

UCLA x Antelope Valley: Investment, Innovation and Impact for Children and Families — Report Back and Next Steps

Since 2019, the UCLA Pritzker Center for Strengthening Children and Families has participated in community service and conducted research in the Antelope Valley community. In furtherance of community-informed research and in recognition of ongoing development within the Antelope Valley, we wanted to understand local perspectives on evolving regional needs and identify opportunities for applied research that is responsive to community priorities.

On May 27, 2026, the UCLA Pritzker Center invited direct service providers, community members, civic leaders, government agencies, and philanthropic partners to convene in the Antelope Valley. Following a presentation entitled, [Child and Family Wellbeing in the Antelope Valley: A Landscape Assessment of Disparities, Progress, and Opportunity](#), roughly 200 attendees participated in small multidisciplinary group discussions in which they reflected on the current regional landscape, proposed community-driven responses to identified challenges, identified gaps in evidence that would help inform their work, and prioritized child welfare-related topics for future research and evaluation. This brief summarizes attendee feedback and outlines opportunities for the UCLA Pritzker Center to engage in research, evaluation, and technical assistance activities in service of the Antelope Valley community.

Community Perspectives on the Current Regional Landscape

Child Welfare System Involvement & Vulnerabilities of Youth in Foster Care

Attendees advocated for further child welfare system change to reassess "neglect-based removals" in response to allegations that may stem from poverty, pushing for prevention-focused and healing-centered solutions instead.



UCLA Pritzker Center Research Director, Dr. Brenda A. Tully, engaging in a conversation with guests.



UCLA Pritzker Center students, Isabella Reina and Patrosinio Cruz, providing community resources.



Attendees share feedback and insights on the presentations.

To address the economic and relational vulnerabilities faced by transition-age youth (TAY) aging out of the child welfare system, attendees called for: foster and adoptive parents who are “invested in foster [youth] success” from adolescence throughout the transition to adulthood; support accessing and maintaining benefits, like CalFresh, to meet their basic needs; opportunities for mentorship from local adults committed to developing meaningful, long-term relationships and legal aid resources to help TAY navigate child welfare case management and dependency proceedings.

Healthcare Shortages, Turnover, & Health Outcomes

Concerned by high infant mortality rates and shorter life expectancy in the Antelope Valley compared to the rest of Los Angeles County, attendees called for local solutions to address limited prenatal care and youth mental health service appointments, high provider turnover, and a lack of racial and ethnic diversity – particularly among youth mental health clinicians. According to attendees, mental health crises among youth and adults in the region can be linked to structural inequities, including the economic stress resulting from local underemployment and poverty.

Access to Child Care, Structured Youth Activities, & Employment Opportunities

Attendees shared concerns that regional shortages in childcare services and under-enrollment in preschool likely contribute to low literacy benchmarks among children in the region. Connections were drawn between the scarcity in early childhood resources and local job market limitations affecting adults, including young adults, in the Antelope Valley region. Attendees also expressed concerns about the scarcity of structured enrichment activities for youth.

To address these barriers to upstream prevention and early intervention delivery, attendees advocated for enhanced resourcing and increased use of Antelope Valley schools as centralized, multi-agency resource hubs. They also called for focused investment in adult education and workforce development that would prepare the local population to fill vacant positions in Antelope Valley businesses and non-profits.

Limited Infrastructure, Geographic Isolation & Transportation Barriers

Attendees shared that the Antelope Valley’s gaps in civic infrastructure, expansive geography, and isolation from the rest of the county interact and compound obstacles to service access. According to attendees, identifying and mitigating the impact of these gaps and barriers on parents is essential to understanding and strengthening child and family wellbeing in the Antelope Valley. As an example, limited public transportation routes result in long wait and travel times on buses, increasing service access difficulties for people using public transit within the region and across the county. Transit issues further compound access to health care and sustainable employment, resulting in strained parenting capacity and overall family instability. Specifically, children with specialized healthcare needs often have their care transferred to providers outside the Antelope Valley, hindering their parents’ ability to maintain local jobs while increasing their need for childcare and afterschool activities.



Resources provided by Baby2Baby were distributed to child and family services organizations..

Siloed Systems & Community-Driven Solutions

Attendees shared that some existing Antelope Valley services are underutilized, yet the community remains “under resourced.” This paradox may be driven by siloed service provision, gaps in coordinated outreach, cross-agency information sharing, and culturally responsive offerings. As a result, families may lack awareness of available resources, face barriers to accessing existing services, or find those available to be unsuitable. Attendees called for community-driven solutions to increase access to information, reduce service silos, and improve culturally relevant healing practices and local workforce opportunities.



Approximately 200 guests attended the event at Xalisco in Lancaster, CA.

Community Insights and Implications

Accountability Metrics & Actionable Data on Family-Serving Systems

Community members want actionable data that is distributed directly to local non-profits to identify necessary service changes, support community strengths, and address needs.

Attendees called for public-facing accountability metrics that meet the following standards:

- Data is collected purposefully, held centrally, and tracked over time
- Interpreted findings are disseminated to the community regularly
- Focus on family preservation and reunification following foster care
- Account for cross-system infrastructure gaps
- Track staff engagement and retention
- Include measures related to equity and cultural responsiveness

Prevention Funding & Inequity Mapping

Attendees called for increased transparency in prevention funding decisions and how data informs funding allocation. They advocated for a cost analysis that would map per child investments in the Antelope Valley versus the rest of Los Angeles County to identify and correct any regional funding inequities.

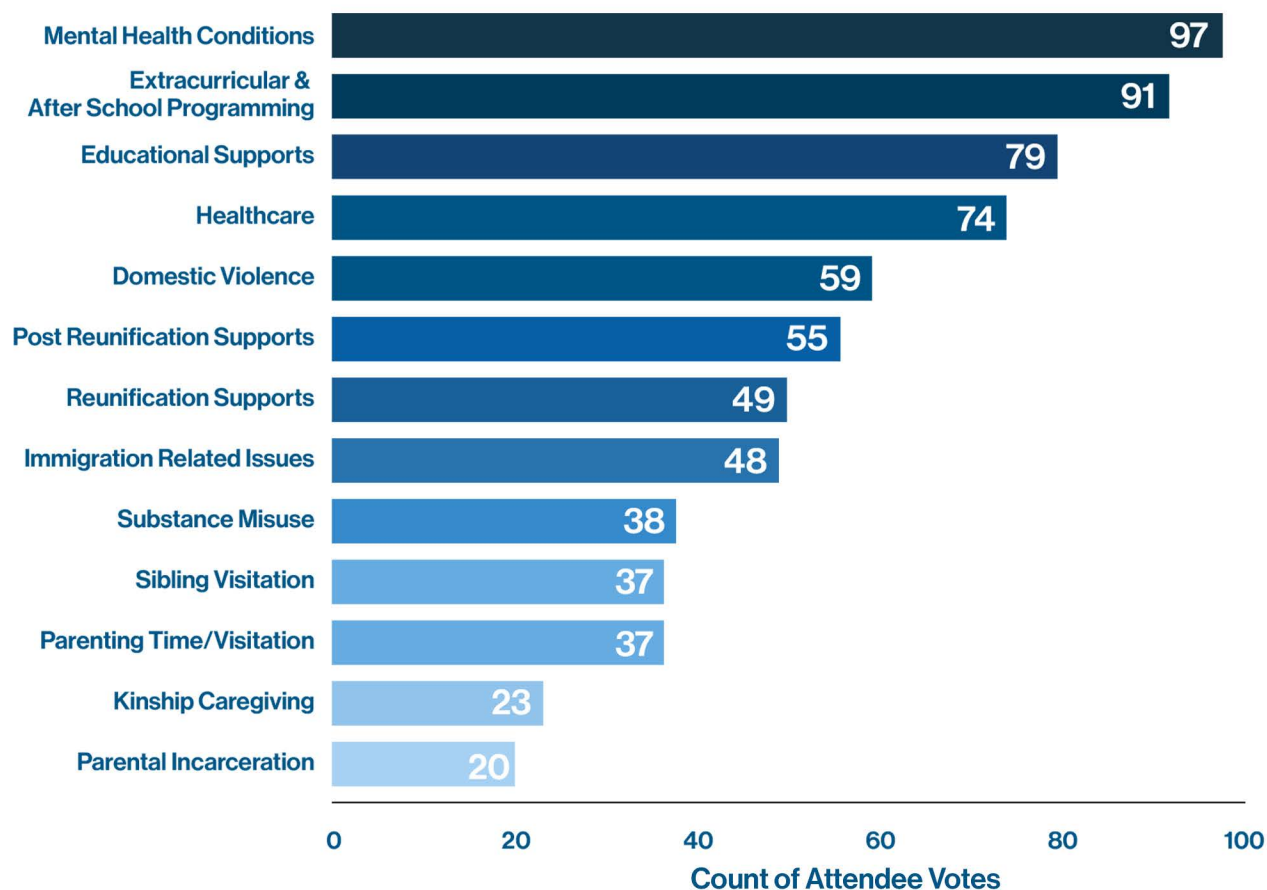
Supporting Transition-Age Youth in Foster Care

Attendees requested rigorous information on outcomes and best practices for ensuring transition-age youth have relationships with caring, committed adults and have the support needed to meet basic needs, manage finances, and build credit.

Participant Priorities for Child Welfare-Related Research

At the conclusion of the event, attendees were asked to prioritize a set of child welfare-related issues in need of future research, which included documented drivers of poor case outcomes and cross-system obstacles affecting families. Attendees were given ten “priority” stickers each and invited to place them on their highest priority topics. Attendees could select up to ten topics or prioritize the same topic multiple times. Figure 1 presents the highest ranked priorities for child welfare-related research. The highest priority areas identified included culturally relevant service provision, mental health and healthcare, extracurricular and afterschool programming, and educational support, domestic violence, immigration, substance misuse, followed by reunification and post-reunification support.

Figure 1. Ranked Priority Areas for Child Welfare-Related Research



Attendees prioritized child welfare-related issues in need of future research.

Looking Forward: UCLA Pritzker Center in the Antelope Valley

The UCLA Pritzker Center is grateful to everyone who supported and participated in the convening and looks forward to ongoing collaboration as we continue and build upon our past work in the region. The UCLA Pritzker Center identified a set of goals and strategies that aim to be responsive to the concerns and priorities of the Antelope Valley community, while advancing the UCLA Pritzker Center's mission to safely reduce the need for foster care and support equitable child welfare reform. Over the next five years, the UCLA Pritzker Center will cultivate partnerships and pursue funding opportunities that could support this work.

Goal 1: Support local changemakers to strengthen prevention resources and educate the community on family preservation and family reunification challenges, successes, and progress in the Antelope Valley

Strategies

- Identify innovative prevention strategies from other jurisdictions to address structural inequities in the Antelope Valley
- Support local organizations to develop performance and accountability metrics that focus on family preservation, system exits, and post-reunification child welfare involvement
- Study child welfare system performance from the perspectives of families and caregivers with lived expertise
- Share performance outcomes and lived experience insights regularly with community members

Goal 2: Equip local service providers with skills to assess internal and cross-system performance

Strategies

- Partner with community providers to evaluate evidence-based practices
- Train community-based organizations to develop their own meaningful and feasible measures of success
- Provide local service providers with tools and ongoing technical assistance related to performance and accountability monitoring

Goal 3: Ensure that efforts to strengthen Los Angeles County's infrastructure are responsive to the needs of families in the Antelope Valley

Strategies

- Survey parents, caregivers, and child welfare workers to identify infrastructure-related barriers and gaps that negatively impact parenting and family stability
- Partner with the UCLA Department of Urban Planning to study transit equity issues for families in the Antelope Valley

Goal 4: Support development of a cross-agency service and resource hub that is accessible communitywide

Strategies

- Collect up-to-date information from service providers in the Antelope Valley on available resources, services, client capacity, and eligibility
- Identify opportunities for cross-agency coordination, collaboration, and innovation by convening local agencies and philanthropic organizations
- Evaluate interventions that support transition-age youth in the Antelope Valley and share findings with TAY service

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