



**Merced County
Community Action Agency**

Strategic Plan 2019-2023



Merced County Community Action Agency

Table of Contents

Page(s)

Executive Director's Message	3
Introduction	4
Vision & Mission Statements	4
Agency Profile	5
Key Strategic Goals	5
Community Profile	6-7
Homeless COC Point-In-Time	8
Poverty in the County	9
Organizational Strategic Challenges	10
Agency Model-Results Oriented-Management & Accountability	11
Strategic Planning: Process	12
Programs, Resources & Services	13-14
2019-2023 Strategic Plan: Goals & Objectives	15-16
Board of Directors	17
Agency Contact Information	17

Executive Director's Message



The Merced County Community Action Agency (MCCAA) has just entered its 54th year as the county's leader in anti-poverty efforts, providing a variety of resources, programs, services and advocacy efforts to alleviate the conditions and causes of poverty throughout Merced County and beyond.

We are excited to continue this important work. We realize that although we have seen a lot of progress and helped thousands of people, there is still much work to do. This strategic plan is a commitment to take a fresh look at our horizons so that we can refine priorities and energize our path to embrace new concepts and seek out innovative solutions. As concepts and realities change, our vision is to be the most trusted anti-poverty agency in the communities we serve and to eliminate poverty. Our mission is to engage people to help them gain self-sufficiency with the support of the important services we provide.

To rise above the challenges we see every day, it is important that we leverage our unique strengths. We must continue to lean upon the passion and dedication of our talented staff and the excellent customer service they provide every day to the people that enter through our doors. Additionally, we must lean on our network of Community Action Agencies, serving every county throughout this nation.

Together we are stronger and more effective.

Throughout this strategic planning process, we have taken the time to engage all of our stakeholders. To listen to what they are concerned about, what we can address, and how we can do a better job with a focus on constant improvement. This plan outlines specific areas we plan to address in the next 5 years. We will do this by better utilizing our vast pool of talent, working closely with community leaders, and expanding our resources.

As always, thank you for allowing me to serve this community and for your commitment to a shared mission.

Brenda Callahan-Johnson, M.B.A., CCAP

Executive Director

Introduction

The Merced County Community Action Board (MCCAB) completes a Strategic Plan based on assessment of the community needs and the internal capacity to deliver services in response to local community needs through an effective alignment of the agency's mission. The agency is the recipient of the Community Services Block Grant (CSBG) funds that are funded by the Federal Office of Community Services and administered by the State of California Community Services and Development Department. The strategic plan addresses how the agency will address the reduction of poverty for vulnerable and low-income residents in Merced County.

The agency is focused on delivering impactful services to help individuals and families reach self-sufficiency and financial independence. As a result, the agency is assessing the internal operations, capacity and sustainability efforts to ensure addressing the local community needs are a priority in the plan. The financial future for Community Action Agencies nationwide is uncertain. The coming years will bring continued instability with a high probability of funding cuts to programs and the agency is preparing to withstand the impact through a 5-year plan addressing key strategic goals.

The Strategic Plan is an evolving process that continues throughout the year, every year; assessment and planning does not stop with the publication of this plan. As conditions change, objectives will be adjusted in order to achieve long-term goals.

Vision

To eliminate poverty in Merced County through individual and organizational dedication, collaboration, and innovation.

Mission

To serve, advocate, and collaborate for those in need by developing innovative strategies for self-empowerment.

Agency Profile

Merced County Community Action Agency, annually serves over 50,000 unduplicated clients throughout Merced County. The Agency continues to expand in order to support areas of need in the county and beyond, eliminating the plight of poverty for thousands of county residents.

Merced County Community Action Agency – now known as Merced County Community Action Board (MCCAB) – was federally designated in 1965 as the agency to carry out anti-poverty work in Merced County, California. MCCAB provides a broad range of community service programs designed to have a measurable impact on poverty. Many of these programs are funded through the Community Services Block Grant (CSBG) program.

Key Strategic Goals

The Merced County Community Action Board's three primary goals for 2019-2023

The agency developed a plan that addresses the agency's ability to address community needs through organizational capacity and ensure the development of effective governance strategies to support the Merced County residents.

- 1) Evaluate and Determine the Future of Programs
- 2) Expand and Develop Innovative Programs to Further Meet the Community Needs and End Poverty
- 3) Board Development and Succession Planning



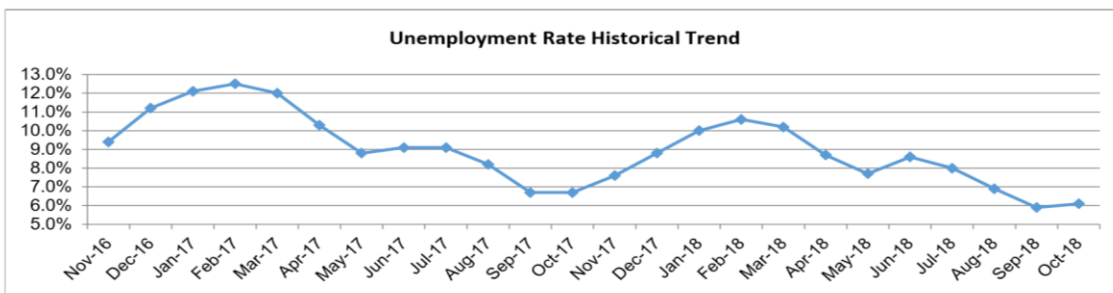
Community Profile



The Merced County Community Action Agency is located in Merced, CA in the heart of California's agricultural Central Valley. Merced county is located southeast of San Francisco and neighbors the Sierra Nevada mountains, national parks, and major cities. This county expands over 1,979 square miles and is named after the Merced River, which flows nearby. The county seat is Merced City. The population of Merced county based on the US Census 2017 was 272,673, which is a 6.6% population increase from 255,798 based on the US Census 2010. The county consists of a population density of 137.78 persons per square mile.

Demographics: Merced County is comprised of primarily 59.6% Hispanic or Latino population, 27.7% White, 8% Asian, 3.9% African-American, 2.5% American-Indian and 3.1% reporting two or more races (*U.S. Census Bureau V2017*).

Income and Employment: The unemployment rate in Merced County was 6.1% in October 2018, up from a revised 5.9% in September 2018, and below the year-ago estimate of 6.7%. This compares with an unadjusted unemployment rate of 4.0% for California and 3.5% for the nation during the same period (*State of California Employment Development Department, October 2018*).



The median household size in Merced County is 3.30 per household, with a median income of \$46,338, in comparison to California's median income of \$67,169. The county's poverty level is 25.2% of the population, in comparison it is higher than the state poverty level at 16.8% and the national poverty level average of 15.8%. (*US Census Bureau, 2017*).

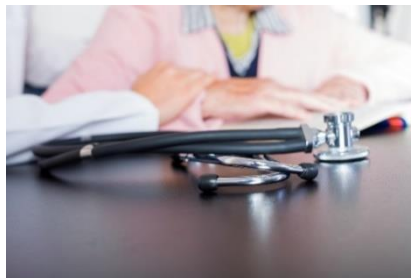


Food: 79.5% of school-age children were eligible for free or reduced price school meals and lived in 'food insecure households' (*Kidsdata.org, 2018*).

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) defines food insecurity as not having consistent, dependable access to enough food for active, healthy living. Approximately one in five U.S. children live in food-insecure households (2). Food-insecure children are more likely to experience a host of health issues, including developmental, cognitive, behavioral, and mental health problems. Among pregnant women, food insecurity is associated with physical and mental health problems, as well as birth complications. Children and communities of color are disproportionately affected by food insecurity.

Food assistance programs, such as food stamps (i.e., SNAP, or CalFresh in California), the Supplemental Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC), and the National School Lunch and Breakfast Programs, provide a safety net to help ensure that low-income children, expectant mothers, and families get adequate nutrition. These programs have been shown to reduce poverty, improve birth outcomes, and improve children's health in general. Student participation in the National School Breakfast Program also is associated with improved school performance and cognitive functioning.

Source: Robert Wood John Foundation



Health: Out of 57 California counties, Merced county ranked 45th in length and quality of life and 54th in health factors such as, behaviors, care, social/economic and physical environment (*Countyhealthrankings.org, 2018*).

Housing: The median house cost is \$196,200K in Merced County (California Association of Realtors, 2017) while the median gross rent is \$934. The owner-occupancy is 52% (US Census Bureau, 2017).

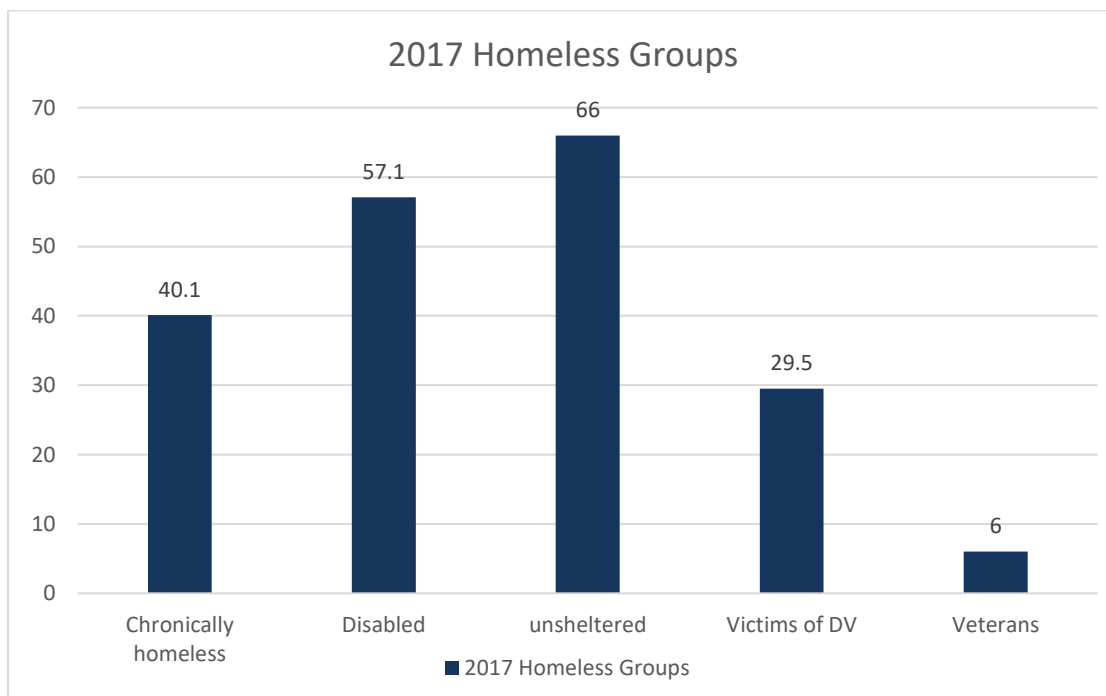


Homeless Continuum of Care Point-in-Time

The county participated in the annual homeless count, in which a total of 454 homeless adults and children were counted, of whom 450 were adults and four (4) were children. The report is completed by the Merced County Continuum-of-Care, as required by the Housing & Urban Development (HUD). The 2017 Point-in-Time count was a collaborative effort completed by Merced county local organizations, institutions, agency partners, community-based organizations, residents, volunteers and the Merced County Community Action Agency.

Of those identified homeless individuals: (Adults Only)

- 40.1% were Chronically Homeless Persons
- 57.1% persons had one or more disabilities
- 66% were unsheltered
- 29.5% were victims of domestic violence
- 6% were Veterans



Poverty in the County



In 2017, one in every four Merced County residents lived under the federal poverty line. Its poverty rate of 25.2% is more than double that of California's 16.8 % and 15.8% at the national level. Merced County currently has 27% of children under the age of 18 living in poverty. A total of 22% of the Merced County households are recipients of Cal-Fresh (Kidsdata.org, 2015). Merced County is often referred to as the center of poverty and poverty related issues, in California.



In the News

According to the Merced Sun-Star, Merced captured another top-10 spot nobody wants — “50 Worst American Cities to Live In,” a report from 24/7 Wall Street. The city ranked ninth, and took the biggest hit from the analysts because of high levels of unemployment and poverty. Delaware-based 24/7 Wall Street is a financial news and opinion company. “More tangible difficulties making the city a less than desirable place to live include an annual unemployment rate of 10.7 percent, worse than nearly any other city in the United States,” analysts wrote.

Merced's poverty rate of 35.1 percent is more than double the national rate of 14.7 percent, and is the 10th worst among the 551 cities rated in the report, analysts wrote.

Read more here: <https://www.mercedsunstar.com/news/local/community/article158736294.html#storylink=cpy>

Article Published: June 28, 2017

Factors that contribute to the high rate of poverty in the county are low educational attainment, lack of living wage jobs, language barriers, inadequate community resources, and a very young workforce. Merced County Community Action Agency is working on community and agency solutions in order to continue to combat these obstacles and strive towards reductions in poverty county-wide.

EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT						
Population 25 years and over	154,225	+/-300	26,864	+/-1,287	17.4%	+/-0.8
Less than high school graduate	48,039	+/-1,376	12,043	+/-967	25.1%	+/-1.7
High school graduate (includes equivalency)	38,356	+/-1,382	6,671	+/-636	17.4%	+/-1.5
Some college, associate's degree	46,346	+/-1,456	6,951	+/-485	15.0%	+/-1.0
Bachelor's degree or higher	21,484	+/-942	1,199	+/-282	5.6%	+/-1.3
EMPLOYMENT STATUS						
Civilian labor force 16 years and over	114,971	+/-1,352	15,601	+/-993	13.6%	+/-0.9
Employed	98,728	+/-1,630	10,237	+/-711	10.4%	+/-0.7
Male	56,322	+/-1,163	5,165	+/-506	9.2%	+/-0.9
Female	42,406	+/-1,017	5,072	+/-457	12.0%	+/-1.0
Unemployed	16,243	+/-1,147	5,364	+/-587	33.0%	+/-3.1
Male	8,904	+/-820	2,734	+/-409	30.7%	+/-4.0
Female	7,339	+/-708	2,630	+/-367	35.8%	+/-4.2

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2013-2017 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates

Organizational Strategic Challenges

Poverty levels are increasing in the State of California due to high-rising prices in housing, lack of employment, low-levels of educational attainment to meet the demands of the workforce, access to nutritious food, access to affordable child care, and job development opportunities. Merced County Community Action Agency is responding to the needs of residents within the county through impacted programs and the need to develop new initiatives, higher performing programs and lead impactful community-based services as a response to the local gaps and needs faced by vulnerable and low-income populations in the county. Funding is critical in a time of an uncertain federal landscape and the agency is facing a need to establish internal capacity to evaluate performance, measure results and sustain services to decrease the poverty rates in Merced County.

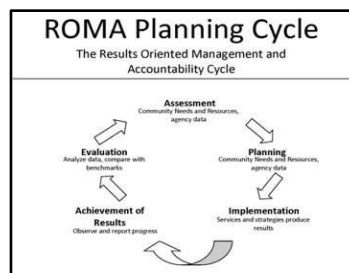
The Board and Agency leadership team identified three key strategic goals for the next five-year period to continue providing essential and effective services for the community.

Strategic Approach: Planning Process Summary



The Merced County Community Action Agency partnered with the California Community Action Partnership Association (CalCAPA) to begin its strategic planning in 2017 for the agency's five-year plan. In order to gain a better understanding of the current state of poverty in the county, the agency identified many key trends through the planning meeting, as well as assessing current demographics, housing, employment, and analyzing data reports.

The strategic planning effort was led through facilitation with a CalCAPA consultant, agency staff, and board members to gain a better understanding of the current state of poverty in Merced County. The Merced County Community Action Agency board and staff are pleased to develop a responsive plan to meet the needs of residents in Merced County.



Results Oriented-Management and Accountability (R.O.M.A.)

Merced County Community Action Agency receives CSBG (Community Services Block Grant) funds from the Federal Office of Community Services, and it is administered by the State Office of Community Services Department (CSD) in California. Since 1994, the Community Action network has used an evaluation tool called R.O.M.A. (Results Oriented Management and Accountability) in order, to ensure funds align with network goals and

local efforts. The ROMA tool focuses on six broad, national anti-poverty goals which also encourage local community action agencies to become more results-oriented and provide accountability.

The Six National R.O.M.A. Goals

<i>Goal 1.</i>	<i>Low-income people become more self-sufficient. (Family)</i>
<i>Goal 2.</i>	The conditions in which low-income people live are improved. (Community)
<i>Goal 3.</i>	Low-income people own a stake in their community. (Community)
<i>Goal 4.</i>	Partnerships among supporters and providers of services to low-income people are achieved. (Agency)
<i>Goal 5.</i>	Agencies increase their capacity to achieve results. (Agency)
<i>Goal 6.</i>	Low-income people, especially vulnerable populations, achieve their potential by strengthening family and other supportive systems. (Family)

Using the ROMA goals to identify crucial components of the plan, Merced County Community Action Agency reviewed their internal capacity, outcomes, and other factors in order to compile the finalized strategic plan for 2019–2023. The agency is committed to build a stronger organization through the utilization of Results-Oriented Management & Accountability practices, as follows:

- The agency consists of an internal R.O.M.A. staff/trainer that will oversee the development and implementation of R.O.M.A. model practices to ensure a strategic approach to evaluate and assess agency outcomes.
- Internal reviews following the R.O.M.A. model will continue to be adopted, followed and reported
- Internal staff trainings will continue to be provided to build internal knowledge, capacity and utilization of outcome-based program management.
- The agency will continue to lead and advocate for the community, clients and support partners to collectively resolve the poverty challenges faced in the community.
- The agency’s Executive Director holds a Certified Community Action Professional certification that will support the agency in evidence-based, best practices and innovative community action efforts to sustain operations and increase outcomes for the agency.

Programs, Resources and Services

Merced County Community Action programs include:



Child Development Programs

WIC (Women, Infants & Children) Supplemental & Nutrition Food Program

WIC helps pregnant women, new mothers, and young children eat well, stay healthy and be active. The program is funded by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA). MCCA has WIC sites located throughout Merced and Mariposa counties serving over 17,000 participants per month, with supplemental foods, health care referrals, breastfeeding support, and nutrition education.

Preschool Programs

The Merced County Community Action Agency has five State-funded preschool sites within Merced County. The program is funded by the California Department of Education (CDE). Offering full and part-day, year-round subsidized preschool programs for qualifying children from 3-5 years of age who are not yet eligible for kindergarten. Serving approximately 260 children annually.



Home Repair & Energy Savings Services

Weatherization

These services are intended to reduce energy consumption in homes through the replacement of inefficient appliances (when appropriate) and minor repairs, making the home more energy efficient, lowering monthly utility bills and providing long-term savings. Repair and replacement of exterior doors and windows, water heaters, stoves, furnaces and coolers, refrigerators and microwaves. Installation of water restrictor-aerators, energy-sipping CFL's, door weatherstripping, attic and subfloor insulation, carbon monoxide detectors, sealing and patching of small cracks and holes and other minor repairs which help to conserve energy. Serving approximately 675 homes annually. The agency also installs no-cost solar systems on qualifying homes in order to provide long-term solutions to energy burdens.

Utility Assistance

Through LIHEAP, MCCA is able to assist eligible households with payments or purchases of electricity, propane, natural gas, heating oil, or firewood. In addition to the credit on their utility bill, clients will also receive valuable information about energy conservation and practical tips on how to save energy and keep your utility bill at a manageable level. Serving over 4,600 families annually. The two types of assistance available are:

1. **Home Energy Assistance Program (HEAP)** – provides a direct payment to an eligible client's utility bill to help offset the cost of heating or cooling their home.
2. **Energy Crisis Intervention Program (ECIP)** – provides assistance to low-income households that are in a crisis situation. Eligibility for ECIP is the same as it is for HEAP except a Shut Off Notice from the Utility Company must have been received by the client prior to application.



Homeless Services

Shelter

The "D" Street Homeless Shelter is operated 365 days per year and is the only shelter in the county of Merced. The shelter provides up to fifty beds per night, serving both men and women. A variety of individuals walk through the shelter's door every day from all different backgrounds; including victims of domestic violence, undocumented aliens, the mentally ill, and others with wide ranging physical illnesses. Services include a hot meal, clothing, personal hygiene products, a warm shower, clean bed, counseling, and security to ensure a restful place to sleep.

Supportive Housing

An 8-unit apartment complex providing affordable housing for homeless individuals facing mental health issues.

HOPWA Program (Housing Opportunities for People with A.I.D.S.)

This program is for short-term rent, mortgage, and utility assistance. Providing emergency homeless prevention funding intended to assist persons with HIV/AIDS who cannot meet their monthly housing expenses.



2019– 2023 Strategic Plan

GOAL 1: Evaluate and Determine the Future of Program

ROMA Goal #5: Agencies increase their capacity to achieve results (Agency)

- Determine if each program is currently in alignment with Agency Mission/Vision
- Evaluate programs with funding decreases and seek out new funding streams
- Assure the sustainability of programs. If not sustainable consider alternatives to delivering the programs. ROI
- Develop goals for each program to meet the community and funding needs. Set timeframe to reach these goals.
- Present annual programmatic reports to the Board on the State of each program including a S.W.O.T. analysis.



GOAL 2: Expand and Develop Innovative Programs to Further Meet the Community Needs and End Poverty

ROMA Goal #4: Partnerships among supporters and providers of services to low-income people are achieved (Agency)

- Secure funding to apply innovative approaches to end poverty.
- Free up discretionary dollars to pursue innovative solutions

- Utilize current successes to attract new dollars
- Mobilize community members to suggest innovative solutions to poverty
- Update and improve the usability of the agency website for customers and the community.



GOAL 3: Board Development and Succession Planning

ROMA Goal #5: Agencies increase their capacity to achieve results

- Ensure the long-term viability and success of the board by expanding the recruiting process as vacancies arise to reach a broader range of candidates.
- Initiate an “alternate” policy in which current sitting board members can have an alternate in their absence.
- Set policy for board attendance to increase attendance and quorum requirements are met, as set by by-laws and funding entities.



Contact Us

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Merced County Community Action Board

Thank you for providing us an opportunity to serve the Merced County community!