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COMPANION POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE LOS ANGELES COUNTY WOMEN AND GIRLS INITIATIVE'S COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AD HOC COMMITTEE

The Community Engagement Ad Hoc Committee (Committee) was formed to facilitate a series of Virtual Town Halls (VTH) on behalf of the Women and Girls Initiative (WGI) during the summer and fall months of 2020. The purpose of the VTH was to hear from the community ways to prioritize and center the experiences of women and girls in Los Angeles County. Conducted during the height of the pandemic, these VTH's focused a great deal on the negative impacts to women and girls, especially essential workers, low income individuals, women of color, as well as other populations hit particularly hard during the pandemic. The accompanying VTH Report (attached), discusses the systemic inequities that led to these disparate outcomes during the pandemic and contains recommendations to help mitigate and eliminate future adverse impacts on our most vulnerable populations.

The companion policy recommendations highlighted here are an amalgamation of the community recommendations, personal and professional experiences and align with the WGI Strategic Framework. These recommendations are of critical and urgent importance for ensuring the economic mobility of women, stabilizing the health and mental health of women and girls, particularly women of color, and to better understand the unique needs of women at every stage of their lives by collecting and using disaggregated data to drive decision-making and fund the most appropriate services. It is also important to underscore that while many of these recommendations address the same or similar needs for a variety of women, the impact of services and supports may vary greatly depending on age, race, and socioeconomic status.

ECONOMIC RESILIENCY

Training, Recruitment, Job Placement/Employment in Traditional and Non-traditional Careers While the community identified a need to further increase the number of women in trade based employment, the Committee felt it equally and/or more so important to embed **comprehensive, on-going, workforce staff development training** in all workforce development efforts to ensure successful programs. This Committee asserts that unconscious bias and stereotyping can influence workforce staff subconsciously when interviewing candidates for potential job training opportunities and position placement, as well as what services are offered, and the support given. Role

models matter, and **it is important that workforce development staff and**

management/leadership reflect the racial and gender identity of the clients and the communities they serve. It is the position of this Committee that all workforce development programming **first elevates the consciousness of staff** through race and gender bias, and gender equity training to ensure foundational success of any workforce development program.

- ***Ensure gender parity and racial equity in all workforce development and training efforts inclusive of workforce staff and leadership. Embed an on-going comprehensive staff development program to train all staff on race, age, gender implicit bias, and gender equity.***
- ***Focus career development strategies on occupations where women are underrepresented such as IT/Tech, construction, and trades, etc. and develop strategies for marginalized women inclusive of those 55+ to increase employment and economic security. Ensure career development efforts include training, recruitment, job placement, how to maintain employment, and career advancement.***
- ***Provide an annual report of Community Workforce Agreements outcomes by gender. Include corrective actions as enforcement of CWA requirements.***

Increase Resources for Childcare

The community focused on expanding the definition of childcare to include care for school-aged children and teenage girls after school. The idea of broadening existing programming at County facilities inclusive of financial literacy, STEAM, girl sports, and leadership development were all central themes considered instrumental to the success and economic stability of girls later in life while exposing them to new ideas and constructive activities.

The Committee wants to stress the connection between **affordable and accessible childcare and the economic mobility of women.** The childcare predicament of essential workers, many of whom are women, and women of color, was brought to the forefront during the pandemic and exposed how broken the system of childcare is in this country. Moreover, a lack of affordable and accessible childcare for all women makes it more difficult to work non-traditional hours and in non-traditional fields such as construction and the trades. In addition, a lack of childcare can cause a woman to start and stop their career at various critical points disrupting their career trajectory. For girls and teenaged parents, a lack of affordable childcare reduces high school graduation rates and can stagnate economic mobility for years to come. And, equally important to solving this childcare crisis, is **increasing the overall number of childcare workers, and ensuring they make a living wage.**

- ***Increase affordable and accessible childcare resources inclusive of essential workers, teenage parents, and young women. Make programming***

available for school-aged children and teenagers at County owned facilities to include STEAM, sports, leadership development and literacy programs.

DATA AND BUDGET

Establish “Actionable” Policies for Women of Color

This Committee stresses the importance of ensuring that a **gender and race lens always be applied when creating policies that impact women of color**. All women, especially women of color should not be considered an “afterthought” when developing policies rather there should be upfront consideration for the cultural and economic differences experienced by women of color and the disparate outcomes that result from decisions made when these differences are not factored in at the onset of policy discussions.

- ***Prioritize policies that address the needs of women of color as it relates to mental and physical health, and financial stability. When developing future policies, acknowledge and address the different cultural and economic realities that impact women of color.***

Disaggregate Data by Gender

This recommendation has been a recurring theme throughout the work of the WGI. There is a marked absence of data on women and girls. Without data, decision makers are challenged to identify, measure and address equity, bias and parity issues when making funding decisions. This Committee strongly supports **the implementation of systems to capture data by gender within every County department** that offers services and supports to the public. Baseline data should be established to substantiate which programs, services and interventions work to lift women and their families out of poverty and funding should be based on data that supports program efficacy over time.

- ***Data should be disaggregated by gender, age, and race. Make budget policy and decisions using a race and gender lens. Factor in the various stages of a woman’s life when making changes to services for women and girls.***
- ***Establish baseline data on poverty rates and measure the number of women who move out of poverty and become stable as a result of County services and interventions.***

Physical and Mental Health and Domestic Violence

The community focused on the undeniable connection between issues of trauma and abuse, homelessness, and domestic violence, and how these interwoven factors intersect at mental and physical health. The community was adamant in recommending that **services be trauma informed and culturally competent**. The Committee urges an increase in **outreach to women of color and women 55+** who can easily fall into depression from increased isolation. In line with culturally competent services, the Committee feels that **more women of color should be encouraged to enter the mental health field as well as serve as trusted messengers; especially needed are**

those with lived experience.

- ***Fund and increase mental health access to girls, young women, inclusive of women 55+, in neighborhoods with a disproportionate number of women and girls of color, and essential workers. Use data to develop strategies that target services to the most vulnerable and highest risk. Engage school resources and CBO's embedded within the community to provide and promote services more broadly.***



LOS ANGELES COUNTY
**WOMEN
+ GIRLS**
INITIATIVE

WGI Virtual Townhall Report

November 15th, 2021



Background

The Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors (Board) established the Women and Girls Initiative (WGI) in 2016 and appointed the Governing Council (GC) in 2017. This group of thought leaders were chosen by the Board to represent the issues impacting women and girls in a meaningful way, to make recommendations to enhance Los Angeles County (County) services for this population, and to help find ways to create more equitable outcomes in the areas of education, housing, career advancement, and health, to name a few. Upon establishing the WGI GC, the Board instructed this body to conduct town halls as a platform to engage with communities across Los Angeles County (LA County), draw from lived experience, and produce recommendations for how to better serve women and girls.

In March of 2018, during Women's History Month, the WGI held an initial set of community convenings in each Supervisorial district to hear directly from non-profits, churches, civic leaders, and other community leaders. In an effort to learn more about the most pressing issues negatively impacting women and girls in their communities, these community leaders were asked to elevate the intergenerational needs of this population and bring forth the requisite recommendations to support positive outcomes for the future. These discussions, a foundational component for developing the WGI Strategic Framework, were used to guide the work of the WGI and continue as an integral part of the work of WGI to this day. The insights from the community, panelists and our expert WGI members, have been instrumental in pushing this work forward and have been used as the platform on which the series of Virtual Town Halls, discussed within this report, are based. The initial community convenings were used as the springboard into the next phase of community dialogue and helped us to accelerate our efforts by expanding our reach, and provided the guideposts we needed to host a series of more thorough, topic based town halls that touched a much larger community audience.

During the Summer and Fall of 2020, the WGI was able to meet this goal by convening community representatives and conducting five virtual town hall events (VTH). While the COVID-19 pandemic necessitated these events to become virtual, in many ways this expanded accessibility to community members who would not have previously been able to attend due to work, childcare, or transportation constraints. The town hall themes were as follows:

- Women and Girls of Color
- Women and the Economy
- Women 55+
- Women and Girls and the impact of Domestic-Violence and Homelessness
- The Future of Women and Girls in LA County

While each of the main topic areas were distinct, all these townhalls integrated the realities presented by the COVID-19 pandemic. Thus, the panel of experts shared their experiences around what was happening in their community in real-time.

For each town hall the WGI secured panelists who are experts in the subject matter, and work closely with the communities they serve. Close attention was paid to balancing the

diversity of panelists to ensure they were reflective of LA County. Each town hall also had several County experts who asked clarifying questions and provided input to the conversations.

The intention for each town hall was to hear directly from the people working closely with their communities, who could share insights on how the County could adapt to better meet the needs of the populations they serve. Specifically, the WGI aimed to use expertise from panelists to then develop detailed policy recommendations. Each town hall began with a presentation sharing contextual data to shed light on challenges women and girls were facing, and how the COVID-19 pandemic had changed or exacerbated those issues. After these presentations, WGI moderators presented questions to the panelists, allowing each of them to share knowledge about the populations they serve, and provide insight on what the County is doing well, or could change.

To identify patterns in a qualitative setting and ensure all participants had the same opportunities to offer critiques of current County practices, the panelists were asked the same three questions related to what the County can do to improve the way it operates:

1. What do women and girls need to reach a better economic and healthy future?
2. What is one action the County should do today to improve the overall quality of life for women and girls?
3. What is one action the County can stop today to improve the overall quality of life for women and girls?

Approach

While each of the five town halls was centered around its own theme, we heard similarities from panelists across all of them. These commonalities reinforced just how intertwined issues like poverty, domestic violence, homelessness, and lack of resource access are; both in their root causes and solutions. Rather than create recommendations divided by the town hall topics, we instead found five common threads among what panelists shared with us: Economic Resiliency, Health and Domestic Violence, Education and Programs, Budget, and Data. These threads encompass what our panelists emphasized as the most critical areas in need of change. In the following report, we describe each of these threads, what town hall participants had to say about them, and the policy recommendations arising from each. Additionally, we consider the intergenerational effects, as well as which recommendations have implications for older women, girls and young women, and women of color. While definitions vary across sources, WGI defines “older women” as those who are 55+, and girls and young women as those in childhood, teenage years, or 20’s.

Many of recommendations found in this report include benefits to all ages from girls to older women and should not be considered as precluding one population or another. It is also important to underscore that while many of these recommendations address the same or similar needs for a variety of women, the impact of services and supports may vary greatly depending on age, race, and socioeconomic status. The recommendations, while calling out specific outcomes for girls, women, women of color and older women,

should be recognized as having intergenerational benefits and have the potential to improve the lives of all women and the whole of society.

Lastly, the WGI received a high volume of valuable feedback from participants that could not feasibly be contained in the body of the report. This feedback is contained in Appendix A as to maintain a comprehensive record of what suggestions were made during the town halls. The WGI also heard suggestions about initiatives currently underway- this ongoing work is described in a following section.

Statistics

Prior to facilitating the town halls, the WGI team conducted a literature review and overview of existing data, to identify what we already know about the most pressing issues facing women in LA County. In this search we focused attention to vulnerable groups, particularly women of color and both young and older women. What participants would later share at the town halls reinforced a glaring lesson from the literature review; that women of color, at all turns, were bearing the worst manifestations of the COVID-19 pandemic, in terms of health outcomes, as well as socioeconomic and intrapersonal ones. The following are some of the data points that make a compelling case for change to the status quo in LA County.

Unsurprisingly, the COVID-19 pandemic led to an enormous surge in unemployment for LA County residents. While a rise in unemployment hit all groups, people with less than a high school education were hit the hardest.¹ This economic need becomes even more pressing when we consider data from the American Progress Annual Social and Economic Supplement that shows **Hispanic and Black women** are far more likely than white and Asian women to be single heads of households and, therefore, the main source of support for their family.² Large swaths of our population were pushed into poverty, or pushed farther beneath the poverty line as a result of these compounding factors.

The Los Angeles County Health Survey revealed another issue that became even more critical during the COVID-19 pandemic: **women aged 50 and older in LA County experience social isolation at concerning high rates**. Over half of Asian women in this age group reported that they rarely or never receive the social and emotional support needed, while white women reported the highest rates of satisfaction.³

¹ Elise, Gould, and Valerie Wilson. "Black Workers Face Two of the Most Lethal Preexisting Conditions for Coronavirus-racism and Economic Inequality." *Economic Policy Institute*. 1 June 2021

² Frye, Jocelyn. "On the Frontlines at Work and at Home: The Disproportionate Economic Effects of the Coronavirus Pandemic on Women of Color." *Center for American Progress*. 2020. Web.

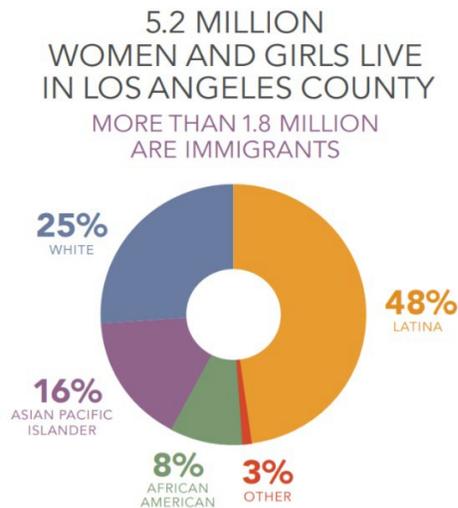
³ Women and Aging in Los Angeles County." *KCET*. USC Sol Price Center for Social Innovation, 19 Jan. 2021. Web

With regard to the COVID-19 pandemic and the digital divide, **white adults in the US currently have significantly higher access to the internet at home, compared to Black or Hispanic adults.**⁴ The pandemic led many non-essential workers to transition to working entirely from home, and students began at-home learning. While in lockdown, this disparity presented challenges for both working from home and at-home learning. Students who did not have access to wi-fi or the fundamental tools to participate in class were oftentimes left behind. Women, who are much more likely than men to be the primary caretakers of children, were presented with additional challenges as mothers trying to work from home and support their children’s education and childcare needs.

As we will detail throughout this report, concurrent issues like homelessness and domestic violence also worsened throughout the pandemic, driven by poverty, isolation, addiction, and lack of support networks and resources. While these issues remain widespread, it is critical that the most impacted or vulnerable groups are included and prioritized in future decision making.

Populations of Interest

The pie chart below illustrates the percentages of women and girls in the County of Los Angeles based on data from 2018. Non-white women and girls make up 75 percent of the total number of women and girls in this County, and more than one third are immigrants.



Age Group	Female	
	Number	Percent
Total Population	5,112,188	100.00%
Age Under 15	895,730	17.50%
Age 15-17	185,868	3.60%
Age 18-24	485,547	9.50%
Age 25-34	795,457	15.60%
Age 35-54	1,373,649	26.90%
Age 55-64	618,044	12.10%
Age 65+	757,893	14.80%

The second image above, generated from the 2019 Population Census, provides population data of LA County female residents, broken down by age groups. The WGI is tasked with the ambitious goal of developing recommendations to better serve this huge population of over 5,000,000.

⁴ "Demographics of Internet and Home Broadband Usage in the United States." *Pew Research Center: Internet, Science & Tech.* Pew Research Center, 26 Apr. 2021. Web

It is important to note that women aged 65 and older are the fastest growing demographic of women within LA County. According to projections by the California Department of Finance, between the 40-year period from 2010-2050, this population will roughly double in size⁵. This group will also become more ethnically and racially diverse than its current composition.⁶

Additionally, women and girls face a myriad of challenges, compared to their male counterparts. While they comprise a roughly equal portion of the population and workforce to men, women are more likely to live in poverty.⁷ Within this group, Latina and African American women face the highest poverty rates, at 23 percent, followed by Asian American and White women. This disparity, along with many others brought to light by virtual town hall participants, helped inform and motivate the policy recommendations to follow.

⁵ "Healthy Aging: A Guide to IMPORTANT HEALTH TOPICS AMONG OLDER WOMEN IN LOS ANGELES COUNTY." LA County Department of Public Health, Oct. 2010, publichealth.lacounty.gov/owh/docs/HealthyAging_2010.pdf.

⁶ <https://www.kcet.org/neighborhood-data-for-social-change/women-and-aging-in-los-angeles-county>

⁷ *Report on the Status of Women in Los Angeles County*. Mount Saint Mary's, 2017, laccw.lacounty.gov/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket=NJktwmFfoac%3D&portalid=10.

ECONOMIC RESILIENCY

What We Heard from the Women of LA County

Highlights from the Town Hall

True long-term solutions for economic resiliency requires thinking about the needs of girls and women at every stage of their development. As girls develop, exposure to Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts and Math (STEAM) is vital to ensure that they will have the opportunity to compete and thrive in emerging fields and technologies. As young women enter the workforce, addressing childcare issues, family leave policies, and financial literacy becomes paramount. As women advance in their careers and begin to reach retirement age, they need to understand how to invest in and build retirement savings and prepare for the future. Panelists felt that addressing these issues is fundamental to jumpstart mobility and buttress economic resiliency.

During these town halls, the link between financial earnings and homelessness was identified as a growing problem. The unfortunate wage gap between men and women, with women earning less on the dollar than their male counterparts, and an even wider gap for women of color, opens the door for the possibility of homelessness at different points in a women's life and could present real obstacles to maintaining economic stability, especially as women age. We learned from experts that older women are currently the fastest growing homeless population, compared to any other group. And, while all of these issues affect women and girls across the board, panelists felt that women of color should be most aggressively targeted for culturally appropriate programming and services that increases knowledge of what career options and resources are available to reach economic independence and to boost overall financial literacy.

The term "Essential Worker", coined during the COVID-19 pandemic revealed the high levels of women who keep the foundation of the economy moving. Essential workers act as connectors to the most critical resources in our society and include grocery clerks, retail salespersons, healthcare workers, teachers, and childcare providers. Panelists felt that going forward it is critical for the County to incorporate them as a specific population whose needs should be prioritized both in short-term and long-term planning of resource allocation and service-delivery.

New economic concepts to consider for essential workers in response to the COVID-19 pandemic include hazard pay, compensation when mandated to quarantine, equitable vaccine access, and mental-health needs given that the risk of danger to essential workers has been elevated to that of public-safety and emergency response personnel. Innovative strategies for economic mobility and career advancement could include establishing community investment programs through partnerships with medical providers, corporations, and other private industry partners. As the County takes a proactive approach to support essential workers and invests in programs and

infrastructure that will support their needs for the future, the underpinnings of the entire economy are too supported.

Implications for the County

The connection between economic resiliency and homelessness establishes an undeniable urgency to focus serious consideration on strategies to shore up safety nets for women and girls. Increased affordable housing and Additional Dwelling Units are one prong of a strategy that will also need to consider systemic barriers to women and women of color, institutional racism, generational poverty, childcare, the digital-technology divide, enhanced intergovernmental cooperation, access to community-based computer labs and workforce development opportunities, and more will need to continue to be a focus of the County to make lasting change. Better economic opportunities and protections for essential workers must be regarded as a priority and the future woman and girl will need to better understand the power of financial independence, the benefits of being financially literate and how economic stability and resiliency are connected to every other outcome in her life.

Recommendations

Recommendation 1: Identify which communities lack quality childcare and “out of school time” care for school aged children. Assess resources, determine gaps to address childcare and programming needs.

Recommendation Description:

As new models emerge for addressing childcare, a new definition may be warranted. The practice of childcare would therefore be expanded to include what happens to children and teens after school before parents come home from work. One speaker from the Children’s Data Network explained that once a young person is involved in one of our juvenile systems, it is highly likely they will continue to get caught in these systems. If the goal is to reduce the chances of a girl becoming systems involved and increase the chances for economic stability later in life, it is imperative that girls are provided with thoughtful and intentional childcare that increases her exposure to new ideas and constructive activities and helps to shape her mind for the future.

Anticipated Outcomes for Most Impacted Populations

Girls and Young Women

Increased self-esteem. More direction and focus. Greater exposure to new ideas and career options. Opportunities to establish positive relationships and gain mentors.

Women of Color and Older Women

More support. Greater availability during work hours; possible career advancement. Increased stability. Reduced stress.

Recommendation 2: Support efforts to bring more women into trade-based occupations and the healthcare field.

Recommendation Description:

Careers not traditionally held by women can usually be traced back to a barrier preventing women from entering the field. For instance, positions traditionally categorized as “trade jobs” may have lessor tolerance for unexpected childcare issues or may have been widely considered “man’s work”. One panelist from Women in Non-Traditional Employment Roles (WINTER) explained that compared to other states, California does not invest much at all in training for women entering new workforces. Advancing this recommendation widens opportunities for community economic development overall and levels the playing field for women and girls specifically.

Anticipated Outcomes for Most Impacted Populations

Young Women/Women of Color and Older Women

Increased options and reduced barriers. Higher earning potential. Occupy a non-traditional space. Offered a different perspective. Learn to think differently. Broadened outlook.

Recommendation 3: Enforce Community Workforce and Project Labor Agreements and ensure that construction jobs are inclusive and support women and girls.

Recommendation Description:

As construction jobs return following the COVID-19 pandemic and the housing crisis creates opportunities to build more affordable housing, so do opportunities to enforce Community Workforce and Project Labor Agreements. These agreements call for recruitment and hiring of lower income workers into construction careers. It is important that women and girls be considered for these non-traditional careers and this recommendation looks to consider them into strong job quality standards on publicly funded or subsidized construction projects. As one panelist explained, these agreements are often instrumental as they provide incentives for companies to allocate contracts to women.

Anticipated Outcomes for Most Impacted Populations

Girls and Young Women	Increased options and reduced barriers. Higher earning potential.
Women of Color	The potential for higher earnings. Occupy a non-traditional space. Offered a different perspective. Learn to think differently. Broadened outlook.

HEALTH AND DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

What We Heard from the Women of LA County

Highlights from the Town Hall

In many instances, women and girls with poor health outcomes are uninformed about what will lead to positive health outcomes. During the town halls, the community voiced the need for an increased focus on educating women and girls on how to make healthy lifestyle and relationship choices.

The community's recommendation aligned with the County's practice to treat domestic violence as a public health need and that both domestic violence (DV) and mental health require community-based advocates who can administer services in a culturally appropriate format by Community Based Organizations (CBOs) that have an established and direct relationship with the community.

Not surprisingly, the intersection of domestic violence, mental health, health, and public health became palpable during these discussions. Anecdotal evidence began to surface that DV, health concerns and poor outcomes were exacerbated during the COVID-19 pandemic. Isolation and a lack of available outlets to address the frustration and mental health fallout resulted in more suspected domestic violence incidences being pushed under the surface and a reported increased mental breakdowns and suicides. Older adults fell into depression and experienced related mental health needs due to the pandemic and require greater supports overall, unrelated to the pandemic. These supports include job and technology training, and increased integration into society to reduce loneliness and provide purpose.

Implications for the County

While health, mental health and public health impact women and girls differently than men, the differences are more disparate in communities of color. Women of color are more likely than the general population of women to experience and discuss domestic violence with their healthcare provider.ⁱ And, domestic violence advocates from the town halls reminded attendees that DV plays a role in the life of over 90 percent of people who become systems involved. These factors and more make it crucial that future generations view domestic violence through a public health lens and treat it from a mental health perspective, rather than a punitive one.

Recommendations

Recommendation 1: Work with CBOs to offer culturally competent mental-health and domestic violence education and programming in neighborhoods with a disproportion number of women of color and essential workers.

Recommendation Description:

The recommendation to work with CBOs that offer culturally competent programs and services was a theme across all the town halls for most issues. Mental health and domestic violence were called out in relationship to homelessness and were particularly concerning to town hall participants who felt that “speaking the language” of those most impacted by these issues can be the distinction between making a real difference in the lives of women of color and essential workers, or simply “scratching the surface”.

Anticipated Outcomes for Most Impacted Populations

Girls and Young Women	Witness/access to positive role models, less likely to repeat a cycle of violence. More likely to normalize mental health support. More likely to make healthy lifestyle/relationship choices. More likely to identify with providers, hear relevant messaging, set healthy goals, and generate overall life successes.
Women of Color and Older Women	Positive modeling for children, healthier, safer lifestyle. More likely to recognize patterns and stop repeated behaviors. Recognition of toxic and abusive behavior. More likely to break cycle, increase personal empowerment/self-esteem and become self-sufficient. Lessen disproportionate impacts on women of color. Nurture a community of women that may lack the level of support provided to other communities. Move the community from a focus on “survival” to active participation and healthy choices.

Recommendation 2: Work with community-based organizations and senior centers to support the aging community from falling into depression or experiencing other mental health related issues due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Recommendation Description:

The COVID-19 pandemic impacted seniors and older women different from any other subset of the population. This group was hit particularly hard due to financial stressors, lack of resources and isolation. While younger women had many of the same public health mandated restrictions, older women were at greater risk for serious complications and

death due to COVID-19 and therefore became more isolated than ever from family, friends, and social circles. Isolation, loneliness, and depression were a reality for many seniors before the pandemic and were only exacerbated by this challenging time. Increased mental health programming and services for older women continue to be necessary to keep them engaged, connected, and thriving, and supports the whole family.

Anticipated Outcomes for Most Impacted Populations

Young Women	Ease older women’s reliance on young mothers. Ease worry and fear. Potential for increased focus on nuclear family. Additional familial supports.
Older Women	Increased emotional/mental wellness. Social engagement to buoy spirits. Healthy contributions to the family and increased value to society at large. Heightened visibility of CBO community supports, increased connection to the community.

¹ Usha Ranji, Amrutha Ramaswamy, and Alina Salganicoff. "Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) Screening and Counseling Services in Clinical Settings - Issue Brief." *KFF*. 02 Dec. 2019. Web.

EDUCATION AND PROGRAMS

What We Heard from the Women of LA County

Highlights from the Town Hall

The community pushed strongly for an interdepartmental lens when discussing education and programs. Resources and assets like the libraries, recreation centers, community centers, beaches and other spaces allow for a plethora of options when building and implementing extra-curricular programs and services, mental health programming, financial and computer literacy, and restorative programs. The community pointed out that a single governmental agency, in this case, a school board, cannot provide all of these services alone, whereas the County has the authority to play a leadership role connecting and integrating services where residents lack the resources to thrive.

While education was an overall concern, the community keyed in the County's power to influence the Los Angeles County Office of Education (LACOE). The idea that rooting out racism through educational programming and incorporating an anti-racism curriculum resonated as well as making changes in how to look at and build programs. The discussion centered around building programming that seriously considers and addresses the structural and underlying issues that contribute to racism, gender inequality and homophobia upfront in order to prevent the inadvertent harms that create the need for the safety net in the first place. In addition, programming should address the school-to-prison pipeline which disproportionately impacts youth and mothers of color most.

Implications for the County

By increasing intentional, integrated, interdepartmental, intergenerational education and programming, the County has the power to fortify residents that are falling behind, and eliminate many of the systemic barriers that stymie the ability of individuals to reach their full potential. With the provision of financial and computer literacy education, girls and women will be positioned to compete in emerging fields, stand confidently on their own and contribute talent and resources to society. Ensuring that programs are built with a restorative, anti-"ism" lens opens the door to healing, helping to create a healthier society and stronger community.

Recommendations

Recommendation 1: Close the digital-technology divide. This includes immigrant communities, older adults and women and girls of color.

Recommendation Description:

The County currently has several initiatives underway to address the digital divide. One County employee described how the expansion of public wi-fi to the edges of County Library parking lots helped many students during remote learning. Another notable

initiative is Delete the Divide. Delete the Divide is aimed at empowering youth and small businesses in underserved communities who are adversely impacted by the digital divide with computer literacy skills as a pathway to well-paying careers. This is an exceptional undertaking and this recommendation contemplates how to include older adults who lack computer literacy and are at a greater risk for fraud, and the immigrant communities who oftentimes go unnoticed. The goal would be to increase technology use and knowability through programs and courses delivered in a culturally and age appropriate format by CBOs.

Anticipated Outcomes for Most Impacted Populations

Girls and Young Women	Prepares girls and young women for future jobs. Provides increased access to critical resources and infrastructure.
Women of Color and Older Women	Provides access to critical resources. Keeps skills sharp to compete in the labor market. Increases awareness of available opportunities and services.

Recommendation 2: Encourage and educate women and girls to begin saving and learning about ways to become financially stable and independent. Implement specific actions to widely promote existing programs and training on financial literacy. Use intergovernmental partnerships and influence to push the use of tools such as CalSave, a state program, to help build a nest egg for retirement.

Recommendation Description:

While financial literacy programs and tools exist to educate women and girls on the virtues of saving and investing, societal messaging and educational programming do not always place enough importance on these life strategies. One panelist brought to attention that 7 million working Californians currently have no access to a savings program through their employer. Where possible, promoting existing programs and training on financial literacy through County department websites and other platforms increases reach to the target population. Using intergovernmental partnerships to broaden the local outreach of state and federal programs are a fundamental approach to increase awareness and access.

Anticipated Outcomes for Most Impacted Populations

Girls and Young Women	Gained exposure to what is available. Increased personal power. Decreased potential to make poor financial choices with lifelong consequences. Potential to develop a healthy relationship with money.
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Women of Color	Greater chance of avoiding poverty and/or moving out of poverty.
Older Women	Better provisions for families. The potential for wiser use of resources. Less reliance on safety net funding. Increased independence and stability. Self-empowering and motivating.

Recommendation 3: Train young women on how to use existing County based tools that list resources, 211, social media pages, department pages and directories, health systems and institutions. Increase access to and awareness of resources to the public including child abuse reporting lines and other critical resources during crisis times when children are less visible and less able to access support.

Recommendation Description:
One simple life strategy that separates those who have adequate resources from those who do not may be in knowing how and where to get needs met. First, knowing what is available, then having the confidence to find and access what one needs can make a world a of difference to an individual who lacks exposure. Having the tools to navigate systems can be pivotal to moving an individual out of dangerous situations and/or into economic stability.

Anticipated Outcomes for Most Impacted Populations

Young Women	Increased level of engagement. Better health and life outcomes. Exponential increase in familial exposure to programs and services through information sharing. Can provide additional safety when needed. Decreased isolation.
Women of Color and Older Women	Increased self-sufficiency and self-reliance. Increased access to services for the entire family.

BUDGET

What We Heard from the Women of LA County

Highlights from the Town Hall

Throughout the course of the town halls the topics of funding and budgets came up often, and panelists frequently addressed the need for a larger allocation of resources to address domestic violence, homelessness and housing, and a number of other issues that impact women in LA County. Several panelists also spoke up on the need to adapt the budgeting process to ensure that members of the community have an opportunity to influence where County dollars are spent. For example, a representative from the Native American Indian Commission emphasized that the County should speak with its dollars about where priorities are, and specifically brought the up the ‘need for a gender-based budget and to think about how to dive deeper into how data is collected’.

Implications for the County

The importance of hearing directly from community and integrating feedback based on lived experience was woven into the purpose and structure of the WGI, and, these town halls. A part of the WGI legacy should be creating the structures for continued community engagement and ensuring that going forward women and girls have a stronger voice in how the County operates. While there are immediate changes to budget allocation that the WGI can recommend, we must look further down the road and ensure that women and girls for generations to come have proper avenues to influence how dollars are spent.

Recommendation

Recommendation 1: Establish ways to allow service providers and CBOs the flexibility to utilize funding in ways that best serve individual client needs.

Recommendation Description:

The need for flexible funding was brought up by multiple providers, due to how many funding restrictions hinder their work. Providers and community groups felt there is a critical need to access flexible spending accounts to fund individualized solutions to clients. For example, a woman experiencing domestic violence may need funds for transportation, or to purchase a home washer to avoid seeing her former abuser at the local laundromat. Financial needs for domestic violence survivors and community members in general come in all forms, and resources must reflect this. Any new funding that can be identified or created should be designed with input from CBOs and be as flexible as possible.

Anticipated Outcomes for Most Impacted Populations

Girls and Young Women	More economic needs met. Access to rapid response resources during crises.
Women of Color	Access to funding for immigrant communities, which may have unique needs. Provide funding for parents to support their children, through costs like books for schools.
Older Women	Provide funds appropriate for women in retirement. Meet additional healthcare needs for older women.

DATA

What We Heard from the Women of LA County

Highlights from the Town Hall

Town Hall panelists repeatedly mentioned the need for more data, as well as better disaggregated data. One panelist, from the organization Black Women for Wellness, made the point that the County should identify the structural underlying issues that contribute to racism, and then ensure its data points are set to evaluate those issues. For example, the County should ensure health outcome data for women is being tracked and analyzed with race as a disaggregate, to monitor changes in health inequity. Another panelist, from Khmer Girls in Action brought up that many South East Asian organizations and individuals have been encouraging the County to disaggregate data related to Asian Americans, since all groups are currently lumped together despite significantly different socioeconomic outcomes.

Implications for the County

As the WGI has noted in its work with the Office of the Chief Information Officer, LA County does in fact collect significant amounts of data, though it needs to refine data storage and dissemination strategies. It is critical that the County put more emphasis on the user experience as well as obtaining and analyzing data, to ensure that what is collected and published has real value for clients, departments, and other stakeholders.

Recommendations

Recommendation 1: Support legislation that would identify methods to collect and disaggregate data by gender in State mandated workforce and programmatic service reports.

Recommendation Description:

It is important to advocate for the increased collection of gender in demographic data collection, as well as improvement in data collection and dissemination where collection of gender identifiers is already happening. Rather than relying solely on new systems and processes for data collection, the production of a resolution outlining desired data disaggregation would be helpful to request from County partners at the State level. In addition to the collection of gendered data at the state level, advocating for departments to have greater access to State managed program recipient data would be beneficial in their ability to identify and address gender inequities in program administration and outreach efforts.

Anticipated Outcomes for Most Impacted Populations

Girls and Young Women	Increased representation. Stronger understanding of which sectors have growing female workforces.
Women of Color and Older Women	Increased representation. Greater opportunities to avoiding poverty and/or moving out of poverty.

Recommendation 2: The Chief Executive Office should direct all County departments to make a concerted effort to initiate data collection at the onset of a new program or during policy change. Data should be continually reviewed on no less than a bi-annual basis.

Recommendation Description:

Some County departments gather data for 2 to 3 years before assessing the outcomes and successes of a program or policy change. Implementing a practice of assessing data, even while a program is very young and in development, allows an opportunity to make on-the-spot changes to things that are not working. Regularly conducting data meetings as a department or team can be incredibly valuable to help shape programs and ensure services have the intended impact on clients and the community. By including feedback from providers and the community based on what the data show, the County can do its part to ensure that data are relevant and useful for stakeholders; and, can provide the necessary information to help guide changes the County needs to make to existing programs, services and policy.

Community Recommendations Currently Underway

In some instances, the community made recommendations for problems the County is actively applying solutions. This was an encouraging development both confirming that the County is moving in the right direction and exemplifying the County's alignment with the needs and desires of the community. The recommendations listed below have a nexus to programs and services described in this section. Through focused advocacy, the community should continue in its efforts to shape how these programs and services develop and provide feedback on what is working, what is not working, and the changes needed to make them better.

Recommendation 1: Identify ways to recruit more women and girls into the healthcare profession as the COVID-19 pandemic has elevated the demand for healthcare workers.

Initiatives Underway:

On February 9, 2021, the Los Angeles County Department of Workforce Development, Aging and Community Services (WDACS) in partnership with the Los Angeles Economic Development Corporation (LAEDC), released a new report entitled, Pathways for Economic Resiliency. The report outlines an increase in demand for healthcare workers as there is a clear shortage of labor. Further, the report recommends that workers interested in securing jobs in the healthcare and social services industries would benefit in developing specialized skills in Patient Care, scheduling, and Cardiopulmonary Resuscitation (CPR). The County is in the planning stages, developing milestones and metrics for this initiative. A strong focus will center on greater recruitment of women in this high growth industry as well as others identified in the report.

Recommendation 2: Utilize community public health councils to connect essential workers with employers and County health officials to improve County Public Health Officer Orders. Implement processes to ensure that women and girls' needs are met when implementing future Orders for industries where women and girls are highly represented.

Initiatives Underway:

The Board of Supervisors (Board) directed the Department of Public Health to implement the Public Health Councils initiative to protect workers that have been highly impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. The initiative supports workers from "Public Health Councils" to help ensure that employees in hard hit industries are protected by Los Angeles County Health Officer Orders and do not experience retaliation. Public Health Councils are comprised of workers that conduct peer-to-peer education with their co-workers regarding required safety and worksite compliance. The initiative also includes educational outreach to employers in these sectors regarding required infection control measures issued through Health Officer Orders.

Recommendation 3: Continue to support efforts to bring more women into trade-based occupations.

Initiatives Underway:

In November 2019, the Board approved the Community Workforce Agreement (CWA). The CWA is an agreement between Los Angeles County and the Los Angeles/Orange Counties Building and Construction Trades Council (LA/OC BCTC), its affiliated local unions, and the Southwest Regional Council of Carpenters. The CWA promotes Fair Labor practices and a supply of skilled and trained craft workers.

The Women in Trades Advisory Council is required by CWA Section 19.2 and has been established as a forum to engage in dialogue and recommendation development that defines and implements strategies to increase female recruitment, training, placement, and retention. The Inaugural Women in Trades Advisory Council meeting occurred on Wednesday, January 27, 2021.

Recommendation 4: Involve creative arts departments to help reduce the impacts of mental-health and DV across all County communities.

Initiatives Underway:

On May 1, 2021, the County kicked off Mental Health Awareness Month with the WE RISE campaign. WE RISE is an ongoing project the Los Angeles County Department of Mental Health uses to educate residents and provides prevention programs to offer connection, hope, recovery, and wellbeing.

By leveraging art, performance, and creative expression, WE RISE events are calls to action to join a movement to breakthrough barriers and defy old assumptions about mental health and the many related social conditions, which compound problems and hurt our communities.

In November of 2017, the County also demonstrated that it views domestic violence as a public health issue by approving a motion relocating the Domestic Violence Council to the Department of Public Health. The Council is a coalition of community organizations, members of the public, and staff members who meet regularly and advise the Board and County Departments on intimate partner violence issues. This change also provided permanent funding and dedicated staff to the Council, ensuring domestic violence is treated as a critical priority.

Recommendation 5: Better organize and breakdown failure-to-protect data into specific, descriptive categories; properly detail and create a just and equitable method of determining why and when family separation procedures are applied.

Initiatives Underway:

The Office of the Domestic Violence Council currently has an ongoing committee that is co-chaired by the Domestic Violence Council, Department of Children and Family

Services (DCFS), and the Inter-Agency Council on Child Abuse and Neglect (ICAN). This committee is also working in conjunction with the UCLA Pritzker Center, which produced a white paper outlining the scope of the issue, as well as an overview of recommendations to create an equitable and effective system around child welfare investigations. This committee is addressing data, training, and policies related to failure to protect issues, and will be releasing a report in the latter part of 2021.

This concern arose from panelists who spoke about working with women at risk of having their children removed from their care. Women experiencing crises like domestic violence or homelessness are often reluctant to use County services for fear of losing guardianship over their own children. Advocates feel the data points and collection methods behind this process need more clarity and specificity. The lack of data related to tracking indices makes it difficult to understand the story for why the drastic occurrence of family separation is needed. To ensure a just and equitable method for determining when family separation should occur, the collection of the proper data is the appropriate first step.

Recommendation 6: Working in partnership with cities, related government agencies, private partners, labor groups and others develop a plan that improves the utility grid of the County so that updated broadband technologies can be installed. The plan should prioritize communities that have been disproportionately impacted by a lack of reliable internet access.

Initiatives Underway:

On August 31, 2021, the Board adopted a motion to assess viable options for the County to facilitate residential access to reliable broadband service in low-income communities where greater than 20 percent of households lack internet service. While the challenge of universal broadband is complex, the Internal Services Department engaged a consultant to evaluate methods to provide residential internet access to disadvantaged households and submitted a report to the Board on September 30, 2021, of three options to meet this objective. This initiative is in the early stages of development and will require action from the Board on next steps for implementation.

Recommendation 7: The definition of childcare should be expanded to include school-aged children and teenagers. The future of childcare should include what can be done to support school-aged children and teenagers by exposing them to sports, leadership development, STEAM, arts, literacy programs, and providing access to computers and technology.

Initiatives Underway:

The Department of Parks & Recreation hosts an annual Girls Empowerment Conference each year, a tradition that began in 2014. The Conference is aimed at encouraging girls in LA County to learn the power of using their voices and build pathways to college and careers. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic restrictions, the 2020 Conference was conducted virtually, with a full month of virtual workshops, speakers, and interactive

sessions. The most recent conference focused on women leaders in LA County, as well as women in sports, business, entertainment, and social change.

In 2019, The Board approved the Women in Tech Initiative to recruit and train women for county information technology jobs. The Board then created a Youth at Work cohort for the first time in 2021, specifically for girls and women aged 16-24. The program provides personal enrichment training, paid work experience, and opportunities for internships aimed at helping women join the Information Technology field. This new cohort will ensure that education and training geared toward technology careers will be accessible for teenagers and young women who are making important career choices.

Additionally, the LA County Library provides several programs aimed at engaging young girls and teenagers. Throughout the Summer of 2021 the department is continuing Outdoor programming around Arts, Crafts, and Performances for children aged 3 to 17. As the County begins to return to normal operations, the LA County Library will likely continue their past in-person programming designed to engage children and teens. For example, they host many teens as volunteers as part of their Teen Advisory Boards, who work with Teen Librarians, design programs for younger kids, and advise the LA County Library on materials to purchase.

CONCLUSION

The Virtual Town halls (VTH) offered a new way of hearing many of the challenges facing women and girls during this unprecedented time. While not all these challenges are new, they were undoubtedly heightened due to the COVID-19 pandemic. As the world embraces a new normal, and moves back to a fully functioning society, it is critical to remember how systemic barriers, racism, sexism, and a lack of available resources have exposed a great divide in this Country; one that left school aged children behind, spiraled some families and individuals further into poverty, and left our most vulnerable essential workers without proper protections or supports.

The stories on how and why residents fall into the care of the County are complex and require a personalized approach to service delivery. Going forward, panelists recommended that a client be fully heard and understood, that their entire narrative be considered so that customized services can be better used to help lift girls and women out of poverty and into safe, healthy spaces. The community felt it important that the County apply an intersectional lens and take a more interdepartmental and intergovernmental approach to its service models. While understanding the limits of jurisdictions, panelist stressed that the County is the institution that can seriously leverage culture change and push other entities like the State and Federal government to better fund services and address needs that would close the gender equity-gap, improve health outcomes for women and girls, fund initiatives that make a difference to older women, collect better data, and shore up education and programmatic outcomes.

A recurring theme that emerged during these discussions was to apply an intergenerational lens when planning investments. One question when developing new

programs and services for women and girls should be the impact to all age groups through each decade. The outcomes for daughters are inextricably tied to how well their mothers navigate the world and their mother's earning potential. The economic and emotional well-being for older women can depend on the level of self-sufficiency of their adult children, or the level of retirement planning they did in early adulthood. It is therefore critical to ensure that funding is strategically allocated to consider these linkages throughout the course of a women's life.

How the County captures, uses and interprets data was also woven throughout these discussions. Data can be used to drive every common thread listed within this report from economic resiliency to health, education, and budgeting. Data, appropriately analyzed, can tell the story of equity, service delivery outcomes, prosperity and even racism. Panelists pointed out the nexus between knowing the outcome of programs and services, their intended or unintended consequences and the power of the County's influence to change the things that are not working. Panelists felt that it is one thing to review data after a program has been functioning for 2 to 3 years and another to make it a practice of regularly conducting data meetings and making on-the-spot changes to policies and practices based on what the data show.

Overall, the VTH were met with a sense of excitement, authentic respect, and hope that the County could be a service provider and partner working to improve the lives of all women and girls. The WGI has harnessed this enthusiasm and great hope to present these recommendations to the Board. This report will live beyond this series of town halls and will help inform the future work of the WGI and the Los Angeles County. These recommendations encompass a considerable part of the County's work on behalf of women and girls and can be used to shape future policy and budget decisions.

What we heard during the VTH was that the community feels (felt) that the County can make real and lasting change. The community felt that hearing community voices and incorporating lessons learned through ground truths and observations exponentially increases the County's ability to provide the services that women and girls need versus what is available. It is the hope of the community, that going forward, the County prioritize intersectionality understanding, intergovernmental approaches and intergenerational perspectives, and allocates funding in a way that supports this renewed approach to servicing women and girls.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This report would not have been possible without the generosity and openness of the many organizations and individuals who participated as panelists and contributed their time and expertise to our virtual town halls. The organizations listed below were critical and informed the recommendations in this report that accurately reflect the needs and priorities of communities across Los Angeles County. In addition, the WGI would like to thank the County employees who volunteered their expertise to pose thoughtful questions and offer insights.

Black Women for Wellness	Khmer Girls in Action	LA Native American Indian Commission
Vision Y Compromise	Women in Non-Traditional Employment Roles (WINTER)	YWCA of Greater LA
CA Work & Family Coalition	United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW)	California Commission on Aging
Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority	ONEgeneration	AARP California
Watts Labor Community Action Center	Jenesse Center	Peace Over Violence
East Los Angeles Women's Center	Center for the Pacific Asian Family	Los Angeles County Chief Executive Office
Los Angeles Economic Development Corporation	Committee for a Greater LA	Children's Data Network

The WGI would also like to recognize the Governing Council Community Engagement Ad Hoc Committee for their contributions and guidance throughout the town halls. The names of the Ad Hoc Committee Chairs are listed in bold.

Araceli Campos	Carmen Estrada-Schaye	Alice Petrossian
Sharon Shelton	Bea Olvera-Stotzer	Jane Templin

APPENDIX A

The WGI considers all feedback from the Community to be valuable. The recommendations contained in this Appendix are items that were very specific to the time that this feedback was captured, e.g., early coordination of the COVID-19 pandemic efforts, or a recommendation to conduct an assessment that would extend beyond the timeframe prescribed by the Board for the WGI to complete its work, or was outside of the scope of the County's jurisdiction. They have been included here for future consideration when appropriate.

ECONOMIC RESILIENCY:

- Conduct focus-groups consisting of girls and clients from across County service areas to better understand the economic mobility and health-services girls need to prosper in a post COVID-19 world.
- Assess how many women are currently facing housing insecurity and what are the future projections due to the high cost of living in Los Angeles, especially when they enter retirement.

HEALTH:

- Require all businesses who have essential-workers to collaborate with the County to make sure employees have access to PPE, access to COVID-19 testing, clear and fair policies related to mandated quarantine leave, and equitable access and understanding to what the vaccine distribution plan is for the County.
- County departments that focus on reproductive health should work with reproductive-justice health-based organizations and related stakeholders to identify new methods of childbearing emerging in a post COVID-19 world that are equally safe to having a child in a medical facility.
- In order to fully understand the obstacles women and girls are facing in health access, it is critical for the County to consider research committees or projects to analyze the status of the insured, uninsured, health-literacy and related topics of women and girls.

EDUCATION/PROGRAMS:

- Together with community organizations, related government agencies, private partnerships, labor groups and others develop a plan that helps identify and supply a personal computer to County residents that do not have computer access in their household.
- The County should request that the Los Angeles County Office of Education work with school districts to develop uniform protocols that allow CBOs to partner with a school district, campus, or related educational spaces. CBOs are usually funded to reach large audiences of young adults and parents on several leadership and extra-curricular opportunities, but the lack of shared policies and/or protocols makes it difficult to partner.
- Identify ways that the County and related restorative justice stakeholders can focus on best practices for DV victims and perpetrators.

DATA:

- Identify data-indexes that could help measure the well-being of essential workers to best direct resources to support them, including those that are undocumented or have immigrant status.
-