



Supporting Child and Family Well-Being in San Diego

A Snapshot of the County of San Diego's Health and Human Services Agency Well-Being Agenda

Authors: Claire Vansell and Dana Thomson
Project Officers: Marissa Abbott and Alayna Schreier

KEY POINTS

- San Diego County's well-being agenda is grounded in the [Live Well San Diego vision](#), a statement that unites many of San Diego County's key programs and external partners around a well-being agenda that focuses on improving the well-being of children and families by building better health, assisting communities to live safely, and cultivating opportunities for residents to thrive.
- Community engagement is a core focus of the county's well-being agenda, with community members involved in decision-making and implementation of the well-being agenda.
- A dedicated *Live Well San Diego* support team works with all departments of San Diego County's Health and Human Services Agency (HHS) to measure progress on indicators, as reported through an annual report.
- San Diego County's HHS is an integrated agency that can work across departments to create strategic plans, share data, and make budgetary decisions together, positioning it well to lead the well-being agenda.

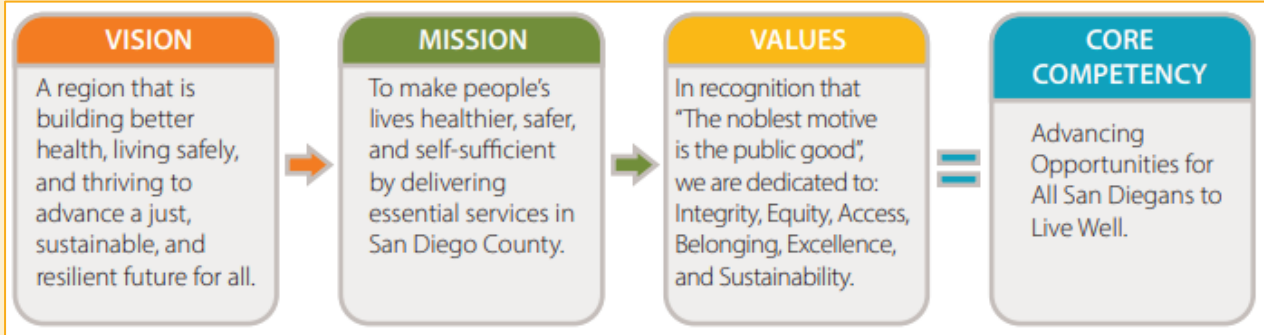
INTRODUCTION

The Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation (ASPE) in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) seeks to understand efforts to promote child and family well-being in jurisdictions across the country. To meet this goal, ASPE contracted with Mathematica and Child Trends, two independent research organizations, to conduct case studies about states and localities that developed and implemented child and family well-being agendas that guide their approach to human services. To collect data for the case studies, the research teams interviewed staff at each site about their well-being agenda. This snapshot describes the development and implementation of San Diego County's Health and Human Services Agency (HHS) well-being agenda, envisioned through the *Live Well San Diego* initiative, based on interviews with HHS staff (Box 1).¹

Box 1. About San Diego County HHS

[San Diego County Health and Human Services Agency's Vision, Mission, and Values](#) align to the core competency of advancing opportunity for all San Diegans to *Live Well San Diego*. The HHS includes the Departments of Aging & Independence Services, Behavioral Health Services, Child and Family Well-Being, Homeless Solutions and Equitable Communities, Housing and Community Development Services, Medical Care Services, Public Health Services, and Self-Sufficiency Services.

¹ Box 2 provides additional detail about the three focal sites and our approach to conducting the case studies.



Strategic initiatives provide the framework for the County to set measurable goals. These initiatives are designed to *span the entire organization, break down silos, and extend across groups for all departments to see their work contributing to the overall success of the region.*

In 2010, the County of San Diego Board of Supervisors adopted the [Live Well San Diego San Diego](#) vision that includes three components which have been incorporated into the [County of San Diego Strategic Plan](#): **building better health, living safely, and thriving.**

CONCEPTUALIZATION AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE WELL-BEING AGENDA

San Diego County's Health and Human Services Agency (HHSA) well-being agenda was developed in iterative phases. The framework for the well-being agenda, the *Live Well San Diego* initiative, first developed from a vision to unify a complex agency, with mandates ranging from social services programs to public health, under a single, cohesive goal. The original messaging to unite HHSA through the *Live Well San Diego* San Diego vision was to address chronic disease in the county by building better [health](#) and increasing access to health care. Compared to a national framework showing that a small number of lifestyle behaviors and diseases cause half of all deaths, San Diego County staff noticed that these behaviors and diseases caused nearly 70 percent of deaths in the County.² Over time, as public health agencies began to recognize how the conditions that people live, work, and grow up in affect their health and the well-being of the entire community, the agency expanded the *Live Well San Diego* vision beyond health. Using a collective impact model, the agency gathered staff from different departments, community members, and subject matter experts from local universities to explore how *Live Well San Diego's* vision could support the well-being of the entire community. A Council was created to oversee this work and develop a strategic agenda. Work groups included representatives from multiple departments that worked on specific areas of the agenda. A charter was created to establish what level of staff would participate on the Council and how decisions would be made collaboratively, with everyone ultimately signing off on the charter. The initial framework took around a year to develop, though as *Live Well San Diego* continued to evolve the collaborative environment helped those involved in this work find linkages between health and safety and other factors such as access to food, housing, working, and transportation. HHSA added pillars of [safety](#) and [thriving](#) to the *Live Well San Diego* vision.

More broadly, HHSA envisions well-being around the key components of health, safety, and thriving. As the different departments began to organize around this common vision, the department focused on child welfare and safety began to think more broadly about how HHSA could better support families' well-being through strengthening families' relationships between parents and children, their communities, and the agency by investing in "more upstream" supports for families. They started to look at how they could bring together the

² The [3-4-50](#) statistic is a public health framework that estimates three behaviors (poor diet, tobacco use, and physical inactivity) contribute to four chronic diseases (cancer, heart disease and stroke, type II diabetes, and lung disease) that result in over 50 percent of all deaths worldwide. When examining San Diego County health data, staff noticed that, in 2000, the statistic for San Diego residents was [3-4-68](#).

different child and family serving systems under one umbrella and created a new Child and Family Well-Being Department, which envisions child well-being as growing up safe, nurtured, and ready to learn.

INCLUSION OF CHILD, FAMILY, AND COMMUNITY VOICE

The development of *Live Well San Diego* and the ongoing implementation of the initiative have been community-driven processes. Parents, youth, and community members all helped to develop the framework and shape the values that guide the *Live Well San Diego* work. Parents, youth, and community members were not only substantively engaged in the development of the framework and implementation priorities—through initiatives such as advisory groups, youth ambassador roles, and parent partner contracts—but also in shaping the structures and processes for how the entire group worked together. One staff member recalled how large groups of 150 community members would meet to help craft the well-being vision based on the whole well-being of the community.

To engage the community, *Live Well San Diego* has over 570 formal community partnerships, which are intended to align efforts across sectors to further *Live Well San Diego*'s vision. Community partners range from local businesses and community-based organizations to school districts and chambers of commerce. Partnerships look different for each organization depending on its own goals and abilities, but it could include hosting an event related to *Live Well San Diego*'s goals, formally adopting *Live Well San Diego*'s mission in charters, or sharing data with HHSA for tracking indicators. HHSA additionally engages the community through five regional leadership teams made up of community leaders that develop region-specific community enrichment plans based on the priorities of their regions. The leadership teams are co-chaired by an HHSA county executive and a community leader through a shared governance model in which HHSA plays a backbone organization role. *Live Well San Diego* also helped develop and promote a resident leadership academy, which is a multi-week program for residents on how to affect change in their community based on what's important to them.

“Our goal is for families to thrive in a connected community that enhances and restores nurturing and responsive relationships and environments. It involves aligning impact on multiple levels so that all children are safe and cherished, all families are nurtured to build up protective factors, and systems and structures create equitable pathways to wellness.”

—HHSA staff member

IMPLEMENTATION OF THE WELL-BEING AGENDA

Implementation of the well-being agenda vision is supported through San Diego's HHSA as the backbone organization that integrates the vision of *Live Well San Diego* throughout the agency. Specifically, HHSA supports a dedicated *Live Well San Diego* support team to track progress on indicators, and the Department of Child and Family Well-Being manages traditional child welfare services in addition to programs that support child and family well-being. Implementation of the well-being agenda is supported through:

- **An integrated agency with all departments united around a common goal.** Being an integrated agency helps San Diego HHSA overcome many administrative obstacles, such as sharing funding resources and data across departments. Each department sets its own goals related to the *Live Well San Diego* mission, unifying efforts. All departments are involved in budget discussions and help identify solutions to avoid budgetary constraints disproportionately affecting a single department.

- **Leadership who passionately support the vision.** Leadership actively engaged staff from all departments to gather input, ensuring the vision addressed common goals despite distinctive departmental missions. Following the creation of *Live Well San Diego's* mission, a focused campaign involved in-person discussions over several months to help everyone understand and embrace the new direction.
- **Clear expectations that planning—and progress—take time.** Employees stressed the lengthy, iterative nature of creating the crafting the *Live Well San Diego* vision and garnering community buy-in. One HHSa employee noted that the department looked at measuring progress on coalition-building work necessary to lay the foundation of *Live Well San Diego* to be able to demonstrate early accomplishments to decision-makers such as funders.
- **A dedicated data team.** San Diego County's data office tracks multiple types of long-term outcomes and indicators that can be used in planning both the agency's strategic initiatives and community partners' needs. The *Live Well San Diego* support team tracks a wide range of factors that influence child and family well-being on a scale of "crisis" to "thriving." The County can make data-informed decisions by looking at data across departments that would otherwise be difficult to track without data collaboration.
- **Clear and compelling data-informed messaging.** Respondents noted that successful messaging "stops the room," "sticks with people," and functions as a "call to action." For example, the 3-4-68 statistic³ was instrumental in galvanizing support for collective impact. County staff used data-driven messaging to engage both with traditional and nontraditional community partners, such as chambers of commerce, faith communities, schools, the media, and elected officials.

TRACKING PROGRESS TOWARD GOALS

As mentioned, HHSa has a dedicated *Live Well San Diego* support team that tracks progress in outcomes over time that support the three goals of Building Better Health, Living Safety, and Thriving. HHSa creates a dataset by linking customer records from over 25 program data extracts from 14 state and federal case management systems. HHSa creates dashboards and decision-making tools using an equity lens to support program leaders. Using these tools, HHSa can target services: an uptick in service use in an area informs where outreach and services are planned and provided. By integrating data across departments, the data team determined that HHSa serves one million—or about one in three—San Diego County residents, with children and youth representing about half. Broader population health metrics are used to create a public [Annual Impact Report for the Live Well San Diego vision](#). Since initially finding that three behaviors caused four diseases that accounted for nearly 68% of all deaths in San Diego County in 2000, the county has [seen a 45% reduction](#) in the number of deaths caused by smoking, diet, and physical inactivity.

SUSTAINABILITY OF THE AGENDA AND FUTURE PLANS

HHSa uses different funding sources to support children and families, including Title IV-B child welfare funds,⁴ state funds, and a mix of federal funds such as the Families First Prevention Services Act funds. Because HHSa is an integrated agency, funding is shared across different departments. As such, budget discussions are department-wide and during fiscally leaner years, strategies to cut funding are joint decisions across all departments to ensure that one department is not disproportionately affected. One employee shared that a strength of the agency's coalition-building is that HHSa often encourages other organizations to take the lead on outside funding opportunities since they are nimbler in executing contracts than HHSa. With *Live Well San*

³ See footnote 2 for more information on the 3-4-68 statistic.

⁴ Title IV-B of the Social Security Act is a federal program that provides funding to state child welfare agencies and federally recognized tribes to prevent child maltreatment and support families. The program is operated by the Children's Bureau within the Administration for Children and Families (ACF).

Diego, the first planning year was originally supported through the federal Communities Putting Prevention to Work program grant. Now, HHSA serves as the backbone organization that supports partners furthering the mission and is funded through general revenue funds and other funds that support HHSA.

KEY TAKEAWAYS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Respondents noted that one key success of *Live Well San Diego* is that San Diego’s HHSA thinks about well-being differently, and more proactively. Creating a strategic plan and tracking indicators along the spectrum of thriving has allowed HHSA to track how the County is building up the social determinants of health. Further, in the last ten years, the agency has gone from a more traditional child welfare model to creating the Department of Child and Family Well-Being and invested more in families upstream to build more prevention work. As a result, the County was able

“[One success is] that shift from being reactive to being more preventative from a child well-being perspective.”

—HHSA staff member

to safely reduce the number of children in out-of-home care.

“[The benefits for children are] all these different intangibles, right? These are [going to] stick with the children as they grow older and they can continue those healthy behaviors.”

—HHSA staff member

Staff members also spoke of how community members are not just engaged through this work but also help contribute to the growth and evolution of child and family well-being in San Diego. For example, new programs have been created such as the [Live Well on Wheels](#) bus, which is a mobile bus that goes to communities to provide resources, such as EBT cards, on the spot – meeting residents where they are. In 2023, the Live WOW bus [partnered with](#) almost 100 organizations to provide services at 336 events, including providing 11,953 vaccinations and 289 EBT cards. Another organization called Outdoor Outreach provides children with opportunities to engage in outdoor activities, such as hiking

or kayaking in the bay, who might not be able to access the region’s natural resources otherwise. Staff shared that their excitement for the future of *Live Well San Diego* is that the vision will be carried on through the community for years to come.

Box 2. Case study sites and approach

In spring and summer 2024, Mathematica conducted three case studies of exemplary states and localities that have implemented a child and family well-being agenda. These sites included [Maryland DHS](#), [Dakota](#) and [Olmsted](#) counties in Minnesota, and [San Diego County](#). Their agendas included the [Integrated Practice Model for Child Welfare and Adult Services](#), [Minnesota's Pathway to Prosperity and Wellbeing program](#), and [Live Well San Diego San Diego](#), respectively.

Mathematica developed and applied screening criteria to identify a broad set of sites that were developing a well-being agenda or integrating a well-being framework into their human services approach. ASPE and Mathematica consulted to finalize the three sites that participated in the case studies.

To collect data for the case studies, Mathematica conducted up to four, 60-minute virtual interviews with staff from each site. Staff included (1) directors in a leadership or oversight position; (2) managers or supervisors responsible for supporting the well-being agenda, including its funding; and (3) data managers or analysts who oversee or support data collection, analysis, and reporting. The semi-structured interviews

probed how sites defined, developed, implemented, monitored, and funded their well-being agendas as well as their reflections on and lessons learned about these topics.

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES

Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation

200 Independence Avenue SW, Mailstop 405F
Washington, D.C. 20201

For more ASPE briefs and other publications, visit:
aspe.hhs.gov/reports



ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Claire Vansell is a Research Analyst at Child Trends.

Dana Thomson is a Senior Research Scientist II at Child Trends.

SUGGESTED CITATION

Vansell, C. and Thomson, D. Supporting Child and Family Well-Being in San Diego: A Snapshot of San Diego County Department of Human Services' Well-Being Agenda (Issue Brief). Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. September 2024.

COPYRIGHT INFORMATION

All material appearing in this report is in the public domain and may be reproduced or copied without permission; citation as to source, however, is appreciated.

DISCLAIMER REGARDING WEB LINKS

Links and references to information from non-governmental organizations are provided for informational purposes and are not HHS endorsements, recommendations, or preferences for the non-governmental organizations.

DISCLOSURE

This communication was printed, published, or produced and disseminated at U.S. taxpayer expense.

Subscribe to ASPE mailing list to receive email updates on new publications:

[Sign up for email updates \(hhs.gov\)](https://aspe.hhs.gov/reports)

For general questions or general information about ASPE:

aspe.hhs.gov/about