

# Human Services Agency MID year REPORT Fiscal Year 2018-2019

## Strengthening Our Community

The Human Services Agency strives to strengthen Ventura County by administering programs that have a positive impact on key community concerns including food insecurity, access to health care and insurance, child and elder abuse, unemployment and homelessness.

The Human Services Agency serves as a foundation for improved career paths and family lives and as a safety net for individuals facing temporary setbacks due to loss of a job, illness or other challenges. Over the last three years, the economy has begun to stabilize with the county unemployment rate falling from 5.3% in June 2015 to 4% in June 2018. Additionally, participation in most assistance programs has also declined: CalWORKS by 17%, CalFresh by 12% and Medi-Cal by 3%. Despite the progress made towards a sustainable economic recovery, many Ventura County residents still access safety net services such as Medi-Cal, CalFresh and CalWORKS.

The number of seniors ages 60+ is projected to grow to 205,000 by 2020, and 264,000 by the year 2030\* comprising 1/3 of Ventura County's population. As the senior population increases, a rise in IHSS participants is expected to continue.

In the past decade, the percentage of county residents receiving support services has grown significantly: from 1 in 8 in 2008 to more than 1 in 4 through the end of January 2019.

\*California Department of Finance



## The Hill-Woolsey Fires: The Human Services Agency Assists with Response and Recovery

On the evening of November 7, 2018 around 11:30 p.m. a mass shooting claiming 12 lives, including a Ventura County Sheriff's Deputy, occurred at the Borderline Bar & Grill in Thousand Oaks. By the next day, first responders were also on the scene battling two major wildfires: the Hill Canyon Fire, which started in the Santa Rosa Valley and the Woolsey Fire near Simi Valley.



The County Office of Emergency Services activated the Emergency Operations Center (EOC) to respond to both the shooting and the fires. With oversight responsibility for Mass Care & Shelter Operations, HSA deployed staff to the EOC to coordinate services for evacuees with the Red Cross. HSA activated the Agency's disaster response plan as outlined in the Continuity of Operations Plan (COOP). The Agency's Department Operations Center, staffed by key members of the disaster response team, convened to begin implementation of the COOP and ensure that mission essential services offered by HSA continued uninterrupted.

As the fire moved away from Ventura County and into the Santa Monica mountains, HSA staff continued to ensure that critical services were delivered to the public and assist residents impacted by the fires. HSA was the managing entity for the County's Local Assistance Center in Thousand Oaks and staff from Intake & Eligibility, Homeless Services, and Veteran Services at the center provided services and information to over 300 residents. Additionally, over \$307,000 in CalFresh disaster related food benefits were issued to residents impacted by the fires.

## Expanding CalFresh to Seniors & People with Disabilities Receiving SSI

For the first time ever in California, hundreds of thousands of seniors and people with disabilities who receive Supplemental Security Income / State Supplemental Payment (SSI/SSP) benefits will also be able to apply for CalFresh food benefits beginning June 1, 2019. This historic change is intended to increase nutrition and health, and reduce hunger and poverty among California's low-income seniors and people with disabilities.

The CalFresh food program is the State's number one defense against hunger and malnutrition. Nearly 4 million people a month - approximately 63,000 in Ventura County - receive an average of \$130 on a debit card to purchase food at grocery stores and farmers' markets. With this change, eligible seniors and people with disabilities will be able to receive a monthly CalFresh food benefit to help meet their basic needs. Some who are part of households already receiving CalFresh food benefits may receive new state funded Supplemental Nutrition Benefits or Transitional Nutrition Benefits, with no change or reduction to their SSI/SSP benefits.

HSA will conduct outreach to help ensure that information about this change in eligibility criteria reaches low-income seniors and people with disabilities who too often find themselves choosing between paying rent, buying food and paying for medication.



## Community Events & Resources

### Community Events & Resources

The Human Services Agency has a new webpage that includes information and links to workshops, community events and resources related to health, social and basic needs services that may be of interest to clients, staff, partner agencies and community members. You can find it [here](#).

# Free Tax Prep & Filing

## Human Services Agency Hosts Free Tax Preparation Assistance

The Human Services Agency is partnering with the Volunteer Income Tax Assistance Program (VITA) to offer free tax preparation assistance to individuals and families with earnings up to \$55,000 in 2018.

Staffed by a cadre of IRS-trained and certified volunteers, the program helps low and moderate-income households prepare and file their taxes and ensures that those who qualify also benefit from the state and federal Earned Income and child tax credits. The Earned Income Tax Credit is considered the single most effective federal antipoverty program for working-age households-providing additional income and boosting employment for low-income workers. Self-employed workers and families with wages up to \$24,950 may also qualify for the California Earned Income Tax Credit (CalEITC). In addition, this year, CalEITC expanded eligibility to include 18 to 24-year-olds at the start of their careers.

Volunteer Income Tax Assistance services are available at locations across the county, including Human Services Agency offices in Simi Valley, Oxnard and Ventura. Appointments are required and can be made by calling 2-1-1. Scheduling early is encouraged as slots fill up quickly.

Due to the recent California wildfires, individuals who reside or have a business in Ventura or Los Angeles County may qualify for additional time to file their taxes. This includes 2018 individual income tax returns and payments normally due on April 15, 2019. Those who are eligible have until April 30, 2019 to file.

For those who are comfortable with computers, [www.myfreetaxes.org](http://www.myfreetaxes.org) is a user-friendly program offered through a partnership between the United Way and H&R Block, which allows taxpayers who earned up to \$66,000 to file their taxes online for free.

## Social Worker Carmen Franco Honored for Innovative Peer Resource Program

The Ventura County Management Council, a member-driven organization promoting excellence in public service, sponsors an annual awards program that recognizes the work and programs implemented by their colleagues. At this year's awards ceremony, Child Welfare Social Worker Carmen Franco was honored with the Innovation Award for developing an "in-house" peer support program.

Child welfare social workers interact daily with children experiencing abuse and neglect and with families in crisis. In recent years there has been increasing recognition that child welfare staff, much like their colleagues in fire, law enforcement, behavioral health, and probation, are at considerable risk of "secondary trauma" due to repeated exposure to challenging situations with children and families. Recognizing the need for additional support, Ms. Franco worked closely with the County Probation Department and Employee Assistance Program in developing protocols for an "in-house" peer support program. The program is providing much needed services and is recognized by the Counseling Team International and Public Safety Peer Support Association. As a result, social workers now have access to excellent support services that help them deal with the trauma associated with their work.



## Video Spotlight: America's Job & Career Center

The America's Job Center of California is a direct link to resources that help adult and youth job seekers choose and pursue careers. Services are available at no cost for those seeking work, including laid-off workers, formerly self-employed workers, and those re-entering the workforce. Support services include:

- Use of computers, printers and fax machines
- Help with resumes and interviewing
- Job listings and employer information
- Employee recruitments
- Information on careers and growing occupations
- On-the-job training and skill certifications
- Career workshops
- Assistance with tuition and books
- Customized training
- Access to unemployment insurance benefits



Watch this [video](#) for more information.

## Budget & Legislative Update

Governor Gavin Newsom has released a proposed 2019-20 budget that calls for a series of bold investments in broadening economic security and opportunity for Californians, while continuing to strengthen the state's underlying fiscal health.

The Governor's proposal includes a range of significant expansions in support of low- and middle-income Californians who are struggling to make ends meet and access greater economic opportunity, introducing policies that aimed at making California more affordable and more equitable for millions of Californians. These policies include:

- Doubling the state's Earned Income Tax Credit
- Working toward universal preschool for 4-year-olds
- Investing in child care infrastructure
- Expanding health care to move closer to universal coverage
- Expanding paid family leave
- Boosting CalWORKS grants
- Increasing investment in state higher education systems
- Expansion of the state's role in addressing homelessness, high housing costs and needs



Confronted by federal challenges to Californians and their communities, the budget proposal calls for investments to support immigrants, improve state and local emergency preparedness, and ensure that the 2020 census is as accurate as possible. Recognizing that California is experiencing a period of sustained economic growth and a positive revenue outlook, the budget proposal also calls for paying down debts and building up reserves. These proposals, in combination with one-time and ongoing investments, are intended to offer a balanced approach to managing the state's fiscal health.

### Expanding CalEITC

The California Earned Income Tax Credit (CalEITC) is a refundable state tax credit that helps low-earning workers and their families make ends meet. Currently, the CalEITC provides up to nearly \$2,900 as a state tax refund, depending on how much families earn and how many children they support.

The Governor's proposed budget would strengthen and expand the CalEITC. The Administration proposes extending the credit to a total of 2.4 million tax filers, up from 2.0 million tax filers who are expected to benefit from the credit this year. The Governor also proposes to increase the size of the credit available to many families and individuals. These two changes combined are expected to more than double the total amount of credits provided from around \$400 million this year to \$1 billion next year. The Administration also proposes renaming the CalEITC the "Working Families Tax Credit." New provisions include:

- Extend the credit to an estimated 400,000 additional tax filers by allowing those with somewhat higher incomes (who are still low-income) to claim the credit
- Increase the credit for many families and individuals who currently receive small credits
- Provide an additional \$500 credit to families with children under age 6
- Explore providing a monthly payment option for workers who qualify for the credit

### Significant Increase to CalWORKS Grants

The California Work Opportunity and Responsibility to Grants (CalWORKS) program provides modest cash assistance for over 775,000 low-income children while helping parents overcome barriers to employment and find jobs. The annualized maximum CalWORKS grant for a family of three has been well below the deep-poverty threshold (50% of the federal poverty line) for the past 11 years. In the 2018-19 budget package, the previous administration took the first of three proposed steps to raise the maximum grant to the deep-poverty threshold over three years, beginning with \$90 million for a 10% grant increase effective April 1, 2019. Governor Newsom's 2019-20 proposal calls for an additional 13.1% increase, which would raise the maximum grant to 50% of the federal poverty line effective October 1, 2019. To fund this increase, the proposed budget allocates \$347.6 million General Fund for the 2019-20 fiscal year (which begins July 1, 2019), with \$455.4 million General Fund as the annual, full-year cost.

### Expanding Services to Homeless Californians

California has nearly 25% of the nation's population of homeless individuals, with an estimated 134,000 homeless residents as of January 2017. More than two-thirds of California's homeless residents are unsheltered, sleeping in locations such as in a vehicle, in a park, or on the street. The Administration highlights homelessness as a key challenge facing California, and proposes several responses, focusing on the population of unsheltered homeless individuals and those with significant need for services. In terms of funding, the budget proposal includes:

- \$300 million General Fund one-time funds to support expansion or development of emergency shelters and navigation centers, available to jurisdictions that establish joint regional plans to address homelessness
- \$200 million General Fund additional one-time funds available to jurisdictions that demonstrate concrete progress toward developing new emergency shelters, navigation centers, or supportive housing units, to be used "for general purposes"
- \$25 million General Fund ongoing support for the Housing and Disability Advocacy Program, which assists homeless individuals with physical or mental disabilities in applying for federal Supplemental Security Income disability benefits by providing outreach, case management, benefits advocacy, and housing supports

\*Source: California Budget Center First Look: Governor's Proposed 2019-2020 State Budget