

BRANDED CONTENT  
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THE LABJ COMMUNITY OF BUSINESS™ PROUDLY SUPPORTS

# CHILD WELLNESS & CHILD WELFARE AWARENESS MONTH





## A Variety of Impactful Resources to Strengthen Families and Communities

Families living in California face some of the steepest child care costs in the country and that financial barrier can disrupt the ability of parents to work and earn income. Child Care Resource Center not only connects families with subsidized child care, but also equips child care providers with the coaching and training they need to positively impact child development. CCRC's expansive array of resources extends beyond child care to include early childhood education, fresh food distribution, mental health services, workforce development and more. As a trusted arbiter of state and federal funding in Southern California for nearly 50 years, CCRC has rapidly scaled services year after year to meet the growing need for support.

The agency was founded in 1976 after a group of parents in the San Fernando Valley struggled to find quality child care, education, and services for their families. As a nascent agency, CCRC then focused solely on child care services. But that focus shifted and evolved to support whole child and family well-being, not just in northern Los Angeles County but into the entirety of San Bernardino County.

CCRC was awarded contracts for Head Start, a nationally recognized early childhood education program for families earning below the poverty level, and opened the first site in 1995. Today, the agency operates 20+ Head Start and Early Head Start locations that provide service to over 2,500 children. In 1998, CCRC and nine other Los Angeles County R&R agencies undertook a major project by contracting with the Department of Social Services (DSS) to provide child care services for participants in the CalWORKs program. Through county and state child care financial

assistance programs, CCRC now affords subsidized child care services to 57,000 children. According to CCRC research, 99% of CCRC families surveyed stated they were either able to accept a job or keep their job because of their child care.

"Thank God there's not that pressure of who I'm going to pay for day care each month," said Desiree Williams, a mother of twins who receives subsidized child care through CCRC. "If I had to pay for daycare, all my money would go to day care and there wouldn't be money left for bills."

Under the leadership of CCRC president and CEO Dr. Michael Olenick, agency programs and services also include parenting and educational classes, literacy support, trauma support, and home visitation. And after learning that many children and families were going hungry, the nonprofit began incorporating into its services fresh food distributions. In 2023 alone, CCRC provided almost one million food items to 10,000 families. In addition to food, the agency also distributed 117,000 diapers and 2,800 wipes, over 1,500 backpacks full of school supplies, more than 6,000 articles of clothing, and numerous sets of personal hygiene products to families and child care providers. When many families were faced with unemployment and food insecurity during the pandemic, these necessities were a critical life line. The services and resources offered by the agency and the passion-driven work of CCRC staff are powerful interventions in the lives of countless families, who are empowered to succeed and thrive without barriers.

The employees at CCRC, in cooperation with the agency's internal research team and external partners, continue to assess needs, identify gaps, and find new solutions to the

**'For me this is so meaningful. I know food insecurity unfortunately is such a big issue in our community. Kids can't focus, thrive, and grow to be big healthy kids if they don't have the food they need.'**

ongoing and growing needs of families. The agency's Government Relations team works closely with policymakers to craft legislation that acts in the interest of families and child care providers in the state. Partnerships with lawmakers have enabled CCRC to secure funding for new projects, like a recent \$400,000 grant obtained with the help of Assemblywoman Pilar Schiavo to launch its Fill the Fridge fresh food program.

"For me this is so meaningful. I know food insecurity unfortunately is such a big issue in our community," said Schiavo. "Kids can't focus, thrive, and grow to be big healthy kids if they don't have the food they need. Being able to help CCRC get these funds to have refrigerators and truck and infrastructure needed to get kids the foods they need – I can't wait to see those refrigerators and trucks in action."

The breadth of CCRC's operation, which includes over 1,200 staff serving upwards of 75,000 children, families, and child care providers, is the result of an unrelenting commitment to the community. To ensure the cultural needs of agency staff and the people it serves are respectfully addressed, CCRC implemented a Diversity, Equity and Inclusion division that

was awarded the "DEI Nonprofit Organization of the Year" distinction by a major Los Angeles publication. Dr. Olenick has been named a leading CEO by the San Fernando Valley Business Journal for seven straight years.

As the nonprofit continues to increase its reach, it's focused on three main funding priorities: 1) Enhance case management services to offer developmental screenings, 2) Alleviate food insecurity among children and families, and 3) Partner with businesses to improve child care accessibility for working families. CCRC has pilot programs in The Antelope Valley and San Bernardino County assessing children using the Ages And Stages tool and makes referrals to Loma Linda Hospital. Because fewer than 6% of all children access any mental health care at all and under 3% receive ongoing care, the agency is building up its mental health services.

For the last five years, CCRC has been developing a coordinated system of information delivery, training, and support to parents and providers with the 60 California Child Care Resource & Referral Agencies. To address food insecurity, CCRC is expanding its food distribution program to include nutritious perishable items. And in an effort to improve child care accessibility, the agency is ramping up business outreach to ensure employers understand the need for child care services and educating them on ways to support the needs of their employees.

CCRC understands that strong families make for strong communities. The agency's commitment to this vision is illustrated not simply in the work it's already done, but in its plans for the future.

Learn more at [CCRCCA.org](http://CCRCCA.org).

## CHILD WELLNESS &amp; CHILD WELFARE AWARENESS

# California Launches Free Digital Behavioral Health Platforms for Children

The Department of Health Care Services (DHCS) recently launched the Behavioral Health Virtual Services Platform – two free behavioral health services applications for all families with kids, teens, and young adults ages 0-25.

“Kids, teens, and young adults are facing a mental health crisis. To make sure our youth have another path to access needed behavioral health services, the state is launching two new apps to give young Californians and their caregivers access to the professional help they need,” said DHCS director Michelle Baass. “The tools are flexible and free for all California families, regardless of income, health insurance, or immigration status. I urge every young person and parent in California to visit the Soluna and BrightLife Kids apps to see if they are right for them.”

Nationwide, rates of anxiety, depression, and self-harm are climbing. Between 2019 and 2021, about one-third of California teens experienced serious psychological distress, with a 20 percent increase in adolescent suicides. Meanwhile, the nationwide mental health provider shortage is causing longer wait times for appointments to community-based mental health providers. Availability is particularly limited among the uninsured, people of color, people with low incomes, and people with disabilities.

“About two-thirds of California kids with

depression do not receive treatment. This platform will help meet the needs of California’s diverse children, youth, and families by expanding access to critical behavioral health supports. Our young people will have an accessible option to get the help they need,” said Dr. Mark Ghaly, secretary of the California Health & Human Services Agency. “The Behavioral Health Virtual Services Platform will give children, adolescents, and young adults a new point of access to high quality services to help them address behavioral health challenges early on, reducing the likelihood of escalation to more serious conditions and alleviating pressure on existing mental health care providers.”

Because kids and young adults have dramatically different needs by age group, the Behavioral Health Virtual Services Platform is a combination of two different web- and app-based applications that support two distinct groups: BrightLife Kids, developed by Brightline, is for parents or caregivers and kids 0-12 years old. Soluna, developed by Kooth, is for teens and young adults ages 13-25. Families with multiple children whose ages span 0-25 can use both platforms to meet their unique needs. Each app will also offer coaching services in English and Spanish, as well as telephone-based coaching in all Medi-Cal threshold languages.

• **Free Coaching:** Live one-on-one coaching sessions with a trained and qualified behavioral health wellness coach delivered through

*‘The tools are flexible and free for all California families, regardless of income, health insurance, or immigration status.’*

in-app chat or video appointments. Telephone coaching will also be available in all Medi-Cal threshold languages.

- **Educational Content:** Age-tailored educational articles, videos, podcasts, and stories.
- **Assessments and Tools:** Stress-management tools and clinically validated assessments to understand and monitor behavioral health over time.
- **Care Navigation Services:** A searchable directory and live care navigation support to connect users to their local behavioral health resources, including connecting users with their health plan, school-based services, or community-based organizations that can provide clinical care options and care coordination services.
- **Peer Communities:** Moderated forums and programs to connect users with other

youth or caregivers.

• **Crisis and Safety Protocols:** Crisis and emergency safety resources for platform users experiencing a mental health crisis or who require immediate assistance.

These new CalHOPE applications will complement existing services offered by health plans, counties, and schools by providing additional care options and resources for parents and caregivers, children, youth and young adults in California.

Both apps must meet accessibility requirements and have strict privacy and confidentiality requirements and must adhere to all applicable state laws and regulations pertaining to privacy and security. Each app will also follow robust safety and risk escalation protocols to ensure the safety of children, youth, and young adults using the apps. Trained behavioral health professionals will monitor app usage to identify potential risks, and licensed behavioral health professionals will be on standby to intervene, if clinically appropriate. Further, each app will connect users to crisis or emergency services, when needed.

*BrightLife Kids is available for download on IOS devices in the Apple App Store and will be available for Android devices in mid-2024; it is also available online. To find out more, visit CalHOPE.org.*



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# Keys to Promote Healthier Lifestyles for Children and Families

High quality nutrition, physical activity, and adequate sleep are a few of the ingredients necessary to promote children’s best health, along with a positive approach to screen use and social-emotional wellness.

But for many families, the environment throws up obstacles – whether it’s a challenge to find nutritious foods, a lack of green space or sidewalks, or the constant lure of social media.

The American Academy of Pediatrics offers practical strategies for pediatricians and families to help children adopt healthy behaviors and overcome challenges within a clinical report, “The Role of the Pediatrician in the Promotion of Healthy, Active Living.” The report, published online earlier this year, updates recommendations last made in 2015 and overviews ways to lower risks of illnesses such as obesity or disordered eating.

Clinical reports created by AAP are written by medical experts, reflect the latest evidence in the field, and go through several rounds of peer review before being approved by the AAP Board of Directors and published in Pediatrics.

In the report, the AAP notes that practical strategies to promote healthy, active living are urgently needed, as few children and adolescents meet the recommendations for nutrition and activity. It proposes a model of care that considers the environment in which a child lives – and how it can be made healthier – as well as interpersonal and individual factors that influence a

child’s health.

“Pediatricians can advocate for all children to have a healthier environment, including access to good nutrition, safe spaces for physical activity, preventive health care and other things we know children need to thrive,” said Natalie D. Muth, MD, RDN, MPH, FAAP, FACS, a lead author of the clinical report, written by the AAP Section on Obesity and AAP Committee on Nutrition.

The AAP report provides charts that list optimal amounts of sleep and physical activity needed according to age group, as well as guidance on screen time and what and how to eat. The clinical report complements the 2023 “Clinical Practice Guideline for the Evaluation and Treatment of Children and Adolescents with Obesity,” with a focus on prevention.

The most effective approach for pediatricians is to offer guidance in a nonjudgmental manner, knowing the many social drivers underlying family life, according to AAP. Families and social media may also harbor myths or misinterpret definitions of “healthy.” Pediatricians and other primary pediatric health care providers have a crucial role in helping to promote lifestyle factors beneficial for the health of children of all weights, shapes, and sizes.

“Research tells us a lot about how to improve a child’s health,” said Christopher Bolling, MD, FAAP, a co-author of the report. “We know that families reap great benefits by eating together

three times a week. We also have evidence that physical activity improves mental health and wellbeing. Once we identify a need, we can brainstorm practical ways that, as it turns out, benefit the whole family and not just children.”

Pediatricians are encouraged to not only track a child’s growth measurements and growth trends, but also review them in a family-centered and nonstigmatizing way to identify areas of potential concern. Healthy behaviors are also associated with a parenting style in which the parent or caregiver demonstrates high respect for the child and emotional responsiveness -- as well as high control and clear and strict boundaries. This authoritative approach includes offering a structure and consistency to meal and snack times and supports a child’s use of hunger and fullness cues to guide their own intake.

The AAP recommends that pediatricians:

- Assess social determinants of health such as poverty, food insecurity, exposure to racism, trauma and toxic stress, and the built environment.
- Assess parenting practices and baseline nutrition, physical activity, sleep, and screen use. When a gap exists between recommended and reported behaviors, consider a patient’s and family’s readiness to make a change and work together to develop a plan, when appropriate.
- Use respectful, nonstigmatizing language when addressing weight, behaviors or need for behavioral change.

• Learn and implement communication approaches for behavioral change such as motivational interviewing.

• Be a role model for healthy patterns around nutrition, physical activity, sleep, screen use and self-care.

• Refer children and adolescents to community resources.

• Support policies to eradicate racism, address social determinants of health, improve nutrition, decrease intake of sugary drinks and increase physical activity.

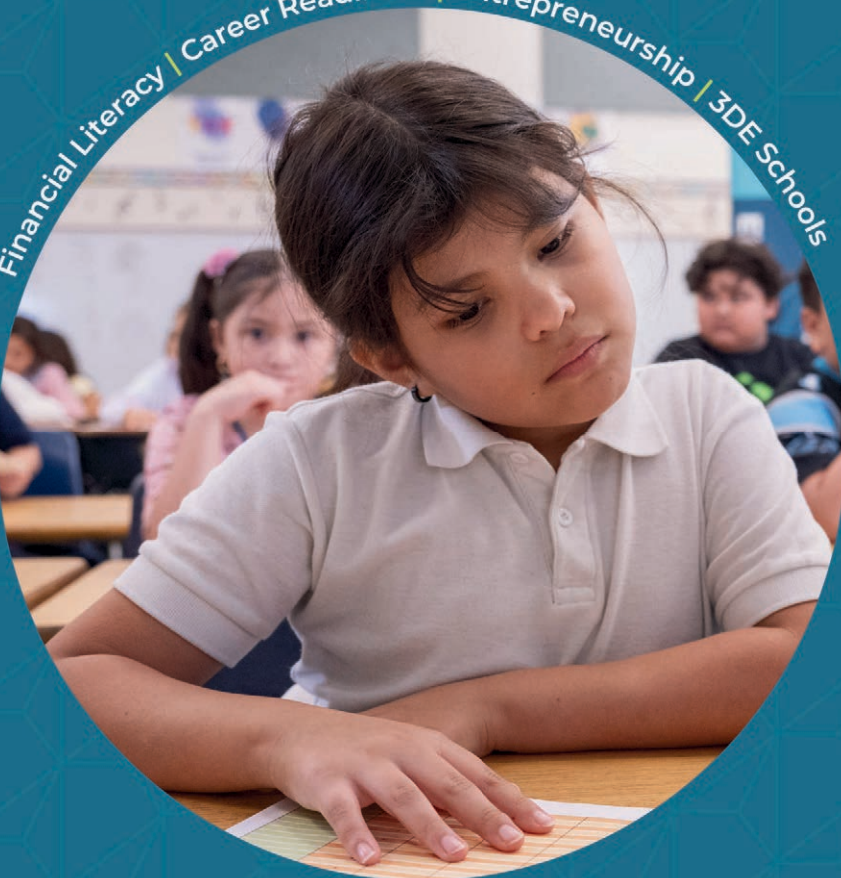
• Advocate for adequate payment for preventive care service and team-based care to support guidance for healthy, active living.

The AAP focuses on the need to support a healthier generation of children, and work to prevent diseases that stem from a complex constellation of genetic, environmental and social drivers.

“Pediatricians work with children from infancy throughout young adulthood, and so they are in a great position to help identify gaps and support families working toward healthier lifestyles,” Dr. Muth said. “We can also partner with parents and role model healthy patterns around nutrition, physical activity, sleep, and screen use. Even when we don’t realize it, children are watching and take their cues from us.”

Learn more at [aap.org](http://aap.org).

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