



News from Maternal and Child Health Access

In 2025, Maternal and Child Health Access faced significant challenges, stemming from the lingering effects of cuts to State Navigator funding in 2024 and a reshuffling of major funder priorities. For the first time in our 29-year history, we have experienced staff and space downsizing. A surge in anti-immigrant actions and raids in Los Angeles and across the country consumed our clients with fear. Continued threats to cut health and benefit programs have caused havoc and confusion, further complicating our ability to reach out and enroll people in free and reduced-cost coverage and CalFresh benefits. Southern California wildfires also devastated communities, displacing thousands and severely impacting service workers' livelihoods.

Despite these obstacles, MCHA stood firm in its mission to open doors to care and improve health for low-income families. Our Welcome Baby Program celebrated its highest-ever prenatal enrollments. Our new Pathways Forward initiative, designed to empower women and build life skills, quickly gained momentum and is set to grow. Through our CalFresh program, we offered reassurance and guidance to clients who were concerned about data sharing, Public Charge, and deportation. Even with fewer staff, our Health Navigators reached thousands by focusing on remote support for those afraid to leave home, and redoubled efforts to help families renew or apply for coverage before the looming Medi-Cal cuts. Our Training Department, though impacted by budget constraints, continued to equip stakeholders with up-to-date information and hands-on support, including for reproductive health.

Advocacy, fueled by our clients' stories, remained a driving force, shaping a more just health care landscape. The following pages share more about each program and reaffirm MCHA's unwavering dedication to the communities we serve and the fundamental right to health care.



Happy Holidays!

mch

Advocate

Standing with the Community

"You've been a tremendous help to me. I pray for those less fortunate..you give hope. Much thanks. "

"I like that any question or anything I need i can always ask it and I get helped."

"En llamada me siento confiada y me quita de mis dudas o problemas que tenga."

"Un excelente servicio muy profesionales en todo lo que hacen con mi bebé y mi familia."

"I learned that we can achieve our goals, and they also helped us learn about the resources available to us."



"Thank you for listening. Empathy is difficult to attain. Seriously. More disheartened dads need this."

"Mi consejera me ayudo mucho con darle pecho a mi bebe. Tenia muchas dudas y preguntas y ella me ayudo a tener confianza en mi habilidad de darle pecho a mi bebe."

"I loved it because it relaxed me to the point of forgetting everything that worries me."

"I really liked how knowledgeable the nurse was when I asked her any question. I also love the trust I built with her. Safe and comfortable space for me!"

Through direct support, individual advocacy, policy change and health care workforce transformation, MCHA is building a California where women, pregnant people and families are supported, and everyone has the opportunity to be healthy.

Message from our new Executive Director, Celia Valdez

Stepping into the role of Executive Director fills me with deep gratitude and excitement. For nearly three decades, I have been inspired by our founder, Lynn Kersey, whose steadfast devotion to women’s and children’s health has been the heartbeat of our mission. Surrounded by a team of passionate advocates who give their all to lift up others, I feel both energized and privileged to continue this essential journey.



This year has tested our community with challenges that have touched us all deeply. As the daughter of immigrants, I understand the uncertainties that many of our clients face. The threat of losing access to health care, the struggle to provide for their families, find and retain stable work and affordable housing, and the ever-present worry about family separation can be overwhelming, often keeping people from reaching out for help. At MCHA, we believe in health justice and equity for everyone. We are steadfast in our commitment to getting people health coverage, supporting healthy births, and ensuring access to nutrition programs. Together, we raise our voices, demand justice, and support policies that reflect our mission and values.

On behalf of everyone at MCHA, thank you for standing with us and fueling our mission with your generosity. Your support makes our work possible. Happy Holidays to you and yours!

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CalFresh

The year 2025 tested our clients like never before. Wildfires swept through Pacific Palisades and Altadena, uprooting families and leaving many of our clients who work in the service industry jobless. Requests for resources and emergency financial help poured in. While many hoped for a swift return to normalcy, recovery proved slow, deepening the need for support and guidance, especially with CalFresh applications.

Amid these hardships, news of proposed SNAP cuts from the new administration sparked anxiety throughout our community. Clients flooded our CalFresh advocates with questions, fearful of losing vital benefits. We armed our team with the latest updates from County and State Advocates to keep everyone informed and reassured. Still, uncertainty lingered, and fewer new clients reached out for help.

In May, reports surfaced that the Department of Agriculture was requesting that states share the personal data of public assistance recipients, including CalFresh participants. Clients sought accurate information and reassurance. We consulted with public benefits and Legal Aid partners. Although most sources indicated the request was not legal, California's DHCS data was ultimately shared.

When Immigration and Customs Enforcement began raids in LA County on June 6, fear swept through our client community. Outreach plummeted, and application calls dropped by a third. Many clients were too afraid to leave their homes, leading to more missed appointments. In response, we quickly shifted back to remote assistance, helping clients with CalFresh reports and renewals so they could keep their food benefits. Yet new enrollments fell by half in the first month alone.



In July, the passage of the “One Big Beautiful Bill” resulted in substantial SNAP cuts and major changes to CalFresh regulations set to take effect in 2026. Many recipients will now be required to work to receive food assistance, including individuals experiencing homelessness. These changes will significantly reduce access to food assistance, forcing those who do not meet requirements to rely on local food banks.

This year stands as one of the toughest in our sixteen years of CalFresh advocacy. Soaring food prices have stretched family budgets to the breaking point, and fears about data sharing with ICE have kept some from applying for help. Despite all of this, we were able to attend over 53 community events and provide outreach and education on CalFresh benefits, enroll 333 new CalFresh beneficiaries, add 44 newborns to existing CalFresh cases, help 211 individuals retain their benefits, troubleshoot 1267 CalFresh benefit problems, and help 119 individuals apply for CalWORKs (cash aid) benefits. Our commitment to our clients has never wavered. Working alongside community partners, we are determined to ensure families do not go hungry. Our advocacy for low-income communities will not stop.

Health Navigation

In 2025, our MCHA **Health Navigation** Department weathered its toughest year yet. After nearly three decades without layoffs, budget cuts forced our team to shrink, but our dedication to the community never wavered. As more people turned to us for help navigating Medi-Cal and other free and affordable health coverage, staff doubled down, guiding clients through confusing systems, untangling eligibility problems, and helping families keep their benefits. Political and social pressures left many immigrants fearful of seeking government help, making outreach even more challenging. In response, our Navigation team ramped up education about immigrants' rights, listened to concerns, and provided steady support to those most vulnerable. Despite a 30% drop in new intakes and client calls due to widespread anxiety, our department remained focused on helping people keep their coverage and is already preparing for policy changes, such as HR1, that will reshape Medi-Cal coverage in 2026.

Our Health Navigation Department drew strength from a network of supporters, including the LA County Department of Public Health, home visiting programs, Kaiser Permanente, QueensCare, and the BAILA network. Their backing fueled outreach, enrollment, and retention efforts. Even in the face of adversity, we made a real difference: **13,532 people received assistance, 6,700 community members connected at 34 resource events, and 732 individuals gained access to free or low-cost coverage, with 90% using their new benefits.** Our team also **helped 3,900 people resolve eligibility and/or access to care problems, and ensured 2,200 existing beneficiaries kept their health benefits at renewal.**

Briana's journey began when a community partner referred her for urgent medical help. At 39, she received a Stage 2 breast cancer diagnosis in October 2024, and within seven months, her cancer advanced to Stage 4, spreading to her bones and organs. All the while, she was caring for her son as he recovered from a kidney transplant. Despite the daunting prognosis, Briana's determination to seek a second medical opinion never faltered. Briana reached out to a specialized cancer center, hoping for an appointment, but was told she needed health plan approval or would have to pay out of pocket. Unaware she had been placed in a managed care plan; she found herself blocked by confusing requirements. That's when our Health Navigation team stepped in, collaborating with her doctors and state agencies to secure a medical exemption. Thanks to these efforts, Briana received a second opinion and the treatment she needed at the cancer center. She expressed deep gratitude for MCHA's unwavering support.



Training and Education

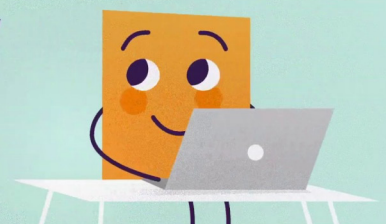
We proudly carried forward our signature We've Got You Covered Core Training, created in partnership with Neighborhood Legal Services of Los Angeles County. Month after month, our sessions filled up within a day, reflecting the community's eagerness to learn. However, an unexpected funding reduction in the May California budget revision forced us to pause these vital trainings in June 2024. This setback resulted in the continued loss of much of Los Angeles County's Navigator infrastructure, including essential support for training on health coverage eligibility, enrollment, retention, and the technical assistance offered by the MCHA training program, during one of the most critical and trying times.

We are deeply grateful to Benefits Access for Immigrants Los Angeles (BAILA), whose recent funding has enabled us to keep some We've Got You Covered Training sessions alive, even as we seek more support. Our thanks also go to Essential Access for empowering our Reproductive Health coverage training. In the face of ongoing challenges in women's reproductive health care, MCHA stands firm in our commitment to ensuring women can access the services they need and want. We also appreciate the Los Angeles Babies Network for bringing our health benefit training to every new Welcome Baby group. As 2025 draws to a close, we are thankful for additional support from Kaiser Permanente, LA Care, and the LA County Department of Public Health. Thanks to these partners, we have training sessions scheduled through Spring 2026 and remain dedicated to securing the funding needed to sustain our training program.



Over **875** individuals
trained, from over **275**
agencies
150 technical assistance
episodes provided

*We've got
you covered*



Maternal and Child Health Access - www.mchaccess.org

Pathways Forward

Pathways Forward is MCHA's new empowerment and life-skills program designed to strengthen the confidence, stability, and long-term wellbeing of women facing economic and social challenges. The program integrates self-confidence building, self-care strategies that help participants feel more at peace even during stressful times, financial literacy, career exploration, values-based decision-making, comprehensive resource navigation, and the development of healthy relationship skills to support safety and wellbeing- creating a unique model where self-care and confidence work together to help participants feel more empowered.

Our first cohort graduated at the end of October, with participants describing the program as motivating, transformational, and deeply affirming. Many shared that, for the first time, they felt ready to **"cross a bridge"** in their lives, **"It enchanted me, it relaxed me and it took me to a beautiful place that I knew when I was a little girl."** One participant reflected, **"I love these classes because they motivate us. Yes we can!"** Others shared interest in becoming a nurse, opening a business, learning technical skills and more. **"There are many possibilities to start the business or dream you have, and that everyday problems are only tests—and that positive thinking is an important factor in achieving your plans and goals toward personal success."**

Early outcomes are strong: participants demonstrated statistically significant improvements in financial literacy, knowledge of available resources, and overall self-efficacy. These results reflect meaningful gains in both practical skills and emotional readiness to take action.

Our second cohort is underway and concludes in December, with the next cohort beginning in January. As Pathways Forward continues to grow, MCHA aims to expand its impact by providing women with the tools, knowledge, resources, and confidence to build stability and long-term wellbeing for themselves and their families.

PATHWAYS FORWARD
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In partnership with Office of Violence Prevention and Southern California Grant Makers

LEARN ABOUT HOW YOUR VALUES AND STRENGTHS GUIDE YOU
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Welcome Baby

Welcome Baby, MCHA's home visitation program, supports high-risk perinatal families in some of the most densely populated and vulnerable communities in Los Angeles County. Welcome Baby reduces disparities and strengthens protective factors by addressing health, mental health, and social needs together. The program delivers immediate results and long-term benefits, making it a cost-effective investment in healthier, more resilient families and communities.



The program serves an average of 2,000 families annually, with 55% Spanish-speaking, primarily Latina and African American. Clients are 98% low income and are mostly high-need and high-risk. On average, over 330 combined nurse (RN) and parent coach (PC) visits are conducted monthly, with 75–80% in person and the remainder virtually. Welcome Baby conducts more than 4,400 perinatal depression screenings and over 2,100 anxiety screenings annually. We performed 1,086 developmental screenings on infants last year.

Since 2009, we have completed 66,323 total visits. Last year, we performed **3935 Welcome Baby visits.** We **saw 1,665 mothers last year** and are projected to see 2,000 this year (hospital census is increasing back to pre-covid levels).

An African American first-time mother who enrolled in Welcome Baby at MLK jr. hospital and was transferred to MCHA postpartum built strong trust and rapport with both her RN and PC, which proved vital support and intervention when she experienced a significant medical challenge.

A few weeks after her medical issue, the client reached out to her care team, sharing that she felt lost and was experiencing manic episodes, hallucinations, and suicidal thoughts. She was deemed ineligible for services at her current provider due to her high-risk level. In response, the PC, RN, and Clinical Supervisor worked together to provide comprehensive support, including additional visits and consistent follow-up. The team identified SCHARP as an alternative resource and promptly connected her to their mental health and therapy service.

At the 3-4 month visit, the client expressed heartfelt gratitude for the program, stating, **"Welcome Baby is so helpful. When I'm in need, I trust and can rely on my Nurse and Parent Coach."** Since starting therapy, the client has been actively engaged, consistently attending sessions, adhering to her medication regimen, and maintaining her appointments. She shared that she now feels more present with her infant and is interested in seeking employment when the baby is a little older. The client has been bonding well with her baby, and the PC has continued to acknowledge and celebrate her strengths and resilience.



MCHA in Policy



2025 has been one of the most challenging years for the families MCHA serves and the programs meant to support them. It's hard to know where to begin. In addition to direct services, like delivering food, diapers, and other supplies to immigrant families who are basically being held captive in their homes because of the ICE raids and helping pregnant women, children, the elderly, disabled individuals, and other family members get access to medical care and help with other basic needs, our focus continues to include health policy advocacy to counter the blows from federal and other decisions beyond our control. In partnership and solidarity with a broad network of super advocates engaged locally or statewide, MCHA fights for changes to address pressing needs in the communities where we live and work. Here are some of our spotlights for 2025.

Protecting our communities from historic federal health care cuts. Since January 20, 2025, no part of health care has been left unscathed by the federal administration—not even research for cancer and to protect maternal and child health. Then, with H.R. 1, the budget blueprint signed in July 2025, nearly \$1 trillion is being shifted out of health care to fund tax cuts for billionaires and large, profitable corporations along with a massive build up for the immigration enforcement we now see terrorizing our communities. Chief among the health care cuts is a combination of new federal restrictions and added red tape, designed to deprive people of eligibility for federal benefits and kick them off health insurance when they do manage to get on. Most adults without a disability who are enrolled in Medi-Cal are already working, but that didn't matter to the proponents of H.R. 1. Using our deep experience in the community, MCHA is using this latest challenge to build back better. We are insisting that CA adopt and effectively implement the broadest exclusions and exemptions allowed for the new federal work reporting laws. For example:

- **Exclusions from work reporting, the shortest retroactive eligibility period, and more frequent eligibility renewals:** Medi-Cal benefits claims data and cross data-matching with specified Medi-Cal aid codes and the Women, Infants and Children's program should be used to exclude, upfront, from work reporting all individuals who are receiving pregnancy-related care or received such care within the past 12 months, regardless of the pregnancy's outcome (live birth, still birth, miscarriage, or termination), as these circumstances qualify a person for the exclusion. This is in addition to claims indicating a disability exclusion. Success here will also mean the person will qualify for two months of retroactive coverage instead of just one (down from three under H.R. 1 for all groups) and will not have to renew eligibility during either the pregnancy or the 12-month post-pregnancy period. We are also pressing to make it easier for beneficiaries to identify themselves having been pregnant during the past 12 months when eligibility is renewed;



not only would this exempt the person from work reporting but it would also result in automatic of extension of eligibility for the full 12-month post-pregnancy period when many return to work and income goes up. Keep full health insurance benefits for at least the year following a pregnancy is important for both maternal and infant health.

- **Lawfully present immigrants and work reporting:** H.R. 1 pulls federal funding for non-emergency services from many groups of lawfully present immigrants, such as refugees, people granted asylum, and many others, starting (federal match is still there for emergency care regardless of status). California will continue to cover them with Full Scope Medi-Cal at state-only expense. But the state plans to require them to meet the federal work requirements. MCHA is pushing back hard, a growing group of lawfully present immigrants is excluded by the feds from work permit; immigrants could jeopardize their current status as well as chances at adjustment if they report working during periods when work was not authorized for their group.
- **Enrollment freeze for undocumented adults:** Our community took another blow when the state Legislature froze enrollment into Full Scope Medi-Cal for undocumented adults ages 19 or older starting January 1, 2026 (18 and under keep Full Scope). This program has been funded with 100% state dollars for non-emergency care. Individuals enrolled by the end of 2025 will keep full benefits, but dental will be cut back to emergency dental starting in July 2026, and they will also have to start paying premiums and out-of-pockets starting July 1, 2027. Among the many reasons MCHA is partnering with many others in calling for reinstating Medi-Cal's state-only Adult Expansion is the critical importance on birth outcomes of comprehensive health care between pregnancies insurance ("inter-conception care").

"I wish there was some way to give MCHA credit so our bureaus could thank you. When I say this is a game changer, I mean exactly that. This is one of those things where the benefits will be felt with full intensity in the first day."

Christopher Michener, CalAIM Outreach – Main Jail, Human Services Specialist, Department of Human Assistance, Sacramento County

- **Preventing the work verification process from becoming a barrier to quick access to Medi-Cal:** H.R. 1 gives states flexibility on how many months of work need to be reported on and the timing for submitting the report and proof. MCHA is leading the charge to make sure eligible applicants can start Medi-Cal right away, without experiencing any delays while work reports are being made and verified.
- **Proving income eligibility for the poorest:** For reasons that bewilders us to this day, the federal rules make it harder for people to prove their income eligibility for Medi-Cal when their income is \$0 or they don't show up in the tax database because they are too poor file. MCHA's homeless clients and many of the other people we serve are in this predicament. The H.R. 1 implementation has opened the door to fixing this longstanding barrier, both at application and renewal, and MCHA is leading the charge.

Thank you to our Generous Contributors!

Our apologies for any misspellings or omissions. Please call (213) 749-4261 or email us at info@mchaccess.org with corrections.

- Asian American Advancing Justice LA
- Berke Family Foundation
- California Association of Food Banks
- California Community Foundation
- Community Partners
- Essential Access
- First 5 Los Angeles
- Gaia Capital Mgt.
- Good Hope Medical Foundation
- LA Care Health Plan
- Los Angeles County Department of Public Health
- Neighborhood Legal Services of Los Angeles
- Southern CA Grantmakers
- The Morrison and Foerster Foundation
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- Mark Belanger
- Tanya Broder & Theodore Wang

Support MCHA Today

Your support for Maternal and Child Health Access empowers underserved women, children, and families to lead healthier, more secure lives. Every donation helps bridge the gap between vulnerable communities and critical resources like healthcare, nutrition, and mental health support. By investing in MCHA, you join a mission to combat systemic inequities, advocate for lasting policy change, and provide life changing services to families in need. Together, we can ensure that every mother and child has the opportunity to thrive, creating healthier futures and stronger communities for generations to come.

While there are many ways to support MCHA, the most powerful is through a critical monetary donation. Your gift fuels our mission - breaking barriers to care, advocating for equitable health policies, and ensuring mothers and children receive the vital services they need to thrive. With your support, we can respond quickly, expand programs, and provide life-changing resources that build healthier futures for families across our community.

To learn more ways you can support MCHA, contact Celia Valdez at celiav@mchaccess.org.

