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Beyond COVID-19 Recovery: Restructuring for a Healthy and Equitable California

As advocates and policymakers work furiously to address the ever-growing health and economic ramifications of COVID-19, we must strive to not simply limit the harm caused by the current crisis, but shore up community protections before the next event occurs. Although the virus itself is new, its broader impacts – including unsafe working conditions, unaffordable cost of living, limited mobility, a fragmented and unnavigable healthcare system, aggressive policing, and racially-driven hate crimes – are familiar to many Californians. Decades of widening economic inequality, disinvestment in public health, and systemic racism have led to precarious standards of living for millions of Californians, and COVID-19 has pulled back the curtain to expose these fault lines in our society. During every crisis, from natural disasters and eruptions of disease to those caused directly by corporate and political decisions, we’ve seen that low-income people of color are both most acutely impacted and face the longest recovery. For this reason, we know that as we plan for recovery, we cannot simply hope to “go back to normal.”

In planning for recovery, we must call for a new, more just and equitable society, one that centers communities over corporate profit, and that ensures that all people – regardless of race/ethnicity, culture, class, national origin, sexual orientation, gender, or ability – have the full opportunity to achieve optimal health and wellbeing.

Over 16 years ago, a coalition of organizations who believed in the power of community advocacy and the need for sweeping structural change came together to create ENACT Day. Now, more than ever, we must center our vision of a healthy and equitable California, elevating bold strategies to ensure the health of all communities, both immediately and in the months and years to come. Guided by the four key policy areas we used in past years, we have identified key strategies for an equitable, inclusive, and community-led response and recovery to the COVID-19 crisis:

Healthy Food Access:

- **Remove bureaucratic barriers to CalFresh:** Support SB 882, which would streamline the CalFresh application and reporting processes, especially for older adults and people with disabilities.
- **Extend access to school meals:** Ensure that school nutrition programs reach all students that rely on free or reduced priced meals for the duration of the COVID-19 public health emergency and beyond.

Healthy and Accessible Communities:

- **Housing first:** Commit to on-going funding of \$2 billion to the California Access to Housing and Services Fund, in order to rapidly and permanently move unhoused people into permanent housing. Extend eviction protections into 2021, and mandate affordable repayment plans without fees or interest.
- **Close the corporate tax loophole:** Restore \$12 billion in annual funding to California schools, parks, libraries, and other community resources through the Schools and Communities First ballot initiative, which requires California corporations to contribute their fair share.

Justice for Immigrant Californians:

- **Expand Medi-Cal to all seniors:** Ensure #Health4AllSeniors by expanding full-scope Medi-Cal to all seniors, regardless of documentation status, as included in Governor Newsom's proposed budget and SB 29.
- **EITC for all:** Allow undocumented taxpayers access to the Earned Income Tax Credit, a program known for supporting families in moving out of poverty.

Preventing Violence and Community Trauma:

- **Stop criminalization:** Prohibit punitive approaches to enforcing physical distancing, which put boys and men of color at particular risk, and more broadly, insist that police departments restructure their policies to work towards relational policing principles.
- ***No new inmates:** Stop new admissions to juvenile detention, correctional and placement facilities. *Unless youth pose an immediate and substantial risk to public safety, alternatives to out-of-home placements — including placement at home with terms and conditions — should be the default response.

Finally, as we gradually emerge from the immediate crisis, we must *keep and extend what works*. These and other effective solutions harnessed during the COVID-19 crisis should not be ended as soon as it is declared to be over. Californians were dealing with challenges like sudden job loss, sky-high medical bills, and community trauma long before COVID-19 arose, and they will continue to deal with it after. We must seize upon the political will for change heightened by this pandemic, and carry it forward as we continue our work to build a healthy, equitable, and thriving California for all.



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ENACT Day 2020 is hosted by: Public Health Advocates, CA4Health, California Food Policy Advocates, Prevention Institute, and the Center for Healthy Communities at California State University, Chico.