

Health Equity for all People in Santa Cruz County

Recommendations for Action and Investment A Human Care Alliance Position Paper

Prevention

Invest in health education, prevention, and early intervention for high-risk populations.

Access

Ensure equal access for all people to health care and treatment, healthy food, and opportunities to exercise.

Basic Needs

Ensure that basic human needs for food and shelter are met for all members of our community.

Critical Needs

As a community, we must ensure that all residents have equal access to health care, healthy food, and other services essential to healthy lives. One in four county residents rely on Medi-Cal for health services, and many low-income seniors, families, and people with disabilities face health care gaps that put their health and financial security at risk.

Growing Senior Population

As the baby boom generation ages, the county's senior population will grow dramatically. Services that keep county seniors in their homes, such as food support, in-home care, and transportation, are at capacity and face growing demand.

Gaps in Affordable Health Care

Low-income residents continue to face critical health care gaps in areas such as dental care, prevention-based services, mental health treatment, and senior health care.

Food, Shelter, and Basic Services

Too many lack access to food, safe housing, and other basic needs. An appalling number of people simply do not have enough food, and many others have limited access to healthy food. When the nearest grocery store is miles away, working families rely on fast food outlets for meals.

QUICK FACTS

By 2030, **73 million people** in the U.S. will be over 65 (from 43.1 million in 2012).
(U.S. Census Bureau: 2014)

52% of Santa Cruz County seniors served by Meals on Wheels live in poverty.

53% of people with mental health issues in America receive no treatment; lack of access is higher for women, single people, and people in poverty.
(CDC Behavioral Risk Data: 2009)

Just **58%** of county residents have dental insurance, down from 72% in 2003
(Santa Cruz Community Assessment Project, Year 20: 2014)

Key Services Keep Seniors in Their Homes

Stella and Joe raised their family in Watsonville in a small house that they worked hard to make a home. Shortly after retirement, Joe suffered a stroke that put him in a rehab facility. He couldn't come home until grab bars and other safety modifications were installed; things that were not in their limited budget.

Thanks to **Helping Hands** volunteers, Joe and Stella were able to stay in their home. After Joe died and Stella began to lose her sight, Helping Hands returned to install smoke and carbon monoxide detectors and add a hand-held shower so Stella, now in her 90's, can continue to live in her home.

"I have been using Meals on Wheels for quite a while, and without these meals I would not have food on some nights. I am retired and on SSD and it is very difficult for me to make ends meet without the meals."

Robert, Capitola

Providing Health Access for Everyone in Our Community

Effective and cost-effective health services focus on prevention and early intervention rather than crisis response and on a coordinated, holistic approach to the specific needs of individuals and families. At the same time, we need to make healthy community life a priority for municipal planning, including the creation of safe, affordable housing and access to healthy food.

Prevention and Early Intervention

By preventing health problems or treating them when they are still manageable, we can reduce costs and improve quality of life.

Coordinated Services to Target Core Needs

Lack of access to basic services can cascade into serious and expensive health problems. Coordinated services—for example, mental health treatment combined with housing support, or senior meal delivery combined with home health care—can effectively serve those at risk.

Housing and Healthy Food

All county residents must have safe housing and healthy food. We need to expand effective direct services such as food programs for seniors and low-income families. At the same time, planning and zoning policies can help ensure affordable housing and access to healthy food in all neighborhoods.

SOLUTIONS THAT WORK

Move services upstream to support programs that reach people before they are in crisis, thereby saving public dollars.

Modest support services for seniors

that allow them to age in place are cost-effective. For example, Meals on Wheels provides a year of healthy meals for less than it costs for one day in a hospital or six days in a nursing home. Better-nourished seniors also have shorter hospital stays and better health outcomes. (*Meals on Wheels America: 2015*)

Eliminating food insecurity for children

improves school performance, behavior, cognitive development, and health, while decreasing obesity. 23% of kids live in food-insecure households. (*USDA study, kidsdata.org*)

Food Support for Local Families

“I’m a mother of two children living in Bonny Doon, and I was looking for a way to bring extra food home. Someone told me about the Community Action Board food distribution program at the Davenport Resource Service Center. It’s only a 10-minute drive, and it has helped support my family so much! I have a chance to choose what my family can eat, as if I was shopping at a store.”

-A Davenport Resource Service Center Mom

The Human Care Alliance (HCA)

is best known for the **high quality, effective health and human services** we provide to tens of thousands of local residents. We impact lives every day, and while that will always be the core of what we do, services alone are not enough to make the lasting changes in our community that we believe are needed. We are challenging our members, our partners and our funders to work together and learn together, across disciplines and city limits, to use all our resources wisely to continue to make a difference in individual lives, while also changing the community conditions that cause the problems we face. We hope these position papers spark a new dialogue that leads to a better future for all of us.



HCA Agencies Working Toward A Healthier Community

Advocacy Inc.
Above the Line
Alzheimer’s Association
Area Agency on Aging/Seniors Council
CACFP/Community Bridges
CASA of Santa Cruz County
Cabrillo College Stroke and Disability Learning Center
Community Connections/Volunteer Center
Diversity Center
Grey Bears
Central Coast Center for Independent Living
Children’s Hospice and Palliative Care Coalition
Community Recovery Services/Encompass Community Services
Day Resource Center/Homeless Services Center
Dientes Community Dental Clinic
Elderday/ Community Bridges
Friends Outside/Volunteer Center
Front Street Inc.
Gemma Program/Encompass Community Services
Health Projects Center
Hospice of Santa Cruz County
I-You Venture/Family Services Agency of the Central Coast
Janus of Santa Cruz
Lift Line/Community Bridges
Meals on Wheels/Community Bridges
Mental Health Client Action Network
New Life Community Services
North County Counseling/Family Services Agency of the Central Coast
Parents Center of Santa Cruz
Planned Parenthood, Mar Monte
Salud Para la Gente
Santa Cruz AIDS Project/Encompass Community Services
Senior Citizens of San Lorenzo Valley
Senior Network Services
Senior Outreach Program/Family Services Agency of the Central Coast
South County Counseling/Family Services Agency of the Central Coast
Suicide Prevention/Family Services Agency of the Central Coast
Survivors Healing Center/Family Service Agency of the Central Coast
Valley Churches United
Vista Center for the Blind and Visually Impaired
Volunteer Center of Santa Cruz County
WIC/Community Bridges
WomenCare/Family Services Agency of the Central Coast
Women’s Health Center
Youth Services Counseling/Encompass



**The Human Care
Alliance**
Serving Santa Cruz
County for More
Than 30 Years

HCA is a unique collaboration of 50 human services agencies working throughout Santa Cruz County to create Equity and Justice in our community; promote Well-being and Opportunity for all people; and practice Cooperation and Compassion as a norm. HCA agencies collaborate, learn together, coordinate services and advocate for greater investment and better results for people in need in our community. HCA agencies take a long-term, prevention-focused approach to building the community through effective programs, quality, cost-effective services and advocacy efforts that empower grass roots engagement.

Web: humancarealliance.org
Email: hca@humancarealliance.org

PO Box 7376
Santa Cruz, CA 95061

Priority Investments in the Health of Santa Cruz County

Drawing on HCA's 30 years of expertise about the needs of community, we are recommending the following countywide strategies to maximize available resources and provide better health outcomes for our at-risk residents.

Invest in education, prevention, and early intervention for high-risk populations.

Increase investment in programs for seniors, low-income people, people with disabilities, and those with pre-existing health conditions. Relatively small investments in prevention, education, and home-based services can prevent health-related crises, keep people in their homes, and reap huge savings in institutional care.

Take action to promote equal access to health care and treatment, healthy food, and opportunities to exercise.

Invest in programs that expand access to health care and treatment. At the same time, local jurisdictions need to engage zoning and planning staff to work to ensure that at-risk residents have access to fresh food and places to exercise.

Ensure that all members of our community have access to basic food, shelter, and sanitation at all times.

Health requires that basic human needs for food and shelter are met; poverty, food insecurity, and homelessness are therefore major threats to overall community health.

