services Agency (HSA) is investing in four strategic focus areas as the foundation for our future work that will help advance agency and County priorities. Last year, guided by Cohort 1 of our Emerging Leaders Program and with broad input through listening sessions and surveys across HSA, we began to develop and implement initiatives to amplify the focus areas of Learning & Growth, Internal Business, Financial Stewardship, and Customer & Stakeholder Satisfaction.

Through dozens of listening sessions, HSA is capturing the voices of employees at all levels. Additionally, a second group of emerging leaders will continue to work alongside leadership on new and existing initiatives, bringing fresh insights to a living strategic plan that will continue to evolve as we strive to serve our community guided by HSA's Mission, Vision and Values.

LEADING BY EXAMPLE

HSA's Emerging Leaders Program is an eight-month series of values-based courses designed to combine training, mentoring and hands-on project work. Participants from every department are selected to represent a cross-section of early to mid-career employees seeking professional growth and organizational engagement.

The first cohort graduated in the summer of 2023. Its 30+ participants developed a number of strategic plan initiatives to address HSA goals in the areas of Learning & Growth, Internal Business, Financial Stewardship, and Customer & Stakeholder Satisfaction. The second cohort, which launched in the fall of 2023, will continue this work and bring new initiatives forward.



COMMUNITY SERVICES

Providing opportunities for better lives by supporting basic needs and linking people with essential services

HELPING TO ENSURE CONTINUED MEDI-CAL COVERAGE

Nearly 1 in 3 people in Ventura County depend on [Medi-Cal](#) for their health insurance needs. The past year brought significant changes to Medi-Cal.

In April, HSA transitioned to the state's new one-stop online portal, [BenefitsCal.com](#), where individuals can apply for and manage their benefits 24/7. Beginning in June, for the first time in more than three years, Medi-Cal clients also faced the return of annual renewal requirements, a process that was paused during the COVID-19 public health emergency. This launched a 12-month "unwinding" period, during which the Medi-Cal eligibility of more than 250,000 people needed to be reviewed prior to renewal.

To help keep eligible clients covered, HSA worked in partnership with dozens of community-based organizations, healthcare providers and the state, launching a multifaceted, multilingual outreach effort to help ensure Medi-Cal clients understood renewal requirements, knew how to get support, and had access to the BenefitsCal website. HSA will continue its expanded outreach work through May of 2024, when the unwinding period ends, meaning all clients have been offered the opportunity to renew.

Since the start of the unwinding period, Ventura County has seen dips in Medi-Cal coverage as people cycle off due to increased income, relocation or other factors impacting eligibility. This was expected due to the three-year pause in renewal reviews. Individuals who remain eligible but lose coverage because they missed the mailing or did not understand the need to provide updates or changes have a 90-day window after their discontinued date to address their needs and regain coverage retroactively.

Beginning Jan. 1, 2024, a new law in California will allow adults ages 26 through 49 to qualify for full-scope Medi-Cal, regardless of immigration status. This initiative is modeled after the Young Adult Expansion, which provided full-scope Medi-Cal to young adults ages 19 through 25, and the Older Adult Expansion, which provided full scope Medi-Cal to adults 50 years of age and older. This latest expansion of full-scope Medi-Cal brings California closer to ensuring health coverage for all residents with low incomes. HSA continues to work collaboratively with the state to ensure a successful implementation.

New rules mean
you may now qualify for full Medi-Cal.
Immigration status doesn't matter.



HELPING TO COMBAT FOOD INSECURITY

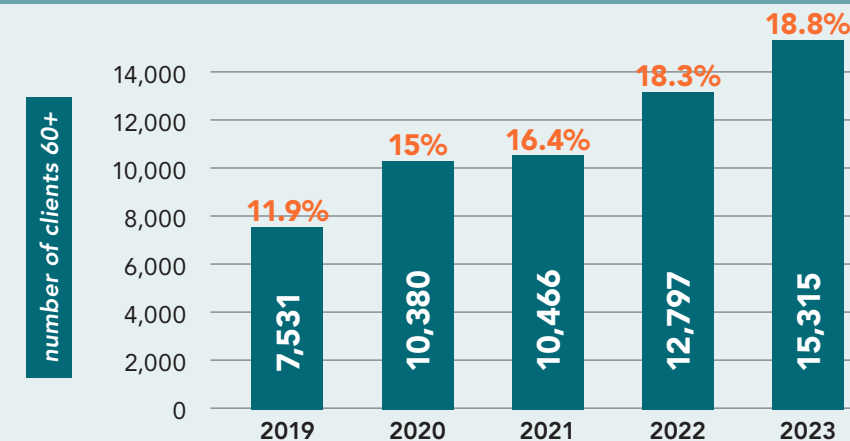
In 2019, California embarked on a new era in [CalFresh](#) benefits for older adults. Historically, California has ranked near last in the United States in older adult enrollment in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (known as CalFresh in California). In 2019, California and Ventura County began to turn the tide.

At the state level, nearly 40% of low-income adults over age 60 are food insecure. In food-insecure households, families and individuals must choose between food and paying utility bills or medical care. As Nourish California, a nonprofit focused on food equity affirms, "CalFresh is our first and best defense against hunger. Connecting older adults to CalFresh is proven to radically improve the health of low-income adults, providing life-saving access to food."

Aided by statewide eligibility changes, HSA has been making a concerted effort to increase access to CalFresh benefits for older adults. Our [Area Agency on Aging](#) and Community Services department work through a number of community-based access points to reach older adults in Ventura County to provide information and assistance with CalFresh. HSA staff visit senior centers, churches, and assisted and senior living housing throughout the county to raise awareness and share information. CalFresh information and assistance is provided at quarterly Living Well, Caring Well events, and in print in the [LIVEWell resource guide](#).

These efforts are delivering results. The number of adults over age 60 receiving CalFresh benefits in Ventura County more than doubled from 2019 to 2023, growing from 7,531 to 15,315 and increasing the share of total participants from 11.9% to 18.8%. As residents age, CalFresh will continue to be a vital safeguard against food insecurity.

Growth in CalFresh Clients Over Age 60 Ventura County 2019-2023



AGING & DISABILITY SERVICES

Promoting optimal living for individuals with disabilities, and healthful aging for the region's growing senior population



EVOLVING TO MEET CHANGING DEMOGRAPHICS

Census data show that between 2012-22 the number of Ventura County residents over 60 years old increased by 50,000. At the same time, the overall population of the county declined slightly, increasing the share of older residents from 18 to 24%. Nationwide, it's estimated that 7 out of 10 of Americans age 65 and older need some form of long-term care. Around 41% of working adults under age 65 also need long-term care because of chronic illness or disability.

HSA is responding to these changing demographics with program integrations to better serve older adults and individuals with disabilities. At the forefront is the [Ventura County Area Agency on Aging's \(VCAAA\)](#) integration as a division of HSA's newly-created Aging & Disability Services department. In addition to VCAAA, Aging & Disability Services oversees four programs: In-Home Supportive Services (IHSS), IHSS-Public Authority, Adult Protective Services, and Public Administrator-Public Guardian.

ABOUT THE AREA AGENCY ON AGING

Established in 1980, VCAAA provides a comprehensive, coordinated system of care that enables older adults, children and adults with disabilities, and their caregivers to live in a community-based setting. Services include benefits enrollment and counseling; case management; fall prevention; senior employment training; senior nutrition and meals; transportation; and the HomeShare program, which matches people looking for housing with people who have extra space and are looking for a roommate. VCAAA's recent integration with HSA will enhance service access and coordination for older adults and individuals with disabilities. Aligning similar programs within the same infrastructure helps HSA provide a wide range of resources for these growing communities and brings us closer to a "no wrong door" model for clients.

WORKING IN THE LOCAL COMMUNITY: VCAAA SNAPSHOTS

MEALS FOR THOSE IN NEED

Prior to the pandemic, VCAAA's [Senior Nutrition Program](#) served about 275,000 meals a year countywide, either in congregate settings or with home-delivered meals. Post-pandemic, that figure has grown to roughly 700,000 meals in 2022-23. This includes support for related meal programs such as the food box program, medically-supportive meals, Project Quarantine, Project Room Key, and Health Care Agency motel vouchers.

SUPPORTING AGING IN PLACE

Among VCAAA's nine case management programs is the [Multipurpose Senior Services Program \(MSSP\)](#), which aims to help residents 65 and older who participate in Medi-Cal to age in place when the care they require approaches that provided in nursing homes. Through a person-centered approach that includes a registered nurse and a social worker, clients may receive community-based services (adult day health care), home modifications (grab bars, bath chairs, etc.), non-medical equipment (medical alert systems, ramps, heaters, fans, etc.), supplemental personal care, caregiver relief, transportation, minor home repairs, and counseling for mental and/or medical issues. During 2022-23, up to 160 MSSP clients were served at any given time.

ADDRESSING LATE-LIFE DEPRESSION

The [Program to Encourage Active, Rewarding Lives \(PEARLS\)](#) is an award-winning program that addresses late-life depression in older adults. The 12-week evidence-based program is a partnership between VCAAA and Ventura County Behavioral Health. As people age and endure losses and changes in physical health, social structure, and independence, they can experience feelings of loneliness, sadness, frustration, irritability and anxiousness. The PEARLS program teaches skills to manage these feelings and improve quality of life. Barbie, who recently graduated from the program said, "I benefited greatly from PEARLS and made good progress with my issues. The best news is I am no longer depressed, and I am enjoying my life." The PEARLS program supported 181 clients in 2022-23.

SIMPLIFYING MEDICARE ENROLLMENT

More than 2,500 Ventura County residents requested help with Medicare in 2022-23 from the [Health Insurance Counseling & Advocacy Program \(HICAP\)](#). VCAAA's HICAP counselors are registered by the California Department of Aging and provide free, unbiased advice while also working to resolve billing issues and assisting with the application of appeals. Their busiest time of year comes during the Medicare Open Enrollment period each fall. HICAP also conducts year-round community outreach. In 2022-23, 124 presentations or one-stop shops were offered across the county. HICAP also serves as a Benefits Enrollment Center and works with Senior Medicare Patrol to report fraud and abuse as well as educate the public.



COMMUNITY ACCESS & ENGAGEMENT

Listening to the community while connecting, supporting and empowering underserved populations, including farmworkers, veterans, job seekers, and those experiencing homelessness



MAKING SERVICE INTEGRATION A PRIORITY

The creation of a new Community Access & Engagement department in the summer of 2023 allowed HSA to integrate and coordinate a variety of services. This new department aims to identify opportunities to align programs and break down silos, enabling community members to access the services they need, regardless from which HSA door they enter.

The department is poised to oversee healing-centric best practices, equitable access and service delivery, and community engagement. It will focus on enhancing collaborations across HSA, between County agencies, and throughout our community partner and provider network. Its three divisions include:

UNDERSERVED POPULATION DIVISION

Focusing on key populations, this division houses HSA's existing [Veteran Services Office](#), [Homeless Services](#) programs including the [RAIN Transitional Living Center](#), [Homeless Management Information System](#) / [Coordinated Entry Administration](#), and [Farmworker Resource Program](#).

EMPLOYMENT AND SUPPORT SERVICES DIVISION

This division brings together [CalWORKs Welfare-to-Work](#), California's Outcomes and Accountability Review, [General Relief](#), CalFresh Employment and Training, STEPS for Justice, and the [Volunteer Income Tax Assistance \(VITA\)](#) program.

COMMUNITY COLLABORATION AND SUPPORT SERVICES DIVISION

This new division focuses on resource navigation, partnership collaboration, community engagement, organizational development from a values-based lens, grant administration and management, and data collection and referral process tracking.

COLLABORATING TO BUILD CONFIDENCE AND HOPE

Stella, whose children were in the child welfare system, was living in her car on the streets of Oxnard. One night while Stella was sleeping, a drunk driver hit and totaled her car, leaving her without any shelter. Child welfare and homeless services social workers moved quickly to help Stella secure temporary shelter using funds from the [Bringing Families Home Program](#) while

simultaneously working on other goals and a permanent housing plan. Within one week of entering temporary shelter, Stella accomplished another major goal and secured employment. Stella had never held a job before, but she was extremely motivated to take steps to reunify with her children.

Despite feelings of fear and rejection, Stella applied for housing with help from her social workers. She was eventually approved for an apartment, and, with help from HSA, Stella's rent, security deposit and modest furniture costs were subsidized. Throughout this journey, Stella maintained her sobriety and has now reunited with her children.

NAVIGATING SYSTEMS FOR ESSENTIAL SUPPORT

In 2022, HSA launched a collaborative Resource Navigator pilot program that connects child welfare and basic needs programs. A resource navigator provides families with hope and access to services that help them exit the child welfare system.

Even after achieving significant progress in their family functioning, one family involved in the child welfare system experienced two major barriers to keeping their family together: financial instability and lack of childcare. After working with a resource navigator who helped the family apply for CalWORKs and navigate the childcare referral process, the mother was able to secure employment and the family was able to secure childcare. With both parents now working, the family reported improvement in their overall stability and ability to meet basic needs. They identified the resource navigator as key to achieving self-sufficiency. Given the positive developments, the family was able to remain together.

SUPPORTING DISASTER RESPONSE OPERATIONS

As a bridge between HSA and the Ventura County Sheriff's Office of Emergency Services, HSA's Mass Care & Shelter branch works to ensure that evacuees in need of shelter during disaster events are matched with the most appropriate emergency resources.

Ensuring readiness to serve in times of disaster requires year-round planning, development and coordination of resources, cultivation of relationships, and training. A large-scale, two-day drill in the summer of 2023 brought together several County agencies, including HSA's Mass Care & Shelter branch, the Sheriff's Office of Emergency Services, Health Care Agency and Fire Department, as well as American Red Cross, Salvation Army, city emergency planning representatives, and more than 70 employee and community volunteers to evaluate the county's collective response capability. All partners will use the lessons learned to adjust procedures for the next real-life emergency event.

Recognizing that certain members of the community may be disproportionately impacted by disasters, Mass Care & Shelter worked with the Community Access & Engagement department and County Executive Office to launch a Community Emergency Access Survey in the fall of 2023 to better understand the barriers faced by residents with disabilities and other functional needs in accessing emergency information and services, particularly in the mass care and shelter environment. Community members' survey responses will be used to identify gaps in disaster planning, response and recovery efforts, and work to ensure everyone in the community has equal access to emergency information and services.



CHILDREN & FAMILY SERVICES

Offering support, hope and opportunity to local children and families

WORKING TO KEEP FAMILIES TOGETHER

HSA strives to provide families the support needed for family preservation. By connecting families with resources and support, we are able to reduce the number of children and youth entering out-of-home care.

When children are unable to remain with their family of origin and placement with relatives is not an option, local resource families are called upon to provide a safe, stable, loving environment. While a child is in out-of-home care, HSA works to strengthen the family of origin by providing the resources and support they need so that they may reunite with their child when it is safe to do so.

COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS ARE KEY

When the community works together, successful outcomes are more likely. Child welfare staff partners with a wide range of organizations and businesses throughout the county to help address the needs of youth and their families.

This year, HSA partnered with Oxnard School District and Hueneme Elementary School District to place child welfare social workers and case aides at six elementary schools and three satellite sites, a substantial increase from last year's two school campuses and one satellite site. Social workers' offices are a one-stop shop for everything from parenting classes and food distribution to a "care closet" full of hygiene supplies, clothes and shoes. This **Healthy Start Program** is one of the many innovative programs helping Ventura County families succeed and stay together.

This year's **Faith in Motion** campaign included collaborations with churches to inform and engage potential resource families. HSA's outreach work has also resulted in the donated use of a six-bed home by Atmosphere Church, a non-denominational Christian church in East County. The home will support resource parents and youth coming into care.

HSA continues to partner with local businesses to help youth and their resource families. More than 50 businesses currently participate in the **Businesses With Heart** initiative, providing discounts to resource families and mentoring to older youth, in addition to internship and employment opportunities.



This past year, the Assistance League of Ventura County and Simi Valley Moose Lodge donated a number of items, including hygiene supplies, clothes and shoes, which HSA provided to the Mixteco Indigena Community Organizing Project (MICOP) to support families migrating to Ventura County. By continuing to increase engagement with local indigenous communities and work with the Mexican Consulate, we're able to build trust and ensure culturally responsive supports and services to families served.

EMBRACING A WELLNESS-BASED PERSPECTIVE

HSA is reimagining what success looks like from a systems-based perspective, with prevention and early intervention supports and services for children, families and communities.

The County of Ventura has been an early adopter of best practices and has a strong foundation on which to build. A collaborative effort was launched in 2022 to take this work to the next level. Guided by a team of leaders from the Human Services, Health Care, Public Health, Behavioral Health, and Probation agencies, and in partnership with the Ventura County Office of Education, Gold Coast Health Plan and Tri-Counties Regional Center, child welfare staff are working to align services and remove silos so that children and families are surrounded by the resources they need to feel safe and supported. Alongside public agencies and community organizations, HSA will continue to play a major role as we take steps to enhance our wellness-based perspective.

CHAMPIONING POSITIVE OUTCOMES FOR FORMER FOSTER YOUTH

This year, HSA was one of seven applicants statewide selected to operate a supplemental income pilot program for former foster youth with low incomes. **VC Thrive** is an 18-month program that provides monthly stipends of \$1,000 to as many as 150 eligible individuals who have aged out of the local foster care system. National data show that young adults who are aging out of the foster care system face significant disparities in education, employment and well-being. This pilot program invests at a pivotal time with the goal of influencing positive outcomes for young adults and their communities. By providing a supplemental monthly income to help cover necessities such as food, housing and utilities, VC Thrive aims to enable participants to focus on pursuing educational and career opportunities that will put them on a path toward self-sufficiency and a greater quality of life.



