

# Stepping Up Together: Co-Creating Paths to a Brighter Future

## Los Angeles County's Strategic Framework for Alleviating Poverty

### Executive Summary

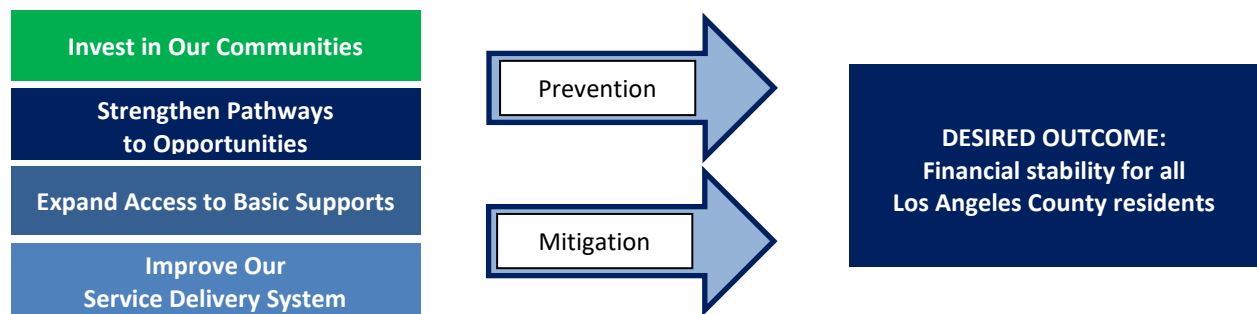
Poverty is a multi-dimensional issue, and tackling it requires a multi-dimensional approach. We have learned—and are beginning to embrace responsibility for—the many ways in which current systems were structured to reinforce racism, disparities, privilege, and oppression across population groups, and to perpetuate the cycle of poverty. And we know that running even the most effective ‘safety net’ services, doing everything right, may serve to mitigate only the very deepest level of poverty, at best. It does not solve the problem.

Los Angeles County leadership is moving in a new direction—one that is proactive toward disrupting poverty. This is a significant shift from how County government has seen itself and operated in the past. On May 18, 2021, the Board of Supervisors adopted a motion that declared poverty and economic opportunity to be matters of public health. The motion further created a ninth Board-directed priority, the Countywide Poverty Alleviation Initiative (PAI), directing that entity to develop a strategic plan for alleviating poverty in the County and for implementing actions to accomplish that.

This is that plan: a strategic framework that reflects the County's moving ‘upstream’ to a primary prevention orientation, taking actions to stop people from sinking into poverty to begin with, instead of helping them only after they fall.

The PAI team began their work by holding numerous listening sessions across the County between October 2021 and March 2022, involving 1,024 participants, including 643 residents and individuals with lived expertise, to seek ideas as to what should be included in this strategic framework. The team conducted listening sessions with representatives from 148 community-based organizations and stakeholder entities across the County (including some state and national partners) and employees from 23 County departments.

What emerged are ideas on preventing and mitigating poverty that are categorized across four strategies:



Some examples of actions for each strategy include:

#### Invest in Our Communities

- ❖ Increase long-term investments in prevention and environmental supports
- ❖ Support grassroots-level organizing, engagement, and community building

- ❖ Convene jurisdictions and partners on shared priorities and advocacy

### **Strengthen Pathways to Opportunities**

- ❖ Create easier connections to high-quality jobs and address discriminatory policies and practices that maintain disparities in hiring, pay, and promotions
- ❖ Create supports for those with hiring barriers to help get them hired and maintain employment
- ❖ Support efforts to make County jobs and new County contracts pay living wages
- ❖ Build assets through micro-lending and grants, matched-savings programs, baby bonds, expanding financial coaching, and increasing alternatives to predatory lending

### **Expand Access to Basic Supports**

- ❖ Develop a process for providing emergency funds to cover people's basic needs
- ❖ Work with partners to help residents secure and maintain affordable housing
- ❖ Expand child care and after-school options
- ❖ Maximize available resources, including guaranteed-income programs, enforcing wage theft laws, and evaluating state/County debt that could be eliminated

### **Improve Our Service Delivery System**

- ❖ Develop a person-centered service delivery system that is respectful, provides individual support, and streamlines access to services across departments
- ❖ Develop a centralized capability for sharing available resources that is easy to access and navigate, and increase free internet access at and near County facilities
- ❖ Reduce barriers so that all people who are eligible for benefits can receive them, and automate benefit access, where possible
- ❖ Advocate for policy changes that improve our system, including re-defining 'child neglect' to reduce the number of families investigated by child welfare, reducing the 'benefit cliffs' experienced by those receiving benefits, re-indexing and recalibrating public-benefit levels and eligibility requirements, and building more flexibility into state and federal funding

Each year, the PAI will prioritize a few actions to implement, using a phased approach. If we are successful in implementing the four strategies, we will expect to see a decrease in the number of Los Angeles County residents in poverty over time, as well as positive shifts in the five program-level outcomes identified: community and civic engagement, income and employment, wealth, basic supports, and responsive services.

Poverty as a systemic issue does not have to be thought of as an overwhelming and intractable. It is time that we challenge assumptions that allow us to accept widespread poverty as a 'given,' and truly disrupt its cycle. It is time that we look at ourselves and fix the systemic issues that perpetuate poverty at multiple levels, at the same time increasing robust supports that actually help people. It is time that all our residents have an equal opportunity to achieve financial stability and to fulfill their goals. We commit to working with our residents, communities, stakeholders, County departments, jurisdictions, and partners to achieve this vision, as we know we cannot get there alone . . . we invite you to join us on this journey.