

# Region 5 State of the Child Report



**CATALYST**  
**CALIFORNIA**

1<sup>ST</sup> LA  
**best start**  
ANTELOPE VALLEY

  
**children's bureau**



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# Acknowledgments

## ***Children's Bureau of Southern California, Best Start AV Region 5***

Ronald Brown, Ph.D. President & CEO  
Laura Campana, Director of Strategy & Innovation • Prevention  
Sylvia Scott, Director of Place Based Strategies – AV  
Brigitte Pico, Data Manager of Place Based Strategies – AV  
Dorelle Arnwine, AV Community Network Facilitator  
Stephaney Reyes, AV Community Network Program Specialist  
Tracey LaMonica, Former Policy Analyst

## ***Catalyst California***

Chris Ringewald, Senior Director Research & Data Analysis  
Alexandra Baker, Research & Data Analyst  
Maria Khan, Research & Data Analyst II  
David Segovia, Research & Data Analyst  
Ronald Simms, Jr., Associate Director Communications  
Elycia Mulholland Graves, Director of Research & Data Analysis  
Michael Russo, Vice President of Policy and Programs

## ***Community Interviewees***

Brian Johnson, True Life Community Church and Valley Oasis  
Chad Scott, Sycamores, Assistant Vice President of Clinical Services SPA 1  
Christian Green, Antelope Valley Resident  
Donna Gaddis, The Children's Center of the Antelope Valley, Executive Director  
Jean Harris, National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) Urban Los Angeles, Program Director  
Karla Garzon, Antelope Valley Resident  
Kim Watson, Project Joy, Founder & Executive Director  
Pilar Diaz, First 5 Los Angeles, Program Officer  
Ruth Sanchez, Antelope Valley ACLU and Dolores Huertas Foundation  
Sarah Perry, Valley Oasis, Chief Executive Officer  
Wendelyn Killian, Antelope Valley Resident  
Zharia Howard, Antelope Valley Resident

# Executive Summary

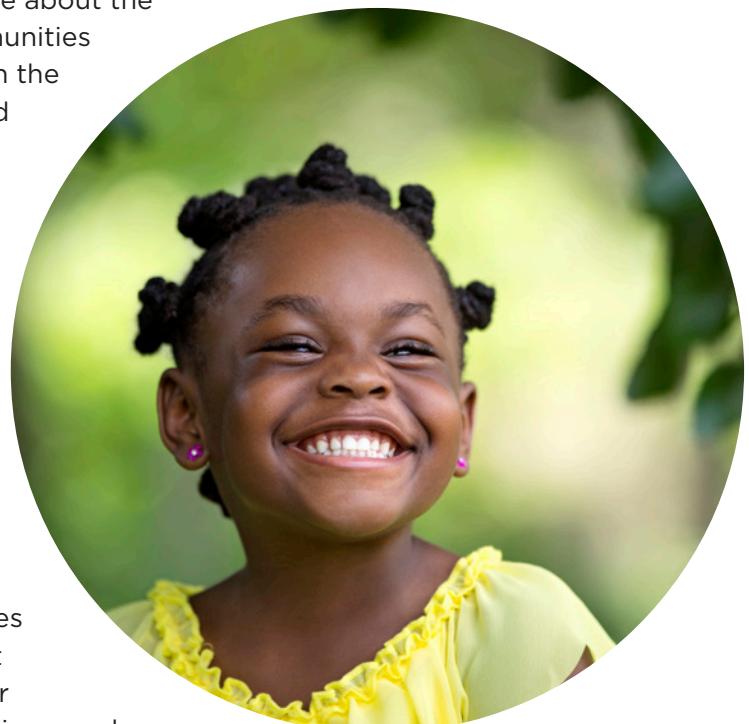
This report presents findings on the state of children and public systems in the Antelope Valley and represents the most comprehensive analysis of data from the region to date. The Children's Bureau of Southern California commissioned it to understand the state of children in the Antelope Valley, identify indicators to monitor, and increase the amount of data available to advocates. We hope county agencies, funders, and other partners use this report to learn more about the region and engage with Antelope Valley communities in their work. Catalyst California partnered with the Children's Bureau to ask over 100 residents and advocates for recommendations on issues to consider, positive examples of programs to uplift, and which data to include in the report. Their recommendations shape the content gathered in this report and were reviewed and approved by community experts. The results show:

**The family-friendly, low-cost-living in the Antelope Valley, that residents love and depend on, is disappearing and a new, more proactive infrastructure for children and families is needed.** The current infrastructure was not established for the population increases the Antelope Valley has experienced in the last decade, and the lack of resources is a driver for school-to-prison, youth-to-houselessness pipelines, and other avoidable outcomes. To be specific:

Antelope Valley has a large, diverse, and growing population with roughly 120,000 children under the age of eighteen and 30,000 children under age 5, including many children who need extra support.

Half of the households in and around the neighborhoods of Lancaster and Palmdale cannot cover basic costs like housing, food, transportation, and child care with their incomes, and four in five families with children under the age of six earn less than the real cost of living.

High housing costs and lower wages contribute to a growing unhoused population in the region.



Resources available in the Antelope Valley are not keeping up with the needs of the residents. Residents struggle to access health and mental health services and there are few child care and learning opportunities for their children.

Equitable treatment of local children and families is a concern. Rates of hate crimes exceed those countywide, and law enforcement is known to both stop Black drivers and injure Black civilians more than people of other races.

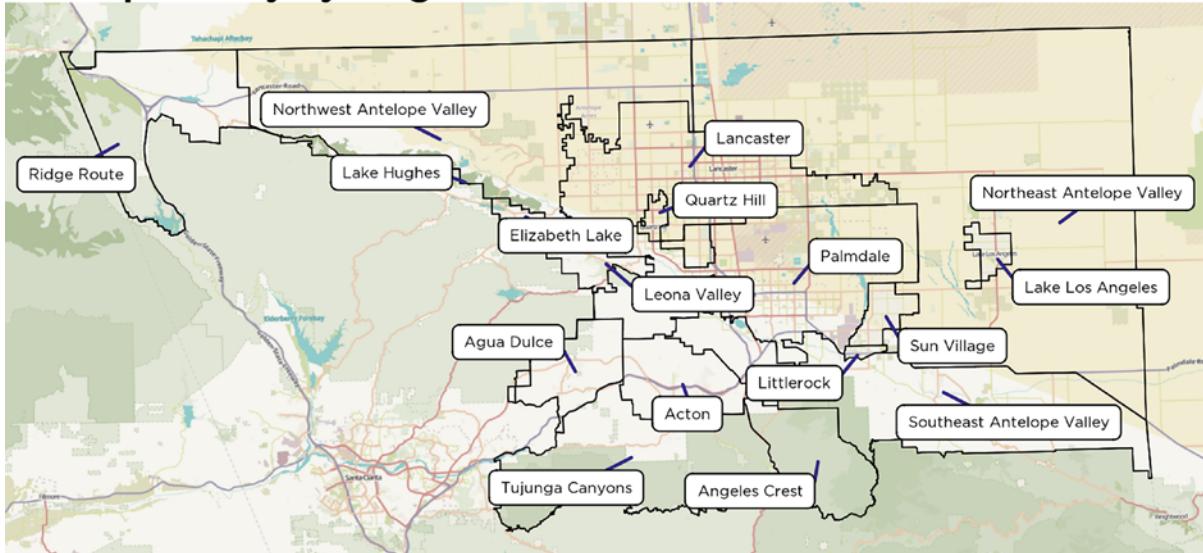
High School graduation rates in Antelope Valley schools are lower than those countywide. School administration and the teacher workforce are not representative of the diversity within the student body. Foster students and students with disabilities – students who may need the most support – are most likely to be suspended from school.

To address these ongoing issues, increased investments in health and mental health are needed, as are increases in child care reimbursement rates and other forms of investments in education within the region. Strengthening the safety net of programs which provide resources or training to residents is a must. Individuals can collaborate to hold systems accountable and spread awareness of resources as well.

The Children's Bureau of Southern California, as facilitator and Regional Network Grantee of First 5 LA's Best Start regional network in the Antelope Valley, will coordinate activities to support this new infrastructure, including hosting regular forums for family-focused organizations, and updating and implementing a community change agenda. We present the results of our data compilation to inform this effort and for consideration of local funders, policymakers, and advocates.

# Introduction

## Antelope Valley by Neighborhood



Source: Los Angeles Times calculated Los Angeles County Neighborhoods Boundaries, 2020.  
Los Angeles County Service Planning Area ArcGIS Hub, Department of Public Health (DHS) Service Planning Area (SPA) boundaries, 2022.

The Antelope Valley is vast, requiring one to drive roughly two hours to cross it from west to east;<sup>1</sup> populous, with an estimated 431,767 people; and growing with an increase in population of 9.1% between 2011 and 2021 while LA County grew by only 2.3%.<sup>2</sup> The region's two largest cities, Lancaster and Palmdale are more populous than Pasadena and Pomona, perhaps more well-known cities on the other side of the valley.<sup>3</sup> The region also includes large unincorporated communities and expansive areas of sparsely or uninhabited desert. It is in some ways an escape from the packed, traffic-filled hubbub of Downtown Los Angeles. Because of its location in the desert, it can reach sweltering high heats above 110°F in the summer and extreme cold of 20°F in the winter.

*"A lot of times you hear about the AV, you think hot and desert, so I was worried. As a parent, one thing I love to do with my kids is being outdoors and feeling safe doing it." - Antelope Valley Resident*

1 Gorman, CA to Wrightwood, CA. Map. Google Maps. Google, 28 November 2022. Web. 28 November 2022.

2 U.S. Census Bureau; American Community Survey, 2011 and 2021 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates, Table DP05, generated by Catalyst California; using data.census.gov; (December 1, 2022).

3 U.S. Census Bureau; American Community Survey, 2017-2021 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates (Pomona City, California; Pasadena City, California; Palmdale City, California; and Lancaster City, California), Quick Facts, generated by Catalyst California; using data.census.gov; (April 24 , 2023).

Community members interviewed for this report who live and work in the Antelope Valley describe the region largely in two tenses (past and present) or in comparison to the city of Los Angeles. In the past, they remembered Antelope Valley as an area full of kind and welcoming places with a small-town feel, where you knew your neighbors and had a sense of community. People could get by with less and it was a great place to grow up or raise children because people cared about you and looked out for one another.

*"I raised three children in the AV, I enjoyed most of the ability to not be packed in a tight neighborhood. We lived in the rural area in the AV, there's a lot of nature and bringing up my kids in the middle of nowhere gave me control over who they were spending time with." - Antelope Valley Parent*

In the present, those we spoke to focused almost entirely on recent challenges: a declining education system, the opioid epidemic, unaffordability of housing and rising houselessness, a lack of resources for a fast-growing population, and crime. They noted families need to work more hours or travel further to make ends meet, reducing quality time with their children. They see a striking difference between the Antelope Valley they once knew and what they see today.

However, community members still favor the Antelope Valley when comparing it to the city of Los Angeles. They favor the slower pace. As a community member put it, *"Antelope Valley is a diverse community that provides a slower, more peaceful living pace than other parts of Los Angeles County or neighboring counties like Orange County."* The spirit of togetherness and what is possible permeates, which is why residents work to improve their communities and believe in the power of advocacy, and that of others, to improve the state of children and their families.

# Methodology

In order to inform local advocates, policymakers, and funders, we wanted to first understand the state of children in Antelope Valley – as described by residents and advocates in the region – and secondly, provide indicators to track and increase data-driven research for advocacy efforts. Our goal was to understand the systems which directly impact both children and families, such as child care, child welfare, and housing and law enforcement. Too often descriptions of what children need leave out the “whole child” approach and their families and communities are often overlooked. This is especially critical when systems impact families inequitably, where some families are more severely affected by a system than others based on their race, income, or other characteristics.

This report addresses challenges through analyzing data residents want to see and might *not* be traditionally considered in early care and education research. This means there is a relatively greater emphasis on data about specific Antelope Valley issues (e.g., discrimination in health care access) and populations (i.e., foster youth and youth with disabilities) and a relatively lesser emphasis on broader topics such as community health needs assessments and profiles. It also includes data collected by Antelope Valley advocates such as Lucy Wilkerson who has published a dashboard of her many findings.<sup>4</sup>

To ensure the most robust data possible, we set out to create this report in partnership with Antelope Valley residents and advocates. In September 2022, we asked over 100 residents and advocates in the Best Start network which data they wanted us to include to describe the state of children in the region. Across three network meetings in multiple breakout groups conducted in both English and Spanish, residents and advocates recommended information they wanted to see in this report. In December 2022, we reported back with a summary of what was asked for, and they told us what resonated and what was still missing. These residents and advocates concluded that to understand the State of the Child, they wanted to see Antelope Valley-specific data about:

1. Demographics of the diverse children and families of the region, especially populations with specific needs like foster youth, unhoused youth, and students with disabilities
2. How our education system, including early education, support these children and families



<sup>4</sup> Lucy Wilkerson, [2020 Census Data - AV BEST START REGION 5](#), Tableau Public (updated February 10, 2023).

3. The economics, especially the cost of living, which impact the budgets of these children and families
4. How the increasing unaffordability of housing and houselessness affect children and families
5. How equitable or unequitable outcomes are from key systems, such as law enforcement
6. And finally, how the lack of resources constricts the choices these children and families have.

This input from the community essentially forms the sections and subsections of this report. Catalyst California gathered the recommended data and shared it with a subset of these residents and advocates for approval in March 2023. This group reviewed and approved the final report in May 2023.

We believe the effort to engage residents and advocates has been worthwhile. No other report to our knowledge includes this amount of Antelope Valley-specific data on systemic impacts on children and families. It is vital, for the children of Antelope Valley, that these data-driven findings be used to improve and build more equitable systems within the region.

All data in this report, and much more, are available in the public [GitHub repository](#). Data are available for different geographies and by different geographic units. At times, SPA 1 is used to denote the Antelope Valley. Other times, smaller geographic units – for example census tracts, ZIP Codes, and school districts - are aggregated to estimate data within the Antelope Valley. Pay close attention to the geographies used in charts and tables.

This report is limited by many factors, including the following:

- There is less data available about the Antelope Valley, given the region includes smaller and more rural populations than other parts of the county. Unincorporated and other areas served by county agencies can lack the specificity of data captured by more local agencies.
- There is less data available for subgroups of the population, such as racial-ethnic groups, particularly when these groups have relatively small populations.
- We were unable to survey representative samples of the population. Instead, we gathered input from a smaller number of interviewees out of a larger number of focus group participants.

This report is meant to serve as a foundation for a growing conversation on the infrastructure and systems needed to improve the overall health and well-being of children in the Antelope Valley region. We recognize the report is not inclusive of every facet which impacts a child and encourage future researchers to build upon the data it initially provides. In the community sensemaking sessions we held, two future research ideas arose:

- 1. A resource and needs assessment map.** Many community members expressed concern over the facilities which provide support for children via extracurricular activities, basic needs services, or educational opportunities, and how they fall short of the demand for those services or are inaccessible. A needs assessment could show organizations how to focus their efforts or where additional services are needed.
- 2. Youth engagement and participation.** Additional engagement with young people on their experiences in the region and what they need to thrive will be key to improving the well-being of children in the Antelope Valley. Developing ways for youth to participate in a greater role shaping their systems can increase successful outcomes for the rest of their lives.



# The Team

The Children's Bureau of Southern California strengthens families and communities with direct services and programs, equips other organizations with innovative tools and training, and informs communities and systems with best practices to improve societal outcomes. The Children's Bureau facilitates the First 5 LA Best Start Antelope Valley regional network.

**Catalyst California** advocates for racial justice by building community power and transforming systems. Catalyst California collected, analyzed, and reported data in collaboration with community residents and advocates within the First 5 LA Best Start Antelope Valley regional network.

While the Children's Bureau and Catalyst California led the work for developing this report, it would not have been possible without the numerous community members who attended our sensemaking sessions and shared their experiences and thoughts.

A special **thank you** to the following individuals for participating in an in-depth interview and providing further insight to the data-driven findings of this report:

- Pastor Brian Johnson of the True Life Community Church and a program director at Valley Oasis, an all-encompassing community-based services and advocacy organization. Brian is native to the Antelope Valley region and has been living in the Eastside for over sixteen years, where he is also raising his three kids.
- Assistant Vice President of Clinical Services Chad Scott in Service Area 1 for Sycamores, an organization that provides access to mental health services to children and young adults at ten locations across Los Angeles County. Chad and his wife have lived in Antelope Valley since 2003 when they moved there to purchase a home shortly after getting married.
- Christian Green is a local youth pastor, a university professor, and long-time community organizer and social justice advocate. He spent his early years growing up in the Antelope Valley when he moved out to Lancaster at the age of twelve. As a former foster youth in the Antelope Valley, Christian works to improve conditions of the system in the region among other involvements.
- Donna Gaddis is executive director of The Children's Center of the Antelope Valley. Donna has been a resident of the Antelope Valley for over thirty-three years and raised both her children in the region.
- Jean Harris is the Antelope Valley program director for National Alliance on Mental Illness Urban Los Angeles and has lived in the Westside of the region for over forty years and raised three children in the area.



- Karla Garzon, a newer resident, moved to East Palmdale to be closer to family and to buy a home. She is an involved community member passionate about improving the region and a mother of three young children.
- Kim Watson is also the founder and executive director of Project Joy, a nonprofit that provides basic needs, services and educational resources to families and youth within the region. Kim has been a resident of the Antelope Valley for over ten years and her family has lived in the area since the 1990s.
- Pilar Diaz is a First 5 LA program officer on the communities team who oversees the work in the Antelope Valley Best Start region.
- Ruth Sanchez co-founded the Antelope Valley ACLU and is a resource manager at the Dolores Huerta Foundation among many other roles. Ruth has been a community organizer in the area and has lived there since 2001. She has two sons who were raised in the Antelope Valley region as well.
- Sarah Perry, chief executive officer at Valley Oasis, has lived in the region for over thirty years. Initially, Sarah lived in Acton and now resides in Littlerock. Sarah is a mom to a high school student who is raised in the Antelope Valley community.
- Wendelyn Killian is a long-time native of the Antelope Valley region and has spent some of her most formative years in the area, where she still has a family home.
- Zharia Howard was born and raised in the Antelope Valley until she moved out for university when she was eighteen years old.

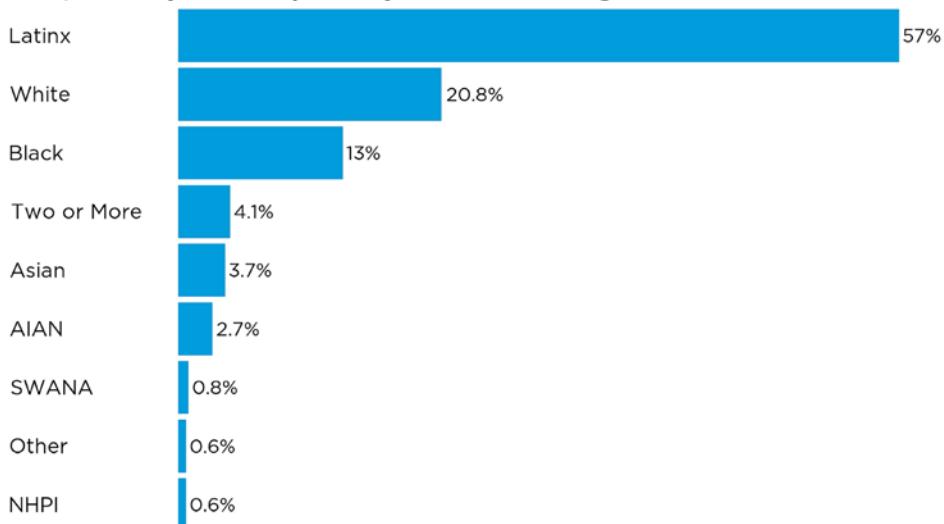
# Findings

*The Antelope Valley is populous and diverse with many children, including those who need extra support*

Antelope Valley is home to a population of 431,767, with 120,525 children under the age of eighteen and 29,666 children under age 5.<sup>5</sup> The majority of Antelope Valley children are Latinx, with relatively more Black children and relatively fewer Asian children living in the Antelope Valley than Los Angeles County as a whole. Roughly one-third of Antelope Valley residents speak Spanish at home, 3.8% speak an Asian, Pacific Islander, or Indo-European language, and the remainder speak English.<sup>6</sup>

## **The Majority of Children in the Antelope Valley Are Latinx**

Race/Ethnicity of Antelope Valley Children Under Age 18



Source: Catalyst California calculations of Children Under the Age of 18 from US Census Bureau American Community Survey 5-year PUMS data (2017-2021).

Note: The sum of racial-ethnic group percentages will exceed 100% because American Indian and Alaska Native (AIAN), Southwest Asian and North African (SWANA), and Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander (NHPI) include data alone or in combination with other races and ethnicities. Latinx includes any mention of Latinx across races.

The majority of children living in the region attend schools in Antelope Valley school districts. California Department of Education publishes information about student subgroups, which is helpful in understanding the state of children, namely the numbers of students in foster care, those experiencing houselessness, and students with disabilities. Nearly 2,000 students in the Antelope Valley school districts are unhoused, about 2.2%

5 U.S. Census Bureau; American Community Survey, 2021 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates.

6 U.S. Census Bureau; American Community Survey, 2021 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, Table DPO2, generated by Catalyst California; using data.census.gov; (December 1, 2022), <https://data.census.gov/table?q=dp02&tid=ACSDP5Y2021.DPO2>.

of the student population.<sup>7</sup> Just over 2,000 students are in foster care in the region (2.3% of the student population).<sup>8</sup> There are 13,103 students with disabilities attending Antelope Valley schools (15.1% of the student population).<sup>9</sup>

#### Student Population by Subgroup in the Antelope Valley, 2020-2021 School Year

SCHOOL DISTRICT	FOSTER		SOCIOECONOMICALLY DISADVANTAGED		HOMELESS		DISABILITY	
	COUNT	RATE (%)	COUNT	RATE (%)	COUNT	RATE (%)	COUNT	RATE (%)
<b>TOTAL</b>	2,001	2.3	65,395	75.2	1,936	2.2	13,103	15.1
Acton-Agua Dulce Unified	108	0.9	7,128	59.8	321	2.7	1,963	16.5
Antelope Valley Union Joint High	488	2.1	15,170	65.8	123	0.5	3,972	17.2
Eastside Union Elementary	137	4.4	2,758	88.3	161	5.2	392	12.5
Keppel Union Elementary	36	1.3	2,235	78.9	14	0.5	413	14.6
Lancaster Elementary	518	3.5	13,118	88.5	534	3.6	2,089	14.1
Palmdale Elementary	520	2.5	18,725	89.3	49	0.2	2,971	14.2
Westside Union Elementary	171	1.9	4,991	56.0	640	7.2	1,128	12.7
Wilsona Elementary	23	1.9	1,194	97.2	83	6.8	157	12.8
Hughes-Elizabeth Lakes Union Elementary	NA	NA	76	46.9	11	6.8	18	11.1

Source: Catalyst California calculations based on the California Department of Education data, 2021-22.

Note: Antelope Valley schools are schools from the following districts: Acton-Aqua Dulce Unified, Antelope Valley Union High, Eastside Union Elementary, Hughes-Elizabeth Lakes Union Elementary, Keppel Union Elementary, Lancaster Elementary, Palmdale Elementary, Westside Union Elementary, and Wilsona Elementary. Socioeconomically disadvantaged means the student is federally eligible for free and reduced meals based on household income requirements, the migrant program, or the foster program. Students can also be categorized as socioeconomically disadvantaged if the student's parents do not have a high school diploma or the student was homeless, directly certified, a tribal foster youth, or enrolled in a juvenile court school. The darkest color in the chart represents the highest percentage.

## COMMUNITY SPOTLIGHT: THE NEHEMIAH PROJECT LA

The Nehemiah Project LA is addressing one of the biggest gaps in the foster care system which is to provide support for youth who leave foster care after turning eighteen. The organization provides transitional housing, employment opportunity training, referral services, and connects youth with vital resources. The Nehemiah Project LA is both led by and serves the Black community with a focus on enhancing education accessibility. The Antelope Valley has over 2,000 foster youth, so services for transitioning out of the foster care system are crucial in this region.

### *Households, especially those with children, struggle to cover costs of living amid high housing costs*

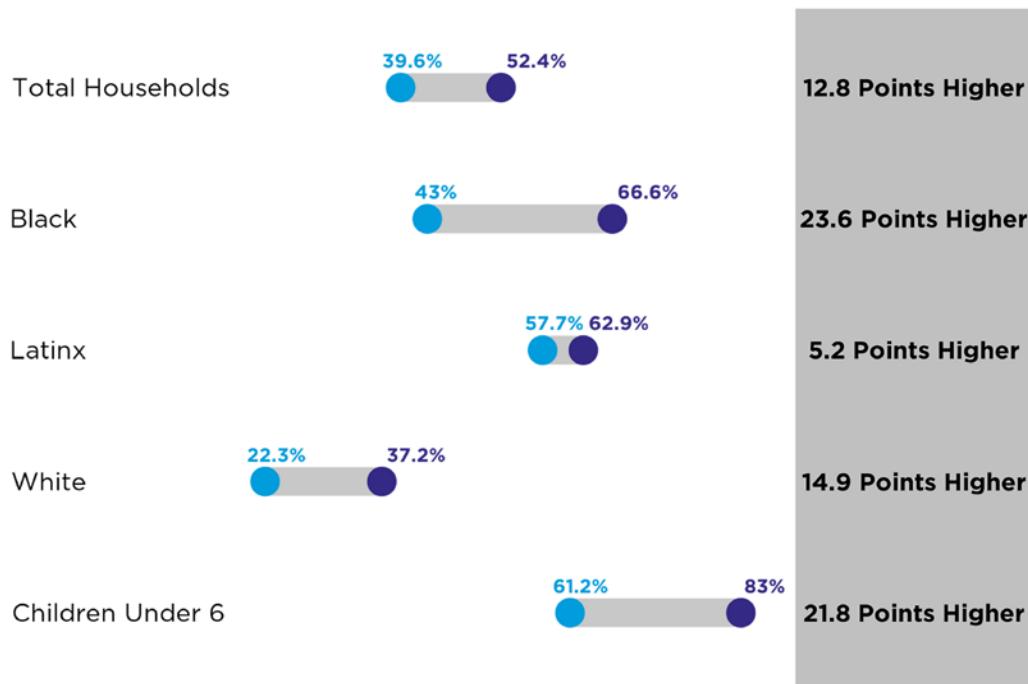
Antelope Valley households are more likely than all LA County households (across various demographics) to earn incomes below the real cost of living – a measure designed by United Ways of California to capture costs like housing, food, transportation, and child care which families need to cover. Half of households in and around Lancaster and Palmdale, and four in five families with children under age six earn less than they need to cover this real cost of living.

<sup>7</sup> Enrollment Data 2021-22, DataQuest, California Department of Education (accessed December 1, 2022), <https://dq.cde.ca.gov/dataquest/>.

<sup>8</sup> Enrollment Data 2021-22, DataQuest, California Department of Education (accessed December 1, 2022), <https://dq.cde.ca.gov/dataquest/>.

<sup>9</sup> Enrollment Data 2021-22, DataQuest, California Department of Education (accessed December 1, 2022), <https://dq.cde.ca.gov/dataquest/>.

## Compared to Los Angeles County, Antelope Valley Families are More Likely to Earn Incomes Below the Real Cost of Living



Source: Catalyst California's calculations based on the United Ways of California Real Cost Measure, 2019.

Note: The Real Cost Measure is a measure of poverty that factors in the costs of housing, health care, child care, transportation and other basic needs to reveal what it really costs to live in California.

*"Historically, AV has been more affordable than other places in LA County... In the last 10 years, that has completely changed. Our housing is no longer affordable, especially for those on any type of services... It doesn't surprise me that half of the households can't afford the cost of living." -Sarah Perry, Valley Oasis*

Without earnings high enough to cover a household's basic needs, families will not be able to afford them. Take food for instance; Feeding America estimates that 59,300 children are food insecure in Antelope Valley Congressional Districts 23 and 25.<sup>10</sup> Over 10,000 Antelope Valley children under age 5 participate in WIC to supplement their nutritional needs. Latinx children comprise the largest share of Antelope Valley WIC participants. Black children make up nearly one in four Lancaster WIC participants.<sup>11</sup>

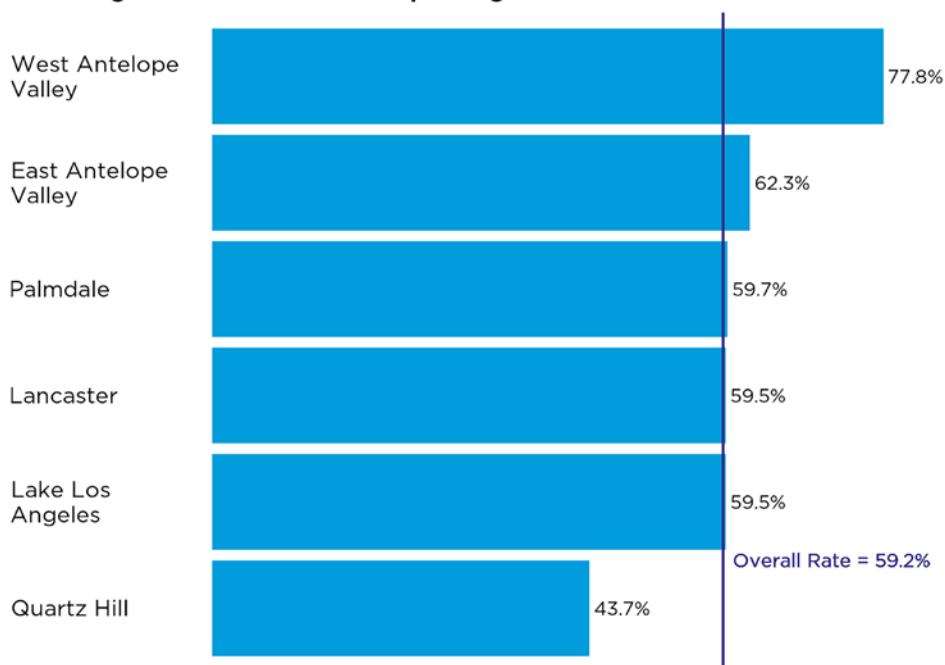
High housing costs also make a household's ability to cover its basic needs much more difficult. Nearly three in five Antelope Valley renter households are burdened by housing costs greater than 30% of their incomes.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Food Insecurity among Overall (all ages) Population in California District 25, Feeding America (accessed April 24, 2023), <https://map.feedingamerica.org/district/2020/overall/california/district/25>.

<sup>11</sup> L.A. County WIC Data, (accessed 2021), <https://lawicdata.org/data-research/by-region/>.

<sup>12</sup> Lucy Wilkerson, 2020 Census Data - AV BEST START REGION 5, Tableau Public (updated February 10, 2023).

**Nearly Three in Five Antelope Valley Renters are Rent Burdened**  
**Percentage of Renter Households Spending 30% or More of Their Income on Rent**



Source: Lucy Wilkerson's calculations based on American Community Survey 2016-2020 5-year estimates.

Common life events such as losing a job, or an unexpected health issue can jeopardize a family's ability to afford rent given the high cost of living. Though more recent data are not available, the Eviction Lab counted 636 evictions between 2013 and 2017.<sup>13</sup> Homeowners also struggle to keep up with payments considering the high housing costs. DataQuick counted 546 foreclosures between 2017 and June 2022.<sup>14</sup>

High housing costs can also lead to houselessness. While houselessness is a complex problem with many causes, the high costs of housing is a significant factor in the state's homelessness crisis, and has been reported as a factor in the Antelope Valley.<sup>15 16</sup> Last year, the Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority (LAHSA) counted nearly 1,000 unhoused people in the cities of Lancaster and Palmdale. In addition, LAHSA counted thousands more unhoused people living just outside city boundaries in the Antelope Valley (4,598 persons in total). This includes 3,570 unsheltered and 1,028 sheltered persons.<sup>17</sup> VICE News reports how law enforcement in the Antelope Valley push unhoused persons out of incorporated cities and into broader, unincorporated areas where they are further disconnected from essential resources and services.<sup>18</sup> In conversations with community

<sup>13</sup> Ashley Gromis et al., Estimating Eviction Prevalence across the United States. Princeton University Eviction Lab, (accessed May 13, 2022), <https://data-downloads.evictionlab.org/#estimating-eviction-prevalance-across-us/>.

<sup>14</sup> Foreclosure Rate per 10k Owner-Occupied Housing Units 2017-2021, DataQuick, RealtyTrac (accessed 2023), <http://www.realtytrac.com/mapsearch/foreclosures/>.

<sup>15</sup> California's Housing and Homelessness Challenges in Context, Legislative Analyst's Office, (February 27, 2023), <https://lao.ca.gov/handouts/soccservices/2023/Housing-and-Homelessness-Challenges-020623.pdf>.

<sup>16</sup> ABC7 Eyewitness News, Skyrocketing housing market in Antelope Valley pushing more people into homelessness, August 28, 2021, <https://abc7.com/housing-market-2021-antelope-valley-california-homelessness/10978732>.

<sup>17</sup> Homeless Count by Service Planning Area 2015-2022, Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority, (accessed April 24, 2023), <https://www.lahsa.org/data>.

<sup>18</sup> VICE News, Living Homeless in the Desert, YouTube Video, 15:17, October 31, 2022, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LzbU-9L1WS4>.

members and Antelope Valley residents, almost every interviewee identified houselessness as a growing concern in the region. Organizations in the region are doing the best they can to support the individuals and families who are on the verge of homelessness, but with the higher cost of living and inflation their efforts are restricted. Donna Gaddis from The Children's Center of the Antelope Valley shared, "*The money and resources we are able to provide clients is not going as far anymore because of how expensive the cost of living is now.*" Furthermore, Sarah Perry from the Valley Oasis shared with us, "*Our programs have the ability to house people who need it, but we need units to put them in and landlords that are flexible enough to work with the population we serve.*"

Now more than ever, it is imperative system leaders of LA County spotlight the Antelope Valley, a region where many families originally moved because other parts of the county were unaffordable. Additionally, the initial low cost of living in the Antelope Valley over a decade ago offered a safe haven for some of LA County's most vulnerable residents, such as domestic violence survivors and foster care parents. The alarming number of unhoused residents in the Antelope Valley is an indicator the region is suffering from a lack of investment and attention.

## COMMUNITY SPOTLIGHT: VALLEY OASIS

Valley Oasis started as a domestic violence shelter and today it's an all-encompassing community-based organization serving the Antelope Valley region providing a range of services for the families they see. For over forty-two years, the organization has provided numerous support services to different types of individuals, such as housing and legal assistance, access to basic needs, 24-hour hotline, transportation, counseling, and more. Even an organization with the capacity and foundation like Valley Oasis expressed they are struggling to continue to provide the services they have been for over multiple years. The population in need is increasing, and their ability to care for them is restricted by lack of affordable housing, employment opportunities in the area, or even transportation. Despite restrictions, the organization has continued to provide services to the neediest and politically under-represented communities, and to advocate on their behalf.

### *Resource access is not keeping up with a growing and diverse population*

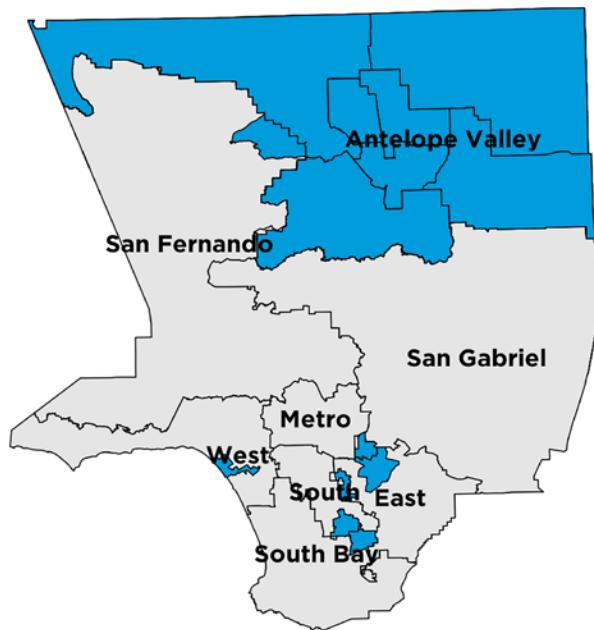
#### *Health*

Antelope Valley stakeholders have been clear about the need for additional resources, including health and mental health services, early childhood education, and parks and recreation. The distribution of resources also varies based on location in the Antelope Valley, with service providers located mostly in the cities of Lancaster and Palmdale. Donna Gaddis shared, "*We lost 20% of the mental health professionals in the AV workforce in the last two years...the shortage of health professionals is definitely impacting the quality of care as well.*"

According to the Los Angeles County Health Survey, 16.4% of Antelope Valley children have difficulty accessing medical care based on parent and guardian reports (highest

among county Service Planning Areas or SPAs).<sup>19</sup> Medical care can be especially important for chronic conditions that need periodic medical care such as asthma. In the region, 12.2% of Antelope Valley children have been diagnosed with asthma at some point in their lives, signifying a need for improving access to health care for the area's population.

## The Entire Antelope Valley is a Health Professional Shortage Area for Mental Health Professionals LA County Mental Health Professional Shortage Area Designations



Source: Health Professional Shortage Areas, 2022, California State Geoportal.

Antelope Valley has fewer health and medical professionals in local Medical Services Study Areas (MSSAs) - the geographic units of analysis for state and federal health planning - than other parts of the county and state. The region has a variety of medical and health professional shortage designations, including:

- Lake Los Angeles and Juniper Hills/Little Rock MSSAs are Medically Underserved Areas<sup>20</sup>
- These two MSSAs plus the Lancaster Central/Palmdale North Central and Palmdale Central MSSAs are Primary Care Health Professional Shortage Areas (HPSA)<sup>21</sup>

<sup>19</sup> Percent of Children (Ages 17 Years and Younger) Who Reported Difficulty Accessing Medical Care, 2018 Los Angeles County Health Survey, Office of Health Assessment and Epidemiology, Los Angeles County of Public Health, [http://publichealth.lacounty.gov/ha/docs/2018LACHS/MDT/Child/M3\\_ChildAccessToCare/M3\\_AccessToHealthCare\\_CACCDIFF.xlsx](http://publichealth.lacounty.gov/ha/docs/2018LACHS/MDT/Child/M3_ChildAccessToCare/M3_AccessToHealthCare_CACCDIFF.xlsx)

<sup>20</sup> Medically Underserved Areas, California Health and Human Services Geospatial Data, CHHS, (updated December 19, 2019), <https://gis.data.ca.gov/datasets/CHHSAgency::medically-underserved-areas/explore?location=34.514402%2C-118.185118%2C9.58>. A medically underserved area has fewer than one primary care physician per 3,000 persons, is designated by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services as a primary care health manpower shortage area, or has a shortage of nursing personnel.

<sup>21</sup> Health Professional Shortage Area Primary Care, California Health and Human Services Geospatial Data, CHHS, (updated December 5, 2019), <https://gis.data.ca.gov/datasets/CHHSAgency::health-professional-shortage-area-primary-care/>

- These four MSSAs plus the Acton/Ravenna, Desert View Highlands/Lancaster West/Palmdale Northwest/Quartz Hill, and Elizabeth Lake/Gorman/Green Valley/Lake Hughes/Leona Valley/Neenach MSSAs are Mental Health Professional Shortage Areas (MHPSA).<sup>22</sup> This means that virtually the entire Antelope Valley is a mental health professional shortage area.

The safety of children is threatened by the lack of health professionals in the area. Karla Garzon, a newer resident to the Antelope Valley region shared, “*As a parent of small children, I worry about the availability of pediatric care in case of an emergency. There aren't many choices for emergency rooms in the Antelope Valley. Given the locations of some of the emergency rooms, I also worry about safety inside and outside of the facilities.*”

Shortage of health professionals directly impacts the quality of care in the Antelope Valley, and even more so for populations who already face disparities in health care such as Black women. Black babies in LA County are two to three times more likely to die before their first birthday than babies of other races.<sup>23</sup> Kim Watson from Project Joy shared, “*People are going for medical treatment, and they are not listening. I went to see them and told them my problems, and no one listened to me.*” She notes that the inhumane history of medical professionals disregarding Black women’s pain has trickled down to the mistreatment she and others have experienced today. The Los Angeles County African American Infant and Maternal Mortality Initiative (AAIMM) helps lead the work in aiming to address this inequity.<sup>24</sup> For example, AAIMM is addressing this issue in the Antelope Valley by bringing a Black maternity house to Lancaster, while also advocating for reforms countywide.

More generally, pregnant women in the region face barriers to care during pregnancy. The Los Angeles County Department of Public Health reports that nearly 1,500 live births in the Antelope Valley Service Planning Area lacked prenatal care in the first trimester (28.8% of live births). This is more than double the rate of county births without first trimester care (13.6% of live births).<sup>25</sup>

Another resource where current Antelope Valley infrastructure is not able to fully serve the population are parks and recreational centers. The County of Los Angeles Department of Parks and Recreation completed a Countywide Parks and Recreation Needs Assessment (PNA) in 2022.<sup>26</sup> The assessment includes findings for the area in an Antelope Valley regional profile. Some key findings from that profile include:

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[explore?location=34.380830%2C-117.925067%2C9.00](https://gis.data.ca.gov/datasets/CHHSAgency::health-professional-shortage-area-mental-health/explore?location=34.380830%2C-117.925067%2C9.00). A primary care health professional shortage area is defined as having a population to primary care physician ratio of 3,500:1 or 3,000:1 plus population features demonstrating unusually high need and a lack of access to health care in surrounding areas because of excessive distance, overutilization, or access barriers.

22 Health Professional Shortage Area Mental Health, California Health and Human Services Geospatial Data, CHHS, (updated December 5, 2019), <https://gis.data.ca.gov/datasets/CHHSAgency::health-professional-shortage-area-mental-health/explore?location=34.296386%2C-118.134212%2C9.00>. A mental health professional shortage area is defined as having a lack of access to care provided by Core Mental Health Professionals (CMHP) and either the CMHP ratio is greater than 6,000:1 and the population to psychiatrist ratio is greater than 20:000:1, or the population to CHMP ratio is greater than 9,000:1 or population to psychiatrist ratio is greater than 30,000:1.

23 Welcome to Black Infants & Families Los Angeles, Black Infants & Families Los Angeles, <https://www.blackinfantsandfamilies.org/>

24 Black Infants and Families Los Angeles, <https://www.blackinfantsandfamilies.org/>.

25 Selected Perinatal Health Indicators Los Angeles County, Maternal, Child & Adolescent Health Programs, County of Los Angeles - Department of Public Health, (May 26, 2020), [http://publichealth.lacounty.gov/mch/fhop/FHOP2019/Special%20Reports\\_SPA\\_2019.pdf](http://publichealth.lacounty.gov/mch/fhop/FHOP2019/Special%20Reports_SPA_2019.pdf).

26 Appendix A: Regional Study Area Profile, 2022 Parks and Recreation Needs Assessment Plus, Los Angeles County Department of Parks and Recreation, (December 6, 2022), [https://lacountyparkneeds.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/AppA\\_RegionalProfiles\\_AntelopeValley\\_11282022.pdf](https://lacountyparkneeds.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/AppA_RegionalProfiles_AntelopeValley_11282022.pdf).

- Regional recreation facilities and trails in the area are poorly served by public transportation and largely inaccessible without the use of a personal vehicle.
- The highest regional recreation need is found in Lake Los Angeles, Littlerock, and Sun Village due to a combination of social and environmental factors including population size, access, and amenities.
- Community members identified heat, distance, safety, lack of information, and limited facilities as barriers to park use for residents in the study area.
- Residents say they need more shade, cooling centers and access to water, affordable transit access to parks, additional facilities and programming, enhanced safety measures, and more information about parks and amenities.

One interviewee discussed the disparity in park and recreation quality between the Eastside and Westside of the Antelope Valley. Ruth Sanchez from Antelope Valley's ACLU and Dolores Huerta Foundation shared, "*The State of the Child on the Westside is very different from the Eastside - latter vulnerable, patrolled a lot more, encounters with law enforcement bad, parks don't have lights or hours, Westside has heated pool, beautiful gym, skateboard ramps.*" She further explained how this disparity in resources can lead to kids associating their self-worth with what they do not have in comparison to their peers. The current lack of accessibility to safe and enjoyable spaces for youth is not setting them up to thrive.

## COMMUNITY SPOTLIGHT: NAMI ENDING THE SILENCE

The National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI)'s Ending the Silence program is a series of workshops and presentations which focus on mental health and suicide awareness. The program partners with school districts and community centers throughout the Antelope Valley, and features speakers who have survived their own struggles with mental health as well as increasing mental health awareness. In our interview with the Antelope Valley program director for NAMI Urban Los Angeles, Jean Harris spoke about how much the pandemic has worsened mental health care access for youth. One of the reasons being the need has increased, and the local supply has drained. She shared that telehealth has further incentivized mental health professional staff to relocate to urban centers, but telehealth is not accessible for everyone, especially for those living in the Antelope Valley.



## COMMUNITY SPOTLIGHT: SYCAMORES

Sycamores is an agency with a whatever-it-takes approach to behavioral health and child welfare, with ten locations of care across Los Angeles County. Sycamores in Palmdale offers mental health services for children, families, and young adults. The agency operates a Family Resource Center which provides free services including a food bank, rental assistance program, afterschool tutoring, and a family-friendly location for Children and Family Services (DCFS) social workers to host monitored visits for children and their parents. Numerous parents and advocates of the Antelope Valley region expressed a greater need for accessible programming for youth outside of school and Sycamores helps fill that need. The Afterschool Learning Lab program pairs middle school and high school youth with teachers to assist with homework. In addition, a certified guidance counselor is available to meet with parents and students to provide education and support with the college and financial aid application process. Serving many first-generation prospective college students, Sycamores is dedicated to helping parents who may not have been able to attend college to support their child in meeting their academic goals. Assistant Vice President of Clinical Services Chad Scott of Sycamores in Service Area 1 shared that since the COVID-19 pandemic, the number of referrals to Sycamores has been unprecedented. In an attempt to increase access to care for new clients, the agency is recruiting new therapists and social workers and began offering group services, community workshops, training, and programming. Due to a nationwide workforce shortage of mental health professionals, particularly in the Antelope Valley, Scott and his team have found it challenging to recruit the number of professionals necessary to meet the demand for mental health services in the region. However, he remains hopeful that the area as a whole can work together to meet the needs of the community.



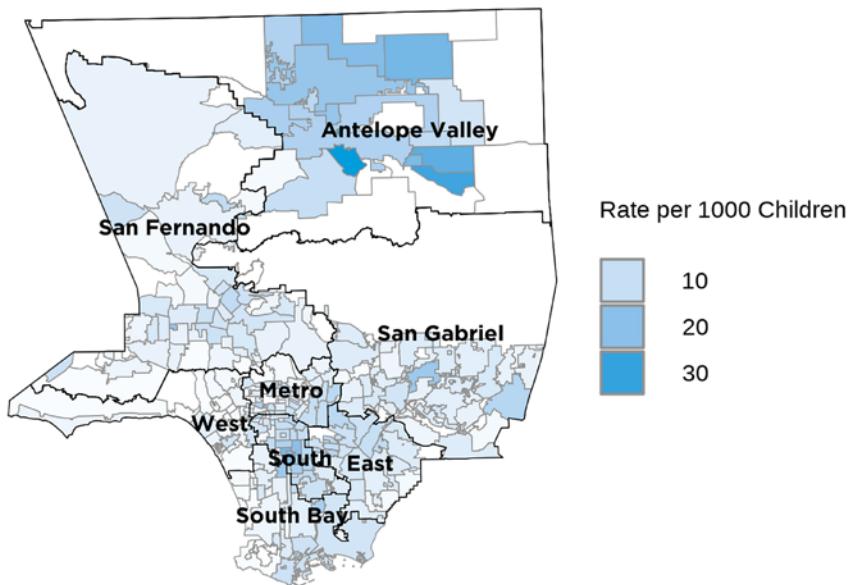
### *Child Welfare*

The Los Angeles County Department of Child and Family Services (DCFS) reports higher rates of substantiated referrals – or reports of child abuse or neglect where authorities identify reasonable cause to believe maltreatment occurred – in the Antelope Valley than in other parts of the county. The average referral rate among Antelope Valley statistical areas is nearly twice the county average (12.2 substantiated referrals per 1,000 children in the Antelope Valley versus 6.4 per 1,000 in LA County).<sup>27</sup>

<sup>27</sup> Shannon Julius, DCFS All Substantiated Referrals 2021, County of Los Angeles, Department of Child and Family Services (updated June 17, 2022), <https://data.lacounty.gov/datasets/lacounty::dcfs-all-substantiated-referrals-2021/>

## **Substantiated Referral Rates are Higher in the Antelope Valley**

### **LA County Substantiated Referral Rate Area Designations**



Source: DCFS All Substantiated Referrals 2021, Los Angeles County Data.

On the other hand, the Antelope Valley has lower rates of services supporting children and families in the child welfare system. Some families experience intimate partner abuse or other forms of domestic violence at the same time child abuse or neglect is occurring. The region has half as many domestic violence services per capita than the rest of the county.<sup>28</sup> Four organizations are listed as offering domestic violence services in the Antelope Valley (High Road Program - Lancaster, Neighborhood Legal Services of Los Angeles County - Antelope Valley Domestic Abuse Self Help, Antelope Valley Domestic Violence Council - Unhoused Solutions Access Center, and The Children's Center of the Antelope Valley). Sarah Perry from Valley Oasis highlights how different issues such as economic instability and a lack of mental health resources overload the system.

*"AV has some of the highest amounts of foster youth, a lot of them are dealing with unstable family situations or living with families that aren't their biological parents ... There's a lot of need for counseling services. Family separation is also an issue we see a lot in our programs, either because of financial issues because caregivers cannot afford to take care of their kids or violence at home. And a lot of youth that come out of foster care don't have anywhere to go." -Sarah Perry, Valley Oasis*

explore?location=34.062678%2C-118.298788%2C8.00&showTable=true.

28 Domestic Violence Services, ArcGIS Hub, County of Los Angeles (updated August 24, 2022), <https://hub.arcgis.com/datasets/lacounty:domestic-violence-services/about>.

All foster children are required to have a mental health screening,<sup>29</sup> but Antelope Valley (SPA 1) caregivers are most likely to report difficulties accessing medical care for their children among SPAs. Antelope Valley caregivers reported medical care access difficulties for 16.4% of the region's children, whereas LA County caregivers overall reported difficulties for 9.3% of children.<sup>30</sup>

*"If we were in any other part of Los Angeles County, there would be a lot more options and choices, maybe not enough but more options."*  
*-Jean Harris, National Alliance for Mental Illness*

On a positive note, there are local services aimed at children and families in the Antelope Valley, including the Black Infant Health Program of Antelope Valley, the Children's Bureau Sunrise Center, and others who work to ensure families have what they need to access care.

## COMMUNITY SPOTLIGHT: CHILDREN'S CENTER OF THE ANTELOPE VALLEY

The Children's Center of the Antelope Valley (CCAV) is a non-profit organization focused on improving the holistic health and well-being of children and families in Northern Los Angeles County. CCAV provides wraparound services which include temporary housing vouchers for domestic violence survivors, therapy and counseling for foster care youth, training for increasing professionals and paraprofessionals in the region, and much more. Executive Director Donna Gaddis, who has also been a resident of the region for over thirty years, shared that there has been an increase in demand for their services and a decrease in purchasing power due to the higher cost of living.

### *Early childhood education*

Due to the lack of subsidized child care, no Antelope Valley ZIP Code has sufficient access to child care. Over 93% of infants and toddlers eligible for subsidized child care were not enrolled in a publicly subsidized early learning and care program in 2020.<sup>31</sup> Preschool accessibility was hardly better: over 64% of preschoolers eligible for subsidized child care were not enrolled in a publicly subsidized early learning and care program.<sup>32</sup> These high rates of low-income children without publicly subsidized early care and education result in parents having difficulty finding affordable care for their children. Survey results conclude 40.9% of Antelope Valley's parents or caregivers report difficulty finding child care (highest among county SPAs).<sup>33</sup> To care for their children, parents often have to make a difficult

29 Diane F. Reed, M.P.H. and Kate Karpilow, Ph.D., *Understanding the Child Welfare System in California: A Primer for Service Providers and Policymakers*, 2nd ed. (Berkely, CA: California Center for Research on Women & Families, 2009), <https://theacademy.sdsu.edu/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/understanding-cws.pdf>.

30 Percent of Children (Ages 17 Years and Younger) Who Reported Difficulty Accessing Medical Care, 2018 Los Angeles County Health Survey, Office of Health Assessment and Epidemiology, Los Angeles County of Public Health, [http://publichealth.lacounty.gov/ha/docs/2018LACHS/MDT/Child/M3\\_ChildAccessToCare/M3\\_AccessToHealthCare\\_CACCDIFF.xlsx](http://publichealth.lacounty.gov/ha/docs/2018LACHS/MDT/Child/M3_ChildAccessToCare/M3_AccessToHealthCare_CACCDIFF.xlsx).

31 Estimate of Unmet Need for Subsidized Early Learning and Care Based on Income Eligibility, AIR Early Learning Needs Assessment Tool, <https://elneedsassessment.org/>.

32 AIR Early Learning Needs Assessment Tool, Estimate of Unmet Need for Subsidized Early Learning and Care Based on Income Eligibility.

33 2018 Los Angeles County Health Survey, Office of Health Assessment and Epidemiology, Los Angeles County of Public Health (updated June 29, 2019), <http://publichealth.lacounty.gov/ha/hasurveyintro.htm>.

choice between working less or leaving the work force. Other parents may work more or sacrifice other basic needs to afford higher-cost child care. Some parents may pay for lower quality of care, or may rely on family, friends, or neighbors to provide child care which may or may not be the best option for these families. Measures to increase the supply of child care and reduce the cost to Antelope Valley families are desperately needed.

### **Top Six Antelope Valley ZIP Codes for Unmet Need for Infants and Toddlers and Preschool Age Children, 2020**

ZIP CODE	NEIGHBORHOOD	WITH UNMET NEED	% WITH UNMET NEED
<b>INFANTS &amp; TODDLERS</b>			
93551	Palmdale, Leona Valley, Southeast Antelope Valley	1,800	96.5
93536	Northwest Antelope Valley, Lancaster	1,977	95.0
93552	Palmdale, Angeles Crest, Southeast Antelope Valley	1,377	94.3
93550	Tujunga Canyons, Palmdale, Angeles Crest	2,664	93.4
93534	Lancaster, Northeast Antelope Valley	1,014	89.3
93535	Northeast Antelope Valley, Lancaster	1,725	88.9
<b>PRESCHOOLERS</b>			
93551	Palmdale, Leona Valley, Southeast Antelope Valley	1,779	89.0
93536	Northwest Antelope Valley, Lancaster	2,599	85.7
93552	Palmdale, Angeles Crest, Southeast Antelope Valley	1,330	85.2
93550	Tujunga Canyons, Palmdale, Angeles Crest	2,429	79.6
93534	Lancaster, Northeast Antelope Valley	1,284	75.6
93535	Northeast Antelope Valley, Lancaster	2,034	72.1

Source: Catalyst California's calculations based on the American Institutes of Research, 2020.  
 Note: Unmet need is the estimated number of children in families earning less than 85% of the State median income minus the total number of children enrolled in publicly subsidized early learning and care programs. Total enrollment in publicly subsidized programs includes enrollment in Title 5 State Preschool Program, Title 5 Migrant Child Care Program, Title 5 Center-Based, Title 5 Family Child Care Home Network, Head Start/Early Head Start, CalWORKs Stage 2, CalWORKs Stage 3, estimated Transitional Kindergarten eligibility for Title 5, and the Alternative Payment program.

## *Equitable treatment of Antelope Valley residents is a concern*

Residents and advocates say the region has a diverse community who comes together in ways that more segregated portions of LA County do not, yet challenges persist. The rate of hate crimes in the Antelope Valley is actually higher than the rate in the county as a whole, with higher rates of hate crimes targeting racial-ethnic groups.<sup>34</sup>

Residents and advocates say law enforcement in the Antelope Valley unfairly targets Black residents as well. An analysis of California Department of Justice statistics shows that law enforcement injures Black civilians at 1.4 times the rate they injure civilians overall in Antelope Valley ZIP codes.<sup>35</sup> Court monitors find that efforts to reform the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department practices resulting in unreasonable force, intimidation, and unlawful stops and searches among Black and Latinx residents are slow or not happening in the Antelope Valley.<sup>36</sup>

Additionally, County law enforcement stops Black and Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander (NHPI) populations at a significantly higher rate than people of other racial-ethnic groups. For example, Sheriff's deputies stopped people they perceived as Black and NHPI for traffic violations at rates nearly twenty times and twelve times greater, respectively, than the group with the lowest rate.<sup>37</sup> LA County law enforcement also arrests Black youth for status offenses at more than double the rate of youth overall.<sup>38</sup>

These inequities in policing occur in the context of other instances of discrimination for Antelope Valley residents. For instance, Antelope Valley adults report highest-among-SPA rates of discrimination when seeking health care. For the region's residents, 6.7% of Antelope Valley adults rated their experience as worse compared to people of other races when seeking health care in 2018, compared to 3.8% of county adults overall.<sup>39</sup>

Inequities in the education system are also concerning to residents and advocates. They say teachers and staff who care about students and represent them culturally are vital for school success. Unfortunately, teacher and staff diversity have not kept pace with a diversifying student body. Most Antelope Valley school district students are Latinx but see relatively few Latinx teachers and staff. White students made up 13.4% of enrolled students in 2018 and White teachers and staff made up 69.4% of all teachers and staff.

34 Shannon Julius, Reported Hate Crimes between 2003-2020 provided by Los Angeles County Human Resources Commission, ArcGIS Hub, County of Los Angeles, (updated October 17, 2022), <https://egis-lacounty.hub.arcgis.com/datasets/lacounty::reported-hate-crimes/explore?location=34.207929%2C-118.173107%2C7.95>; U.S. Census Bureau; American Community Survey, 2016-2021 American Community Survey 5-Year Population Estimates, generated by Catalyst California; using data.census.gov; (November 30, 2022), <https://www.census.gov/data/developers/data-sets/acs-5year.2020.html#list-tab-1036221584>.

35 Catalyst California calculations of California Department of Justice (2016-2021) and American Community Survey (2021) five-year population estimates.

36 Leila Miller, Sheriff's Department reform in Antelope Valley has lagged for years, court monitors say, yahoo news, Los Angeles Times, February 25, 2021, [https://news.yahoo.com/sheriffs-department-reform-antelope-valley-182041158.html?guce\\_referrer=aHR0cHM6Ly91c2Mt29yZC1ZG10Lm9mZmljZWFWchMUbGl2ZS5jb20v&guce\\_referrer\\_sig=AQAAABE8drEkrcj7A\\_trWgVffCrhFPtgeqJYCHqxVN3dIri\\_ii5U0r4Oox3Xvsr5EaskrV8Uth8PW\\_klFDQ\\_6CDxkPLuyrU58QsPXV2a8Ldz8lvwxoG6fUSKdgc2ldje8ZrdeakARCLlxI8\\_OhFwNYmywOTWs\\_FaV4MvgfNTuCRrJHEN](https://news.yahoo.com/sheriffs-department-reform-antelope-valley-182041158.html?guce_referrer=aHR0cHM6Ly91c2Mt29yZC1ZG10Lm9mZmljZWFWchMUbGl2ZS5jb20v&guce_referrer_sig=AQAAABE8drEkrcj7A_trWgVffCrhFPtgeqJYCHqxVN3dIri_ii5U0r4Oox3Xvsr5EaskrV8Uth8PW_klFDQ_6CDxkPLuyrU58QsPXV2a8Ldz8lvwxoG6fUSKdgc2ldje8ZrdeakARCLlxI8_OhFwNYmywOTWs_FaV4MvgfNTuCRrJHEN) (accessed 2023).

37 Chauncey Smith et al., Reimagining Community Safety in California (Los Angeles: Catalyst California, 2022), <https://www.catalystcalifornia.org/campaign-tools/publications/reimagining-community-safety-in-california>.

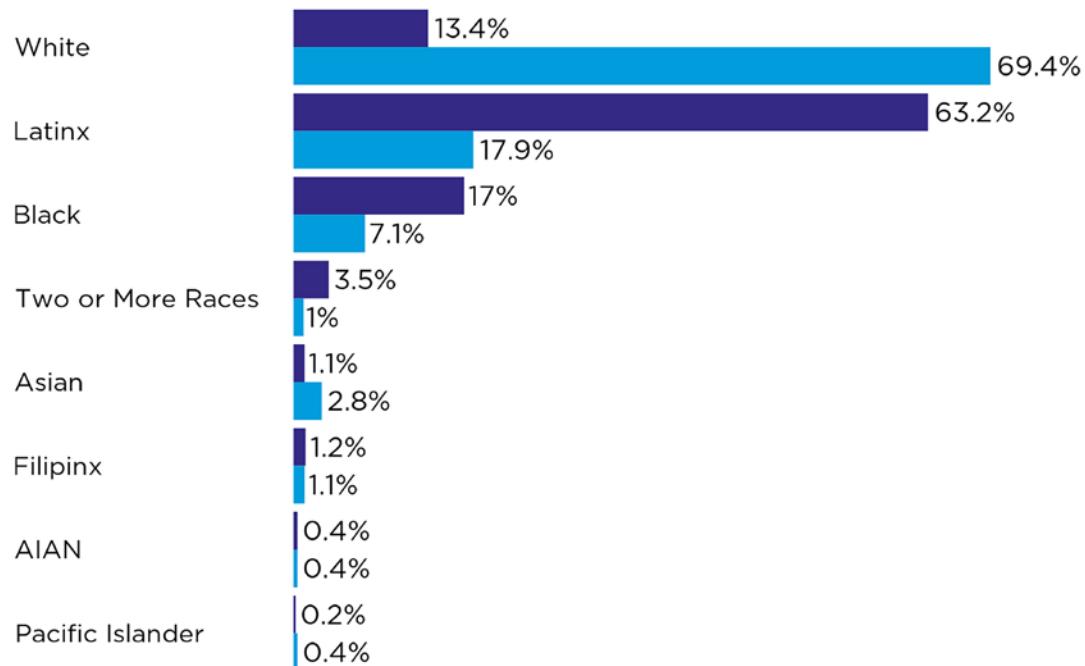
38 Catalyst California calculations of California Department of Justice (2011-2020) and American Community Survey (2016-2020) data, Catalyst California (accessed 2023), <https://www.racecounts.org/issue/crime-and-justice/>.

39 How Adults (Ages 18 Years and Older) Rated Their Experience Compared to People of Other Races When Seeking Health Care in the past Year, 2018 Los Angeles County Health Survey, Office of Health Assessment and Epidemiology, Los Angeles County Department of Public Health, [http://publichealth.lacounty.gov/ha/docs/2018LACHS/MDT/Adult/M3\\_SocialDeterminantsOfHealth/M3\\_Discrimination\\_DISC66HC.xlsx](http://publichealth.lacounty.gov/ha/docs/2018LACHS/MDT/Adult/M3_SocialDeterminantsOfHealth/M3_Discrimination_DISC66HC.xlsx).

By contrast, Latinx students made up 63.2% of enrolled students and Latinx teachers and staff made up 17.9% of all teachers and staff. Without representative teachers and staff, residents and advocates are concerned about the equitable treatment of their children.

### Most Students are Latinx Whereas Most School Staff are White

Percentages of Student Enrollment and Teachers and Staff in the Antelope Valley



Source: California Department of Education, 2018-19.

Note: American Indian and Alaska Native (AIAN), White, Two or More Races, Asian, Filipino, and Pacific Islander are Non-Hispanic.

*A schoolhouse-to-jailhouse pipeline results from lack of diversity, scarcity, and inequity*

The combination of a growing and increasingly diverse population of children, increase in cost-of-living and a crisis in resource availability and inequitable systems result in negative outcomes for the youth. Within the Antelope Valley education system, a lack of funding can contribute to low student achievement. Additionally, inequitable and punitive processes that push students out of schools contribute to a schoolhouse-to-jailhouse pipeline.

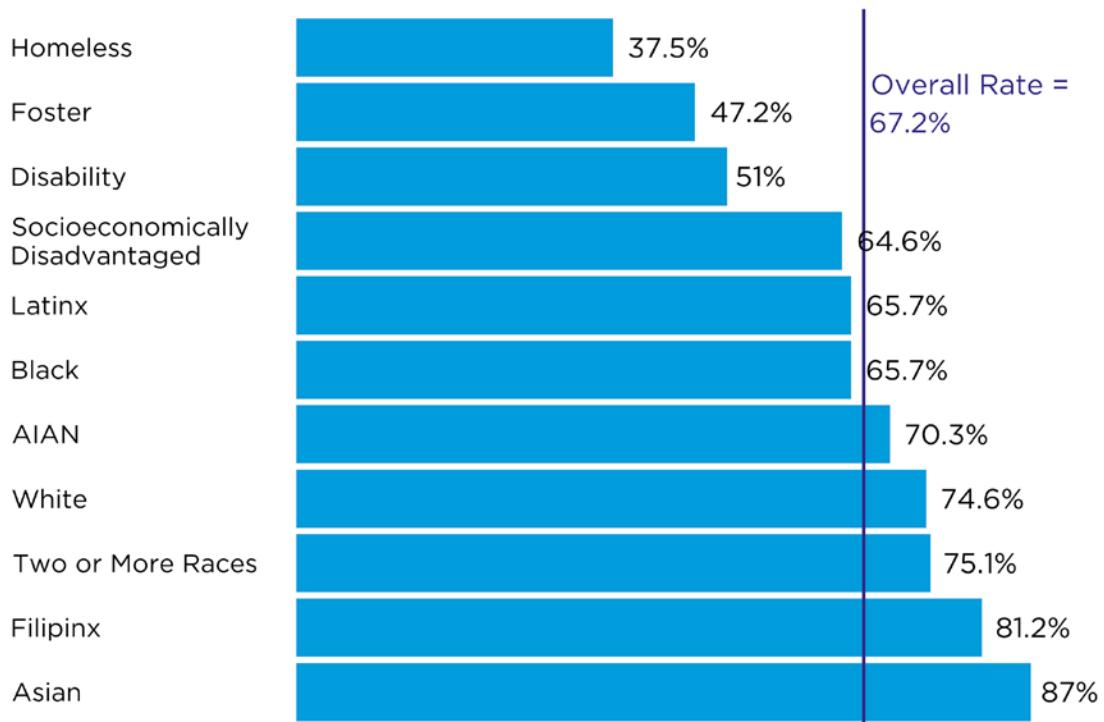
***“Educational system and school districts up here can be challenging. A lot of the schools are understaffed and underfunded. Classroom sizes are high and test scores are low.” - Chad Scott, Sycamores***

Antelope Valley residents and advocates who were interviewed were critical of the state of the region's schools. Student outcomes in the area are lower than those of the county: Antelope Valley schools graduate 67.2% of their eligible students compared to the county rate of 86.1%.<sup>40</sup>

40 Adjusted Cohort Graduation Rate and Outcome Data 2021-2022, California Department of Education, (last reviewed December 19, 2022), <https://www.cde.ca.gov/ds/ad/filesacgr.asp>.

These outcomes vary by racial-ethnic group. Antelope Valley schools graduate Latinx (65.7%) and Black students (65.7%) at the lowest rates while graduating Asian (87%) and Filipinx (81.2%) students at the highest rates.

## **High School Graduation Rates by Student Subgroup, 2021-22 School Year, Antelope Valley School Districts**



Source: California Department of Education, Adjusted Cohort Graduation Rate and Outcome Data, 2021-2022. Note: Rates are out of 100 students. AIAN stands for American Indian and Alaskan Native.

Residents and advocates highlight that many student populations need tailored support but face a punitive education system. Unfortunately, Antelope Valley schools suspend many of these student populations at high rates. The region's schools suspended foster students and Black students at twice the rate of students overall and suspended students with disabilities, American Indian and Alaska Native (AIAN), and NHPI students at higher rates than students altogether.<sup>41</sup> All in all, Antelope Valley schools suspend students at a higher rate (4.7% of students) than LA County (1.7%) and the state (3.2%).<sup>42</sup>

41 Suspension Data 2021-2022, California Department of Education, (last reviewed December 19, 2022), <https://www.cde.ca.gov/ds/ad/filessd.asp>. Antelope Valley schools include schools in the following districts: Acton-Agua Dulce Unified, Antelope Valley Union High, Eastside Union Elementary, Hughes-Elizabeth Lakes Union Elementary, Keppel Union Elementary, Lancaster Elementary, Palmdale Elementary, Westside Union Elementary, and Wilsona Elementary.

42 2021-22 Suspension Rate Los Angeles County Report Disaggregated by Ethnicity, DataQuest, California Department of Education, (accessed 2023), <https://dq.cde.ca.gov/dataquest/dqCensus/DisSuspRate.aspx?year=2021-22&agglevel=County&cds=19>.

## Suspension Rates by Student Group, Antelope Valley School Districts, 2021-22

STUDENT GROUP	STUDENT ENROLLMENT	UNDUPLICATED COUNT OF STUDENTS SUSPENDED	SUSPENSION RATE
Foster	3,203	388	12.1
Black	15,493	1,804	11.6
Students with Disabilities	16,383	1,267	7.7
AIAN	384	24	6.2
Pacific Islander	161	10	6.2
Male	51,270	3,065	6.0
Socioeconomically Disadvantaged	77,770	4,227	5.4
Two or More Races	3,977	206	5.2
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>100,391</b>	<b>4,738</b>	<b>4.7</b>
Homeless	2,861	133	4.6
Migrant	226	10	4.4
English Learners	14,378	615	4.3
Latinx	64,817	2,302	3.6
Female	49,022	1,673	3.4
White	12,591	358	2.8
Filipinx	953	12	1.3
Asian	1,197	7	0.6

Source: Catalyst California calculations of California Department of Education data, 2021-22.

Note: The student group category for non-binary students was unavailable because of a lack of data. Antelope Valley schools are from the following districts: Acton-Agua Dulce Unified, Antelope Valley Union High, Eastside Union Elementary, Hughes-Elizabeth Lakes Union Elementary, Keppel Union Elementary, Lancaster Elementary, Palmdale Elementary, Westside Union Elementary, and Wilsona Elementary. AIAN stands for American Indian Alaskan Native.

One interviewee noted her son was placed in an English-language learners course solely based on his last name even though his only language is English at home. Disparate rates of chronic absenteeism might also hint at how welcome and integrated different student groups feel in Antelope Valley schools. Black students are chronically absent at nearly triple the rate of Asian and Filipinx students.<sup>43</sup>

## COMMUNITY SPOTLIGHT: PROJECT JOY

Project Joy is a community-founded nonprofit organization that aims to provide support for many families, children, and youth in the Antelope Valley region who need to live a full life with stability. The Youth Program run by Project Joy provides after-school tutoring, a youth sports camp, and an AI learning program. In addition, the organization provides basic needs, family resiliency services, and community empowerment resources. Project Joy provides safe and nourishing spaces for youth in the Antelope Valley region to set themselves up for success.

### *Solutions*

It is clear from the data and resident interviews that the State of the Child in Antelope Valley requires a more proactive whole-child focused system of support. This infrastructure would interrupt the schoolhouse-to-jailhouse and foster-youth to unhoused-youth pipelines. It would return high academic achievement in schools and bring more resources to children and families in the region. Specifically, it would include enough health and mental health services for Antelope Valley residents to be seen by area doctors in a timely and culturally competent manner. Steps to get there include:

- **Addressing basic needs.** This report finds increases in WIC participation, foreclosures, the unhoused population, and more examples of people needing support for their basic needs. Raising wages and strengthening the safety net are a top priority.
- **Holding systems accountable.** This includes holding leaders who punish the unhoused rather than addressing the root causes accountable; demanding transparency in local budgets to see that monies appropriated for the unhoused house them; and creating pathways for a diverse group of leaders who reflect the communities they govern.
- **Increasing the State's child care subsidy reimbursement rates for early educators and child care providers.** Because child care providers often earn poverty wages, the state faces a dire child care workforce shortage. Increasing their wages will retain and recruit more workers into the field. Increasing access for families can provide more opportunities for work and incomes which meet their needs, resulting in additional time with their children. Increasing child care providers in the field will offer more and more affordable child care options for Antelope Valley families.

<sup>43</sup> Respectively, 45.7% vs. 15.4% and 15.3%. Chronic Absenteeism Data, California Department of Education, (last reviewed December 19, 2022), <https://www.cde.ca.gov/ds/ad/filesabd.asp>.

- **Increasing investments in health and mental health services.** An area of over 400,000 people should not be subjected to such service shortages. Increases should come from both current budgets and new revenues. For example, advocates can find funds that currently go to law enforcement for responding to mental health and housing crises and redirect them to mental health and housing departments for preventative care. Advocates can also raise funds for community schools with wraparound health services or other services communities need.
- **Increasing investments in learning resources for children and families.** One of the most repeated concerns among Antelope Valley parents we interviewed was the lack of extracurricular learning activities for their children. Investments in afterschool programs, parks and recreation, libraries, and other programs are a critical need. Residents also noted the need for parenting and educational resources.
- **Sharing more resources among organizations and individuals.** Despite lower rates of resources than other parts of the county, the Antelope Valley still has many resources which are unknown because of distance, language, internet, or other access barriers. Sharing resources helps connect people who need them.
- **Encouraging cross-sector collaboration.** Too often the state of children, especially the state of young children (age 0 to 5) is not connected to larger systems at work. For example, child care is not thought of as a direct link to the workforce or the unhoused population is not thought of as result of the foster youth system. Residents of the Antelope Valley tell us that these are connected, and that it will take collaboration between early child advocates, workforce advocates, foster youth advocates, and housing advocates to build the infrastructure necessary for children and families.
- **Continuing advocacy for more resources for children and families.** The Children's Bureau facilitates a network of organizational and individual advocates. Growing that network by contacting Stephaney Reyes at [BeststartAV@all4kids.org](mailto:BeststartAV@all4kids.org) is a step that anyone reading this report can take.
- **Developing new advocates.** Residents made us aware that many of the area's parents do not know their rights in interactions with law enforcement or school administrators. There is a need for a number of advocacy organizations to train and support residents to build community power.

***When community members were asked, what would you like to see policymakers and systems leaders do?***

I wish our local government looked at the unhoused population with compassion and not as a burden because these are people who need help.

For enrichment activities, it really comes down to funding, there are a lot of [organizations] out here that can do enrichment and that means infrastructure as well but they do not have the funding.

Cut the red tape, we have empty buildings that belong to the city, and a lot of city land, why do we keep giving breaks to big corporations to build [?] City officials campaign a lot on unhoused and foster youth, but nothing gets done.

Giving different ways for the community to express their needs goes a long way.

Talk to the children and families instead of telling them what you are going to do. Listen to what they are saying and what people on the ground who are doing the work are saying.

We need to advocate for people in education settings to go into the mental health field and provide a way for them to be able to afford to do [so].

We have to address the whole person. If we don't take care of our kids, they are the first priority and they rely on us as a village.

They [law enforcement] need to be able to see children as children. As Black people, we feel that law enforcement forgets that our kids are kids.

True affordable housing, rehabilitation, true mental health resources, we have people with mental issues, we need to treat them how they need to be treated.

Stay accountable to the Antelope Valley once they're [elected officials] in office.

In a perfect world, a ton of mental health providers ... While there is a counselor at each site and a social worker per site, it's not enough. We need more on-the-ground service providers whether its attendance, or social workers, or more counselors, supporting mental health resources.

The excellence isn't at the poorer high schools anymore - how do we raise them up again.

Prisons are managed at the state level: wanting to see more interventions there to disrupt the cycles of families getting cycled through the prison system.

An all-encompassing resource hub for unhoused populations that live in vehicles.

# Conclusions and Recommendations

In speaking with residents and reviewing data, this report identifies many community strengths and assets but also an increase in challenges for children of Antelope Valley. The lack of resources, especially health, mental health, and extracurricular resources for children, weighs heavily on the area's families. With a growing population, a failure to invest in more resources will result in even fewer resources available over time. In this context, we recommend a more proactive and robust approach to infrastructure for both children and families.

Beyond access, equity needs to be addressed. Students need to see more teachers and school staff with similar backgrounds and residents need to see more leaders who share similar concerns. One resident spoke about how seeing someone of his race "make it" made it possible for him to see where he wanted to go and how it changed the trajectory of his young life. The region needs that trajectory for all its children.

And this work poses some larger questions. For decades families from elsewhere in the county have moved to the Antelope Valley enticed by the low cost of living and family-friendly atmosphere. Residents and data tell us that affordability is vanishing. What does it mean for the county when Antelope Valley is losing its low cost of living and family-friendly atmosphere? What does it mean for LA County that one of the last affordable places for working families is no longer so affordable?

The Children's Bureau and the Best Start network in the Antelope Valley are an important locus of change in the region and are great places to continue the conversation for solutions.



## ***When community members were asked, how would you define the State of the Child?***

The State of the Child is in a state of emergency. There is an emergency need for resources, therapy, accessibility, and accountability.

I think there's a lot of people who care out here and a lot of people doing good work. I think the State of the Child in the AV is hopeful because there's a lot of agencies out here doing the best work to improve the quality of life for people.

I don't think the State of the Child is where it should be. It needs some solutions and some healing ... There is an African saying, they greet each other and say, "how are the children" the response that you want is "all of the children are well" and when I think about the children in the AV I feel like I can't say that.

The State of the Child is poor ... A lack of resources, a lack of healthcare, a lack of jobs, poverty. I am deeply concerned about the state of our children.

The State of the Child on the Westside is very different from the Eastside.

I want to believe that we can make change, but I hope that we can do it fast enough because I'm concerned that we are going to lose this whole generation. I just want kids to be kids. I want them to be burden-free and joyful, secure in their homes and their families.

The State of the Child in the AV is not good... poverty is rising, accessibility to educational opportunities is lacking ... More and more women with children are homeless – how are we wrapping our hands around them?

We are at a disadvantage. In the AV, my biggest worry is that we don't have enough information accessible to help our kids succeed and communities are left to figure that [out] on their own in a very competitive world.

The State of the Child in the AV is guardedly optimistic. I feel like the community here is invested. If we come up with solutions, it has to be structured and built out of this community.



**Catalyst California:**

Website: [www.catalystcalifornia.org](http://www.catalystcalifornia.org)  
Email: [info@catalystcalifornia.org](mailto:info@catalystcalifornia.org)

**Children's Bureau of Southern California:**

Website: [www.all4kids.org](http://www.all4kids.org)  
Email: [BestStartAV@all4kids.org](mailto:BestStartAV@all4kids.org)



For access to the data and more, please visit:  
[https://catalystcalifornia.github.io/State\\_of\\_the\\_Child\\_Region\\_5/](https://catalystcalifornia.github.io/State_of_the_Child_Region_5/)