



Merced County Community Action Agency



Strategic Plan 2024-2028

**MCCAA STRATEGIC PLAN
2024 - 2028
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A MESSAGE FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

MERCED COUNTY COMMUNITY ACTION AGENCY

Throughout the 5-year period of our last strategic plan,

Merced County Community Action Agency (MCCAA) fulfilled its designated role as the county's lead anti-poverty agency by providing advocacy, services, and planning on behalf the county's low-income neighbors and our communities. Successes we achieved were not isolated; each success was built upon a solid foundation established through 60 years of innovation, dedication, planning and growth. Yet, fulfilling our role did not come without significant challenges to stay on the course we had set.

At the onset of our last strategic plan cycle, the COVID 19 Pandemic changed and threatened many of our plans. The pandemic came rapidly; it was quickly followed by the challenge of the "Lockdown" and its disruption of community systems and economics.

MCCAA had to quickly adapt and evolve into new ways of delivering services and responding to the existing needs of our clients created by the pandemic environment. And adapt we did - through innovation, dedication, and the professionalism of our staff along with linkages on behalf of our community involved Board of Directors and community partners. We are extremely proud of the fact that throughout the pandemic we never closed our doors and our dedicated staff never hesitated to continue vital services needed in our community.

We will soon commemorate 60 years of successes since our 1965 beginning. We will continue as an agile, adaptable, and innovative organization that targets resources and services where most needed. As we examined the elements contributing to our success, we were able to confirm it was due to having a supportive Board of Directors; to our quality services provided by dedicated and professional staff, and our organizational agility made possible with support from community leaders, many volunteers and the diverse community partners who collaborated and provided resources. The strategic plan was developed to assure MCCAA can continue fulfilling our mission "To serve, advocate, and collaborate for those in need by developing innovative strategies for self-empowerment".

Our commitment to planning, monitoring and evaluating our progress will enable us to control and respond appropriately within any environment we must operate. This plan provides us with a compass we will use to stay on course and to make a difference in the lives of people, as we provide resources and motivation for those who face barriers to economic self-sufficiency and self-empowerment.

I offer my sincere thank you for your interest and your support to our agency and mission.



Sincerely,

Brenda Callahan-Johnson, MBA, CCAP
Executive Director

MCCAA: Agency & Area Profile

The Organization:

Merced County Community Action Agency (MCCAA) is a private nonprofit anti-poverty planning and social service organization with a lengthy history of advocating for and serving the residents of Merced County, California. The organization's anti-poverty efforts were initiated in 1965. MCCAA was then known as the Dos Palos Poverty Fighters, which was one of the first agencies to sponsor a Head Start Program in the nation.

The agency's early efforts and growth were incentivized by funding from the Economic Opportunity Act of 1964. This legislation was at the core of President Johnson's War on Poverty. Though President Kennedy was responsible for the concept and planning that established the foundations for the Economic Opportunity Act, it was Johnson who shepherded the legislation to passage. The Act encouraged and enabled local communities so they could:

- Develop plans and programs to address barriers that were preventing people from escaping poverty.
- Mobilize available resources (private, local, state and federal) to remove barriers.
- Provide opportunities and support to economically disadvantaged so they could live with respect and dignity.

These organizations would then be eligible to apply for federal funds to match with local resources and deliver locally designed programs and services.

At that time, most communities had an interest in reducing poverty and providing opportunities for their residents, but infrastructure for planning and service delivery was non-existent. The act provided seed funding for the establishment of locally governed nonprofits to develop at the local capacity. These entities were known as Community Action Agencies, of which the Dos Palos Poverty Fighters was an early applicant and an effective advocate that launched several successful anti-poverty programs. Those efforts continue today, and the agency is now recognized as the Merced County Community Action Agency, which is one of approximately 1,000 Community Action Agencies in a national network all governed by independent Boards of local people.

The core funding MCCAА receives is from the Community Services Block Grant Act (CSBG), a successor legislation to the Economic Opportunity Act.

CSBG funds are used by MCCAА to lever additional funding and resources to carry out its mission, “To serve, advocate, and collaborate for those in need by developing innovative strategies for self-empowerment”. MCCAА continues to plan, administer and deliver locally designed services to relieve the conditions of poverty, and/or to provide motivations and opportunities to assist low-income people in their efforts to escape poverty.

Current services and programs of MCCAА respond to a set of priorities identified in the agency’s Community Needs Assessment completed in 2023 (available on the website www.mercedcaa.org).

Programs include:

MAJOR PROGRAMS:

- Women, Infants and Children Program (W.I.C.)
- Preschool Centers
- Homeless and Housing Services
- Utility Assistance, Home Weatherization
- A.I.D.S Programs, and Resource and Referral Services (HOPWA)
- CAL-AIM

OTHER LOCALLY DESIGNED AND COORDINATED SERVICES:

- Summer feeding program
- Storm/Disaster Assistance
- Diaper Bank
- Water Assistance
- Administration of the Homeless Management Information Database (HMIS).

The agency collaborates and partners with many local organizations and recruits numerous volunteers to ensure effective and nonduplicative programing.

Staff leadership and the Board of Directors will use the 2024 - 2028 Strategic Plan to guide the implementation of locally designated program services and achieve the successful operations and positive outcomes the agency is recognized for producing.

Target Service Area: Merced and W.I.C.

MCCAA's principal service area is Merced County, California. Although some of its services, such as Weatherization, are provided in communities outside of its home county, planning and innovation developments are directed to benefit the residents of Merced County.

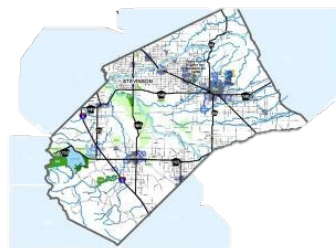
Located in the northern San Joaquin Valley section of California's Central Valley, Merced County is a medium-sized, agriculture-based, rural county. More than half of the county's land is made up of an agriculturally rich alluvial plain.

Current estimates, depending on the source, place the population around 288,825. There are 5 cities in the county which, together, make up approximately 55% of the total county's population. Included in those five is the City of Merced, with a population of about 88,000 or nearly a third of the total citizens. The population has grown in recent years, with the 2020 census showing a 10% increase.

There are many challenges for an anti-poverty social service agency to address in Merced County. Merced has the misfortune to rank high on all the undesirable economic factors that define poverty or its effects. The poverty rate of its citizens has historically remained high, higher than nearly all other counties in the state or nation. According to 247 Wall Street, a finance reporting website, The Merced metropolitan area in California is one of 23 U.S. metro areas where more than one in every five people live below the poverty line. The 23.5% poverty rate in Merced is the sixth highest of the 386 U.S. metro areas with available data.

Merced's population is also diverse:

- Other (Hispanic): 33.5%
- White (non-Hispanic): 25.9%
- White (Hispanic): 20.2%
- Asian (non-Hispanic): 7.31%
- Two+ (Hispanic): 6.16%



According to worldpopulationreview.com, 47.1% of Merced County residents speak only English, while 52.9% speak other languages. The non-English language spoken by the largest group is Spanish, which is spoken by 44.36% of the population.

The current high school graduation rate in Merced County for people 25 or over is 71.4% compared with the national average of 87.6%.

And according to a report by Feeding America using data from several governmental sources, Merced County is ranked as having the 3rd highest childhood food-insecurity rate of any county in the nation.

Merced County's unemployment rate rose to 7.8% in October 2023, up from the revised 7.5% in September and surpassing the year-ago estimate of 6.2%, the Central Valley Voice reported. Merced County's unemployment rate at the start of 2023 was 9.7%. California reported an unadjusted rate of 4.80%, while the national rate stood at 3.6% during the same period. Compared to California's 58 counties, Merced ranks fourth highest in the state for unemployment.

In Merced County, the median household income for the most recent year computed was \$64,772 and annual per capita income for Merced was \$26,869. The U.S. the national household income is \$67,521, which is not too dissimilar from Merced. However, the national annual income per capita is \$68,811, which shows a significant difference from Merced's per capita income.

Lack of adequate income and low educational attainment is a major cause of poverty and is easily understood. The problems compound when individuals and families find their heating and food costs rising regardless of their income or earning limitations. MCCAA's services help offset the economic limitations, especially when it threatens the low income individual or families' physical and mental health. Weatherization, Utility Payment Assistance, Shelter and Supportive Housing, W.I.C., Childcare Feeding and Summer Lunch programs are all important aids to helping families gain control of their budgets or supplement their budgets and ameliorate the situation in which the economically disadvantaged find themselves.

MCCAA applies the knowledge its staff and Board of Directors gain from their operations and the needs assessment to decide what projects to develop and where and how to deliver services. Details of the knowledge base used by the agency are contained in the Community Needs Assessment, available to view on mercedcaa.org.

Executive Overview

MCCAA Strategic Planning Process:

A strategic planning process is dynamic and cyclic. A strategic planning process uses a formalized framework that permits and encourages participation of an organization's key stakeholders. The process is designed to achieve consensus of those responsible to guide and administer the organization's activities.

The Board of Directors of Merced County Community Action Agency (MCCAA) understands the need for a good strategic plan. Knowing that the time-window for the existing strategic plan was ending, the MCCAA Board and Executive leadership undertook to develop and approve an updated and revised strategic plan for the period 2024-2028.

A formal process was adopted, designed to achieve common consensus and agreement on what needs should be addressed and what major goals should be established for the next period. The process was concluded in mid-October 2023 when the MCCAA Board of Directors and Executive Leadership discussed, debated and deliberated what are the most pressing needs that the agency could most adequately address in the next five years. The outcome of the process would be a guiding document that establishes which goals to pursue, what potential outcomes are expected and the services and strategies the agency will support to achieve the identified changes between 2024 and 2028.

Sources of information input were varied, i.e.

1. Performance reported periodically against benchmarks regarding the agency's accomplishment and outcomes during the previous period.
2. Review of Goals in the previous 5-year strategic plan (2019-2023).
3. Information gained from a recently completed Comprehensive Need Assessment.
4. Board and staff members own knowledge and perceptions of the community in which they lived were used at a 2 ½ day strategic planning retreat held in mid-October 2023.
5. Published Community Needs Assessments by partner organizations.

The organization is managed in a manner that provides ongoing reporting of activities and accomplishments to the Board of Directors and management staff. These reports emphasize the relationship to established goals, to predicted outcomes and to agency performance standards and are reported at each meeting of the Board of Directors. As a result, Board members were well informed and prepared for the retreat and able to make decisions to guide the organization in future operations.

In preparation, the detailed comprehensive Community Needs Assessment had been completed and presented to the Board at its June 2023 meeting. This assessment survey available demographic data from agency service reports, external sources (e.g., Census Bureau, HUD housing information, Workforce agencies, health planning organizations, education data, etc.), and client and community partner focus groups and interviews. The data compiled and the priority needs indicated were again reviewed at the beginning of the October 2023 Strategic Planning Retreat. Additionally, prior to the retreat a SurveyMonkey questionnaire was sent to key staff and each board member for the purposes of **1)** stimulating thinking prior to the event, **2)** determining the differences or similarities in perceptions and knowledge about the level of agency success meeting the previous period's goals, and **3)** to obtain a list of Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats these key individuals perceived or anticipated could impact the agency's abilities to achieve goals.

The 2 1/2-day retreat, facilitated by John Wilson of Progress Resources Inc. in October 2023, used the findings from the needs assessment work to set the stage, review the mission and vision of the organization, and to facilitate establishing both the priorities and the direction that the Board wants to see in the coming years.

Prior Strategic Plan (2019-2023)

The process of updating or modifying the strategic plan started with a review of the **2019 – 2023 Strategic Plan of MCCA**. The agency maintains a copy of its Strategic Plan on its web page and copies were provided to each Board member prior to the retreat so they could refresh and reinforce their knowledge of what had set the currently pursued goals.

The SurveyMonkey questionnaire provided Board Directors and staff an opportunity to comment on the progress made under the previous plan.

The MCCA 3-Goals stated in the last (2019-2023) Strategic Plan were:

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

Prior to the 2023 Retreat, SurveyMonkey questionnaire respondents reported their beliefs about whether MCCA had achieved each of the past Goals above:

Goal 1: Regarding the Future of Program – 100.00% of respondents believed the agency fully met this goal.

Goal 2: Regarding Expand Programing – 66.67% believed the agency met the expectations of this Goal completely; 33% believed the goal was partially addressed.

Goal 3: Regarding Board Development and Succession – 66.67% believed the agency made good progress toward satisfying the objectives of this goal and met at least 90% of expectations.

Retreat Planning participants were satisfied with how **2019-2023** goals had been addressed, especially when factoring the challenges to operations and communications caused by the year of the COVID Pandemic, lockdown and remote work that was required for nearly a year.

Some elements of **Goals 2 and 3** were determined to continue to be relevant, and so will be seen in the **2024-2028 Strategic Plan**, as will be treated later in this document.

After reviews and stage setting were completed, participants turned attention to planning and determining goals for 2024 through 2028.

Decisions:

“Planning is bringing the future into the present so that you can do something about it now.” – Alan Lakein

Agency Fundamentals – Vision, Mission, Values, and D.E.I. Statements:

The agency’s current Vision, Mission Statements and D.E.I. Statements were reviewed and discussed. There was 100% agreement that the statements expressed the agency’s beliefs and continue to be valid as written.

The planning group decided to add to the existing fundamental statements by creating a values statement. This statement will inform current and future customers, employees, board members and investors about what MCCA values. Stating the agency’s values will clarify and reinforce the attitudes and behaviors that are expected of employees.

Additionally, a statement of commitment to diversity, equity and inclusion was established.

Our Vision:

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

Our Mission:

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

Our Values:

The Board, leadership and staff of MCCA recognizes the dignity of all people. We value them and are committed to treating everyone with respect.

Our Commitment to Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion:

At Merced County Community Action Agency, we commit ourselves fully to the ongoing work of creating a more diverse, equitable, and inclusive community. We enthusiastically embrace the diversity of customers, communities, and employees, and seek to do “Whatever It Takes” to create places where all people feel welcome, equal, heard, and valued.

We stand against racial injustice and discrimination of all kinds, including any mistreatment of people based on their race, language, ethnic background, ability, religion, sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression.

We will make all reasonable accommodations to our policies to be the most inclusive workplace possible. We acknowledge this is a process and not a destination. We will remain committed to regularly evaluating and refining our D.E.I Statement and our efforts to make progress.





S.W.O.T

During the retreat, participants were provided with the results of the online inventory of the agency’s Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (SWOT). This exercise gave all an opportunity to work in subgroups to analyze, reject, or add to the inventory.

Identified S.W.O.T. characteristics to advantage or to counter:

<u>Strengths</u>	<u>Weaknesses</u>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Strong leadership. 2. Ability to meet issues proactively. 3. Reputation of swift & prompt work. 4. Working well with unhoused individuals. 5. Weatherization program. 6. W.I.C program. 7. Outstanding staff, willing to do their jobs correctly. 8. Financially strong agency. 9. Agency is flexible and adapts quickly. 10. Diversity of programs. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Agency awareness and marketing. 2. Personnel retention and turnover. 3. Aging Board of Directors; need for recruitment. 4. Website. 5. Effective recruitment strategies.

Opportunities:

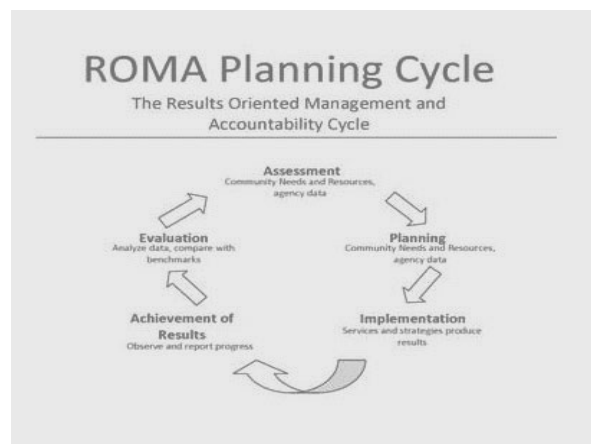
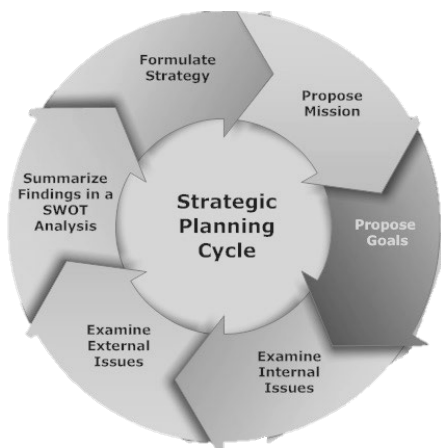
1. Work creatively with other agencies to address community needs.
2. Program and funding opportunities are expected to continue helping people.
3. Retain the Executive Director.
4. Strong connections within community.
5. Able to collaborate with staff and Board Members for the greater good.

Threats:

1. Funding cuts.
2. Staffing/Labor Shortage.
3. The potential of federal and state governments not working together to sustain programs that benefit the poor.
4. Lack of skilled employees in the labor market to conduct programs.
5. Other threats to funding.

As a result, participants conducted an internal and external environmental scan of factors according to their personal knowledge and perceptions, which used with the demographic data from the Community Needs Assessment supported decisions about what goals would best enable the agency to pursue its Mission and accomplish the targeted strategies selected.

We used ROMA principles and practices to move from the assessment of agency capacity needs from the SWOT discussion to establish strategies and goals for this Strategic Plan.



Selected Goals and Objectives for 2024-2028

Goal 1:

Increase the involvement of the board in agency functions and board meetings and outline ideas and paths for succession planning and recruiting and on boarding prospective Board members.



Objectives for Goal 1:

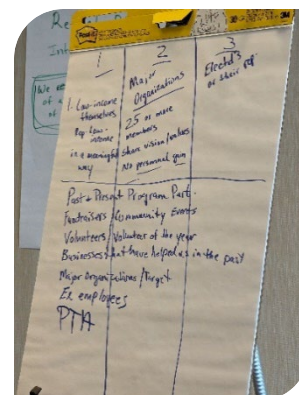
- Low income and community members: Identify agency programs and area groups from which appropriate representatives may be elected to the Board.
 - a. Past and present program participants, volunteers; fund raisers
 - b. Prepare candidates for meaningful participation.
 - c. Develop orientation materials, system of support for low-income candidates without board level experience.
- Private sector representatives: Identify major organizations, 25 or more members, who share MCCA's values as prospective sources of Board members for linkage.
 - a. Must share vision and values.
 - b. Service because of belief in mission, not personal financial or commercial gain.
 - c. Past or present partners on projects or events
 - d. Possible to Recruit from ex-employees.
- Prepare elected officials to desire service on MCCA Board through education, contacts, and relationships.

Goal 2:

Build and recruit competent, professional, mission driven executive staff.

Objectives for Goal 2:

- Develop internal opportunities.
- Provide training opportunities to build career.
- Develop connections and communications access to professional networks relevant to key executive functions at MCCA.



Goal 3:

Actively search out and secure a new site location for the Merced Child Development Center in the City of Merced that is in a better location and more modernized. (Self-explanatory)

Goal 4:

Implement new, innovative, and proven retention policies to retain staff and be competitive in recruiting new staff.



Goal 5:

Expand the CAL-AIM Enhanced Care Management program to allow for more staffing and a broader reach into Medi-Cal programs.

Goal 6:

Continue to expand assets through unrestricted funding sources and social entrepreneur activities when possible.

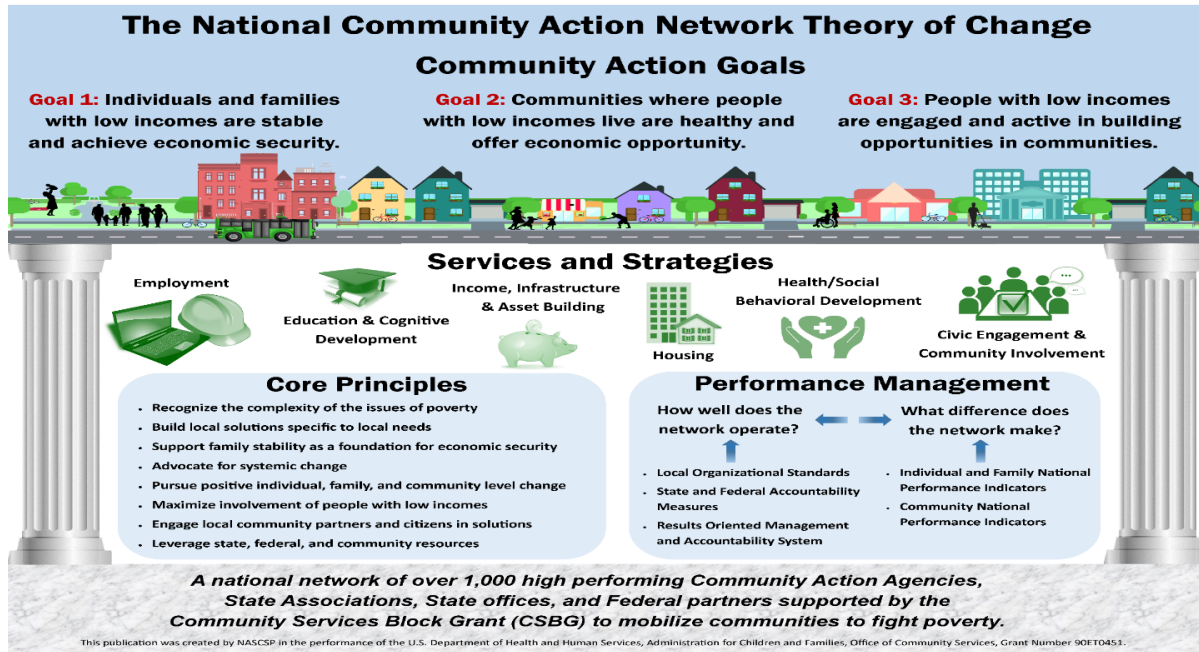
The **MCCAA Mission** is *“To serve, advocate, and collaborate for those in need by developing innovative strategies for self-empowerment”*.

Prior year goals related to the Original Six National Goals for Community Action, but the network adopted new goals in 2017 as part of the National Theory of Change. While the original goals included agency capacity and partnership building, the new goals are focused on family and community situations.

Agency capacity-building goals must be included in our agency strategic planning to maintain the high level of performance that MCCAA has achieved. This is part of the foundational statement included in the National Theory of Change and it will require some specific focus of effort and resources to maintain our standards. As part of this effort, we have identified several agency level strategies that must be a part of the agency’s strategic plan for the coming year. These strategies include strengthening the board and staff, and increasing facilities, programs and services to meet the needs of families and communities.

In this Strategic Plan, we have identified the Agency Capacity Goals capacity goals that are needed to provide the foundation for all our activities.

In the Community Action Plan provided to the California Department of Community Services and Development (CSD), we have identified Family and Community goals that are related to the Community Needs Assessment conducted.



These agency goals we have identified are important to agency functioning and capacity building:

The Merced County Community Action Agency 2024 Community Needs Assessment gathered information about the needs of the low-income population in its service area. These identified needs were listed in the Community Action Plan and will be reported in the CSBG Annual Report.

Through the compilation of responses, the agency has identified the top five area of needs to be:

1. **Housing related issues** – both access to (which is a community level issue) and affordability of housing units and high cost of utilities (which is a challenge to individuals and families).
2. **Lack of affordable childcare opportunities for low-income families.**
3. **Issues related to physical and mental health** – including individuals and families having health insurance as well as the availability of care and services (which is a community level issue).
4. **Food Insecurity**
5. **Youth Programs.**

Agency Level Strategy	Agency Goals (Agency Level Outcomes)
Increase involvement of the board in agency functions and board meetings.	Generation of ideas and paths for succession planning.
Build and recruit competent, professional, mission driven executive staff.	Maintenance of leadership that can support the mission.
Establish innovative and proven retention polices for staff.	Ability to retain high quality staff and be competitive in recruiting new staff.
Secure new site location for Child Development Center.	Obtain and maintain facility that is in a better location and modernized.
Expand CAL-AIM ECM program.	Establish broader reach into Medi-Cal programs.
Expand assets and unrestricted funds.	Achieve increased flexibility in addressing needs and supporting programs and services.

In addition to the change in the National Goals, the National Performance Indicators currently focus on family and community changes that are the result of actions of Community Action Agencies. While we believe the above identified strategies are essential to the agency’s well-being, we know that agency capacity is just the tool to enable us to provide appropriate services to the individuals, families and communities we serve. Turning now to look at what the agency must address to have progress towards and achievement.

The following identifies the National Performance Indicators from the CSBG Annual Report at both the family and community levels.

At the family level:

Area of Need from the Community Needs Assessment	Family Level Services	Outcomes for individuals, and families to be reported via CSBG Annual Report
Housing Issues/homelessness and Affordability	Provide permanent supportive housing for chronically homeless individuals with disabilities over a one-year period. 80.	FNPI 4a - The number of households experiencing homelessness who obtained safe temporary shelter . FNPI 4b - The number of households who obtained safe and affordable housing .
Housing Issues/Maintenance of Utility service and appropriate heating/cooling equipment	LIHEAP and weatherization (home lighting, heating, and cooling), up to 500 individuals over a one-year period.	FNPI 4g - The number of households who experienced improved health and safety due to improvements within their home (reduce stress, toxins and infectious diseases) FNPI 4z1 the number of families acquiring a comfortable and livable space.

Childcare	Provide affordable child education services to 200 individuals over a one-year period.	FNPI 2a - The number of children (0 to 5) who demonstrated improved emergent literacy skills. FNPI 2b - The number of children (0 to 5) who demonstrated skills for school readiness.
Food Insecurity/Youth Programs	Summer lunch program (900)	FNPI 5z1 - The number of Youth who have food security over the summer months.
Food insecurity/Homeless	Provide three meals per day at the D-Street Shelter serving over 50,000 meals per year.	FNPI 5z2 - The number of individuals who have food security while living in shelter.
Food Nutrition/at risk women and children	Food benefits and education through WIC serving over 18,000 individuals per year.	FNPI 5a -The number of individuals who demonstrated increased nutrition skills (selecting and consuming healthy foods). FNPI 5z3 - The number of babies with appropriate birth weight.
Lack of health Insurance	Enhanced Care Management provides support to low-income members to get health insurance and healthcare. Partner with Central California Alliance for Health to enroll unhoused individuals in health insurance. (180)	FNPI 5z1 - The number of individuals who have health insurance.
Lack of healthcare	Enhanced Care Management provides support to low-income members to navigate the healthcare system. (500)	FNPI 5b - The number of individuals who demonstrated improved physical health and well-being.

At the community level:

Area of Need	Community Level Strategy	Outcome for community
Housing Affordability	Lead service provider on a 94-unit housing complex designated for homeless.	CNPI 4a Number of safe and affordable housing units developed in the identified community (e.g., built or set aside units for people with low incomes). CNPI 4b Number of safe and affordable housing units maintained and/or improved through WAP or other rehabilitation efforts in the identified community. CNPI 4c Number of shelter beds created in the identified community. CNPI 4d Number of shelter beds maintained in the identified community.
Lack of affordable child development opportunities for low-income families	Provide affordable child education services located throughout Merced County for working parents.	CNPI 2a Number of accessible and affordable early childhood or pre-school education assets or resources added to the identified community. CNPI 2z1 number maintained

**WITH APPRECIATION FOR THEIR LEADERSHIP, PARTICIPATION AND
EFFORTS IN DEVELOPMENT OF THE 2024-2028 STRATEGIC PLAN**

MCCAA BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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