

Having Our Say!

A coalition of over 30 organizations, advocating for communities of color in California.

HOS 2021: Policy Priorities

(Updated as of July 2021)

The Having Our Say Coalition (HOS) recognizes that health is about more than access to health care. Despite the passage of inclusive policies, California continues to face challenges with the distribution of resources, institutional racism, and entrenched social systems; all of which, disproportionately impact the ability for communities of color to access opportunities that will lead individuals to live holistically healthy lives. The HOS 2021 Policy Priorities reflect the consensus of our coalition across a diverse platform of issue areas that can each impact a person's ability to live a healthy life.

Background: Having Our Say (HOS) Coalition was founded in 2007 to raise the voices of communities of color in the health reform debate and the fight for access to quality health care. We integrate community voices into multifaceted advocacy initiatives that are informed by the California Department of Public Health definitions of the social determinants of health. The coalition has brought together more than 30 member organizations, including grassroots community organizations, health care clinics and providers, and advocates to fight for health equity and racial justice.

ECONOMIC JUSTICE

HOS understands that economic stability directly impacts the wellbeing and health outcomes for communities of color. In the midst of an ongoing pandemic, there remains many ways that state agencies can more effectively address the barriers imposed on marginalized communities.

Reduce Language Barriers for Californians attempting to access state unemployment services: HOS strongly supports the Mixteco Indígena Community Organizing Project (MICOP) Centro Binacional para el Desarrollo Indígena Oaxaqueño (CBDIO) sponsored [AB 401 \(Chiu\)](#), now a 2-year bill, which would seek to reduce language barriers for non-English speaking Californians attempting to access services provided by the Employment Development Department (EDD) by updating processes to include qualified human translators in any and all Medi-Cal threshold languages, for the county, as well as implementing a community review processes and field testing.

Amplify state investment in agricultural workers: The COVID-19 pandemic has led to an economic downturn that agricultural workers and many on the food supply chain have not yet been able to recover from successfully. Although no longer an active bill, we support future efforts like those proposed in the CBDIO sponsored [AB 125 \(Rivas\)](#) which called for a ballot measure investment to combat hunger, support the well-being of farmworkers, advance agricultural solutions to the climate crisis, and develop infrastructure for healthy food access for all.

Expanding family paid leave: While many Californians have been personally impacted by severe illness due to the ongoing pandemic, Family Medical Leave Act/sick leave protections continue to prioritize 'nuclear family' units, which inherently excludes many LGBTQ+ communities. HOS supports the California Work and Family Coalition sponsored [AB 1041 \(Wicks\)](#)

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which would expand this coverage to any family member related by blood or a chosen family member.

Health Access and Equity

HOS continues to champion initiatives that create universal, equitable, and culturally congruent access to health care for communities of color. The ongoing issues of lack of insurance coverage and precarious access to care for marginalized communities has been further highlighted by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Health4All: The Governor's FY 2021-22 budget made history making California the first state to include all undocumented income-eligible immigrants aged 50+ in Medi-Cal. While this is an important step, California must continue the job by extending Medi-Cal to all adults regardless of immigration status which is especially needed given the disproportionate impact of COVID on immigrant communities. HOS will continue to support the California Immigrant Policy Center (CIPC), CDBIO, California Black Health Network (CBHN) and MICOP sponsored [AB 4 \(Arambula\)](#) & [SB 56 \(Durazo\)](#) to ensure everyone can access vital health care services.

Reduce barriers to enrollment in health insurance coverage: Despite record job losses, particularly for low-income Californians, we have not seen a comparable uptick in enrollment for Medi-Cal and Covered California. This is particularly true for children and for Black and Latinx communities. HOS supports Health Access, Western Center on Law and Poverty (WCLP), and CPEHN's sponsored bill [SB 644 \(Leyva\)](#), now a 2-year bill, to authorize the Employment Development Department (EDD) to share information on unemployment insurance claimants with Covered CA to facilitate enrollment in subsidized health insurance coverage.

Office of Racial Equity: Chief among the insights from current public health policy discussions on those most negatively impacted by COVID-19 is a broader acknowledgement of the need for a robust, state level leadership approach to pursuing racial equity. As a coalition, HOS endorses the establishment of an Office of Racial Equity as proposed in CBHN, Public Health Advocates (PHA) sponsored [SB 17\(Pan\)](#). This includes the issuing of [an executive order declaring racism a public health crisis](#) by the Governor and the development of a statewide Racial Equity Framework.

Dedicate more COVID relief funds to the hardest hit communities: HOS is deeply committed to ensuring response strategies from the California Department of Public Health's recent approaches to COVID-19 relief integrated into a long-term plan that addresses the current needs of BIPOC communities. Additionally, proposed solutions would proactively look to the future by preventing risks for adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) from the negative social educational impacts of the pandemic. HOS members support a targeted 3-year investment in "The California Health Equity Fund" and the jointly sponsored CBHN, Latino Coalition for a Healthy California (LCHC) sponsored bill [AB 1038 \(Gipson\)](#) which would provide direct support to local health departments, nonprofits, clinics and tribal organizations that serve disproportionately impacted communities to take action in any of the following areas:

- Housing security
- Food security & healthy food systems
- Economic stability
- Schools and childcare

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- Health promoting built environments
- Environmental justice.

HOS members support the CHEF as it includes a clear process for stakeholder engagement and community leadership that will ensure that strategies meet local needs and build community resilience.

Strengthen demographic data collection and disaggregation: As a racially and ethnically diverse coalition, HOS champions efforts to more accurately convey the realities of our communities and their composition. Often, demographic categories serve the function of erasing lived experiences by lumping together a wide variety of ethnic, national and cultural heritages under larger categories that obscure stark disparities (including income, educational attainment, refugee status and more). This leads to lack of support, resources, and increased burden on marginalized communities across all areas of public life. HOS supports the Asian Resources Inc. (ARI), LCHC, CBHN, Black Women for Wellness (BWW) sponsored [AB 1358 \(Muratsuchi\)](#) which builds on previous efforts to disaggregate Asian and Pacific Islander categories, expands these categories to identify Black/African American categories, Native American groups including Alaska Native and Middle Eastern North African (also known as MENA) categories.

Mental and Behavioral Health

HOS continues to prioritize and advocate for holistic approaches to care that include accurately addressing the diverse mental and behavioral health needs of communities of color. In a moment when stark pre-existing disparities have intensified, we support a focus on community-informed and culturally competent solutions.

Improve accountability for cultural competency in local behavioral health: Although all local behavioral health departments are required to submit periodic cultural competency plans for their counties, many continue to fall short of those intentions and the goal to provide culturally appropriate readily accessible care. In 2019, HOS supported [AB 512 \(Ting\)](#) which would have improved county accountability through the development of statewide standards to ensure that equity and cultural competence are in performance measures that are going to be used to evaluate county level mental health care services. The coalition will continue to engage in administrative efforts to improve accountability for cultural competency in local behavioral health and supports the now 2-year CPEHN sponsored bill [AB 686 \(Arambula\)](#).

Increase support for hate crime victims: HOS supports creating funding to support trusted community based organizations working to directly address recent trends in violence directed at API communities. We applaud the incorporation of the historic \$100MM API Equity Budget in the State FY 2021-2022 budget and continue to support the Korean Community Center of the East Bay (KCCEB), Asian Americans Advancing Justice LA (AAAJ-LA) sponsored [AB 866 \(Chiu\)](#) which is now a 2-year bill. Establishing direct to CBO funding will support victims of hate crimes seeking mental health services, restorative justice programs, and related methods of recovery from trusted organizations.

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Establish a Mobile Crisis Support Team/988 hotline: As marginalized communities face various ongoing crises, the impact on mental health continues to grow and has shifted attention to many documented incidents of police involved fatalities resulting from persons in a mental health crisis calling 911 for aid. Having Our Say supports the Miles Hall Lifeline Act proposed by the Multi-Ethnic Collaborative Community of Agencies (MECCA) sponsored bill [AB 988 \(Bauer-Kahan\)](#). This would establish an easily accessible hotline solely dedicated to mobile crisis support, significantly decreases the risk of these incidents and increases emergency access to mental health crisis care when needed.

Food and Nutrition Access

HOS remains committed to ensuring that communities of color have access to the nutritional options that enable them to grow, thrive, and maintain a high quality of health. Currently, many Californians already experiencing food insecurity pre-pandemic have continued to struggle with further diminished resources and many remain excluded from support due to immigration status.

Facilitate healthy food access: Nutrition is intimately connected to both physical health and mental wellbeing. HOS supports the CPEHN, CBHN sponsored [AB 368 \(Reyes\)](#), now a 2-year bills. This initiative would establish a 2-year pilot program to provide food prescriptions for medically supportive food, such as healthy food vouchers or renewable food prescriptions, to eligible Medi-Cal beneficiaries with certain chronic illnesses.

Food4All: While California is approaching universal access to nutrition assistance for low-income residents, there remains a significant portion of the population excluded from CalFresh eligibility due to their immigration status. HOS supports the California Immigrant Policy Center (CIPC) and Nourish California sponsored bill [SB 464 \(Hurtado\)](#) which would close this loophole by making any immigrant who is ineligible for CalFresh solely due to their immigration status eligible for nutrition benefits through the California Food Assistance Program.

Provide emergency food assistance: Many low-income families include individuals considered 'mixed immigration status' and therefore ineligible for emergency food assistance. HOS knows that this ineligibility does not decrease their need and advocates for their inclusion in emergency food assistance programs through support of the Coalition for Humane Immigrant Rights (CHIRLA) sponsored bill [AB 221 \(Santiago\)](#).

Reproductive Justice

As a coalition, HOS acknowledges the crucial role that bodily autonomy and access to resources supporting individual agency play in reproductive health. These decisions can either ensure or hinder how communities are able to thrive. Having this in mind, we support both proactive and retroactive measures aiming to remedy present disparities faced by communities of color.

Compensate survivors of forced sterilization: Historically, as late as 1979 (and beyond in some cases) mostly Latinx-identified women were forcibly sterilized without their informed consent due to California eugenics laws. As a coalition, we know the devastating impacts this had on not only these women but their communities across generations. HOS applauds the inclusion of \$7.5MM fund for survivors in the State FY 2021-2022 budget and supports the California Latinas for Reproductive Justice sponsored bill [AB 1007 \(Carillo\)](#) which will establish a program

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seeking to redress the harm done by administering that funding as compensation.

Improve maternal care and services: Structural racism continues to have extremely dire consequences for Black/African American mothers, birthing people, and their infants when seeking appropriate pregnancy-related care. This includes at the point of labor and delivery, postpartum and heavily impacts low-income persons. Having Our Say also supports the Black Women for Wellness, California Black Health Network, Western Center on Law and Poverty sponsored “Mominibus” bill [SB 65\(Skinner\)](#) and their proposal to add income support via CalWORKs, establishing a monthly income stipend for pregnant and postpartum people, and the establishment of a maternal mortality review board at the CDPH and improve the maternal and infant mortality and morbidity investigation processes. We applaud the inclusion of several of these provisions in the finalized State FY 2021-2022 budget such as the inclusion of doula care as a preventative services benefit for Medi-Cal with a current year commitment of \$152,000 and subsequent \$4.4MM annual commitment in on-going funding.

Eliminate cost sharing: HOS supports the reduction in barriers to medical abortion services as proposed by ACCESS Women’s Health Justice and Black Women for Wellness Action Project sponsored bill [SB 245 \(Gonzalez\)](#). This would eliminate consumer cost sharing (e.g., co-pays, deductibles) for these services when covered by any and all health plans.

Community Safety and Criminal Justice

HOS recognizes negative impact and challenges with trust many marginalized communities experience through interactions with policing, related violence, and traditional approaches to community safety. All have direct implications on all aspects of health which must be addressed in ways that center community perspectives in decision making and avoid unnecessary harm.

C.R.I.S.E.S. Act: In attempts to avoid, at times fatal, interactions with police departments many marginalized communities opt to avoid engaging them even during cases of need. HOS values community centered solutions and [AB 118 \(Kamlager\)](#) The CRISES Act which would establish the Community Response Initiative to Strengthen Emergency Systems (CRISES) Act 3-year pilot program and 11-member C.R.I.S.E.S. Committee, to expand community-based alternatives to police.

V.I.S.I.O.N. Act: Coalition members continue to highlight the ongoing trend of community members who have already been deemed eligible for release from being transferred by local jails and our state prison system to immigration detention. This has the effect of creating a ‘double sentence’, at times both isolating newly released persons from their sole sources of support for successful transition and levying the threat of renewed danger upon return to countries of origin that they departed due to life threatening conditions. HOS supports the Asian Americans Advancing Justice-California/Asian Law Caucus (AAAJ/ALC) and CIPC sponsored [AB 937 \(Carrillo\)](#) Vision Act initiative that would mandate the end of transfers to ICE.

Support youth leadership: HOS supports the Prevention Institute sponsored bill [AB 46 \(Rivas\)](#) which would establish the California Youth Empowerment Commission in state government consisting of 25 voting commissioners between 14 and 25 years of age. The California Youth Empowerment Act aims to address process and power.

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Housing

As one of the pre-existing ongoing crises exacerbated by the pandemic, HOS is committed to innovative policy solutions addressing homelessness and housing insecurity. Creating strategies that prioritize solving this systemic inequity directly impacts wellbeing as one of the social determinants of health.

Fund long-term housing solutions: Increasingly, public conversation is highlighting longstanding knowledge that corporations can either deplete or augment resources in local communities through the impact of their taxes to municipalities. Although HOS is disappointed in the lack of progress for [AB 71 \(Rivas\)](#) “Bring California Home Act”, we continue to champion long-term solutions to homelessness and housing insecurity funded through corporations paying their fair share to the communities they inhabit.

Develop more affordable housing: The ongoing pandemic and related economic insecurity for many has highlighted the extreme lack of affordable housing across California. Knowing the disparate impact this has on communities of color, HOS supports [AB 387 \(Lee\)](#), The Social Housing Act of 2021 and its proposal to establish the California Housing Authority for the purpose of developing mixed-income rental and limited equity homeownership housing and mixed-use developments to address the shortage of affordable homes for low and moderate-income households.

Strengthen transitional support for the formerly incarcerated: Along with the disparate impact incarceration has on many communities of color, a long unresolved issue occurs when community members complete their sentences and have minimal support provided to transition to public life as productive citizens. HOS supports substantial investments in institutional support as proposed in the establishment of the Reentry Housing and Workforce Development Program proposed in [AB 328 \(Chiu\)](#). This now 2-year bill would mandate coordination with the Department of Corrections and require the Department of Housing and Community Development to provide grants to counties and community based organizations for innovative or evidence-based housing and housing, housing-based services, and workforce development to allow people with recent histories of incarceration to exit homelessness and remain stably housed.

Environmental Justice

HOS understands the crucial impact that both the social, physical, and environmental factors (such as pollution) have on the health of communities of color. We champion initiatives that improve access to natural resources and safe outdoor spaces.

Support access to the outdoors: Despite California’s reputation as one of the most bio-diverse landscapes in the country, not all Californians have access to plentiful outdoor spaces and publicly available natural resources. HOS acknowledges the negative impact this has on communities of color, especially low-income and the ways lack of access factors into one’s ability to live a healthy life. Our coalition supports efforts proposed in [SB 624 \(Hueso\)](#), the Environmental Equity and

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Outdoor Access Act which would ensure all Californians can benefit from, and have meaningful access to, the state's rich cultural and natural resources.

Increase state investments in environmental protection: Increasingly climate change is amplifying the frequency and intensity of natural disasters in ways that have a devastating lasting impact on the lives of all Californians – especially those in marginalized under-resourced communities. Although no longer being included in the current legislative cycle, HOS continues to support the ideals proposed in [SB 45 \(Portantino\)](#) and [AB 1500 \(Garcia\)](#) while looking forward to supporting similar initiatives in the future.