



COUNTY OF MONTEREY
HEALTH DEPARTMENT

ACTION PLAN FOR BUILDING SAFE & THRIVING COMMUNITIES



2026

UPDATE

2026 Action Plan Update: Building Safe & Thriving Communities

Table of Contents

Executive Summary	1
Background	2
A Framework for Building Safe & Resilient Communities.....	3
Holistic Ecosystem of Care & Growth Rooted in Health Equity	5
Path Forward: From Planning to Action.....	7
In order to move this plan into action, the following next steps are recommended:	7
Appendix.....	8
Planning Process	8
Population Level Data.....	8
Community Engagement Summary – Priority Areas.....	6

Executive Summary

In 2013, the County of Monterey launched its first strategic plan for youth-related gang violence prevention, seated in the County Administrative Office, building on past work addressing violence prevention. In 2024, stewardship of the plan moved to the Health Department. This updated action plan captures an ongoing commitment to building a safe and thriving Monterey County that centers young people.

This plan defines the holistic system of support that builds resilience for young people ages 0-24, based on best practices and conversations throughout the county with key County of Monterey department leadership, various City partners, community-based agencies, and systems-impacted youth.

This framework has a focus on prevention and intervention, with a three-pronged approach: 1) Invest in early childhood development programs that support our youngest children and their families before they enter the school system, laying a strong foundation for resiliency; 2) Better coordinate services for young people and their families in and out of school; and 3) Build capacity of service providers to be healing centered, trauma-informed, and culturally attuned.

These approaches are complemented by four strategies: Build on community strengths; shift power towards equity; commit to prevention, healing and resiliency; and rely on Collective Impact. Programs and services within the holistic system: Mitigate Harm and Promote Healing; Create Meaning; Nurture Relationships; Build Welcoming Spaces; Invest in Family Financial Stability; Act Collectively.

Finally, this plan identifies immediate next steps in refreshing a coordinated, countywide strategy, including the organizational structure and youth engagement needed to inform program and policy direction and to guide the alignment and allocation of public and private resources to best serve young people and build a safe and thriving community.

Background

Coordinated youth violence prevention work has decades of history. 25 years ago, now former Salinas Mayor Ana Caballero issued a framework for violence prevention, *Cultivating Peace*, prepared by the Prevention Institute and primarily funded by David and Lucile Packard Foundation. With a call to all sectors to participate – from cities, the County, schools, business, faith, health and human services, and law enforcement – this framework laid a foundation for deeper collaboration into the future. At a time when gang-related youth violence rates were at the highest in the State (29 homicides in 2009), *Cultivating Peace* inspired the Community Alliance for Peace in Salinas, 4Cities4Peace in South County, and the Blue-Ribbon Task Force in Seaside, and ultimately the County of Monterey’s own Strategic Framework. Programs such as cross-functional teams, community policing and Boston-based “Operation Ceasefire” went into effect, and the City of Salinas joined the national youth violence prevention movement. Public and private investments came in through STRYVE, CalGRIP (now CalVIP), and The California Endowment. Building Healthy Communities was launched, Gonzales passed a Bill of Rights for Children & Youth, and the Early Childhood Development Initiative (now called Bright Beginnings) and Bright Future Education Partnership galvanized around collective impact.

This is not a comprehensive list of all the efforts that have helped to keep violence rates low for over a decade but demonstrates the breadth and depth of partnerships and long-term commitment needed to make lasting change. They have all contributed to enduring collaboration across sectors and jurisdictions, of shifting power to communities, and a dramatic, lasting decrease in violent crime. Yet, this sustained investment is not impermeable. Two factors have stressed this system of youth support: federal level disinvestment of public institutions and services that help to strengthen individual and community resiliency, and state level reform to the juvenile justice system which has unintentionally created a surge in youth-related homicide. This trend makes an update to the County’s action plan timely and crucial.

While there is much to learn from the success of the past, young people today are growing up in vastly different conditions than those at the turn of the century when *Cultivating Peace* was released. The planning we do today is for the children of the youth of those days - Generations Z and A. Gen Z, born 1996-2013, experienced the first presidency by a non-white person and legislation of gay marriage. For them, information and social media are ubiquitous, and they prioritize mental health and work-life balance as they enter adulthood. Gen A, born in 2010 to the present, are the most globally connected and racially diverse. Lifelong exposure to screens and streaming strongly differentiates how they play, learn and interact from previous generations, and their level of education will be higher and life-expectancy longer.

Major contextual factors of today and near future include:

- COVID exacerbated already disparate health outcomes and made them more evident.
- Natural disasters locally, including fires, floods and drought, are the norm.
- An affordability crisis in Monterey County and nationally that impacts economic stability.
- Impact of growing instability of federal institutions and immigration enforcement.

All these factors must be considered by this next generational cycle of planning and systems building.

A Framework for Building Safe & Resilient Communities

At a high level, approaches to youth-related violence prevention are largely like what was defined 25+ years ago. The difference we see today is the depth of collaboration and co-creation needed for sustainability, an increase in sharing of power between institutions and community. Furthermore, there is a far more nuanced and broad understanding of the root causes of racial disparities in health and wealth outcomes, and the systemic and personal work needed to bridge the gap. A three-pronged approach is complemented by four types of strategies:

Approach

- 1) Build intergenerational resiliency and prevention by investing in early childhood development programs that support our youngest children and their families before they enter the school system, laying a strong foundation for resiliency.
- 2) Coordinate services for young people and their families, with a focus on those who are least connected to positive community support and are most vulnerable to being engaged in delinquent and violent activities, or are already system-engaged.
- 3) Build capacity of service providers to be healing centered, trauma-informed, and culturally attuned.

Strategies

Build on Community Strengths:

- History of deep collaboration and success of collective impact.
- Commitment to understanding root cause - including how our current structures perpetuate harm.
- Strengthening community policing to build trust in institutions of law enforcement.
- Addressing systemic racism as a public health issue, and in
- Designing for a unique context in Monterey County and in each community within the county.
- Mobilizing community, as demonstrated during the census and COVID response, including launch of community health workers.
- Bridging between community and institutional leaders, using processes like participatory budgeting.

Shift Power towards Equity:

- Targeted Universalism - focus on most vulnerable group, which will result in improvements for all.
- “Systems Transformation” that addresses infrastructure, systems, individual behavior (child/youth, parent/caregiver, and service provider), shifting policies, practices, resources, relationships and connections, power dynamics, and mental models.
- Community-led governance and action:
 - Lead with youth (not for youth)
 - Align with the Spectrum of Community Engagement to Ownership
 - Build strong communication and accountability between community and government

Commit to Prevention, Healing and Resiliency:

- Start at the beginning: invest in early childhood systems for greatest return on investment.
- Understanding ACEs (Adverse Childhood Experiences) & PACEs (Preventing Adverse Childhood Experiences).
- Invest in Social Determinants of Health.
- Ensure all families have their basic needs met.

Rely on Collective Impact:

- Invest in the infrastructure that supports deep collaboration and co-creation.
- Youth resiliency needs a holistic approach
- Recognize violence as public health issue
- While we work collaboratively across the county, we understand each community is unique.

Holistic Ecosystem of Care & Growth Rooted in Health Equity

Through the planning process, hallmarks of the holistic ecosystem that cares for and supports the growth of young people emerged.

Mitigate Harm and Promote Healing

- Social emotional health of youth, parents and providers
- Physical health of young people (obesity, etc.)
- Dismantle structural “-isms” (racism, genderism, queere-ism, able-ism, class-ism)
- Creative expression
- Reconciliation

Create Meaning

- Personal growth (life, community and career skills)
- Work and service
- Social and Civic connection
- Positive stories and narrative

Nurture Relationships

- Give it the space and time it needs
- Peer to peer
- Intergenerational
- Inter-sector
- Youth, parents, providers, employers, policymakers

Build Welcoming Spaces

- Safety in built environment (including transportation)
- Uplifting spaces (public art, cultural representation, global connection)
- Healthy spaces (green space, recreation, exercise, nurturing food)
- Violence-prevention-centered general plans

Invest in Family Financial Stability

- Financial literacy of youth and family
- Access to Social supports - CalWORKs, CalFresh, Medical, housing, child care, etc.
- Growing towards “inclusive economics” (including thriving-wage career pathway)
- Build education and career pathways

Act Collectively

- Shared vision where everyone belongs (including system involved)
- Collaborative spaces and solutions
- Align with existing initiatives – don’t go at it alone.
- Conduct participatory public processes for prioritization and budgeting.

Community Engagement Summary – Priority Areas

A micro level community engagement process included the coordination of focus groups with youth throughout Monterey County. Partner organizations who supported this process are: MILPA, Building Healthy Communities – Monterey County Black Caucus, City of Soledad Youth Council, City of Greenfield Youth Council, City of Gonzales Youth Council, Monterey County Probation Department – Youth Center and Juvenile Hall.

This process informed the priority areas and will guide our equity focused approach. Deeper more expansive community engagement efforts that are in alignment with the Spectrum of Community Engagement to Ownership framework will be the most optimal approach in the implementation phase of this action plan update.

Priority Areas:

<i>Economic Stability</i> • Vocational education • College bound support • Workforce development • Financial literacy	<i>Welcoming Spaces</i> • Sports and recreation • Pro-social programs • Built environment (safe streets, transportation) • Better interactions with law enforcement
<i>Mentorship</i> • Peer to peer and intergenerational connections • Youth leadership academies • Parenting education and supports	<i>Health</i> • Access to healthcare • Mental health services in schools • Trauma-informed care • Culturally relevant and language access
<i>Voice & Power</i> • Engage youth in decision-making • Engage youth in program development • Civic engagement	<i>Housing</i> • Affordable housing • Workforce housing • Resource systems navigation

Path Forward: From Planning to Action

To move this plan into action, the following next steps are recommended:

1. Reestablish a collective impact support system (at MCHD)
 - a. Resource a backbone in Health Department
 - i. Coordinating - communications, data collection and sharing, etc.
 - ii. Holding - convenes cross sector, multi-disciplinary partners, socializing collective work
 - iii. Implementing - catalyst, funder
 - iv. Influencing – social, service and policy networks
 - b. Support an Advisory (coordinated by backbone): youth-led + services + community
2. Further socialize the Ecosystem within County, with youth, CBOs, policymakers
 - a. Build capacity of community to support & prioritize safety & resilience (talk about the plan so people know it exists)
 - b. Deepen understanding of what is already happening . . . (Landscape Analysis of Action - efforts/projects already happening)
 - c. Prioritize action: what are leverage points, gaps
3. Promote a new, positive, youth-led narrative
 - a. Empower youth to lead the change
 - b. Build on community engagement for this update: What does it mean for us (young people) to feel safe? How can that be done with the resources we have?
 - c. What do youth envision for themselves? How would they name this initiative?
4. Support prioritization of strategies for (e.g., specific group/locations)
 - a. Narrow down outcomes and their indicators
 - b. Narrow down strategies for each audience (youth, parent, agency, policymaker, community member)

Appendix

Planning Process

- Advisory team (list)
- Review of existing, related planning processes and studies (e.g., Bright Futures Education Partnership, County Health Needs Assessment)
- Community engagement: MILPA, Probation, County Departments, Children's Council, etc.

Population Level Data

Trends in select indicators closely linked to future outcomes (options for monitoring):

- Kindergarten Readiness
- ELA-Math
- Third Grade Reading
- Absenteeism
- Graduation rates
- Youth-related violent crime
- Maternal Education
- Maternal Mental Health Screening
- Substance use
- SNAP/CalFresh Access
- Child Dental Care
- Overcrowded housing
- Homelessness (McKinney Vento)