

Merced County

Merced County Accountable Communities for Health

Empowering community to prevent diabetes, fight depression and substance abuse, and expand opportunities

The California Accountable Communities for Health Initiative (CACHI) was established to spearhead efforts to modernize our health system and build a healthier California. To realize this vision, CACHI utilizes a model known as **Accountable Communities for Health (ACH)**, where multiple sectors align goals and collaborate to address the leading health issues facing our communities.

PROBLEM: Few Opportunities, Limited Resources and Duplicated Efforts

Despite living in a region that produces the greatest bounty of fruits and vegetables in the country, many families in Merced County have difficulty gaining access to healthy food. What's worse, they often live—and work—under harmful conditions that are at the root of high obesity, diabetes and substance abuse rates.

Nearly three out of four adults in Merced are considered overweight or obese, while one in six have been diagnosed with depressive disorder—two signs that poverty, work stress and food deserts are driving down health. Likewise, the county's diabetes mortality rate is 50 percent higher than the California average, while substance abuse disorders top the list of community issues. All this points to a great need for mental health care and accessible economic opportunities in a county that has a shortage of providers and one of the state's highest unemployment rates.

In recent years, community organizations, businesses and local governments have attempted to chip away at the problem, often launching their own collaboratives. After some time, they noticed their efforts just weren't reaching the tipping point.

SOLUTION: Unite Efforts to Improve Health

Ultimately, these organizations decided there must be a better way. Merced County Accountable Communities for Health soon formed to unify the multiple collaboratives that had launched to promote behavioral health and wellness, reduce diabetes and improve equity through workforce investment.

This ACH, with backbone support from the Merced County Department of Public Health, aligns and coordinates multiple sectors—business, government, health care and nonprofit organizations—to bridge disparate efforts and align action, allowing for transformational change.

ACH IN ACTION: Implement a 3-Pronged Strategy to Address Behavioral Health, Diabetes & Workforce Investment

To address depression and substance abuse, ACH organizers have begun implementing Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) screening in all primary care offices, integrating efforts between disparate providers. This effort runs alongside a comprehensive awareness campaign to reduce the stigma around mental health so that residents are willing to take advantage of new opportunities for care.

To reduce diabetes, the ACH is focusing on health communications to prevent diabetes, with a special focus on K-8 schools and paraprofessionals like promotores and community health workers. They are also working directly with clinicians and patients to reduce friction so that more residents can enter diabetes management programs.

To expand workforce opportunities in partnership with employers, ACH member organizations are developing fully active school-to-work pipelines for residents from racially and economically disadvantaged communities, and are working to assist the bottom 20 percent of lowest income employees in accessing training through their workplace.

NEXT STEPS: Execute the Plan, Evaluate the Results

What does this all add up to? A comprehensive, innovative multi-sector approach that ensures maximum upstream action to prevent diabetes, fight depression and substance abuse, and expand opportunities. Merced County ACH will continue to execute this plan and evaluate the results of this new strategy, gleaned from valuable insights and inspiration for communities across the Central Valley.

Learn more at www.co.merced.ca.us/82/Public-Health.