



October 24, 2019

**INFORMATION ITEM**

**SUBJECT: FIRST 5 FRESNO COUNTY PRESENTATION**

**SUMMARY OF THE ISSUE**

Located in California's vast Central Valley, Fresno County is a community rich with cultural and economic assets. With over 50% of its population under the age of 30 and 65% of its population identifying as Hispanic, Black, or Asian, Fresno truly represents the future of California and the future of the nation. The metropolitan region is home to nearly one million residents, more than 20% of whom are foreign-born, a rate 1.5 times the national average, and more than 40% of adults speak a language other than English at home.

Still, Fresno County is home to more than 77,000 young children with many of their families struggling to thrive physically, emotionally, and economically. First 5 Fresno County has embraced the belief that children thrive when their families thrive, and for the past 20 years, the local Commission has invested more than \$300 million in programs and services so that families have access to the community-based supports they need. Emilia Reyes, Executive Director, will highlight First 5 Fresno County's current investment areas and innovative partnerships to enhance the early childhood system of care in Fresno County.

**BACKGROUND OF KEY ISSUES**

**Fresno County Early Childhood Profile**

Fresno's high poverty rates and deep history of socioeconomic and racial inequality mean young children – especially young children of color – face barriers to healthy growth and development before they are even born. Without access to critical health and education resources that are often available to higher-resource families, young children fall behind in ways that persist into adulthood. This lack of access is evidenced in disproportionately poor outcomes such as prenatal health, early childhood development, and kindergarten readiness for many of Fresno's children. The majority of these outcomes are even worse for children, mothers, and families of color; pre-term birth rates are 2/3 higher for Black mothers than for White mothers (15% vs. 9%), and infant mortality rates for Black infants in Fresno are 3X higher than for White infants. Latinx infants also experience 20% higher mortality rates than White infants. Poor

outcomes persist as young children age, with only 18% of children in working families having slots in child-care programs and only 34% of Fresno children being kindergarten-ready at the time of enrollment. All of this has ripple effects through K–12 and into adulthood, perpetuating systemic challenges for children who are born into lower-resource families.

## **First 5 Fresno County 2020–2025 Strategic Plan**

Given the complexity of challenges facing Fresno County families, in 2018, First 5 Fresno staff led a robust community engagement process to learn from families how to best shape future community investments. Over 600 stakeholders participated in a series of focus groups and surveys, more than half of which were parents and caregivers. The six key challenges that surfaced are the heart of First 5 Fresno’s newly adopted 2020-2025 Strategic Plan, which is available at <http://www.first5fresno.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/First-5-Fresno-County-2020-2025-Strategic-Plan-FINAL.pdf>.

Challenges Fresno County Families Face:

1. Accessing high-quality child care and early education services
2. Barriers to physical, mental, and behavioral health care services
3. Limited support to build understanding of early childhood development
4. Finding safe community spaces and healthy food options
5. Economic insecurities
6. Navigating the early childhood service system

Keeping the community’s feedback at the forefront, First 5 Fresno also remains committed to five crucial efforts and initiatives aiming to continue to leverage, sustain, and increase impact. The below areas of investment are examples of how First 5 Fresno has embraced the unique role of a county-wide convener and coordinator in the early childhood service system.

**Lighthouse for Children Facility:** An innovative community hub for Fresno County families and early childhood professionals offering services, resources and opportunities to transform the first five years of a child’s life. At the Lighthouse for Children, families access high-quality child care, parent-child interactive classes, speech therapy, new mother support sessions, and Professional Learning Communities and trainings. An Infographic is available at <https://www.lfcfresno.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/03.-20105-01-F5Fresno18-Lighthouse-One-Sheet-05.pdf>.

**Help Me Grow Fresno County:** A coordinated system of services and assistance available to families to support the healthiest development of young children. A local Help Me Grow phone number is available for families to call with any question on their child’s development. They can be immediately connected to the right supports with a focus on the whole family. Locally, First 5 Fresno has supported Help Me Grow-like

system coordination efforts prior to it being a national model convening decision-makers with the goal to learn and improve the experience of families navigating the often complicated service system.

**African American Infant Mortality Prevention:** Community-driven projects and partnerships to tackle the high rates of infant mortality among the African American community in Fresno County. Efforts include a Best Baby Zone investment focused on specific census tracts where many African American families live, with the goal to develop community-informed strategies to ensure babies are born healthy and families live in thriving community spaces. Another investment includes developing and launching a group prenatal care model to reach Medi-Cal eligible pregnant patients per year. The group prenatal care program is a 10-month model with a demonstrated history of reducing pre-term birth, infant, and maternal mortality rates. In addition to group sessions for low-income pregnant mothers, the model also provides wraparound services (e.g., transportation support, on-site childcare) to mitigate additional stressors faced by pregnant mothers.

**Direct Service Programs:** First 5 Fresno is committed to community-based partnerships targeting its most vulnerable families with services like home visitation, parenting education and other health promotion, early learning, and direct supports to families living in rural and urban Fresno County.

**Quality Counts California:** Leveraging First 5 California's IMPACT funds, First 5 Fresno has built up the Quality Counts investment focused on assessing, improving, and communicating the level of quality in early care and education programs. Over the last four years, more than 200 child care sites and 1,800+ early childhood educators have participated in coaching, consultation, and rating activities.

## **SUMMARY OF PREVIOUS COMMISSION DISCUSSION AND ACTION**

The Commission has not previously discussed or taken action on this subject.

## **ATTACHMENTS**

None.