



# SAN BENITO COUNTY COMMUNITY HEALTH IMPROVEMENT PLAN 2023 - 2024

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# Introduction

*The Community Health Improvement Plan serves as a community-focused guide to address partner-selected health concerns and disparities identified in the San Benito County Community Health Assessment (CHA).*



Picture of Deputy Director Nicholas "Nic" Calvin welcoming CHIP partners to the fourth and final CHIP meeting. Photo by Evelyn Mejia.

This Community Health Improvement Plan (CHIP) presents priorities that emerged from meetings of CHIP partners in late 2023 to make progress toward making San Benito County a healthier place to live.

A CHIP relies on community engagement and directs local organizations to improve health conditions by strengthening partnerships through coordination, collaboration, and accountability among the organizations and the community.

Community partners representing different sectors and agencies gathered for four facilitated meetings to discuss data collected from the San Benito County CHA. This document shares initial ideas developed by the community partners about how to make improvements in two selected priority areas: **supporting families with young children** and addressing the community's **behavioral health needs** (mental health and substance use).



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# About San Benito County

*The best thing about living [in San Benito County] is the quiet small-town atmosphere in a rural setting. Its rich history surrounded by the natural landscapes makes this city unique and distinguished from any other. — Quote taken during a Community Health meeting*

Located in the Central Coast region of California, approximately 130 miles south of San Francisco, San Benito County spans nearly 1,400 square miles and has two incorporated cities and three unincorporated towns.

Since its establishment in 1874, the county expanded to accommodate a population of 64,210 residents. The population has consistently grown, witnessing a 5% increase between 2020–2022 and a notable 22% surge since 2010. Despite this recent growth, the county maintains its rural ambiance while fostering a strong sense of community and historical charm.

Although most residents identify as Latino (60%), San Benito County is diverse in culture, languages, ancestry, and ethnicity. A more detailed demographic profile of the county is available in the **2023 San Benito County Community Health Assessment (CHA)**.



*Picture of Pinnacles National Park. Designated the 59th National Park in the United States in 2013. Photo by Vera Ortiz.*

The predominant industry in San Benito County, in terms of acreage, is agriculture.

The county's climate is influenced by cool ocean air, resulting in warm summers and mild winters that create an ideal environment for the variety of outdoor activities that San Benito County has to offer.

# CHIP Development Process

## 2023 CHIP Development Timeline

**Meeting 1**  
**October 4, 2023**  
**(in-person)**

**Theme: CHIP Introduction**

- Group agreements for working together.
- Review of CHA data.
- Additional questions, data, insights.
- Criteria for selecting priorities.

**Meeting 2**  
**October 25, 2023**  
**(virtual)**

**Theme: Identifying Priorities**

- Results of the online survey.
- Identification of potential priority areas and rationale for them.
- Initial discussion of possible responses.
- What additional data/information are needed?
- Who else should be involved?

**Meeting 3**  
**November 15, 2023**  
**(virtual)**

**Theme: What's Possible?**

- Preliminary list of recommended actions to respond to priorities.
- Commitments to support specific actions.
- Indicators to show progress in each area.

**Meeting 4**  
**December 13, 2023**  
**(in-person)**

**Theme: Taking Action**

- Review the draft CHIP with priorities and action steps.
- Identify champions for each priority area.

San Benito County Public Health Services engaged with local stakeholders, including contributors to the development of the CHA and new representatives from diverse organizations, to launch a CHIP partnership. The inaugural in-person meeting in October 2023 brought together participants to review data from the CHA and establish criteria for selecting priorities. An online survey was then distributed to CHIP partners to prioritize specific objectives.

Once priorities were determined during the second meeting, CHIP partners initiated discussions on collaborative ideas and plans. Subsequent meetings focused on refining these ideas into more detailed plans. Numerous organizations and collaborations are actively involved in improving health conditions through existing planning initiatives. Rather than duplicating these efforts, the CHIP process aimed to coordinate activities within each identified priority area and possibly align with existing initiatives to advance equity and improve health in San Benito County.

# Guiding Principles

The reduction of health disparities, with a particular emphasis on health equity and addressing the social determinants of health (SDOH), was a fundamental basis for the data collection and analysis of the CHA. This emphasis has been carried over into the CHIP development and reflected in the CHIP partner discussions and decision-making of community-wide efforts aimed at improving lives and health in San Benito County.

To gain a deeper understanding of the values held by CHIP partners and establish shared values as a collective, participants were initially tasked with responding to the question, "What three things do you stand for?"

Despite diverse responses, a notable overlap emerged, with the top three recurring answers being "family, healthy community, and equity."

**Health Equity:** the condition in which everyone has a fair and just opportunity to reach their highest level of health.

**Social Determinants of Health:** community conditions that contribute to differences in health outcomes and shape daily life and can disproportionately affect certain groups.



Word cloud of the CHIP Partners' responses to the question "What do you stand for?" during the first CHIP meeting.



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# Criteria for Selecting CHIP Priorities

As the CHA affirms, San Benito County residents face many health challenges. All of these warrant more attention, services, collaboration, and funding. The CHIP partners agreed to focus initially on **supporting families with young children** and addressing the community's **behavioral health needs** because they met many of the criteria identified in an early CHIP meeting:

*21 CHIP members responded to an online survey asking them to select priorities that would contribute to the overall **goal** of making San Benito County a healthier place to live, work, and engage for all county residents.*

- **Broad impact:** what percentage of the population is impacted by addressing this priority?
- **Specific impact:** how does this priority address disparities or the health and well-being of underserved, disadvantaged county residents?
- **Educational benefit:** how does addressing this priority educate San Benito County residents to increase their health and well-being?
- **Prevention:** how does addressing this priority prevent avoidable future harm, suffering, and costs?
- **Youth:** how does addressing this priority support young people to become healthy, thriving adults and/or involve them in these efforts?
- **Alignment with community voices, needs, and strengths:** how does addressing this priority align with priorities we know or learn about from community members?
- **Opportunities for community collaboration:** how does addressing this priority strengthen collaboration across different sectors, organizations, and administrative systems?

# Community Health Assessment (CHA) Data Snapshots



**San Benito County's population is young.** One in four residents (25%) is under the age of 18.



**Many individuals and families are experiencing economic hardship.** Up to 38% of San Benito County households may be struggling to cover basic costs, including housing; nearly all of these households include at least one working adult.



In 2022, **San Benito County's unhoused population** included 268 people living unsheltered and another 89 living in shelters. About 16% of this population is under the age of 25, and about 70% are Latino.



About 11,790 San Benito County residents are eligible for **CalFresh** (California's Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, which provides assistance purchasing food), but **only 3,418 households are enrolled.**



The 2019-2021 California Healthy Kids Survey (CHKS) found that **43% of San Benito County 11<sup>th</sup> graders reported current alcohol or drug use.**

According to the San Benito County Opioid Task Force, drug-related overdose deaths have increased steadily, with **opioid-related deaths overtaking all other drug-related deaths in 2021** (similar to patterns around the state and country).



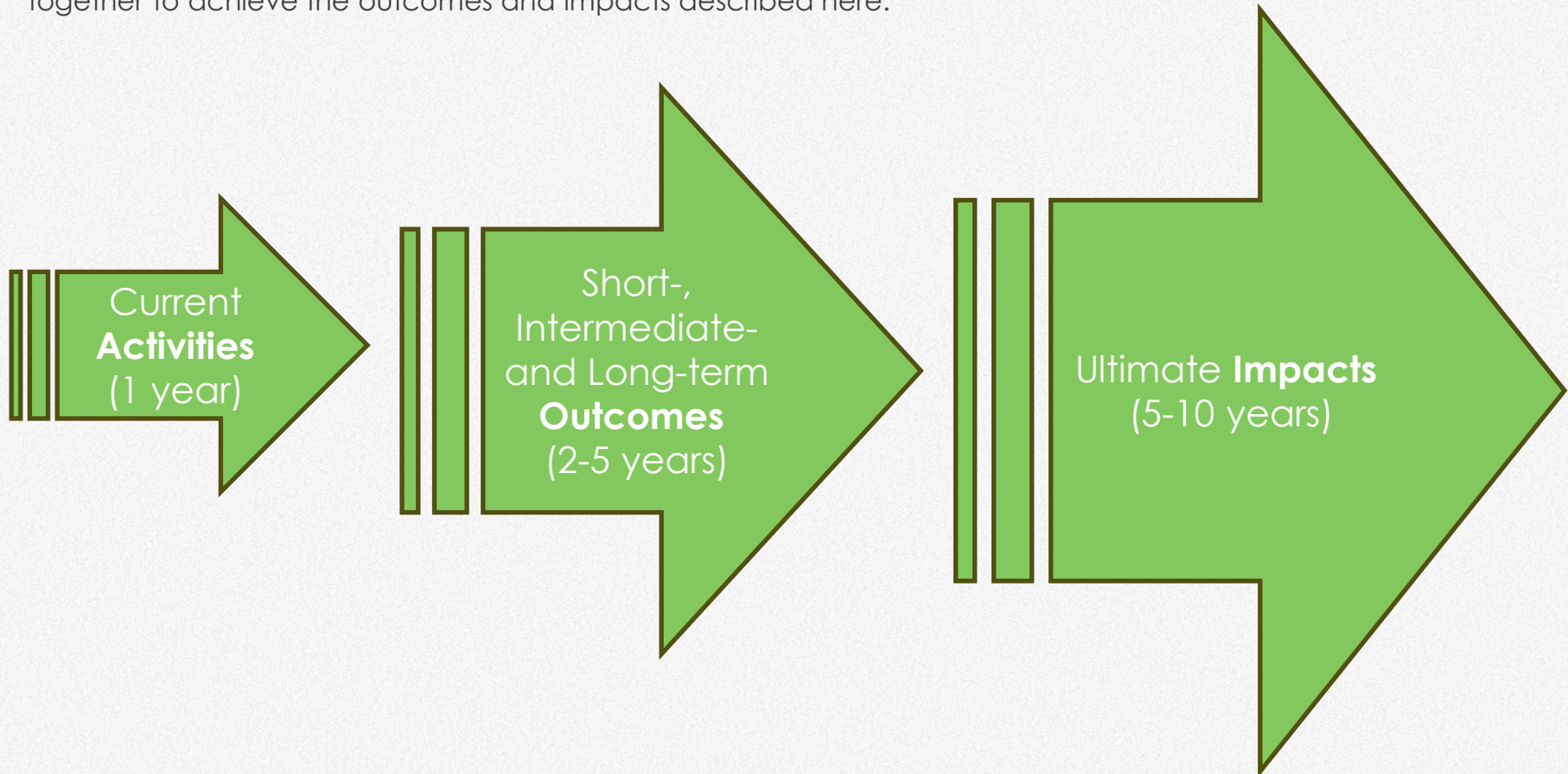
In 2022, the percentage of adults reporting 14 or more days of **poor mental health per month (age-adjusted) was 12.4%** in San Benito County. When asked about the frequency of mentally unhealthy days over the last 30 days, the average number of mentally unhealthy days reported was 4.06. Not surprisingly, the average number of mentally unhealthy days trended upward during the years of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Parent intake forms collected by First 5 San Benito suggest that **30% of caregivers of young children reported feeling down, depressed, or hopeless** for several days in the prior 2 weeks.

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# Activities, Outcomes & Impact

To make progress in each of the two CHIP priority areas, CHIP partners are pursuing **initial activities in 2024-25** that are intended to lead to outcomes and impact over several years. The activities are the first steps; we hope others will join these efforts, add their suggestions that align with these, and work together to achieve the outcomes and impacts described here.



# Behavioral Health (Mental Health & Substance Use)



Current Activities (1 year)	Outcomes (2-5 years)	Impact (5-10 years)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop and launch a countywide stigma reduction campaign</li> <li>• Clarify referral pathways for all entry points in the system</li> <li>• Identify promising, evidence-based programs (EBPs) that meet local needs and address gaps (e.g., Familia Adelante; youth drug court)</li> <li>• Identify training and recruitment needs across agencies</li> <li>• Make intake and referral materials available in Spanish and indigenous languages</li> <li>• Increase collaboration, education, and communication among partners and the community</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Additional prevention and treatment programs available in the community</li> <li>• Reduced stigma leads to an increase in help-seeking behaviors and earlier interventions, and overall improved access to appropriate prevention programs and treatments</li> <li>• More access to bilingual staff and services across the system</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Clients receive appropriate referrals to early intervention services and treatments that meet their needs</li> <li>• Improved behavioral health outcomes for all ages, especially youth</li> <li>• Improved access for currently underserved (uninsured, Spanish-speaking and other indigenous languages)</li> </ul>

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# Behavioral Health Tasks and Asks



## Lead Agencies:

- Youth Recovery Connections
- San Benito County Behavioral Health
- San Benito County Probation Department
- Family Matters
- San Benito County Health and Human Services Agency, Public Health Services

## Year 1 Tasks and Asks:

- **Engage community members:** co-design stigma campaign, materials, referral paths, and program outreach with those experiencing behavioral health challenges
- **Identify resources:** (e.g., state/federal/philanthropy grants; agency budget line items or redirects) to support activities and evaluation
- **Research models:** for proposed activities (stigma reduction campaign, EBPs such as Familia Adelante, and youth Drug Court), including budgets and implications for San Benito County (staffing, infrastructure, sustainability)
- **Convene partners:** to clarify referral pathways; assess training and recruitment needs and opportunities (e.g., CalAIM); and increase collaboration/communication
- **Identify materials** (intake and consent forms, patient materials) to translate into Spanish and indigenous languages

# Support for Families with Young Children



Current Activities (1 year)	Outcomes (2-5 years)	Impact (5-10 years)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>Inventory</b> of existing community resources, coalitions, programs (and gaps), searchable for specific populations/ages</li><li>• Increased <b>collaboration and information-sharing</b> among local programs</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Families and providers can access services, especially at transition points (e.g., aging out of eligibility)</li><li>• Enrollments increase for those eligible for supportive programs (e.g., CalFresh) increases</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Families are connected to a variety of services that meet their changing needs (housing, food security, employment, childcare, health care ...)</li><li>• Families and providers know where to go and whom to contact; fewer individuals/families fall through the cracks</li></ul>

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# Support for Families Tasks and Asks



## Lead Agencies:

- First 5 San Benito County
- Community Bridges, Regional WIC program
- YMCA of San Benito County
- San Benito County Health and Human Services Agency, Public Health Services

## Year 1 Tasks and Asks:

- **Engage families** in co-design of referral pathways, resources, inventory of services and gaps, information-sharing with families, outreach and enrollment
- **Identify resources** (e.g., state/federal/philanthropy grants; agency budget line items or redirects) to support activities and evaluation
- **Convene partners** to complete inventory of existing resources (starting with the First 5 Asset Map) and increase collaboration and information-sharing
- Identify opportunities and resource requirements for **up-to-date referrals** (e.g., local online dashboard/directory, 2-1-1, Unite Us)
- **Identify immediate opportunities to support families** (e.g., CalFresh enrollment)

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# Next Steps

At the December 2023 meeting, concluding the first phase of planning work, the CHIP group identified immediate next steps for early 2024, drawn from the "Tasks and Asks" listed earlier. These include:



- **Continuing CHIP conversations and meetings** with staff support from the Community Health program at San Benito County Public Health Services to keep the momentum and accountability going, including reaching out to additional partners
- **Sharing the initial CHIP priorities and activities** with a broader audience through public forums and news outlets (e.g., BenitoLink) and reporting on progress at regular intervals
- Convening a subgroup of current CHIP members to **map currently available services and assets** for both Behavioral Health and Family Support
- Working together (with San Benito County Public Health Services communications support) on **stigma reduction campaign messages and materials**
- Seeking **community input on access to services and gaps** from groups convened for other purposes (e.g., Mental Health Services Act/ listening sessions)
- Identifying **forms and materials to translate into Spanish** and beginning the process of making these more accessible to Spanish-speaking residents



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# References

## Cover

- Top left photo: Produce sold at Hope Harvest Festival 2023 in Tres Pinos, CA.
- Top right photo: Walnut tree orchard on Southside Road in Hollister, CA.
- Bottom left photo: Children playing with bubbles at the Migrant Heath Fair 2021.
- Bottom middle photo: Volunteers at a Hollister Litter Project organized community clean-up in August 2021.
- Bottom right photo: Close up of cauliflower sold at the 2023 Hollister Downtown Farmers' Market.
- All photos by Genesis Garcia Smith.

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