



County of Ventura Human Services Agency



2019-2020



Annual Report

Human Services Agency Snapshot

The Human Services Agency (HSA) strives to strengthen Ventura County by administering programs that have a positive impact on key community concerns, including food insecurity, access to health care, child and elder abuse, unemployment and homelessness. HSA serves as a foundation for improved career paths and family lives and as a safety net for individuals facing setbacks due to job loss, illness or other challenges.

The importance of HSA's mission was further elevated when a health

emergency was declared in Ventura County on March 12, 2020, due to the pandemic. Stay-at-home orders aimed at reducing the spread of COVID-19 closed businesses, schools and

daycare centers that had contributed to a stable local economy.

The pandemic not only took an especially heavy toll on low-wage workers in shuttered industries who quickly fell behind on rent and struggled to feed their families but also disproportionately

affected children in families at high risk of instability, older adults, and people with disabilities whose support networks became more difficult to access, increasing the potential for

social isolation.

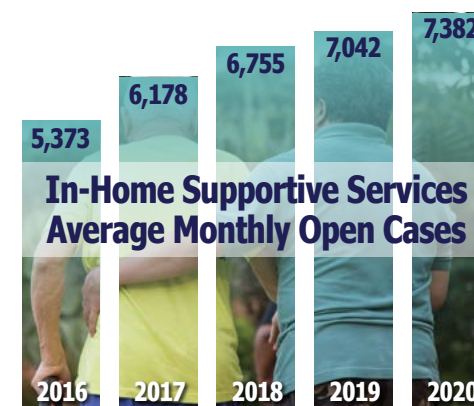
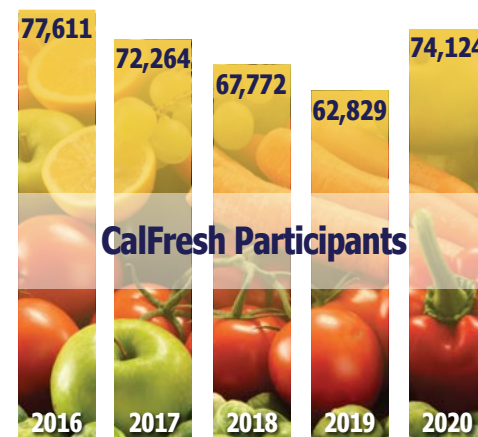
In response to the community's emerging needs, HSA rapidly expanded partnerships, implemented new programs, and re-tooled

service models to ensure client interaction through virtual platforms as well as critical in-person visits bolstered by additional safety precautions.

When this fiscal year began on July 1, 2019, participation in public assistance programs had been steady or declining in response to the stable economy. However, by the end of the

fiscal year on June 30, 2020, participation in the CalFresh food assistance program had climbed by 18% as the economy suffered. While the number of In-Home Supportive Service clients had been increasing steadily for years alongside the county's growing senior population, the pandemic further heightened the critical need for safe in-home care options, and the caseload rose by another 5%.

While the county had enjoyed a record-low 3.0% unemployment rate in May 2019, this changed abruptly between February and April 2020 when 41,600 local jobs were lost and the county's unemployment rate soared to a record-high 13.9%.



Human Services Agency

Helped **218,575** individuals receive health care through Medi-Cal benefits.

Helped **74,124** individuals supplement their diets with CalFresh benefits.

Assisted **7,382** individuals who receive In-Home Supportive Services.

Investigated **3,230** reports of suspected child abuse or neglect.

Responded to **4,712** allegations of adult abuse.

Facilitated **93** adoptions for children.

Completed **26,451** well-being phone calls to vulnerable adults in the first weeks of the pandemic.

Filed **\$17.3 million** in compensation and pension claims on behalf of veterans and their families.

County of Ventura Board of Supervisors

District 1 – *Steve Bennett*
District 2 – *Linda Parks*
District 3 – *Kelly Long*
District 4 – *Bob Huber*
District 5 – *John C. Zaragoza*

County Executive Officer *Michael Powers*

Human Services Agency Director

Melissa Livingston

Human Services Agency Revenue & Expenditures

2019-2020 Revenue

Federal & State Funds \$254.2 million
County Funds \$29.2 million

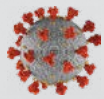
Total \$283.4 million

2019-2020 Expenditures

Staff Salaries & Benefits \$139.6 million
Direct Client Assistance \$92.6 million
Services & Supplies \$51.2 million

Total \$283.4 million

COVID-19 – *Meeting the Moment*



Responding to the community's needs during the pandemic required HSA to implement new ways of doing business rapidly and effectively, while keeping 1,350 staff and 225,000 clients—more than one of every four county residents—safe. In partnership with the Board of Supervisors, the County Executive Office, other County agencies and community organizations, HSA marshaled the expertise and experience of stakeholders to re-create service delivery systems that remained human centered, even as they incorporated new technologies, protocols and safety standards.

HSA MISSION

We strengthen families, support self-sufficiency and promote safety, health and well-being.

COVID-19 Response Efforts

New Ways of Serving Clients Virtually

Connecting to Careers

HSA operates several employment and training services, including Workforce Innovation & Opportunity Act, CalWORKs, and CalFresh, to assist participants in obtaining the work-related skills necessary to secure living-wage jobs and reduce reliance on public benefits.

Largely prior to the pandemic, HSA's Career Services team assisted 545 CalWORKs Welfare-to-Work clients in securing unsubsidized employment. By April 2020, however, with the COVID-19 recession three months underway, 57,400 residents were unemployed, giving way to a record-high unemployment rate in Ventura County and the lowest labor force participation rate in 17 years.

To help mitigate financial hardships stemming from the pandemic, HSA's Career Services team implemented a \$450,000 grant-funded program that provided one-time cash assistance to some

Ventura County 5-Year Unemployment Rate



900 low-income individuals whose employment had been affected by COVID-19 and who were challenged to afford housing, utilities, childcare, transportation or telework equipment, including computers and internet access. Further, HSA's Career Services staff assisted 8,500 job seekers with virtual employment searches through the America's Job Center of California online portal, and served businesses countywide affected by the pandemic.

HSA's Career Services team provided outreach to nearly 100 employers that laid off or furloughed upwards of 6,000 employees during the year, while offering on-the-job training and job placement assistance to job seekers.



Serving an Aging Population

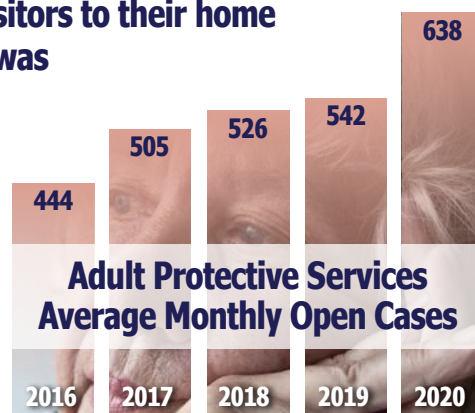
As Ventura County's senior population continues to grow more rapidly than any other age group, and with older adults now outnumbering children for the first time, the demand continues to rise for programs, including Adult Protective Services and In-Home Supportive Services, that keep older adults safe and enable them to remain in their own homes for as long as possible.

When seniors were advised to stay home to minimize exposure to the coronavirus, HSA recognized that some could become more vulnerable to isolation, self-neglect and elder abuse. Therefore, Adult Protective Services social workers made nearly 2,000 wellness calls to clients between April and June 2020, checking in and providing a point of contact for those without any family or friends to provide support. Additionally, using personal protective equipment and new safety protocols to reduce risks, social workers made in-person visits to seniors when necessary to investigate claims of abuse and neglect, and ensure clients' well-being.

The In-Home Supportive Services program provides resources for low-income seniors and those with disabilities to hire workers, including family members, to provide support with personal care, household work and errands.

These seniors welcomed visitors to their home during the pandemic, as it was essential that they receive assistance from their caregivers.

To reduce risks for both clients and their providers, HSA conducted outreach and education campaigns regarding safety precautions; implemented a provider



back-up system to help ensure coverage of clients' needs should COVID-19 prevent a provider from delivering care; and coordinated with the State, the Office of Emergency Services, and the providers' union to make personal protective equipment available to providers and clients.

Over the past five years, the number of residents receiving In-Home Supportive Services has climbed by 37%. Given the increasing senior population and the recognition that safety may be best maintained in one's home during events such as pandemics, that trend is expected to continue.

COVID-19 Response Efforts

Meeting Basic Needs

Financial hardship created by the pandemic generated significant demand for the CalFresh food assistance program, boosting participation by nearly 10,400 households from February to June 2020. CalFresh serves as the State's primary defense against hunger and malnutrition, helping recipients purchase nutritious food at grocery stores and farmers markets using electronic benefits transfer cards. Each month, roughly 74,000 people in Ventura County—about 4.8 million statewide—receive CalFresh benefits.

To ensure CalFresh benefits and other essential assistance continued to flow to eligible community members while HSA offices remained closed to the public to help clients and staff avoid illness during the pandemic, HSA pivoted from in-person services to online, phone, fax, and drop-off/mail-in services. While the average CalFresh household typically receives \$225 in benefits monthly, the State authorized emergency allotments to ensure all CalFresh families received the maximum benefit for their household size, providing an additional \$15 million in food purchasing power to local families from March through June 2020.

HSA optimized virtual service provision options to ensure issuance of critical benefits with no in-person contact.

Further, the State established a pilot program that enabled CalFresh participants to purchase groceries safely online through designated retailers, and implemented the Pandemic-Electronic Benefits Transfer program that provided additional benefits to more than 56,000 local children who qualify for free or reduced-price meals at school.

Moreover, the State temporarily deferred program renewal requirements, allowing Medi-Cal and CalWORKs participants to retain their health coverage and cash assistance benefits as the pandemic unfolded. Further, the availability of enhanced unemployment benefits proved critical for local residents, keeping many from seeking CalWORKs benefits. Still, some additional households with very low incomes became eligible for CalWORKs, giving rise to a 5.3% increase in participation from February to June 2020.

\$15 million in additional food purchasing power went to local families from March through June 2020 through CalFresh emergency allotments.

56,411 local children received Pandemic-EBT benefits to help purchase food.









COVID-19 Response Efforts

Strengthening Families

HSA strives to strengthen families so that they have the best chance to provide their children with safe, healthy, nurturing environments. To that end, HSA has implemented system changes to ensure that families are assisted at the first signs of child abuse or neglect, often through linkage to in-home services that allow children who might otherwise enter the child welfare system to remain safely in their own homes while their parents receive the supports needed to attain family health and wellness.

HSA has also ensured that children experiencing abuse or neglect receive safe and supervised care in family settings whenever possible, with early access to services and a voice in key decisions, until they can reunite with their parents or enter a permanent home.

Efforts have focused on teaming multi-disciplinary service providers with caregivers and biological parents to develop and implement plans that strengthen families.

Additionally, HSA has piloted an electronic case file system that gives social workers access to critical information in the field, with plans underway to make the system available to all Child Welfare Services staff.

These changes to the child welfare system have not only kept more families intact, decreased entries to foster care, reduced the number of children living in congregate care settings, and ensured more permanency for children over the last several years, they laid the foundation for a more successful response to the pandemic. More children residing with their parents or in family settings with resource families (relative caregivers or foster parents) instead of in shelters or group homes meant fewer concerns about the transmission of the coronavirus among foster youth. More firmly established partnerships with service providers allowed for connectivity with families at high risk, even as reports of abuse and neglect declined due to the closure of schools and other environments where signs of problems are most often noticed and reported.

Significantly, Child Welfare social workers' experience in teaming with multiple service providers and family supporters facilitated a rapid transition from in-person to virtual meetings, ensuring that 2,140 child and family team meetings could take place safely during the year, regardless of the pandemic. Furthermore,

throughout the pandemic, Child Welfare social workers donned personal protective equipment, adhered to strengthened safety protocols, and utilized mobile technology to perform critical investigations into allegations of abuse and neglect, conduct home visits and facilitate essential visitations between children and their parents.

HSA launched the CalWORKs Home Visiting Program in collaboration with Ventura County Public Health that includes a comprehensive prenatal-to-kindergarten home-visiting and education program for parents or caregivers, called Parent as Teachers (PAT). This evidenced-based program sees all family systems as having strengths and assets, with goals to prevent child abuse and neglect, increase parent knowledge of early childhood development, improve parenting practices, facilitate early detection of developmental delays and health issues, and increase children's school readiness and success. Over the past year, PAT has provided 80 families with personal visits, child screening, group connections and resource networks.

COVID-19 Response Efforts

Staying Connected

To ensure that older adults and individuals with disabilities received contact during the pandemic, HSA established a call center that enlisted disaster service workers from nearly all County agencies to check on vulnerable clients' well-being, relay educational information about COVID-19, provide referrals to community resources, and record clients' questions for follow-up by social workers.

Over 50 disaster service workers placed more than 26,000 calls to In-Home Supportive Services and CalFresh clients in English, Spanish, Tagalog, Farsi, Mandarin and Vietnamese, and provided clients in need of food or meal deliveries with 1,650 referrals to FOOD Share and the Ventura County Area Agency on Aging.

The senior population is growing faster than any other age group in Ventura County:

- » **All Baby Boomers will be 60+ in 2025.**
- » **The over-60 population will increase 13% between 2020 and 2025.**
- » **For the first time in Ventura County, older adults are projected to outnumber children in 2020.***

**Source: January 2020 demographic data from the California Department of Finance*



Securing Housing

The **Ventura County Pandemic Rental Assistance** program advanced the Board of Supervisors and County Executive Office's goal to help residents with low incomes retain their homes at a critical time, using some \$11.4 million in federal Coronavirus Relief funding to provide one-time rental assistance for Ventura County residents who owed past-due rent because of a hardship due to COVID-19.

1,000+ landlords in all 10 cities and unincorporated areas of the county were issued funding.

1,690 households were assisted with past-due rent.



Protecting Those at High Risk

Project Roomkey was established by the Board of Supervisors and County Executive Office in early April 2020 in recognition that individuals over age 65 or with underlying health conditions experiencing homelessness or living in congregate shelters were most susceptible to COVID-19. Project Roomkey housed 430 people who were otherwise homeless and provided valuable medical and mental health care, laundry services, three meals each day, and onsite security.

Project Roomkey provided temporary housing at four motels across Ventura County to those most vulnerable to contracting and becoming ill from the coronavirus.

HSA worked in partnership with the County Executive Office, Office of Emergency Services, Public Health, Behavioral Health, Farmworker Resource Program, and a large network of community partners to provide onsite oversight for Project Roomkey, maintaining the safety and well-being of these vulnerable residents and offering opportunities for transition into long-term housing.

The Board of Supervisors and County Executive Office also recognized the unique vulnerability of farmworkers to becoming exposed to the coronavirus, given that most of the county's 36,000 farmworkers continued their essential work in the food supply chain throughout the pandemic, and given that some live in congregate dormitory-style housing. Therefore, the County called upon multiple agencies to provide targeted assistance to the farmworker community, including HSA's Farmworker Resource Program, which was established to build trust and relationships among the agricultural community and to assist with prompt resolutions to workplace concerns.

The **Farmworker Resource Program** partnered with the Agricultural Commissioner, the Health Care Agency, a team of Ventura County Medical Center doctors, and other County and community groups on a new initiative called Cultivating Health in Agriculture. This initiative brought medical professionals and other partners to local farms to provide educational information regarding the coronavirus in **English, Spanish, Mixtec, Zapotec** and **Purépecha**, facilitate COVID-19 testing at worksites, offer referrals to community resources, and distribute donated food to farmworker families in need.



Success Stories

Kristle's Journey

With a team of community partners, a family finds a home

Home insecurity wasn't new to Kristle. When she was a child, she often lived in a car with her mother. This past year she faced similar hardships, but this time she was pregnant and struggling to take care of her three children, two boys, ages 7 and 3, and a little girl just 1 year old. They had been living in a car for months before the SPIRIT of Santa Paula gave the single mom and her children a place to tuck themselves in at night.

But Kristle's due date was getting closer, and having a newborn at a shelter was a concern, especially during the pandemic. When it was discovered that Kristle was on a waitlist for Section 8 housing, HSA's Homeless Services staff knew they could help her secure permanent housing.

HSA staff from Homeless Services and Child Welfare Services strategized with staff from the SPIRIT of Santa Paula, Salvation Army, United Way, and Oxnard Housing Authority. Together they

secured a temporary stay for Kristle and her children at a motel using an emergency voucher, and collaborated on a case plan for providing supplemental services to the newborn.

Kay Wilson-Bolton, founder of the nonprofit SPIRIT of Santa Paula, continued checking in on Kristle and providing food for the family at the motel after the baby was born. "The children were great. We loved them," recalled Wilson-Bolton. "As for our role in this season of Kristle's life, we were able to provide exactly what she needed, a temporary safety net."

"We went from being in the car on the coast, to a motel, to shelters and then everything else. And now we're in a home getting a washer and dryer."

When Kristle was finally scheduled to move in to Section 8 housing, she received guidance and supplemental services throughout the process. "Ms. Chavez was a big help getting everything taken care of," said Kristle about her assigned Homeless Services social worker who helped with paperwork and kept the plan on track. She continued, "We went from being in the car on the coast, to a motel, to shelters and then everything else. And now we're in a home getting a washer and dryer."

With four children now, Kristle stays busy making a home for them all, adding, "They've been through a lot, but they like having a permanent home." Today, this family is safe and happy.

From July 1, 2019, to June 30, 2020, HSA's Homeless Services helped facilitate housing for 328 families comprised of 1,266 adults and children. On average, the team served 230 individuals each month, providing field-based case management services focused on housing stability, financial stability and other goals to promote self-sufficiency.



Neighbors Together Keeps Families Together

Striving to make every family successful

All Santiago wanted was to stay together with his four boys.

A little over a year ago, he and the mother of his children, ages 1 through 6, separated. The eldest took the separation the hardest. He cried every morning when dropped off at school and spent much of his day in the office, refusing to go to his classroom. Santiago tried to intervene, but custody challenges kept him from seeing his sons.

As a male survivor of domestic violence, it wasn't easy for Santiago to ask for help, but the thought of losing his children was even tougher. He reached out to HSA's Healthy Start for support and guidance. This school-based preventative program helps families coordinate resources, support and education aimed to preserve and strengthen families, and is part of the larger Neighbors Together Initiative aimed at enhancing child welfare practices and aligning efforts with community partners to better assist families in high-need neighborhoods.

Healthy Start linked the family to services, including therapy for Santiago and his son and parenting classes offered by Ventura County Behavioral Health. Santiago also became one of two males who participated in a domestic violence support group.

Santiago did everything to keep his children safe, going above and beyond court-ordered requirements. Soon he was awarded full custody of his sons. Santiago's increased presence in his children's lives quickly made a difference, with the stable environment contributing to improved school attendance.

Yet Santiago's dream of family unity was in jeopardy when his car broke down beyond repair. Without reliable transportation, Santiago worried about losing his job and, in turn, stability for his children.

When James Storehouse, a community-based organization that fulfills emergency requests to help stabilize families at risk, heard about Santiago's resilience and strength, the nonprofit stepped in and donated a vehicle to the family. "I couldn't believe the social worker when she told me," said Santiago. "I couldn't believe that someone would just give a car away to a stranger without anything in return. Now I won't have to worry if my car will break down on my way to work and

lose my job again. I will not have to worry about waiting for my brother's car to be available to take my sick boys to the doctor or to an important appointment." He continued, "I want to encourage other fathers to speak up and not feel ashamed to ask for help."

"I want to pay it forward. I want to help other families like they helped mine."

Today, Santiago feels more confident and is determined to be the best possible parent. When asked what he would like to say to the family who donated their car to the nonprofit, Santiago replied, "I want to meet them to say 'thank you' in person and to let them know I want to pay it forward. I want to help other families like they helped mine. May god bless them and their family."



Recovery in the Year Ahead

While striving to advance long-term goals and innovations, HSA will maintain a critical focus on addressing community needs stemming from the unprecedented impacts of this pandemic through new programs and service models.

Skills Development for Job Seekers

With some jobs permanently lost due the pandemic, laid-off workers with limited options will benefit from enhancing their skills. Through new California Workforce Development Board grant funding, HSA is poised to implement an apprenticeship program, in partnership with transportation and construction-related trade unions, that targets participants who are historically underrepresented in these trades, including women, veterans, formerly incarcerated individuals and disadvantaged youth.

Plans are also underway to implement a work-based learning program to support English Language Learners, aged 18 and older—including farmworkers who speak indigenous languages—in accessing services and building job skills that will help increase employability.

Increased Access for Disproportionately Impacted Populations

Healthcare Coverage

HSA will partner with community organizations to enhance outreach efforts and enrollment services aimed at helping residents obtain and retain Medi-Cal coverage using state funding that prioritizes underserved populations including: immigrants and families of mixed immigration status; individuals with limited English proficiency; young people of color; older individuals; people with disabilities or mental health disorders; and workers with low wages.

Food Assistance

HSA will launch the Restaurant Meals Program, enabling CalFresh clients who are 60 years of age or older, those with disabilities—and their spouses—and those who are homeless, to use their CalFresh benefits to purchase lower-cost prepared meals at participating restaurants. This program will expand options for vulnerable CalFresh clients who lack food storage, refrigeration and cooking appliances or who have limited mobility, making meal preparation challenging.



Farmworker Household Assistance

A group of local agricultural employers, farmworker advocates and community-based organizations created the Farmworker Household Assistance Fund to help support the urgent needs of the farmworker community adversely affected by the pandemic. HSA was engaged to administer the program using a combination of private and federal Coronavirus Relief funding. Some 3,700 farmworker households applied for assistance, and HSA will issue \$3.5 million in funding in Fall 2020.

Disaster Response and Recovery

As the focus on pandemic recovery remains front and center, HSA recognizes that the community could also experience a natural disaster, requiring special planning if it is not safe to open traditional congregate evacuation shelters. Therefore, HSA is partnering with the American Red Cross, Office of Emergency Services, cities throughout the county and other community partners to enhance mass care and shelter coordination.

Responding to and recovering from natural disasters is difficult for all, but some groups are likely to be disproportionately impacted by disasters, including people with disabilities, older adults, children, people with limited or no English proficiency, individuals with health vulnerabilities, and others who may need particular assistance or additional support during or after an emergency. To better understand and address the needs of these populations, HSA is preparing to launch a community needs assessment in collaboration with the County's Emergency Planning Council.







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