

CONTRA COSTA COUNTY NEEDS ASSESSMENT

In March, a local emergency was declared in Contra Costa County in response to Covid-19.¹ Such poignant examples of how interconnected our health and wellness is have not been felt since the Great Depression. To date, over 30 million jobless claims have been filed in the United States. Contra Costa County is feeling the impacts as more individuals and families are finding new ways to stay housed, keep food on the table, and receive necessary medical care.

Even before the recent Covid-19 pandemic, Contra Costa County faced extreme public health risks arising from shortages in county budgeting and spending. With over 150 eligibility worker vacancies, Contra Costa County's most vulnerable residents struggle to obtain life-saving and stabilizing services. A \$32 million budget gap at the County Hospital is likely to be an increasing cost and may result in the closure of invaluable health programs and staff redundancies. Coupled with a lack of funding for necessary medical practitioners at community-based health resources, it is clear that the emergency preparedness for the county and residents must be addressed.

As funding dries up and vital public and nonprofit services become less accessible, residents are experiencing increased wait times for health and safety-net services. County first responders are reporting an uptick in non-emergency call-outs as residents are lacking options on where and how to obtain the care they need.

As the adage goes, an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure. To shore up access to medical and behavioral health services, and bolster county safety-net programs, the Board of Supervisors has charged us with assessing the needs of our county residents in the context of a **potential 0.5% sales tax increase**.

Findings

- As many cities within, and the County overall, are struggling with budget deficits, the COVID-19 response has exposed the need for new revenue streams to support county residents during unprecedented emergencies.
- Under-investment in preventative and safety-net services is creating an increase in costs to taxpayers and county coffers.
- Without the financial resources to fund resident health, safety-net, affordable housing and early childcare services, inexorably taxpayers are spending more to address bigger problems arising from shortfalls in the accessibility and availability of early interventions.
- Targeted investments would save the county money by reducing emergency service expenditures.
- As part of County emergency medical preparedness, it is imperative that the County Hospital, medical clinics and community-based health resources remain accessible and available for residents.
- By creating a new revenue source, the county can reduce the dependence on money from the general fund in addressing county public health and safety-net needs.

¹ <https://www.mercurynews.com/2020/03/12/coronavirus-number-of-confirmed-cases-in-contra-costa-county-is-up-to-16/>

Voices from the Community

"Before being enrolled in CARES, managing my diabetes was more difficult. I often missed work when my blood sugar was too high. With CARES, I don't have to worry about the cost of the appointment or lab tests. And Brookside keeps me on track by calling me when it's time for my next appointment. Having access to medicine has helped stabilize my health."

- County Resident

"During a regular check-up, I saw a child who exhibited behavioral problems and other signs of urgent mental health challenges. I initially referred the family to a mental health service provider in the same clinic, but due to restrictions the clinic was unable to treat the child without a diagnosis. I then referred them to a non-profit service provider, but their waiting list was too long. Finally, I reached out to a mental health provider that I know personally in hopes that my young patient could be seen. However, a few months later at my patient's next check-up, the child was still awaiting diagnosis as the parent had not heard from any of the providers which I attempted to refer them to."

- Local Pediatrician

"Since the Family Justice Center began tracking interpersonal violence data in 2015, we have observed an uptick in domestic violence, violence against children and elders, sexual assault, and human trafficking in Contra Costa County. By removing barriers to services, victims have found it easier to seek the interventions they need to change their lived experience. As we enter week 7 of the regional shelter-in-place order, we are witnessing an alarming increase in police reports of domestic abuse, and anecdotal stories of child and elder abuse. But the fact that formal child abuse reports have declined by 50% and elder abuse by 30% since shelter-in-place began makes all of us worried. In times of county emergency and prosperity, reliable public funding is critical to protect the vulnerable in our community and break cycles of abuse."

- Susun Kim
Executive Director

Needs Assessment: Health and Emergency Services

County health services require a new funding source to keep facilities open and preserve the accessibility of medical care so that any patient – regardless of income or background – can receive the treatment they need to maintain their wellness. The County's ability to respond to emergencies and provide crisis funding for both emergency services and medical facilities has been accentuated during COVID-19.

Even before the current pandemic, residents faced the closure of the county's only public hospital and medical clinics which provide life-saving care within our community. Already Contra Costa Regional Medical Center has seen a hiring freeze that has impacted hiring and forced some clinics to cut hours.

In addition to the county hospital, community-based health care clinics, like La Clínica de la Raza, are integral to providing quality care to vulnerable populations in Contra Costa County. More than ever, it is critical to ensure that these clinics have the funds that they need to employ appropriate numbers of healthcare professionals to meet the cultural and geographic needs of county residents.

To ensure community health, fire districts across the county must operate efficiently and effectively. Since July 2017², a lack of funding in East Contra Costa has resulted in the operation of only 3 east county stations covering 259 square miles and over 120,000 residents. This lack of resources has placed additional pressure on neighboring fire districts, mainly the Contra Costa County Fire Protection District, which now responds for calls in East Contra Costa's Fire District 2 to 4 times more than East Contra Costa Fire responds to calls in Contra Costa County Fire Protection District's area.

Determinants of wellness extend beyond physical and mental health care and are further described in the safety-net section of this report.

The needs of public and community health facilities include:

- ✓ Backfill funding for the current hospital deficit
- ✓ Adequate medical provider staffing to deliver appropriate levels of care, maintain accessible treatment hours and reflect cultural and geographic diversity
- ✓ Reopening closed fire districts to ensure efficient emergency response

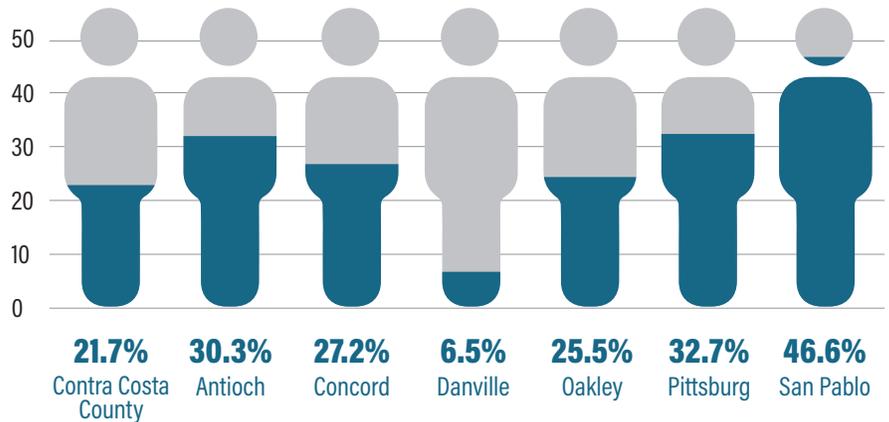
² [Analysis of the District's Legal Authority and Obligation to Provide Fire Protection Services, September 29, 2017.](#)

Needs Assessment: Safety Net Programs

Across Contra Costa County in 2017, **21.7%³ of county residents fell below 200 percent of the poverty level**, with the worst levels (46.6%) in San Pablo. In the current pandemic, an April 2020 report from the Economic Roundtable indicated that 40% of county workers face a high risk of unemployment, with 84% deemed “not essential,” 62% unable to work from home, and 40% who are not salaried employees⁴.

Since 2016, Contra Costa County has lacked a combined **178 county social workers and eligibility workers** who are instrumental in assisting county residents experiencing poverty and homelessness access state and federally funded programs to help meet their needs. To comprehensively manage community needs during this medical emergency, and in times of prosperity, our food banks must have sustainable inventories, legal advocacy and community outreach require adequate staffing and funding to help residents obtain full government benefits, prevent eviction, and link residents with healthcare benefits, interpersonal violence protection, emergency housing, and job training and re-entry programs as we're able to reopen our economies.

Residents Below 200% of Federal Poverty Level



Domestic Violence Screening Calls



As income disparity grows in Contra Costa County, safety-net programs reduce economic inequities. By adding public and nonprofit **critical wraparound** services for county residents- including child and elder abuse protection, behavioral health, alcohol or substance abuse treatment programs, legal advocacy for low-income and undocumented residents, and social service and workforce development for residents re-entering society, we begin to level the playing field and navigate pathways toward holistic wellness.

County Needs for Safety Net Programs Include

- ✓ 97% of the funding for safety-net eligibility workers is provided by state and federal dollars already paid by our county taxpayers. A small, but targeted investment by the county would fill these vacancies to help our most vulnerable residents access services to meet their needs.
- ✓ Bolster county funding for safety-net providers – e.g. alcohol and substance abuse treatment, interpersonal violence prevention, and legal advocacy– struggling to operate in Contra Costa County with rising day-to-day costs.
- ✓ Increasing the availability and accessibility of county's safety-net programs will prevent vulnerable individuals from needing to rely on county fire and emergency services for lower level of care needs.

³ <http://www.vitalsigns.mtc.ca.gov/poverty>

⁴ *In Harms Way*, Daniel Flaming and Patrick Burns, April 2020

Needs Assessment: Housing

California has a serious housing crisis and Contra Costa County is experiencing more than its share of the crisis. The California Housing Partnership found that Contra Costa needs 32,000 affordable rental homes to meet demand from very-low-income and extremely-low-income residents⁵. This low-income housing scarcity, and the resulting dramatic rise in rents, is a leading cause of homelessness, with 2,295 people experiencing homelessness – more than 70% of them unsheltered – in the 2019 point-in-time count – a 43% increase since 2017.⁶

Solving our housing crisis is beyond the scope of the revenue to be generated by the proposed sales tax, but these revenues could be used as County matching funds to leverage new State funding for affordable housing production and preservation, and to alleviate homelessness.

Some of the proven programs to meet our housing needs that could be implemented or supplemented with new revenue include:

- ✔ **Greater investment in homelessness prevention** – cost-effective, one-time or short-term assistance to keep people at risk of homelessness in their homes. This strategy is used effectively by Contra Costa’s homelessness Continuum of Care and should be supplemented.
- ✔ **Develop community land trusts** or similar housing trusts for pre-development investment in land acquisition.
- ✔ **Funding for rent subsidies**, such as existing Rapid Rehousing programs, to stem the tide of displacement and help meet the housing needs of low-income residents.

In a very real sense, housing is healthcare. Unsheltered homeless people make an average of five emergency-room visits each year and providing them with housing has been shown to significantly reduce emergency-room visits and their overall healthcare costs. Numerous studies have shown that housing can be provided at less cost than the additional use of emergency-room and related healthcare and additional law-enforcement interactions that come from living on the streets.

Needs Assessment: Early Childhood

Children and Infants are one of Contra Costa County’s most vulnerable populations. Research shows that **a child’s brain develops most dramatically during the first five years of life**, yet far too many children in Contra Costa County lack access to high-quality early learning and care services and childhood comprehensive health needed.

Studies show that every dollar invested in early education saves seventeen dollars in reduced costs for remedial education, incarceration and social support.⁷ Child care and the child care workforce are of paramount importance as a critical service for economic recovery.

Childcare

17,900 children ages 0-5 years who are eligible for subsidized child care cannot access it due to low supply. Child care shortages are caused in part by low wages of child care workers, approximately half of whom are eligible for public assistance despite working.

Mental Health

7,000-10,000 children have unserved mental health needs according to reports by Health Providers in the county.



⁵ Contra Costa County’s Housing Emergency Update, May 2019, Danielle M. Mazella and Lindsay Rosenfeld, California Housing Partnership

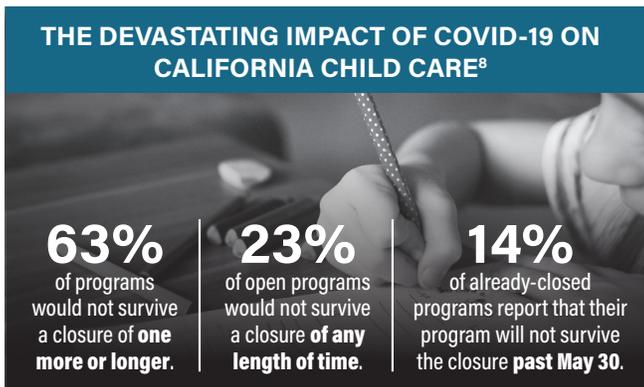
⁶ 2019 Point in Time factsheet, Contra Costa Health Services

⁷ <https://www.ncsl.org/research/human-services/new-research-early-education-as-economic-investme.aspx>

Early Learning

Only 44% of children in Contra Costa County met the definition of “fully ready” for kindergarten; 35% were partially ready; and 22% were not ready to start school. Antioch, Pittsburg and west Contra Costa have the highest concentrations of poverty and the lowest rates of children “fully ready.”

With the widespread closure of child care services, during the current Shelter-in-Place order, child care services are utilizing home visiting and parent education programs to improve child outcomes and prevent child abuse during these unprecedented times.



The needs for this community include:

- ✓ **Improve ECE workforce pay to improve early learning program quality**
- ✓ **Expand parenting support and early childhood development services**
- ✓ **Expand a coordinated early ID and intervention system to improve service delivery for children up to age 5**

Sales Tax Working Group

Co-chaired by Mariana Moore and Joshua Anijar, the Sales Tax Measure Ad Hoc Committee Working Group represents public health, nonprofit and labor stakeholders across Contra Costa which met during regular public meetings between Dec '19 - May '20.

- **ACCE**
- **Budget Justice Coalition**
- **California Nurses Association**
- **Contra Costa Labor Council, AFL-CIO**
- **Community Clinic Consortium**
- **East Bay Leadership Council**
- **Ensuring Opportunity**
- **Firedoll Foundation**
- **First 5 Contra Costa/ Family Economic Security Partnership**
- **Healthy & Active Before 5**
- **Hospital Council**
- **Human Services Alliance**
- **IFTPE Local 21, AFL-CIO**
- **Lift Up Contra Costa**
- **Lisa Driscoll, County Finance Director**
- **Multi-Faith Action Coalition**
- **Public Defenders Association**
- **SEIU 1021**
- **Supervisor John Gioia's Office**
- **Supervisor Karen Mitchoff's Office**
- **Teamsters IBT 856**
- **United Professional Firefighters of Contra Costa County**
- **United Way Bay Area**

These entities met and developed the needs in this report. As the specific language for a potential sales tax measure has not yet been introduced, they may not be in a position organizationally to endorse solutions at this time.

Needs Assessment: Proposed Solutions

Based on needs assessment discussions and county voter polling, levying a 1/2 cent sales tax in Contra Costa County can create a new revenue source that directly addresses accessibility to and availability of health resources including the County Hospital and community-based health resources, expands county emergency services, adds capacity for eligibility workers - with minimal financial investment from the county - to link our most vulnerable residents with the resources they need to stabilize and improve their lives, establishes leveraging opportunities to improve housing security, prevents interpersonal violence against residents of all ages, and ensures that the children of Contra Costa County have access to necessary health resources and enriching learning opportunities which are both accessible and affordable.

⁸California Child Care at the Brink - May 2020: https://cscce.berkeley.edu/files/2020/05/CSCCE_California-COVID-Data-Snapshot.pdf

Sales Tax Working Group Co-Chairs

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