



DESERT HEALTHCARE
DISTRICT & FOUNDATION

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT REPORT

MARCH 2026



TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | |
|---|----|
| Letter to the Community | 02 |
| Executive Summary | 03 |
| Methodology..... | 04 |
| The Community Participants | 06 |
| The Strategic Roadmap | 09 |
| Summary of Findings | 46 |
| Detailed Findings | 14 |
| Workforce Development | 14 |
| Awareness and Access | 17 |
| Engagement..... | 20 |
| Data- Driven | 24 |
| Strategic Partnerships | 26 |
| Community Spotlights | 29 |



LETTER TO OUR COMMUNITY

Dear District Community,

Thank you to everyone who participated in our Community Engagement Sessions and completed the community survey. Your time, insights, and openness made this process meaningful and impactful, and we are deeply grateful for your engagement. Listening to our community is essential to how the Desert Healthcare District and Foundation continues to serve its residents. These conversations reaffirmed our commitment to creating spaces where everyone's voice can be heard and respected.

Your feedback is directly shaping our 2027–2031 Strategic Plan and guiding our priorities, investments, and partnerships. We are committed to ensuring that your input is reflected in our decisions and to keeping you informed as this work moves forward.

We also encourage you to remain engaged with us by attending public board meetings, where you can submit public comments, and by reaching out to us at info@dhcd.org. Your continued involvement helps ensure that community voices remain central to our work.

The final Strategic Plan will go into effect in July 2026 and will be made available on our website: <https://www.dhcd.org/>

Thank you for your partnership and continued trust.

Sincerely,

Chris Christensen, CEO, Desert Healthcare District and Foundation

Kimberly Barraza, Board President, Desert Healthcare District and Foundation



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY


The Desert Healthcare District and Foundation (DHCD/F) is currently developing a new five-year strategic plan for the 2027-2031 period. This planning effort reflects the DHCD/F's role as a healthcare system amplifier - setting clear priorities, aligning resources, and strengthening the broader health ecosystem to improve outcomes across the organization's service area. The process has been anchored in a context-sensitive approach guided by three core principles:

- **Community Centered:** Represents the current and future voices, trends, and needs of the Coachella Valley's diverse and complex communities.
- **Financial Viability:** Identifies and harnesses the opportunities for scalable, sustainable impact with the newly signed 30-year lease agreement.
- **Tangible Impact:** Drives meaningful and measurable change for all stakeholders in the short, medium, and long-term views.

As a public healthcare district, DHCD/F recognizes that meaningful and sustainable impact must be shaped in partnership with the communities it serves. Because a truly community-centered strategy cannot be developed in isolation, DHCD/F intentionally built a robust period of community engagement into the strategic planning process. Throughout February and early March 2026, DHCD/F organized seven in-person community sessions, one virtual session, and a widely distributed community input survey designed to capture diverse perspectives across the Valley.

This engagement was especially critical given the social and political moment our region is navigating. The Coachella Valley is experiencing significant changes that directly impact residents, including shifting demographics, workforce shortages, evolving policy and funding environments, and concerns within immigrant communities. These dynamics directly affect how residents access healthcare, how health providers implement care, and how community-based organizations meet growing needs. In response, the DHCD/F's main goal is to develop a strategy that adapts to immediate challenges while advancing long-term system goals.

This report reflects the key themes and ideas voiced by the community. These insights will directly inform the final 2027-2031 Strategic Plan, guiding DHCD/F investments, partnerships, and actions over the next five years. Through continued collaboration, DHCD/F remains committed to advancing a community-centered, financially viable, and impact-driven strategy toward health equity



METHODOLOGY

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

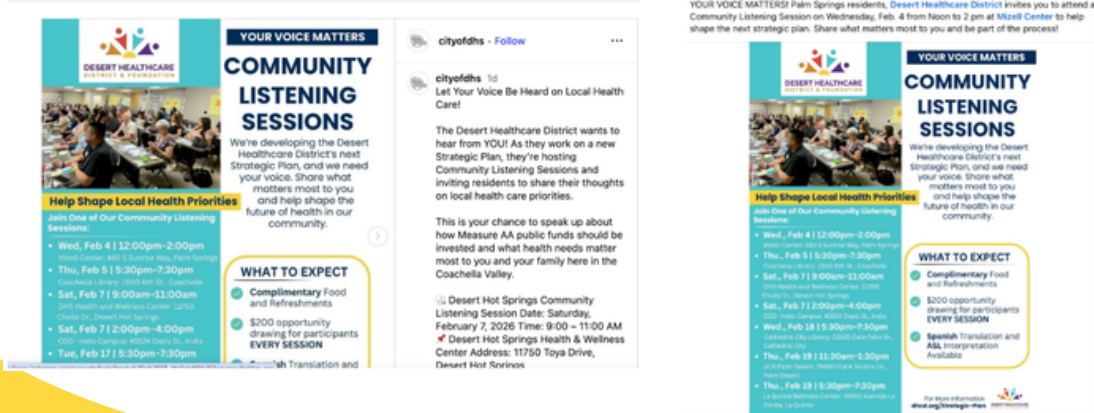
The community engagement process was designed to ensure broad, inclusive, and meaningful participation across the Coachella Valley and included seven in-person sessions, one virtual session, and multiple asynchronous data collection methods. The approach was guided by a commitment to **accessibility**, through the use of open and welcoming community locations, varied meeting days and times, and the provision of Spanish translation and American Sign Language (ASL) interpretation at all in-person sessions; **geographic equity and virtual access**, achieved through engagement activities in all seven zones within the DHCD/F's mandate and a virtual session hosted during March's monthly Coachella Valley Equity Collaborative call; **inclusive facilitation**, using culturally responsive and participatory approaches to encourage open and respectful dialogue and packets with printed materials including surveys, QR codes and the presentation in both English and Spanish; and **multiple participation pathways**, including verbal discussion, written paper notes, and surveys available in both paper and online formats. *Quotes from participants are incorporated throughout the report to reflect listening community perspectives. In some instances, quotes have been paraphrased for clarity or translated from Spanish to ensure readability.*

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT SESSIONS AND OUTREACH

DHCD/F implemented a coordinated, multi-channel outreach strategy to promote participation and ensure broad community awareness of the engagement sessions. Promotion included paid and organic social media campaigns on Facebook and Instagram, with geo-fencing around host communities and content developed in both English and Spanish; a dedicated Strategic Plan tab on the DHCD/F website featuring session details and downloadable flyers; and an email campaign distributed to more than 700 curated community contacts, with partners encouraged to share through their own networks.

Additional outreach efforts included the distribution of printed flyers at host sites and community locations; collaboration with legislators, cities, and special districts; direct outreach by Board of Directors (Board) members to constituents within their zones; appearances on local media platforms, including DHCD/F's Healthy Desert Healthy You podcast, Spanish-language newspaper Frontera, and interviews and public service segments through KESQ and La Poderosa.

DHCD/F Partners Promoting the Events:



Community engagement sessions followed a consistent format that included an overview of the draft strategic plan, facilitated group discussions, and opportunities for written and survey-based feedback. Dates, locations, and Board representation for each session are summarized in the visual below.

| ZONE | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | Virtual |
|-----------------------------|--|--|--|---|--|--|--|--|
| LOCATION | Mizell Center 480 S Sunrise Way Palm Springs, CA 92262 | DHS Health and Wellness Center 11750 Cholla Dr. Desert Hot Springs, CA 92240 | La Quinta Wellness Center 78450 Avenida La Fonda La Quinta, CA 92253 | Cathedral City Library 33520 Date Palm Dr. Cathedral City, CA 92234 | UCR Palm Desert- 75080 Frank Sinatra Dr. Palm Desert, CA 92211 | COD- Indio Campus 45524 Oasis St., Indio, CA 92201 | Coachella Library 1500 6th St, Coachella, CA 92236 | Zoom Coachella Valley Equity Collaborative Monthly Call |
| DATE & TIME | 2/4/2026: 12:00pm-2:00pm | 2/7/2026: 9:00am-11:00am | 2/19/2026: 5:30pm-7:30pm | 2/18/2026: 5:30pm-7:30pm | 2/19/2026: 11:30am-1:30pm | 2/7/2026: 2:00pm-4:00pm | 2/5/2026: 5:30pm-7:30pm | 3/4/2026: 10:30am-12:00pm |
| REPRESENTATIVE BOARD MEMBER | Greg Rodriguez (Vice President) | Carole Rogers, RN, MPH | Dan Logsdon, M.D. (Treasurer) | Evett PerezGil | Anyse Smith, Esq. | Kimberly Barraza (President) | Leticia De Lara, MPA (Secretary) | |

COMMUNITY INPUT SURVEY

Goal: To complement in-person and virtual engagement, DHCD/F implemented a community input survey to broaden participation and capture quantitative insights alongside additional qualitative feedback into community priorities across DHCD/F's service area. The survey was made widely accessible and distributed across multiple channels to ensure residents throughout the Coachella Valley had the opportunity to participate. *While the survey provides valuable directional insights, the sample size should not be considered fully representative of the Coachella Valley as a whole, and findings are interpreted alongside other engagement and data sources.*

Step 1: Survey Design and Accessibility

The survey was available to all residents of the Coachella Valley and offered in both English and Spanish. It was provided in digital and paper formats to reduce barriers to participation and support inclusive engagement.

Step 2: Distribution and Data Collection

The survey was open throughout February and early March and distributed at community engagement sessions, through the DHCD/F website and social media channels, and via DHCD/F's constant contact email distribution list. Participants were encouraged to share it within their networks. DHCD/F received 224 responses: 185 in English and 39 in Spanish.

Step 3: Data Aggregation and Analysis

Following the close of the survey period, responses were aggregated, cleaned, and analyzed. The quantitative and qualitative data was reviewed to identify trends, priority areas, and differences across respondent groups. Key insights are integrated throughout this report.

THE COMMUNITY PARTICIPANTS

THE COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT SESSIONS

The community sessions brought together a diverse group of residents, community leaders, service providers, and advocates from across the Coachella Valley to share their experiences, concerns, and ideas for the future of health and well-being in the region.

Participants represented 15 cities in and around the Coachella Valley:



Participants represented a wide range of cities, backgrounds, languages, lived experiences, and ages that reflected the rich cultural and social fabric of the Coachella Valley.

Attendance varied across zones, with an average of 28 participants per in-person session, a high of more than 40 residents in the Coachella community session, and a total of 233 participants across each of the eight sessions (in-person and virtual attendance counts may include individuals who participated in more than one session).

In addition to residents and community members, the sessions included representation from key groups that work closely with and advocate for the needs of Coachella Valley residents. The sessions also included participation from influential public officials and community leaders, including the Mayor of La Quinta and elected officials in Coachella, school district trustees, supervisors, and local city council members.

Key groups represented during the Community Engagement Sessions include:



Community-based Public Health



Healthcare Providers & Systems



Housing & Community Development



Education & Youth Development



Community Support & Social Services



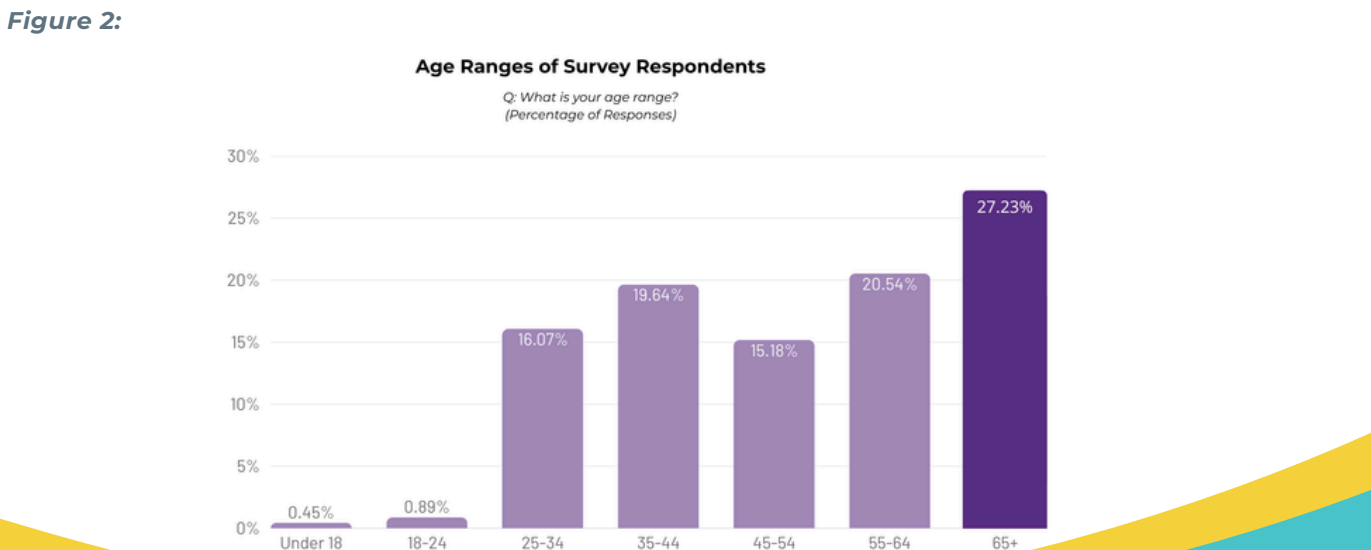
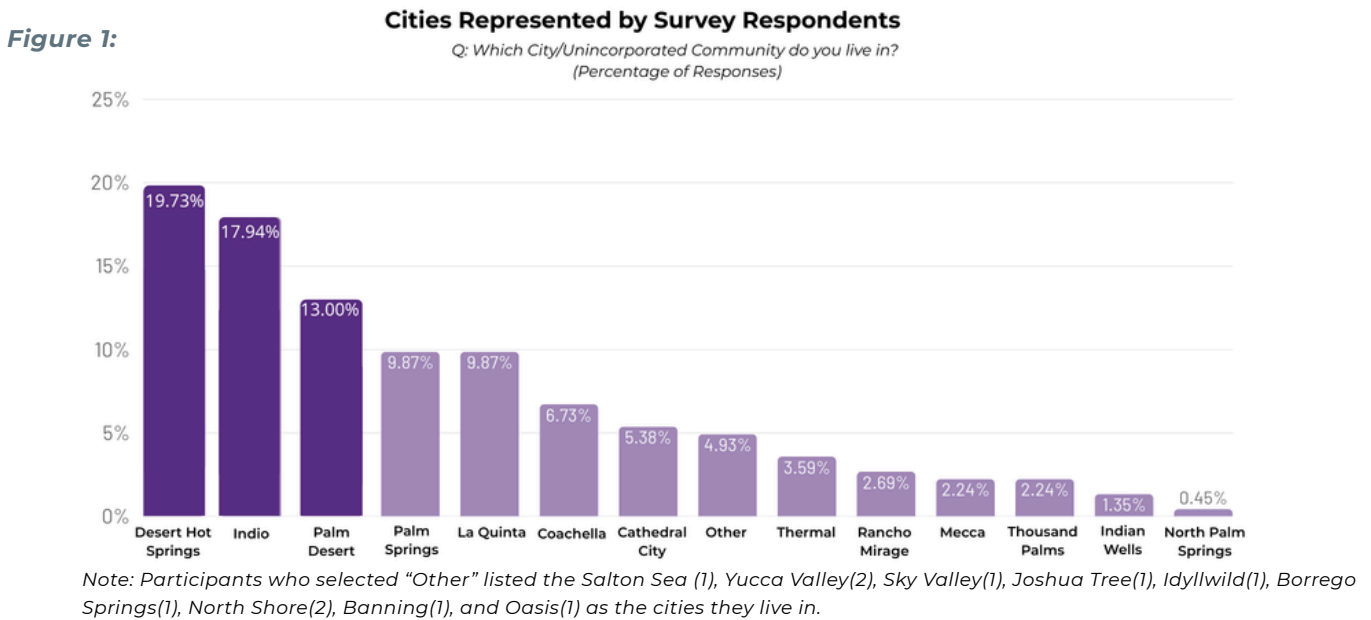
Workforce & Economic Opportunity

THE SURVEY

The community survey received 224 responses from residents and stakeholders across the Coachella Valley. Respondents represented a diverse mix of community members, including residents, community-based organizations, healthcare professionals, advocates, and local leaders. The survey also captured input from individuals across a wide range of ages, income levels, and lived experiences, providing valuable insight into the priorities and needs of communities throughout the Coachella Valley. It is important to note that there may be overlap between survey respondents and in-person/virtual session participants.

Demographics:

Survey respondents represented communities across the Coachella Valley, reflecting participation from cities throughout DHCD/F's service area. Participants also represented a wide range of ages and backgrounds, with more than half reporting they have lived in the Valley for over 20 years. The respondent pool reflects the region's diversity, including a majority identifying as Hispanic or Latino and nearly half reporting Spanish as a primary language spoken at home.



Lived Experience & Socioeconomic Context:

Survey respondents also represented a range of lived experiences and socioeconomic backgrounds. Many participants identified as immigrants or first-generation residents, caregivers, or individuals living with disabilities, highlighting perspectives from community members navigating a variety of health and social challenges. The survey also captured input from households across a range of income levels, providing insight into the economic realities facing residents throughout the region.

Figure 3:

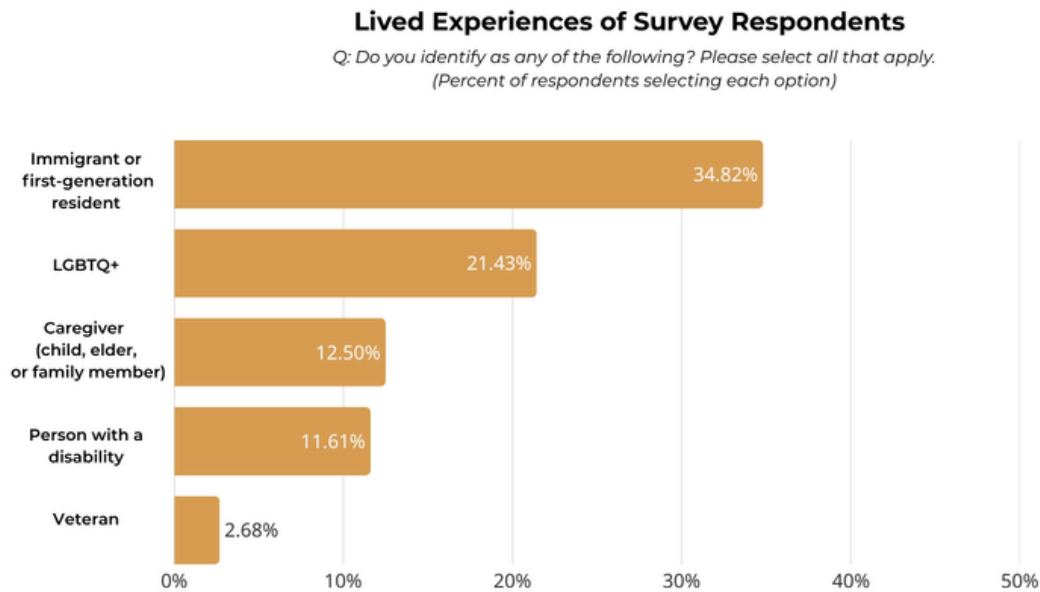
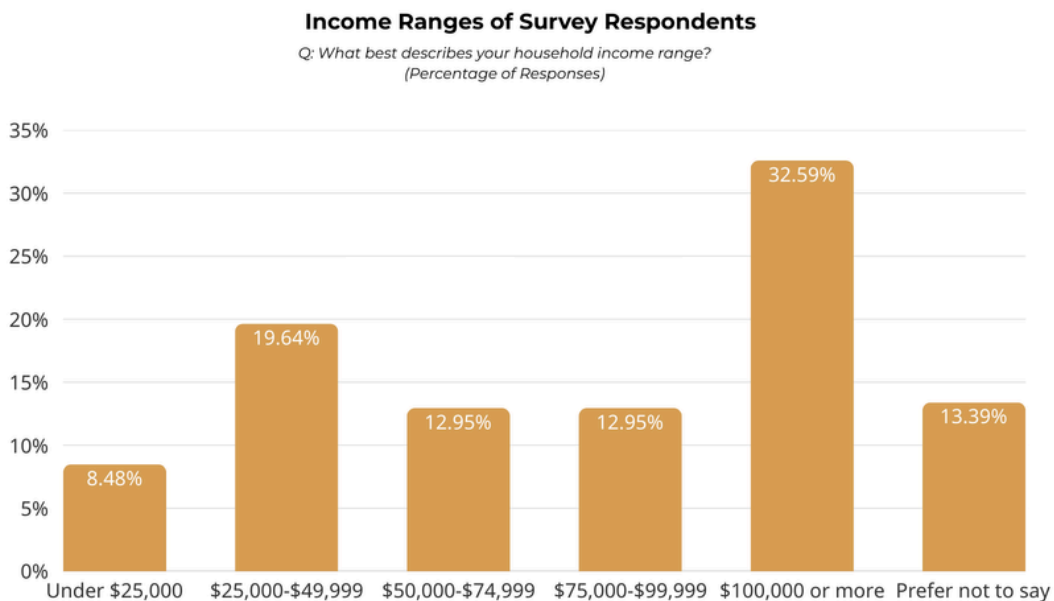


Figure 4:



THE STRATEGIC ROADMAP

A strategic plan serves as a roadmap for an organization's work, clarifying the impact it seeks to achieve, how it will focus its time and resources, and how it will respond to the most pressing needs in the community. It is composed of key building blocks and requires a step-by-step process.

The first phase of our strategic planning process focused on aligning DHCD/F Board and staff around a shared understanding of the organization's long-term direction. Through this work, DHCD/F refined the Vision and Mission statements outlined below.

Vision: To achieve optimal health at all stages of life for all District residents.

Mission: To improve health access and outcomes for all District residents through strategic funding and partnership-building to advance resilient communities.

Together, these statements establish the organization's "True North", providing a foundation that guides decision-making, priorities, partnerships, and investments. These statements were shared and validated through the community engagement process, where they resonated strongly with participants and were affirmed as reflective of community priorities.

Once the Vision and Mission were finalized, we drew on a wide variety of quantitative and qualitative data sources, including community health needs assessments, insights from partners and the community, and findings from prior DHCD/F initiatives, alongside a series of Board and staff work sessions to identify four core areas of work that will guide DHCD/F's efforts over the next five years. Several early goals and initiatives were presented to community members during the engagement sessions (as outlined in the Detailed Findings section of this report) to ensure they reflect community needs and to refine them based on feedback. *The Social Determinants of Health (SDoH) framework was embedded throughout this process, helping to contextualize community needs and shape how related priorities were grouped.*

WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

Equitably increase the workforce of primary, specialty and behavioral health professionals.

AWARENESS & ACCESS

Equitably increase awareness of health services and access to primary, specialty and behavioral health services.

ENGAGEMENT

Engage in strategic partnerships, programs, and funding to equitably address social determinants of health.

DATA-DRIVEN

Using information to make better decisions and improve community impact.

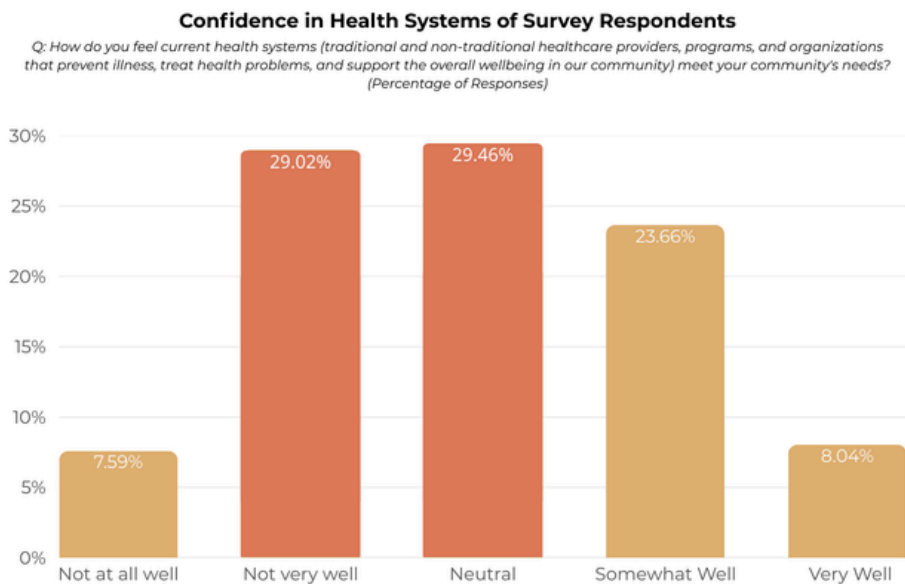
SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

Across all seven in-person community engagement sessions, the virtual session, and the community survey, participants consistently highlighted challenges and opportunities that align closely with the four core areas identified by the DHCD/F as priorities for the next five years. Community members frequently connected their experiences back to these focus areas, reinforcing their relevance to the lived realities of residents across the Valley. The themes below summarize the key insights that emerged across all sessions and the survey and illustrate how residents experience these challenges in their daily lives.

#1 Current Health Systems are not Meeting Community Needs across the Coachella Valley.

Throughout community engagement sessions and the survey, members of the community reinforced that the current health systems in the Coachella Valley, from traditional healthcare providers to programs that support the well-being of communities, are not adequately meeting the needs of residents, consequently contributing to delayed care, higher rates of preventable illness and disease, and increased reliance on emergency health services, all of which can contribute to early or high mortality rates.

Figure 5:

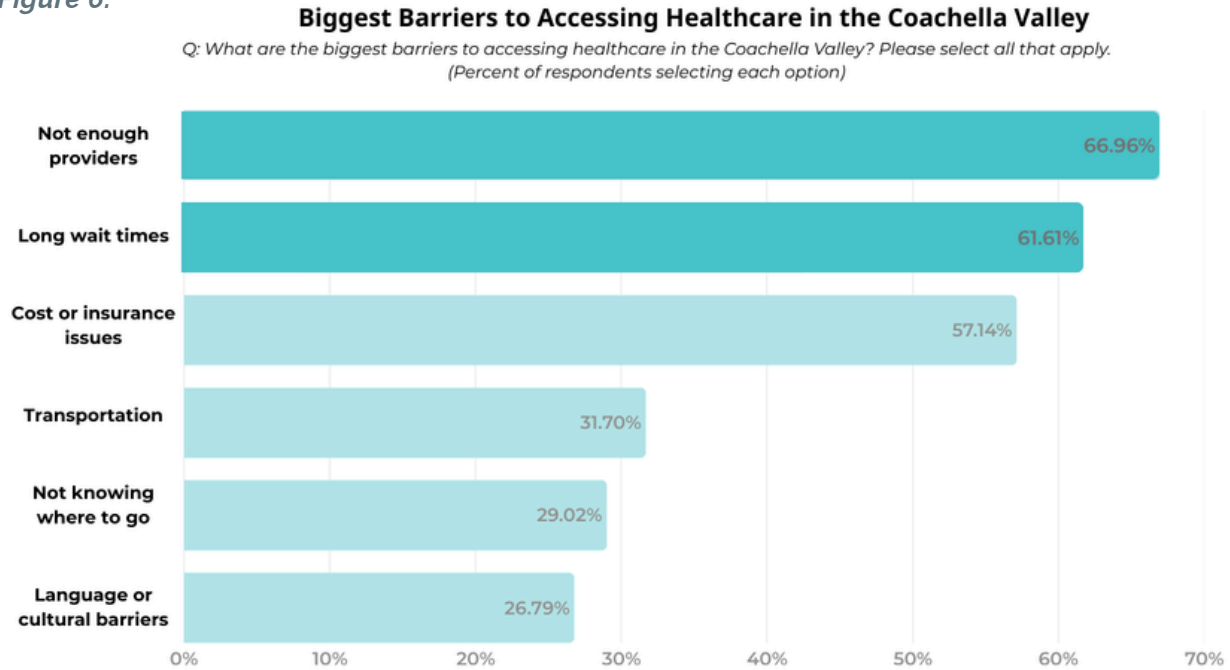


#2 Workforce Shortages are a System-wide Barrier to Accessing Consistent, High-Quality Care

Residents across the Valley described difficulty accessing timely care due to provider shortages, limited specialists, and high turnover among healthcare providers. These challenges often result in long wait times, short appointments, difficulty building trusted relationships with doctors and care teams, and a lack of culturally competent providers who reflect and understand the communities they serve.

Survey responses reinforce this finding, with provider shortages identified as the most significant barrier to accessing care, followed by long wait times, which often reflect limited provider capacity in the region.

Figure 6:



#3 Awareness, Navigation, and Access Gaps Prevent Residents From Fully Benefiting From Existing Health Services and Resources

Community participants frequently shared that while many services exist in the Valley, residents often struggle to find them, understand how to access them, or navigate complex systems to receive care. Language barriers, limited digital access, and the absence of centralized information make it difficult for many community members to connect with available resources, and in some communities these challenges are compounded by gaps in available services, particularly where provider options or specialty care are limited.

#4 Social Determinants of Health are Major Drivers of Community Wellbeing

Residents consistently emphasized that health is shaped by more than medical care alone.

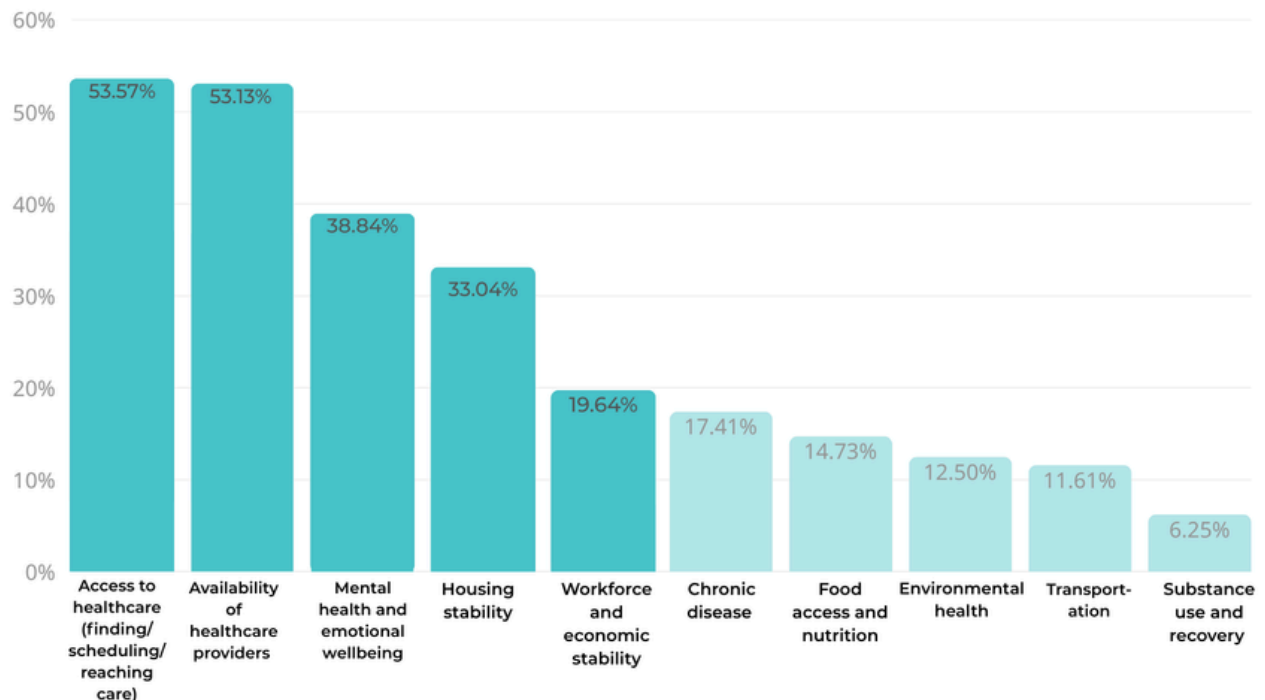
Issues such as housing stability, food access, transportation, environmental conditions, and social connection were repeatedly identified as critical factors influencing the health and wellbeing of individuals and families across the Valley.

“Addressing food access, environmental heat exposure, transportation barriers, and care navigation together would have a greater long-term impact than expanding clinical services alone (Survey Respondent)”

Figure 7:

Health or Wellness Challenges Identified by Survey Respondents

Q: What are the most important health or wellness challenges facing your community today? Please select up to three.
(Percent of respondents selecting each option)



When asked to select up to three of the most important health or wellness challenges facing their community today, over half of survey respondents identified access to healthcare and the availability of healthcare providers as top concerns. Among the social determinants of health, housing stability, and workforce and economic stability were the most frequently selected.

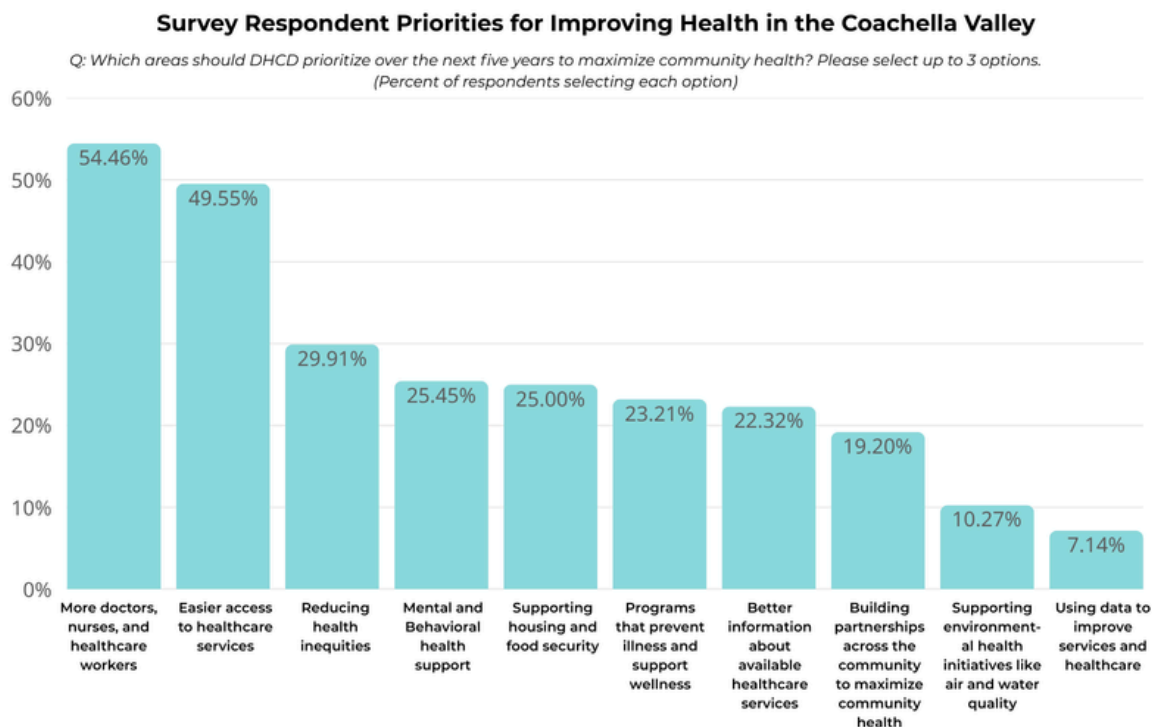
#5 Better Coordination, Data Sharing, and Collaboration Across Organizations are Needed to Reduce Fragmentation and Improve Collective Impact

Community members highlighted that many organizations are working hard to support residents, but efforts are often fragmented and difficult to navigate. Participants expressed a strong desire for stronger partnerships, shared information systems, and more coordinated approaches to ensure services reach those who need them most. We also heard support for DHCD/F to leverage partnerships with the Valley's largest government entities and funders, and to convene smaller organizations to streamline efforts and work collectively to maximize impact.



Survey responses further reinforce the key themes highlighted above. When asked which areas DHCD/F should prioritize over the next five years to maximize community health, respondents most frequently emphasized expanding the healthcare workforce and improving access to healthcare services, reflecting the strong concerns raised throughout engagement sessions about provider shortages and barriers to timely care.

Figure 8:

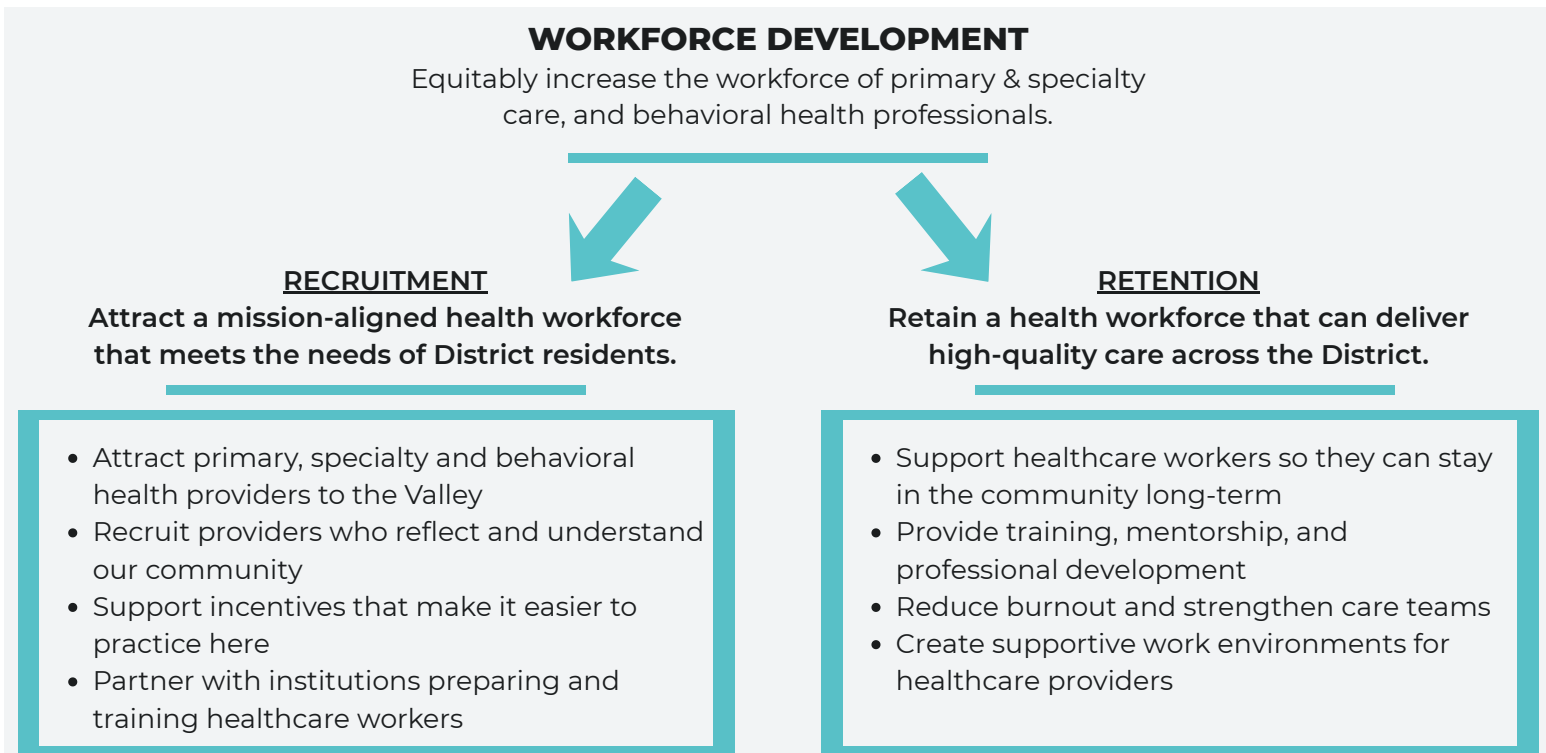


Respondents also highlighted the importance of reducing health inequities, strengthening mental and behavioral health support, and addressing social determinants of health such as housing and food security, underscoring the community's recognition that health outcomes are shaped by both medical care and broader social conditions.

The next section, "Detailed Findings" takes a deeper look into each key area of focus presented to participants in DHCD/F's Community Engagement Sessions and highlights the top themes and ideas echoed across all data collection methods for each focus area.



DETAILED FINDINGS



The visual above was presented to Community Engagement session participants and summarizes the core area: Workforce Development.

1 Developing Local Healthcare Talent Pipelines is Seen as the Most Sustainable Workforce Solution

Across community engagement sessions, we heard residents consistently emphasize the importance of building a healthcare workforce pipeline that invests in local students and community members. Individuals who grow up in the Valley are more likely to return or remain in the region long-term and bring valuable cultural understanding to patient care. Throughout the community engagement process, we heard the importance of strengthening education pathways from high school through community college and university programs, as well as expanding internships, scholarships, residencies, and fellowships that support local residents entering healthcare careers.

“
As a youth of the East Coachella Valley, I recognize the need for better health care. But because we are low income, pursuing a higher education, specifically in health care, will only be a burden for our family, so we don't pursue it. (Zone 7)
”

“
I think the example that really would help the folks would be to offer scholarships to local residents that pay for health-related training.
(Zone 7)
”

2 Significant Gaps Exist in Key Healthcare Specialties

There were several consistently highlighted shortages in specific areas of care that are critical to the health of the Coachella Valley community. The most commonly discussed gaps centered around behavioral health, pediatric specialties, dental care, geriatric care, and women's health. Residents described long wait times, limited appointment availability, and the need to travel outside the Valley for specialized services as common challenges. Community members emphasized the importance of recruiting providers in these fields to the Valley, while also ensuring that new providers are culturally competent, bilingual where possible, and familiar with the unique needs of the region's diverse communities.

From my experience, our pediatric needs across the district as far as specialty care are very much lacking (Zone 5)

The distance we are from specialists and not having transportation is a big issue as specialists are at least 2 hours away (Virtual)

My family and I travel outside the valley to reach specialty doctors (Survey)

3 Cost of Living and Workforce Conditions Create Challenges for Recruiting and Retaining Providers

Community members frequently raised the high cost of living in the Valley as a major barrier to attracting healthcare providers. Relocation costs, limited benefits, and housing availability were cited as factors that may discourage providers from moving to or remaining in the region long-term. Participants also noted that workforce conditions, such as heavy patient loads, limited support in certain parts of the Valley, and challenges sustaining adequate staffing levels, can make it difficult for providers to remain in the community. Together, these factors contribute to ongoing challenges in recruiting and retaining healthcare professionals needed to serve the Coachella Valley. Across zones, participants emphasized the importance of affordable or workforce housing and stronger support structures for providers to help stabilize the healthcare workforce.

Getting people to relocate out here is a big problem (Zone 4)

I think our providers are overwhelmed and burnt out (Survey)

Not only do the scholarships help put a higher education within reach for many of our students going into health care pathways, but also covers the high cost of transportation and living (Zone 5)



The following tactics were raised during the community engagement sessions and the survey as potential approaches to strengthen the healthcare workforce in the Coachella Valley. While not all ideas may fall directly within the District's role, they represent strategies that could be explored through partnerships and regional collaboration.

Pipeline & Training Expansion

- Early exposure to healthcare careers through high school pathway programs and partnerships with local schools
- Strengthening dual-enrollment and early college pathways that connect high school students to healthcare training programs
- Tuition assistance or scholarship programs for local students who commit to serving in the Valley
- Paid internships and training opportunities that allow local students and residents to gain experience in healthcare settings
- Mentorship opportunities connecting students with healthcare professionals practicing in the Valley

Recruitment & Retention Supports

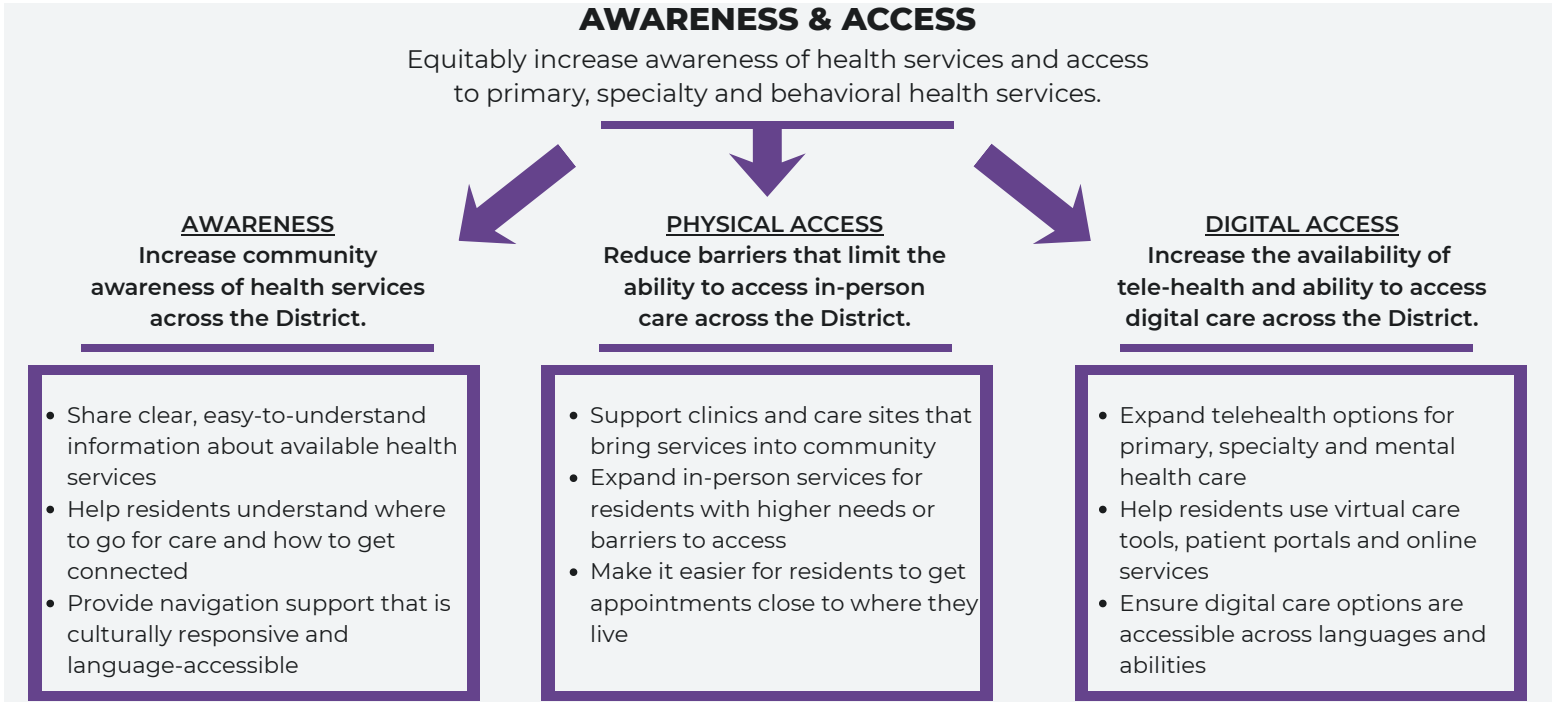
- Workforce housing partnerships or housing assistance programs for healthcare workers
- Focus on re-recruiting pre-COVID providers who left due to burnout
- Relocation support for families of healthcare workers moving to the Valley
- Wraparound services for students pursuing healthcare careers

Culturally Competent Workforce Strategies

- Support Community Health Workers and Promotoras
- Recruit bilingual providers

Expanding Access to Specialists

- Partnerships with academic and medical institutions to expand residency and training programs in the Valley
- Recruitment efforts focused on bringing behavioral health, pediatric, and dental specialists to the region
- Telehealth services to help connect patients with specialists who are not locally available



The visual above was presented to Community Engagement session participants and summarizes the core area: Awareness & Access.

1 Residents Need Clearer Health Education and Navigation Support to Access Care

Across zones, participants highlighted the need for clearer health education and practical support to help residents navigate the healthcare system. Community members described challenges understanding where to go for care, how to schedule appointments, how referrals work, and how to access or use health insurance and benefits. Participants also noted that many residents struggle to understand what services are covered, what care may cost, and how to access affordable care options. In addition, language barriers, limited health literacy, and fragmented information sources were frequently cited as barriers. Community members emphasized the importance of culturally responsive health education that helps residents understand how to prevent illness, maintain healthy lifestyles, and seek care earlier. Strengthening both preventive health education and navigation support was widely seen as an important step in helping residents better understand available services and successfully connect to care.

I've noticed is there's not enough insurance options out there for our community. And I don't think our community is also aware of the different insurance opportunities available to them (Zone 6)

Many families do not struggle only with access, but with understanding how to navigate insurance, referrals, specialists, appeals, and patient rights. Without navigation support, access alone does not translate into care. (Survey)

2 Trusted Community Messengers and Channels Are the Most Effective Way to Reach Residents

Across zones, participants emphasized that health information is most effective when it is delivered through trusted community channels rather than traditional institutional communication. Community Health Workers, promotoras, faith-based organizations, youth leaders, and community-based organizations were frequently identified as trusted sources of health information. Word-of-mouth networks, community outreach events, and partnerships with local organizations were described as critical pathways for reaching residents who may not engage with formal healthcare systems. Participants also noted that many residents rely on digital and social media platforms (WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok) to receive information and stay connected to community networks, suggesting these channels could play an important role in expanding health outreach and awareness.

“ We need to learn how to capitalize on the community health worker benefit because most people don't know how (Zone 1) ”

“ I use TikTok and Google to inform myself on different health conditions, like my diabetes (Zone 3) ”

“ I think there's a lot of fear from our communities to direct ourselves directly sometimes with any institutions that we're not familiar with. And so always that trusted partner is going to help alleviate some of that fear and help them overcome it (Zone 4) ”

3 Access Barriers Continue to Limit Care Across the Valley

Residents across zones described persistent barriers to accessing healthcare. Transportation challenges were frequently raised, particularly for seniors, low-income residents, and individuals living in more rural areas of the Valley. Participants also highlighted long wait times, limited provider availability, and shortages in key specialties, which often require residents to travel outside the Valley for care, including to Loma Linda or across the Mexican border. Affordability was another concern, with residents noting that the costs of insurance, copays, medications, and services not fully covered by insurance, such as dental or vision care, were burdensome. Potential solutions, such as expanding mobile clinics and programs that bring care to residents, strengthening transportation support, and creating new medical infrastructure in under-resourced areas, were raised by community members.

“ We have to wait so long for appointments, and when our children get sick we can't even get seen at urgent care because it takes hours and hours. It forces residents of our community to go the emergency room or across the border (Zone 7) ”

“ Public transportation can be unreliable, and many bus stops are located along busy highways far from where people actually live. Expanding routes into neighborhoods and making transportation more reliable would help residents consistently access healthcare and other essential services (Survey) ”



TACTIC TOOLBOX

The following tactics were raised during the community engagement sessions and the survey as potential approaches to strengthen awareness and access in the Coachella Valley. While not all ideas may fall directly within the District's role, they represent strategies that could be explored through partnerships and regional collaboration.

Strengthen Navigation and Health Education

- Creating a centralized referral hub connecting residents to healthcare and social services
- Establishing a single hotline or navigation line that residents can call for guidance
- Developing a one-stop website or online portal for healthcare resources
- Building a unified provider directory listing available providers and services in the Valley with up-to-date information
- Offering health education workshops that explain how to access care, referrals, and insurance benefits
- Providing culturally responsive and multilingual health education materials
- Supporting benefits navigation programs to help residents understand insurance coverage and eligibility
- Support chronic disease prevention education programs

Expand Trusted Community Outreach Networks

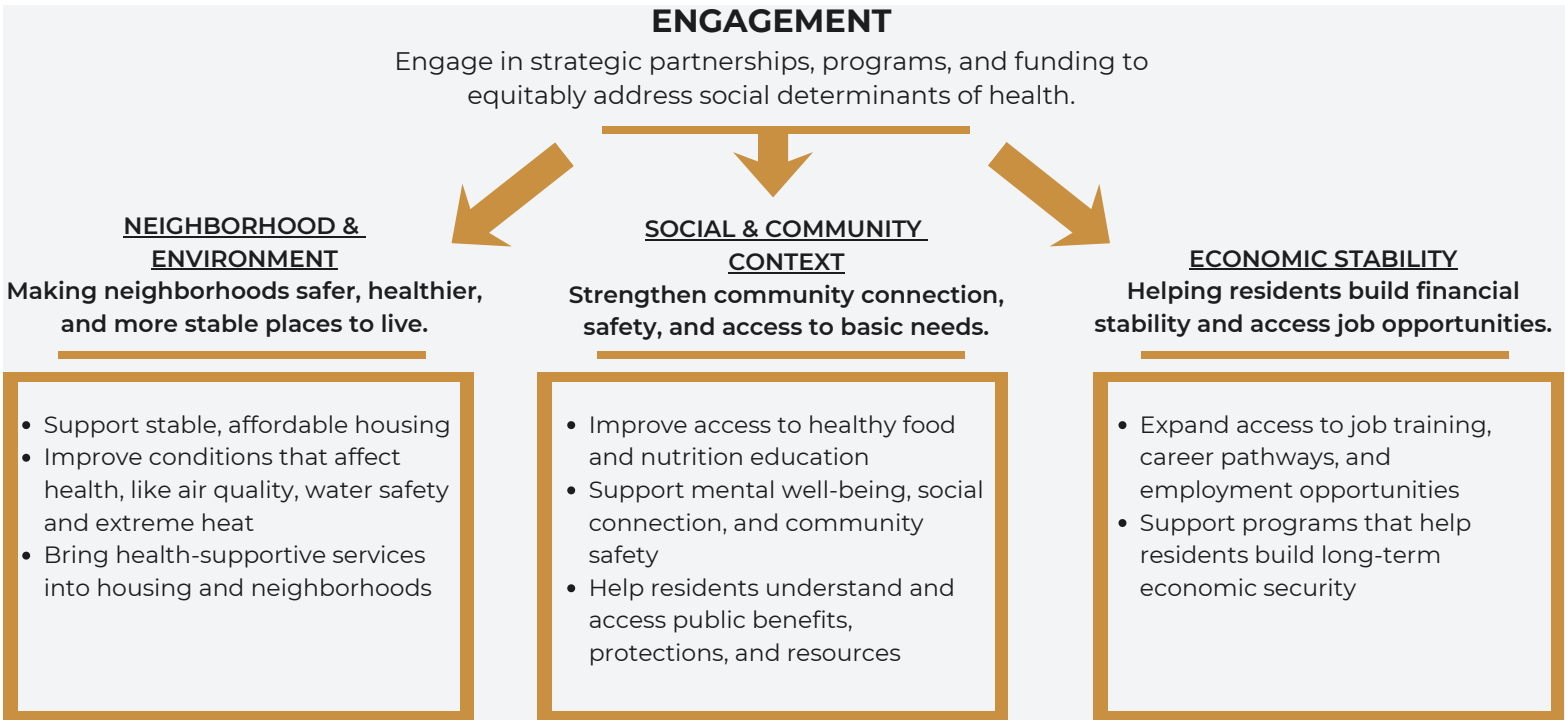
See *Partnerships* section of the report for key networks to collaborate with to increase access and awareness

Key Communication Channels

- Sharing information through WhatsApp
- Leveraging Facebook community pages
- Using Instagram and TikTok to spread health information and resources
- Partnerships with Spanish-language radio stations
- Leveraging local television and community media
- Sending out mailers to hard-to-reach communities
- Exploring ads to promote available resources via bus stops, TV, or billboards

Increasing Physical Access

- Expanding mobile clinic services across the Valley
- Increasing transportation support for residents traveling to healthcare appointments
- Transportation vouchers
- Expansion of public transit routes
- Ride services for medical appointments
- Development of hospital or clinic infrastructure in the Eastern Coachella Valley
- Development of emergency or urgent care clinic in Desert Hot Springs



The visual above was presented to Community Engagement session participants and summarizes the core area: Engagement.

1 Food Access and Nutrition Are Central to Community Wellbeing

Residents across sessions described food access and nutrition as important contributors to community health. We heard individuals share about heavy reliance on food banks, rising food prices at local stores, and limited access to fresh produce in some communities. Community members also emphasized the importance of culturally appropriate nutrition education and information about medically tailored diets to support chronic disease prevention and management. Expanding access to healthy, nutritious foods, including fresh produce and culturally relevant options, was also widely seen as an opportunity to improve community well-being.

“
We see a lot of children with behavioral problems because the only meals they have are the ones they eat at our community center (Zone 2)
”

“
Food sovereignty means more than food access. The Coachella Valley produces massive amounts of food, yet many residents struggle to access healthy food. When communities control food production and distribution, we improve health and economic stability and cultural connection at the same time. (Virtual)
”

“
I have noticed that the food given out at our food banks is better, however it still needs some work. When you are low income, you aren't looking at the nutrition value, you are looking at the least expensive option that will feed your family (Zone 6)
”

2 Social Isolation and Mental Well-Being Are Growing Community Concerns

Community members frequently raised concerns about loneliness, social isolation, and mental health challenges across multiple age groups. Seniors were described as particularly vulnerable to isolation, while youth were noted to lack sufficient mentorship opportunities and supportive spaces. Participants also discussed ongoing stigma around mental health and the need for peer support networks, community spaces, and programs that foster social connection. Several residents shared that broader social stressors, including uncertainty about economic conditions, immigration policies, and declining trust in institutions, have heightened feelings of fear and isolation in some communities, underscoring the importance of strengthening community support systems and safe spaces for connection.

A lot of people feel alone. They feel isolated. They might not have families to support them or a person that's reaching out to them (Zone 3)

It would be great to invest in community-based third spaces. These spaces can offer ongoing mental health support (Virtual)

We know the past couple of years there has been a mental health and loneliness epidemic (Zone 1)

3 Economic Stability and Access to Basic Resources Shape Health Outcomes

Across zones, residents pointed to economic stability as an important component of health. Affordable and safe housing was frequently raised as a major concern, with residents noting how rising housing costs and unstable living conditions can contribute to high levels of stress and poorer health outcomes. Community members also discussed the need for job training opportunities, youth career pathways, and support for workers in sectors such as agriculture and hospitality that often experience seasonal employment. In addition, residents noted that navigating public benefits, including Medi-Cal, CalFresh, housing assistance, and disability benefits, can be complex, creating barriers for individuals seeking basic resources that support stability and well-being. The community suggested expanding workforce training opportunities, strengthening housing support programs, and improving benefits navigation services as some solutions for long-term stability.

The high cost of living creates challenges for residents where they need to choose between basic living necessities such as food and healthcare (Zone 4)

Health care, mental health, and housing go together (Zone 2)

Many of our students or families leave the region because there are better paying jobs on the coast. And so one of the things that we're really working on is how do we attract more companies that will provide higher paying jobs so that students and families can stay (Zone 5)

4 Community Organizations Want Greater Coordination and Opportunities to Collaborate

Community members as well as community partners all expressed strong interest in deeper collaboration among community organizations, service providers, and public agencies. Many described challenges such as duplication of services, weak referral pathways, and limited coordination across programs. Residents and organizational representatives also voiced support for continued community engagement opportunities, stronger coordination of services to tackle SDoH issues, and suggested that the District could play an important role as a convener of partners working to address community needs.

“ We need to make sure that adjacent organizations have lists of trusted organizations and providers across the Valley so we can refer our clients to the most culturally appropriate services (Zone 1) ”

“ We have services that exist that we know people need. But because so many of our organizations work in silos, we are missing an opportunity to help more people by working together and creating a better referral network (Zone 7) ”

“ Collaboration between all our agencies is so so important (Zone 2) ”





TACTIC TOOLBOX

The following tactics were raised during the community engagement sessions as potential approaches to strengthen engagement in the Coachella Valley. While not all ideas may fall directly within the District's role, they represent strategies that could be explored through partnerships and regional collaboration.

Expand Community Spaces and Programs

- Expand peer support groups for seniors, youth and caregivers
- Create youth mentorship and leadership programs and opportunities
- Support community gathering spaces and events
- Increase access to community recreation programs and outdoor spaces

Strengthen Food Access and Nutrition Programs

- Expand partnerships with local food banks and pantries
- Support community gardens and urban agriculture initiatives
- Increase nutrition education programs
- Expand medically tailored nutrition programs
- Improve access to fresh and culturally relevant foods
- Partnerships with local farmers and farmers markets

Support Housing Stability and Healthy Living

- Expand partnerships with affordable housing organizations
- Support programs that improve healthy housing conditions

Promote Environmental Health

- Support initiatives that address air quality and dust exposure, particularly as it relates to the Salton Sea
- Support community education around environmental health risks

Strengthen Economic Opportunity and Workforce Pathways

- Expand job training and workforce development programs
- Create more career pathways for youth
- Support programs that work with seasonal workers (farmworkers and hospitality)

DATA-DRIVEN

Using information to make better decisions and improve community impact.

DATA MATURITY (INTERNAL)

Use data to better understand community needs and make smarter decisions.

- Improve how the District collects, understand, and uses information
- Make sure decisions are based on real community needs and timely data
- Strengthen accountability by tracking what's working and what's not
- Use data to learn and improve how funding and programs are delivered

DATA HUB (EXTERNAL)

Make data easy to access and use so the District community and partners can make better decisions.

- Share clear, accessible data about community health and services with partners and residents
- Provide tools, reports, and insights that partners can leverage
- Help organizations learn from each other and work more effectively together

The visual above was presented to Community Engagement session participants and summarizes the core area: Data-Driven.

1 Data Should Better Reflect Resident's Real Experiences with Healthcare

Across zones, community members expressed strong support for using data to better understand the real experiences residents face when accessing healthcare in the Coachella Valley. Community members noted that many challenges, such as long wait times, travel distances to see specialists, and high out-of-pocket costs, are widely experienced but not always reflected in available data. Participants emphasized the importance of capturing and tracking both quantitative and qualitative information that reflects these lived realities so that decisions and investments can be grounded in a clearer understanding of community needs.

“
Stories and qualitative data from our residents really ground us in our community and helps us understand the decisions folks are having to make when it comes to health
(Zone 6)
”

“
I think the existing data can only show us so much, but in order to have a full picture, we really need that resident input (Zone 4)
”

2 Better Data Sharing and Transparency Are Needed Across Organizations

Community members repeatedly highlighted the lack of shared visibility across healthcare and community organizations. Many described systems operating in silos, where providers and service organizations are often unaware of the services others offer. Participants noted that greater access to shared health and program data, such as service utilization, referral outcomes, and community health trends, could help organizations better design programs, target resources, and identify service gaps. Improving data sharing and transparency across organizations was seen as an important opportunity to strengthen coordination and help residents connect more easily to the services they need.

3 Community Organizations Need Support to Build Data Capacity

Many nonprofits and smaller service providers acknowledged that they have limited capacity to collect, manage, and use data effectively. Participants described challenges such as limited staff time, lack of technical tools, and difficulty meeting reporting requirements. Several organizations noted that stronger technical assistance, shared tools, and support for evaluation could help them better understand their impact and contribute more effectively to collective efforts to improve community health.

“One of the issues that we have is implementing our own data systems within our clinic. I think most research organizations use things like Redcap or other systems like that that we don't have access to. And the implementation of it is pretty difficult (Zone 4)”

“There are community organizations doing community-wide surveys. We should partner with local organizations who have already done surveys and already know what the community wants and needs. Why pay for the data work if it's already being done by other folks (Zone 5)”



TACTIC TOOLBOX

The following tactics were raised during the community engagement sessions as potential approaches to strengthening data in the Coachella Valley. While not all ideas may fall directly within the District's role, they represent strategies that could be explored through partnerships and regional collaboration.

Tracking Community Health Experiences

- Tracking wait times for appointments and specialty care
- Tracking distances and travel times experienced by residents to get to care
- Monitoring out-of-pocket healthcare costs

Improve Data Sharing and Visibility

- Create and increase visibility of a shared provider and services directory
- Establish shared platforms that allow partners to see program and activity data
- Make community health data more accessible to organizations and residents

Build Data Capacity

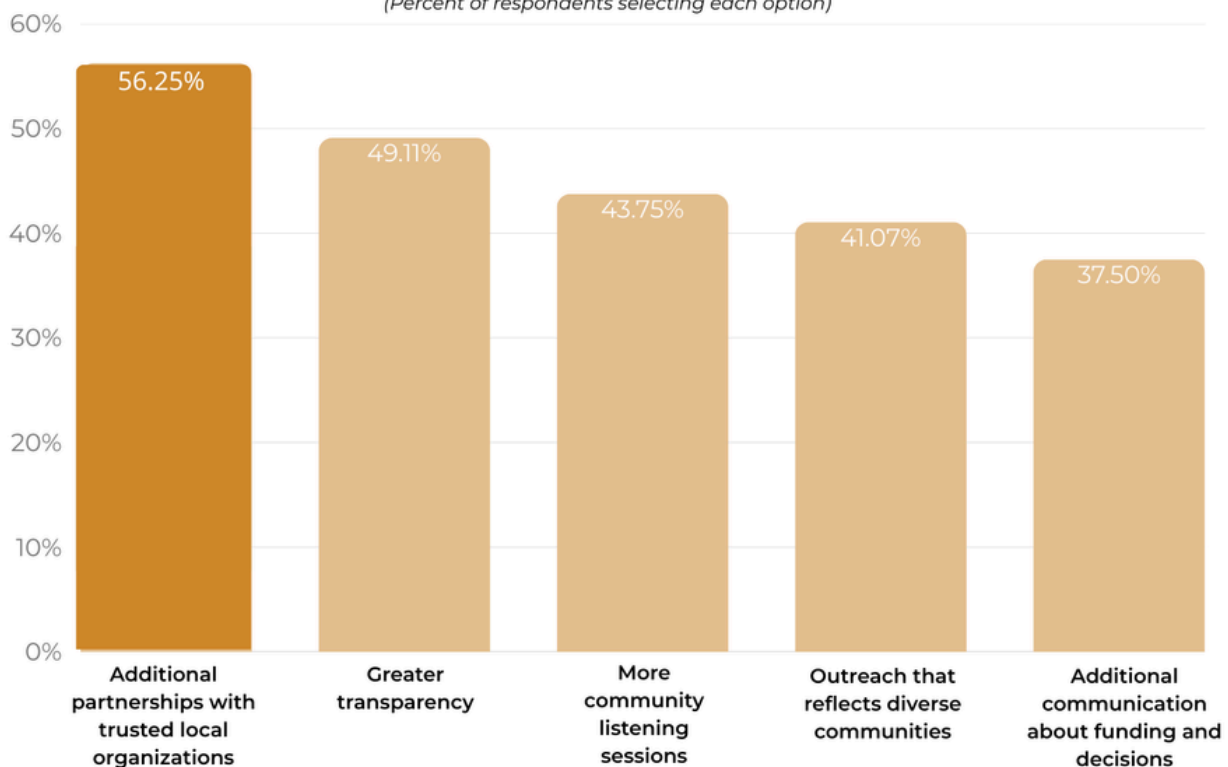
- Provide technical assistance and training for nonprofits
- Support organizations with data collection and evaluation tools

STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS

Throughout the community engagement process, we asked residents and stakeholders not only what priorities DHCD/F should focus on, but also who they believe must be at the table to successfully achieve those goals. A consistent theme across sessions was that meaningful progress will require strong, coordinated partnerships across sectors. This was reinforced by survey respondents, who indicated that, for effective community engagement, DHCD/F should pursue additional partnerships and work with trusted local organizations.

Effective Engagement with Communities According to Survey Respondents

*Q: How should DHCD engage with communities to be most effective? Please select all that apply.
(Percent of respondents selecting each option)*



What is outlined on the next two pages is a categorization of the partner types identified through community input, along with guidance on the roles these partnerships could play in each of the four core areas. While these categories provide structure, many partners will play cross-cutting roles across multiple pillars. Health outcomes are interconnected, and the partnerships required to advance them are similarly interdependent.



Healthcare Delivery

These partners deliver direct care, generate frontline data and are central to workforce, access and coordination strategies.

Includes:

- Community health centers and FQHCs
- Behavioral health providers
- Hospital systems and rural emergency departments
- Healthcare Coverage
- Specialty practices
- Mobile Clinics
- Street Medicine programs



Education & Workforce Development

These partners support workforce pipelines, economic stability, youth engagement, and long-term economic sustainability.

Includes:

- Universities and medical schools
- Community colleges and nursing programs
- School districts
- Workforce development board
- Job training providers
- Apprenticeship and youth employment programs



Community-Based & Outreach

These partners build trust, improve navigation, collect lived-experience insights, and ensure equity in engagement.

Includes:

- Promotoras/Community Health Workers
- Immigrant-serving organizations
- LGBTQ+ centers
- Senior centers
- Faith-based organizations
- Tribal and Indigenous partners
- Food banks and pantries
- Youth programs
- Volunteer networks



Public Sector & Government

These partners shape infrastructure, regulation, emergency preparedness, benefits access, and population-level data.

Includes:

- County departments (public health, environmental health, social services)
- City governments and planning departments
- Housing authorities
- Public health systems
- Law enforcement and emergency response
- Benefits and enrollment programs



Housing, Environment & Infrastructure

These partners influence upstream drivers of health, geographic access, and community resilience.

Includes:

- Affordable housing developers
- Housing authorities
- Environmental and climate groups
- Salton Sea and air quality stakeholders
- Transportation providers
- Urban planning and infrastructure agencies



Backbone & System Coordination

These partners reduce fragmentation, align services, support shared data systems, and enable cross-sector coordination.

Includes:

- Regional collaboratives
- Service coalitions
- Nonprofit alliances
- Capacity-building organizations
- Multi-agency outreach networks



Data & Technology

These partners enable shared metrics, dashboards, transparency, and data-driven learning.

Includes:

- Healthcare data holders
- Public data systems
- Health IT platforms
- Referral management systems
- Evaluation and research partners



SPOTLIGHT

SENIOR* COMMUNITY

*For the purpose of this report, seniors are defined as 65+

As the senior population in the Coachella Valley continues to increase, community members consistently emphasized the importance of ensuring that older adults have access to the care, support, and resources necessary for healthy aging.

Key Challenges for the Senior Community

- **Limited access to healthcare providers**, particularly geriatric specialists, and doctors who accept Medicare
- **Transportation barriers**, especially for seniors who no longer drive or live far from medical services
- **Difficulty navigating healthcare systems and benefits**, particularly for those managing multiple conditions or living on fixed incomes
- **Risk of social isolation**, with many seniors experiencing limited opportunities for social connection or community engagement

“
Older adults living in our valley struggle with stable housing on fixed incomes and long distances to specialty care (Zone 1)
”

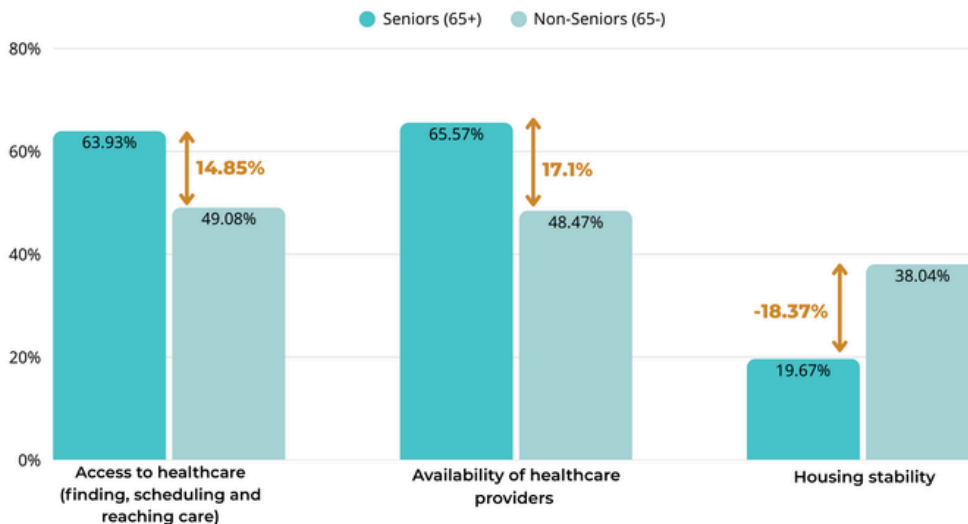
“
Thinking about our seniors, we know that once we age, we tend to get isolated even more. And even though seniors are living longer, they don't have access to the same wealth that people had in the past (Zone 6)
”

Survey Insight

As evidenced in the chart below, the Community input survey revealed that seniors were 15% more likely to identify access to healthcare as a top community health challenge and 17% more likely to cite the availability of healthcare providers. Interestingly, housing stability was perceived as less of a challenge for the 65+ population of survey takers compared to those younger than 65.

Seniors vs Non-Seniors on the Health or Wellness Challenges Facing Their Community

Q: What are the most important health or wellness challenges facing your community today? Please select up to 3 options.
(Percent of respondents selecting each option)





SPOTLIGHT

SENIOR COMMUNITY(CONT.)

Opportunities to Improve Senior Health and Wellbeing

- **Expand transportation programs** and ride-share assistance to help seniors reach medical appointment and essential services
- **Increase access to specialists, geriatric care providers and in-home support services** to better meet the healthcare needs of an aging population
- **Strengthen senior centers and community wellness programs** that promote social connection, engagement and healthy aging
- **Provide greater support navigating healthcare and benefits systems**, including assistance with Medicare, digital health tools, and accessing available services

We should pair youth/students with seniors for digital access and support (Virtual)

Our senior centers play such a vital, vital role in this community. We have the largest group of 100 plus in, I think, across America (Zone 5)





UNDER-RESOURCED COMMUNITIES

Throughout the community engagement process, residents highlighted the unique challenges faced by communities across the Coachella Valley's diverse landscape. Desert Hot Springs and communities in the Eastern Coachella Valley were consistently identified as underresourced, with residents highlighting the unique barriers they face in accessing care.

Key Challenges in Under-resourced Communities:

- **Limited local healthcare facilities:** Residents in Desert Hot Springs and East Valley communities often travel long distances to access primary care, specialists, urgent care, or hospital services, frequently relying on facilities in Palm Springs, Palm Desert, or other parts of the region.
- **Transportation and geographic barriers:** Long travel distances, limited public transit options, and reliance on personal vehicles make it difficult for residents to access timely care. In some cases, road closures or emergencies can further isolate communities such as Desert Hot Springs from emergency services.
- **Language and culturally appropriate care barriers:** Residents across underresourced communities highlighted the need for trusted messengers and bilingual healthcare providers.
- **Socioeconomic and environmental challenges:** Many residents, including farmworker and seasonal worker communities essential to the region's hospitality and agricultural economies, face barriers related to lower incomes, demanding working conditions, and extreme heat. In parts of the Eastern Coachella Valley, environmental factors such as poor air quality associated with the Salton Sea further contribute to health risks.

“
There are main road closures, and
in case of emergency there are no
local facilities available in DHS
(Survey)”

“
We need to be out in East Valley communities.
People are scared to come out and get the
services they need for multiple reasons, and
oftentimes represent multiple marginalized
identities, but they feel really scared to come out
(Zone 4)”

“
DHS is a community that hasn't grown
commercially like other communities,
and there isn't an urgent care available
to the community (Survey)”

“
There are not enough medical
facilities in Eastern Coachella
Valley (Survey)”



UNDER-RESOURCED COMMUNITIES (CONT.)

Opportunities to Improve Health and Wellbeing in Under-resourced Communities

- **Invest in local healthcare infrastructure** to expand access to primary, specialty, and urgent care closer to where residents in need live.
- **Strengthen transportation options to access care** by improving connections that help residents travel to hospitals, specialists, and preventative services when care is not available locally.
- **Expand community-based outreach through trusted messengers, including community health workers and promotoras**, who can help residents navigate healthcare systems, connect families to services, and build trust within the community.
- **Improve language access and culturally responsive care** to ensure services are accessible to Spanish-speaking and immigrant communities through bilingual providers, translated materials, and culturally competent care.



As an East Valley resident for life, we need staff and doctors and people who look like our community who understand our community who can relate to our community and meet them where they're at (Zone 7)



We need to establish a hospital in DHS in case of emergency (Zone 2)





LGBTQ+ COMMUNITY

Throughout the community engagement process, residents and stakeholders emphasized the presence and importance of the LGBTQ+ community in the Coachella Valley, and the need to ensure that healthcare systems and community services are inclusive and responsive to their needs.

Key Challenges for the LGBTQ+ Community

- **Limited access to culturally competent and affirming healthcare providers**, with participants emphasizing the importance of providers who understand LGBTQ+ health needs and lived experiences.
- **Experiences of stigma or discrimination in healthcare settings**, which can discourage some LGBTQ+ individuals from seeking care or fully engaging with available services.
- **Limited availability of gender-affirming care**, including a lack of local providers offering gender-affirming medical services and support.
- **Mental health and emotional wellbeing challenges**, with participants noting the importance of accessible and supportive mental health resources for LGBTQ+ individuals.

“
As a trans person, there is lack of trans health and trans care in the East Valley (Zone 7)
”

“
When it relates to folks that are aging, particularly in the LGBTQ plus community, they are more likely to not have extended family members because of discrimination, prejudice, and being pushed out of their families, and also more likely to not have children, so they need supportive networks (Zone 1)
”

Survey Insight

Survey responses from LGBTQ+ individuals reveal distinct health challenges and barriers compared to non-LGBTQ+ respondents. Notably, mental health and emotional well-being are significant concerns, with LGBTQ+ respondents 14% more likely to identify them as critical health challenges facing their community.

Self-identified LGBTQ+ vs Self-identified Non-LGBTQ+ on the Health or Wellness Challenges Facing Their Community

Q: What are the most important health or wellness challenges facing your community today? Please select up to three options. (Percent of respondents selecting each option)





SPOTLIGHT

LGBTQ+ COMMUNITY(CONT.)

Opportunities to Improve Health and Wellbeing for the LGBTQ+ Community

- **Expand access to culturally competent and affirming healthcare providers**, including training for healthcare professionals to better understand LGBTQ+ health needs and lived experiences.
- **Strengthen access to mental health services**, particularly services that are inclusive, trauma-informed, and responsive to the needs of LGBTQ+ individuals.
- **Support community organizations and safe spaces for LGBTQ+ residents**, creating opportunities for connection, support, and access to trusted resources.
- **Promote inclusive policies and practices across healthcare and community organizations**, helping ensure that LGBTQ+ residents feel welcomed, respected, and safe when seeking care.

None of the local hospitals provide gender-affirming care. That's a massive issue, particularly in the political climate right now. That's causing a major issue (Zone 5)

While most providers in the Valley are gay friendly, they're not necessarily gay smart (Zone 1)





SPOTLIGHT

YOUTH* COMMUNITY

**The UN formally defines youth as persons between the ages of 15 and 25*

Throughout the community sessions, attendees emphasized the critical role youth play in the future health and well-being of the Coachella Valley, while also highlighting the unique challenges young people face today. Notably, youth voices were largely absent from this process, representing only 0.9% of survey respondents and appearing in very small numbers during in-person or virtual community engagement sessions. This absence was recognized by many participants, who discussed the importance of developing strategies to engage youth more meaningfully and elevate their perspectives on the future of health in the Valley.

“
Our young people have potential to spread so much awareness. They are the ones who go to the university, the churches, group settings and meet up with other young people (Zone 2)
 ”

“
We really have to invest in our youth in order to be able to carry our communities forward (Zone 4)
 ”

Key Challenges for the Youth Community

- **Growing youth mental health needs**, with participants raising concerns about increasing anxiety, depression, and emotional wellbeing challenges among young people and the need for more accessible mental health support.
- **Limited access to services outside of school settings**, with counseling, wellness services, and youth programs often unavailable after school hours or outside of the school system.
- **Lack of safe and engaging spaces for youth**, particularly in some parts of the Valley where residents described limited opportunities for structured activities such as sports, arts, mentorship programs, and community events.
- **Barriers to connection and trusted support systems**, with some young people lacking access to mentors, trusted adults, or programs where they feel comfortable seeking help or sharing their experiences.

“
I am going to advocate for our unaccompanied youth and youth transitioning out of foster care. Their biggest fear when they transition out is no longer having access to services (Zone 1)
 ”



SPOTLIGHT

YOUTH COMMUNITY(CONT.)

Opportunities to Improve Youth Health and Wellbeing

- **Expanding access to youth mental health services**, including counseling, wellness programs, and preventative mental health support that is available both within schools and in community settings.
- **Investing in youth-centered programs and safe community spaces**, where young people can participate in activities such as sports, arts, mentorship programs, and recreation that promote connection and personal development.
- **Expand community-based outreach through trusted messengers** including community health workers and promotoras who can help residents navigate healthcare systems, connect families to services, and build trust within the community.
- **Creating career pathways and leadership opportunities for youth**, including programs that connect young people to education, internships, and workforce opportunities in fields such as healthcare and community services.



We need to engage young people in ways that help them feel comfortable opening up to someone they trust. Many youth worry that they will be judged or misunderstood, so it's important to support programs that can connect with them authentically and make them feel safe, heard, and supported (Zone 1)





SPANISH-SPEAKING COMMUNITIES

The Coachella Valley is home to a large and vibrant Spanish-speaking population, and during community sessions, members emphasized the importance of ensuring that healthcare systems and community services are accessible to individuals who primarily speak Spanish.

Key Challenges for the Spanish-Speaking Community

- **Language barriers when accessing healthcare services**, with residents noting that healthcare providers, interpreters, and Spanish-language materials are not always available, making it difficult for some patients to communicate with providers or fully understand their care.
- **Limited availability of health information and resources in Spanish**, which can make it harder for residents to learn about available services, insurance programs, and community health resources.
- **Challenges navigating complex healthcare and insurance systems**, particularly for individuals who may be unfamiliar with how healthcare programs, appointments, referrals, and coverage work.
- **Work and scheduling constraints**, as many Spanish-speaking and immigrant residents work in industries such as agriculture, hospitality, and service sectors where long hours, transportation challenges, and limited flexibility can make it difficult to attend medical appointments.
- **Housing affordability and stability challenges**, including rising housing costs and overcrowding, which can increase stress and make it harder for families to prioritize preventive care and routine healthcare visits.

“
My parents, my grandparents go to the doctor
and can't communicate with their doctor
because their doctor doesn't speak Spanish and
there's no one there who has the medical
information or knowledge in Spanish to be able
to communicate that effectively (Zone 1)
”

Survey Insight

Survey respondents who identified Spanish as their primary language were significantly more likely to identify housing stability and food access as key health challenges in their communities. In contrast, non-Spanish-speaking respondents were nearly 25% more likely to cite the availability of healthcare providers as a primary concern. This difference suggests that Spanish-speaking communities may be placing greater emphasis on social determinants of health, such as housing stability and food security, when considering the factors that most affect their health. When basic needs are not consistently met, challenges related to healthcare workforce capacity may feel secondary to more immediate economic and household pressures. (Figure on next page)

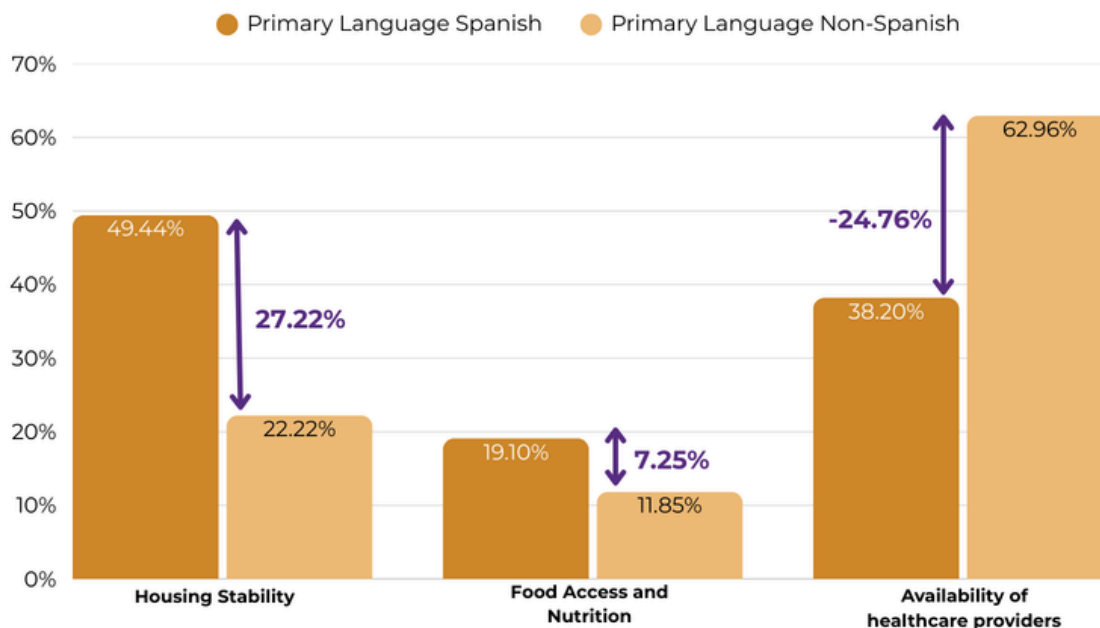


SPOTLIGHT

SPANISH-SPEAKING COMMUNITIES (CONT.)

Primary Language Spanish vs Primary Language Non-Spanish on the Health or Wellness Challenges Facing Their Community

Q: What are the most important health or wellness challenges facing your community today? Please select up to 3 options.
(Percent of respondents selecting each option)



Opportunities to Improve Youth Health and Wellbeing

- **Expand bilingual healthcare access and Spanish-language health information**, ensuring that patients can communicate effectively with providers and easily understand available services, insurance options, and program resources.
- **Strengthen partnerships with trusted community messengers**, such as promotoras, community health workers, faith leaders, and local organizations that can help connect residents with healthcare and social services.
- **Improve outreach and navigation support**, helping residents better understand available programs, schedule appointments, and navigate healthcare and insurance systems.
- **Expand community-based health education and prevention programs**, particularly programs delivered in Spanish that focus on preventive care, chronic disease management, and family health.

A lot of times, I see residents get mail from Medicare, Medi-Cal, etc, and even though they are aware they only speak Spanish, they send all important paperwork in English (Virtual)

There are many people who don't see the doctor because they are afraid they'll be made fun of for only speaking Spanish (Zone 7)