



# 2024-2025 Community Needs Assessment and Community Action Plan

## Executive Summary

June 11, 2023



California Department of  
Community Services and Development

Community Services Block Grant



The **mission** of Foothill Unity Center is to help neighbors in crisis attain self-sufficiency by partnering with the community and using our resources wisely to provide vital support services with love and dignity.

Foothill Unity Center envisions a community where all have their needs met including the need to give; all get the necessary support to become self-sufficient; all are treated with love and dignity, all the time.

As a federally designated Community Action Agency and the region's primary provider of integrated resources, we are commissioned to combat the conditions and causes of poverty that plague our low-income communities. Our service area, with an urban population of 498,000, spans the Foothills of the San Gabriel Valley, including the cities of Altadena, Arcadia, Azusa, Baldwin Park, Bradbury, Duarte, Irwindale, Monrovia, Pasadena, Sierra Madre, South Pasadena, and Temple City. Since the pandemic, we have also regularly served additional neighboring cities with high needs including Alhambra, El Monte, Monterey Park, Rosemead, San Gabriel, and Covina.

### **Poverty in our Community**

Though our neighborhoods may appear affluent, 23% of families lack enough resources to meet basic needs. These households, with income less than 2X the poverty level, live with food insecurity, meaning there was either sometimes or often not enough food to eat in the last 7 days.

- 11% of the population, 53,000 people including 14,700 children, live below the Federal Poverty Level (FPL). In 2023, the FPL for a family of 4 is an annual income of \$30,000.
- Nearly 8,000 seniors live below FPL. The FPL for a household of 1 is \$14,580/year.

Poverty increased throughout the pandemic due to closed businesses, lost jobs, childcare challenges, family illness and poor access to healthcare. At the same time, government safety net programs helped to decrease the level of poverty, including the federal Child Tax Credit, the federal Earned Income Tax Credit, expanded Medicaid, expanded CalFresh food assistance, and eviction moratoriums. Now in 2023, the COVID emergency has ended, and many businesses have reopened. While wages have increased in the last year or two, inflation has increased more. USDA reports that food prices increased 11.4% in 2022 and are expected to increase another 8.6% in 2023. As of April 1, 2023, the COVID eviction protections have expired. Tenants have until March 31, 2024 to pay back all of their rental debt (e.g. rent not paid throughout the moratoriums). We expect that as federal and state safety net programs expire, low-income families and individuals will face an increasing risk of poverty, food insecurity, poor health, and homelessness.

### **Conditions and Causes of Poverty:**

- **Unemployment and underemployment with low and stagnant wages, often coupled with low levels of educational attainment.** In the cities with the highest poverty rates, 31% of adults do not have any degree, 27% have only a high school diploma. This population often works for minimum wage in service jobs in the hospitality and retail industries. Even with full time employment, many find that their income is insufficient to maintain economic stability, because of the high cost of living in the San Gabriel Valley.

- Our region has a **severe scarcity of affordable housing, resulting in a cost of housing that is more than 3X the cost in the rest of the country.** Nearly 69,000 households face housing costs that are more than 30% of their income; more than 32,000 households are severely cost burdened with housing costs exceeding 50% of their income. The 2022 homeless count found 5,173 homeless individuals across the San Gabriel Valley. 63% are unsheltered.
- **Poor access to healthcare, especially for mental and behavioral health.** The increase in Mental and Behavioral Health illness since the pandemic is well-documented, brought about by social isolation, loss of loved ones, and widespread economic struggles that contribute to stress and anxiety. Healthcare for dental, vision, and chronic conditions is often lacking among those struggling to maintain a roof over their heads. Insurance alone doesn't guarantee access to care. Barriers include language difficulties, lack of transportation, lack of childcare, differential treatment based on race, in addition to costs not covered by insurance.
- The **shortage of affordable childcare** has risen to become a significant cause of poverty these past few years, having a disproportionate impact on single parent households and low-income households. The National Database of Childcare Prices reports the 2022 estimated cost of childcare in LA County to be \$19,355 annually for an infant, which is 24% of LA County median family income. A family with more than one child pays even more, making childcare cost rival the cost of housing in our community. The high cost of childcare can prevent a parent from working altogether.

Poverty translates directly to food insecurity and poor nutrition, housing insecurity and homelessness, and barriers to access to quality healthcare. As recently published in the Journal of American Medicine, poverty is the fourth leading cause of death in our nation.

## **Community Needs Assessment**

Foothill Unity Center's bi-annual Community Needs Assessment includes qualitative and quantitative data from the public and private sectors, educational institutions, and community partners including faith-based organizations, healthcare providers, and civic organizations. Interviews, focus groups and surveys were conducted with the low-income population that use resources offered through the Center. This year's community needs assessment reflects the voices and responses of more than 300 individuals, program participants, community partners, donors, volunteers, trainees, staff and community members regarding the current needs within the San Gabriel Valley. These voices and responses to this year's Community Needs Assessment are what drives Foothill Unity Center's program priorities, organizational strategies, and its 2024-2025 Community Action Plan.

The top prioritized needs identified through the community needs assessment are:

- Food and Nutrition Resources
- Employment/Job Development and Education Resources
- Financial Support Resources
- Healthcare Resources
- Housing and Homeless Resources

## **Foothill Unity Center's 2024-2025 Community Action Plan**

As the Community Action Agency of the Foothills, Foothill Unity Center will tackle the conditions and causes of poverty through its existing core programs structured to serve Family, Agency, and Community. This plan will address the top needs identified in this year's community needs assessment.

Our **Food Program** is a resource to end hunger for the housed and the unhoused, as well as a collaboration with community partners and vendors to mitigate food waste. Daily food distributions include bagged lunches and hygiene kits for the homeless, homebound grocery deliveries for seniors and disabled persons who are isolated, sick and shut-in, and emergency family food to those that can cook and store food. This consistent supply of food provides a sense of security that basic needs can be met, in addition to being the introduction to the full slate of safety net resources available at the Center. Activities to enhance the nutritional impact of food services include healthy recipes, nutrition education workshops, and healthy food demonstrations. As available, hygiene products are distributed with food. As guided by the Los Angeles Regional Food Bank, we collectively establish policy and assurances that nutrient-rich foods are always accessible by low-income communities. By collaborating with Food Forward, we serve as a weekly produce hub for food pantry partners to access a rainbow of fruit and vegetables. Contributing to the edible food recovery goal set in California's recent legislation, SB 1383, we are a food recovery organization, partnering with food generators to mitigate food waste and remedy food insecurity in CA. This network of dedicated community partners is committed to ending hunger and preventing chronic diseases prevalent in the low-income communities that they serve.

Our **Job Development** Program is a pathway for individuals to enter or re-enter the workforce by gaining employment and access to wages that support economic security. Our Workforce Development Manager assists the low-income population with job search and placement, helping with resumes and interviews, on-site job counseling, workshops for basic skills development and financial literacy, and access to job certification training and work experience opportunities. We provide job leads, vouchers for those who need appropriate clothing for job interviews, and bus tokens and taxi vouchers to remove transportation barriers. We host sessions where clients can meet and interview with staffing agencies at our sites for potential job opportunities. We provide connections to enroll in higher education or trade schools, and linkages to sources for financial aid.

Our Center is a training site for the US Dept. of Labor's Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) programs -- providing work experience, training and marketable skills in administrative work, food distribution and warehousing. Staff and trainees are required to train for and receive their food

handling and safety certificate; and they can participate in forklift education and certification on-site. We provide on-site work experience and field training for nursing students and social work and public health interns.

Our **Health Program** is designed to diminish health disparities with access to healthcare, education on ways to manage chronic health diseases, and assistance with navigating the healthcare system. Internal and external efforts include coordination of dental and vision screenings, exams, and procedures through mobile clinics, vaccines, glucose/diabetes screenings, blood pressure screenings, health education workshops and exercise groups. We have expanded the health services department to include linkages to mental and behavioral health providers as a step to address the well-being of individuals.

Our **Housing and Homeless Program** assists those experiencing urgent emergency and chronic housing needs, providing permanent and temporary placements that include motel vouchers, temporary housing, rental assistance, navigation, retention, rapid rehousing, housing readiness assistance, and eviction prevention. The Center partners with Family Promise, faith-based organizations and others, to provide unconventional approaches to address the housing crisis, such as safe parking and access to mobile showers along with haircuts. Case management's help to access needed financial support and public assistance, along with the Center's integrated services, often provides the support needed to maintain housing and not slip into homelessness.

Our **Case Management Program** is the driving strategy and standard of care practice that supports our Food, Housing, Health, and Job programs through assessment, case planning, care coordination, advocacy, resource linkages, and follow up. Individualized client plans allow our case workers to track progress and make adjustments specific to personal situations. Case management provides access to a complete continuum of services, a safety net that improves the odds of success for an individual to move from poverty to economic security. Our case workers navigate the healthcare and housing systems, education opportunities, and the network of community partners.

Our **Volunteer Program** provides the necessary additional capacity to deliver integrated services across our core programs. Community engagement in our food distribution, holiday distribution events, and organizational needs provides volunteers the opportunity to accept civic responsibility and to affect change. Volunteers learn about the issues that low-income people face; and as a result, such volunteers become better advocates and change makers for the betterment of our communities. In a typical year we have approximately 6,000 volunteers.