



## Ventura County

CHILD, YOUTH, AND FAMILY  
WELLNESS SYSTEM

### VISION BRIEF

Recent federal, state, and local innovation has brought an unprecedented opportunity for transformation of our public and community systems. We must work together to leverage the opportunity in a timely manner to capitalize on behalf of our most vulnerable children and families.

Our systems have historically been about surveillance and compliance, a fact that has at times led to the development and implementation of harmful practices. *Ventura County's Interagency Leadership Team (ILT)*, comprised of executive leadership from all of Ventura's public systems; Health, Children and Family Services; Behavioral Health; Probation; Education; and Regional Centers, is working together to "retool" our systems to focus on preventative work and transparency with the community.

This **vision brief** lays out the **WHAT**—A shared vision for Ventura County's children, youth, and families; elaborates on **WHY** system change is required; and **HOW** to make the necessary change happen.

#### The WHAT: VISION—Child, Youth and Family Wellness System

Our **vision** going forward is to create a **Child, Youth, and Family Wellness System** by aligning government, community, and family stakeholders to maximize wellness and quality of life so all children, and their families, are safe, healthy, educated and well with a sense of belonging, purpose, and opportunity to achieve their aspirations.

To achieve this vision, we must focus on the Whole Child, Whole Family, and Whole Community. If we are going to support youth and their families achieve wellness, then our service systems must coordinate and collaborate to address unmet basic and complex needs. We are determined to champion and accomplish such changes through equitable policy, program, and practice alignment throughout the entire continuum of health and human services, encourage neighbor-to-neighbor reciprocity and actively involve diverse community partners.

#### Benefits of System Change

Research and direct observation tell us that connecting and aligning multi-system efforts results in:

- Reduced costs to counties and systems;
- Increased clarity of mission and purpose for each system and community; and
- Allows for thoughtful reinvestment of savings "upstream".

#### Theory of Change

*Our theory of change is simple yet profound.*

*If we align public systems and community partners for integrated whole child, whole family, and whole community care, then children and families will have equitable access to services, support, and wellness opportunities—and we will strengthen protective factors; decrease formal system involvement; and increase wellness for generations to come.*



## Future Snapshot

When we begin to achieve this vision together, Ventura County children, youth and families will have equitable access to supports early and easily:

- A cross disciplinary system that relies on family and community voice while promoting health, wellness, and healing will be in place;
- Public Agencies will support the needs of the community by identifying, connecting, and aligning efforts underway; and
- Supports not yet available, but critical to family health and wellness, will be identified and pursued through a collaborative framework that leverages shared resources and shared accountability.

## The WHY: CHANGE is REQUIRED - From Silos to Alignment & Integration

Together we want to make it clear that the business of health and human services in Ventura County is changing. No longer is working alone within one's own agency, in other words "siloes efforts", the norm. Such efforts are inefficient, costly, and in some cases have harmed families. In a siloes system, families must tell their story over and over, at times exacerbating the trauma they may have experienced because they are often involved with multiple systems at the same time. Then, each system will develop a case or family plan that sometimes overlaps or contradicts the plan developed by another agency.

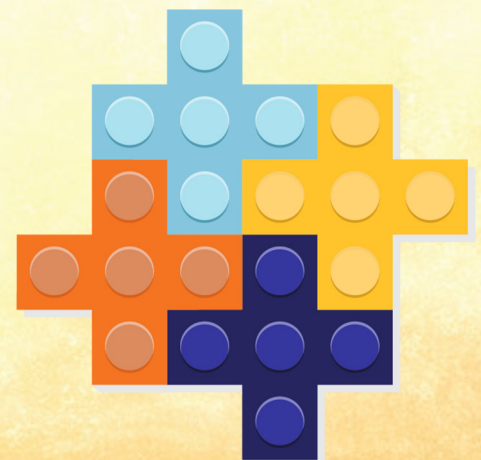
We have come to realize that no one system has the mandate, reach or resources to address both person-specific situations and the social conditions that exacerbate such issues, e.g., poverty, inadequate housing, racism, unemployment, community violence.

We are purposeful and strategic in working towards alignment and integration across public and community sectors to achieve our vision that will improve outcomes for children, youth and families for generations to come.

## Breaking Barriers Pillars of Change

Various state and federal oversight bodies, including Breaking Barriers California, have made it clear that to build an integrated Wellness System, ***there are four critical elements:***

- Cross System Shared Leadership and Governance
- Cross System Shared Data and Outcomes Management
- Cross System Shared Fiscal Management and Responsibility
- Cross System Shared Community and Family Engagement



## The HOW: Assets To Build On

There is an emerging roadmap for building Ventura's Wellness System that is based on a set of core values that drive the ongoing process.

Our roadmap indicates that **we have much already in place to build on**. Ventura County is an early adopter of best practices and has demonstrated and modeled successful system and practice changes that are replicated in other counties. Our past and recent accomplishments serve as foundation for the infrastructure we now have.

### *Assets to build on include:*

- 1. Implementation of the Katie A.** settlement agreement that recognizes the role Mental Health plays in the healing and recovery of high-needs youth in and near the foster care system.
- 2. Ventura County's Citizen Review Panel** led to mapping of geographic areas of need, including the Oxnard Plains where we found similar data sets in the same area in multiple programs. Families here account for a disproportionate percentage of child welfare and probation intakes, show high levels of involvement in health and mental health systems, and are impacted by performance in area schools.
- 3. Continuum of Care Reform (CCR)** has led to universal and expanded access to mental health, and community-based services for foster youth in VC, a decrease in congregate care and juvenile detentions, and the need for coordination and collaboration in light of complex needs of young people.
- 4. Family First Prevention Services Act (FFPSA)** is a federal law that moves the focus from just responding following an incident of child abuse or neglect (while keeping children safe) to actually preventing the need for system involvement in the first place. It requires systems to engage community partners and residents, lift up the voice of parents with lived experience, and develop a shared practice approach among public partners and Community-based organizations.

*FFPSA is the opportunity to identify a continuum of supports linked to a county's effort to build a prevention system. It requires a community pathway so that families in need can be helped before a crisis occurs, and without having to come to the attention of the system through surveillance. Families will be empowered to access services and supports.*

Taken together, this means the human services agency is a vital partner, but not the only partner in the prevention effort, and not necessarily the lead for each phase and all aspects.

It is clear that no one agency or system can do the work alone. We are already working together to develop shared outcomes for children, plan collaboration across systems, and build programs to address needs that no one agency can meet.





There are numerous state and federal supports and requirements that can be leveraged in the work ahead. These include the Child and Family Services Review; *Requirement for a Comprehensive Prevention Plan*; and *Systems alignment through AB 2083*.

As required by **AB 2083**, Ventura County's public partners all signed an **MOU** indicating their commitment to working together to build our Wellness System.

The requirements of the 2083 MOU include, but are not limited to:

1. **Interagency Leadership team** (ILT) for consistent interdepartmental & interagency leadership
2. **Integrated Core Practice Model** Work together to promote the high-quality practices of the integrated practice model
3. **Information & Data sharing** Maximize coordination, streamline services access, & improve service delivery
4. **Alignment & Coordination of Services** in a more culturally & responsive manner
5. **Staff Recruitment, Training, & Coaching** to produce a dynamic, diverse, & compassionate workforce
6. **Shared Financial Resource Management** with a child-family centered focus when discussing, planning, & determining solutions
7. **Parent/Youth Engagement** Include parent & youth voice in community learning & engagement
8. **Development of System Level Outcomes** to a create shared metrics that reflect shared responsibility to the children & families of Ventura County

**Probation Lens** We know that juvenile justice reform in past 20 years has moved us from an incarceration model to a community supervision model. Approximately 90% of youth involved in the juvenile justice system are being managed in the community. This has prompted justice agencies to implement community-based programs/services to improve life outcomes. Proactive alignment of services & resources with other human service entities is the next step to enhance wellness among our youth & families.

**Education Lens** The work of developing a cross sector wellness system has already begun. "Folks are already thinking differently." Historically, there have been a lot of duplicated efforts, but now agencies are checking with other agencies to be more efficient and effective.

For example, the Ventura County Office of Education has implemented Behavioral Health Wellness Centers in schools. Since this is a service that focuses on the children and families in the community, more effort should be directed to expanding these services and resources. We must help our county get back into a positive light, but also celebrate the accomplishments and current things that are happening.

**Health Care Lens** Healthcare is being transformed by new federal ACA policy changes and the state's CalAIM 10-year plan. *CalAIM has three primary goals:*

1. Identify and manage member risk and need through whole person care approaches and addressing Social Determinants of Health;
2. Move Medi-Cal to a more consistent and seamless system by reducing complexity and increasing flexibility; and
3. Improve quality outcomes, reduce health disparities, and drive delivery system transformation and innovation through value-based initiatives, modernization of systems and payment reform.

These changes must be shared across all sectors, public and private, as we ask ourselves, "How does this impact what is already going on, what will be changed by when?" In Ventura, HCA is focused on **CalAIM** since it expands services to historically underserved populations and an emphasis on reentry individuals.

Additionally, HCA already puts focus on the Social Determinants of Health (SDOH). SDOH are the conditions within the environments where people are born, live, work, play, worship, and age that affect a wide range of health functioning, and quality of life outcomes and risks.

As part of this effort, Public Health leading the **Countywide Health Information Exchange** which is working to facilitate data linkage and information sharing to create efficiencies and better serve children and families. The resulting referral network will connect people to services and help identify gaps.

**Behavioral Health Lens** The priorities of Ventura County Behavioral Health (VCBH) align with the integrity and vision of building a Wellness System for our County.

One of those key priorities is **CalAIM** which will help create broader eligibility and greater access for youth and their families:

- CalAIM is a system transformation based on a whole system, person centered, population health approach that will provide care coordination and care management across physical health, behavioral health, and local services to improve health status and address social drivers of health.

Other priorities to leverage include:

- The **8 Wellness Centers** on High School campuses to address increased need for support and intervention on a universal level. VCBH is exploring expanding wellness center models with state funding in partnership with Gold Coast Health Plan and Ventura County Office of Education.
- **Logrando Bienestar**, an outreach program specifically targeting historically underserved and marginalized populations, creates relationships to bridge them to social services and provides educational workshops to family members.

Going forward, VCBH is committed to **enhanced outreach and services** to better engage incoming consumers and families through their New Access and Outreach Division; building and maintaining **strong relationships with Community Based Organizations (CBOs)**; and working with **smaller, local providers to ensure culturally appropriate** services.



<sup>1</sup>For more information on the Social Determinants of Health and Healthy People 2020, go to: <https://www.healthypeople.gov/2020/topics-objectives/topic/social-determinants-of-health>



**Regional Center Lens** Avoiding duplication of services will cut wasteful spending while supporting better use of tax dollars. The money that is saved can be used for other programs for children and families. Public Partners working together as a team allows for children to be at home in stable environments much faster. Coordination among systems may take some time, but such shared efforts will benefit children and families because they will experience better access, quality and outcomes of care from a comprehensive system approach that took its time to unify and build.

**Children & Family Services Lens** Collaboration has historically been a part of Ventura County, but this level of collaboration is different from the past. While AB 2083 is focused on high needs youth, the work of *building a Wellness System in Ventura focuses on the whole family*. The mandates for CFS are the same, but a new ethos permeates the agency; a shift “from a mandated reporter to mandated supporter” to ensure child and family wellbeing.

This is both the smart and the right thing to do. It is **“smart”** because it is efficient and effective. It is the **“right”** thing to do because there is a moral imperative to do better. The work going forward must focus on **equitable opportunities and outcomes** for all and must **lift up the voice and influence of persons with lived experience**.

## Infrastructure Building Blocks

**Ventura County partners share** a commitment to building equity, engaging the community and stakeholder voice, and to authentic partnering with families. This is reflected in the infrastructure now in place to begin making the changes we have described:

- The **2083 Operations Group** is comprised of the Deputies of ILT members to assure good horizontal (cross-sector) and vertical (within agency) coordination and communication throughout the effort.
- The **Essentials for Childhood Collaborative (E4C)**, and the **Early Childhood Coalition (ECC)** are public/private collaborative bodies that meet regularly to engage each other in alignment of initiatives, all with a focus on equity and parent voice.
  - Among the key partners is the **Ventura County Partnership for Safe Families and Communities**. This body functions as our County’s Child Abuse Prevention Council and was commissioned by the Board of Supervisors in 1982. The Partnership began family violence prevention and family strengthening work 40 years ago and continues to grow strong.
  - One highlight of their contribution to the Wellness System is alignment of ACEs Aware, a statewide initiative launched by California’s former Surgeon General to provide for early identification and response to adverse childhood experiences. The Partnership is building a Network of Care between pediatricians and community providers for a robust community response.
- The **Neighborhoods for Learning and Wellness**, led by **First 5 Ventura County**, is building on the foundational work of Ventura’s Citizen Review Panel to develop a prototype for saturation of aligning integrated, successful practices and resources in the county’s highest need area to increase child and family wellbeing.
  - Ventura’s *“Neighborhoods for Learning and Wellness”* is a targeted universal public health approach that addresses the social determinants of health at the **“micro”** (child and family), **“mezzo”** (program/organization) and **“macro”** levels (policy and systems). It is being co-designed with families and community residents in close collaboration with existing infrastructure and networks, such as the Essentials for Childhood Initiative whose partners are fully committed to this.



## Anticipated Benefits

Working together to build a Child, Youth, and Family Wellness System is **the smart and right thing to do**. It is **smart** because it is evidence-based, cost-effective, and ultimately more efficient and effective than what we are doing now. It is the **right** thing to do because there is a moral imperative to increase equitable outcomes for the most vulnerable among us.

It is anticipated that the following **will be different** as we begin to achieve our shared vision:

1. **Fewer youth/juveniles will be detained**, and those who are will be helped to break the “cradle to prison” pipeline. They will experience trauma-informed, gender-specific services that support natural resilience and lead to wellness and positive life trajectories;
2. More opportunities for **positive behavioral health**, with faith-based leaders and behavioral health professionals coming together to reduce stigma and increase access to care;
3. Child safety will remain the priority, and **fewer families will be separated** as the aligned system shifts from “mandated reporter” to mandated “supporters” who share responsibility for child, youth, and family wellbeing.
4. Children and youth will have access to mental health support on campus through **Wellness Centers**.
5. There will be **equitable and improved access and utilization of services and supports** by families in need. The Priority Access to Services and Supports beta test in Ventura reduced wait time from investigation to receipt of services from an average of 85 days, to fewer than 10 days.

**The vision is  
within our reach;  
we must all work together  
to achieve it!**



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# This VISION of a Child, Youth, and Family Wellness System was developed in April 2022 by members of the Ventura County Interagency Leadership Team:

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