



Maintaining Our Gains, Leading Toward the Future

A Call to Action for a Healthy, Safe, and Equitable California

"California was not part of this nation when its history began, but we are clearly now the keeper of its future."

*-Joint Statement from California Legislative Leaders,
November 9, 2016*



Photo by Tim Wagner



Californians have a tremendous stake in the national policy debates underway. Fundamental issues like healthcare access, environmental protections, privatization of public-sector assets and services, and the rights of vulnerable and marginalized communities hang in the balance. Our state is already poised to protect many of the core factors that form the bedrock of Californians' health and well-being. Together, California communities, families, decision-makers, business leaders, and lawmakers have the opportunity—and the responsibility—to take a proactive and affirmative stance that propels us toward a future that is fair, just, and prosperous for all of our residents.

In these uncertain times, we must continue to aspire toward the future—it is not enough to oppose ideas and reject policies that violate our values of fairness and inclusion. We must lay out a bold vision of what we are working *for*, building on California's track record of making effective investments in healthy, safe, and resilient communities. These are investments that save lives, save money, prevent needless suffering, and make our state a formidable economic and social force.

Now more than ever, we must be bold in our leadership and insist that all Californians deserve to live in communities that support their health, safety, and equity.

We ask California's decision-makers to advance the following principles in policy and funding decisions:

Prioritize community-based prevention and public health to prevent illness and injury in the first place. By changing the community conditions that impact overall health, safety and equity, comprehensive prevention efforts effectively address a range of community needs at once. Efforts to expand access to parks and green spaces, for example, can help people lead healthier, more active lives, strengthen community cohesion and safety, enhance the local economy, and even curb greenhouse gas emissions by helping people shift away from driving by creating trails and pathways.

Work across sectors to maximize the potential co-benefits of prevention. Multi-sector collaborative efforts are now more important than ever. As our understanding of the role of community conditions in shaping health and well-being increases, so do the opportunities to leverage the skills and expertise of diverse sectors—from housing and transportation to parks and economic development—to build strategic alliances and find common cause to benefit health and well-being. Policies should be designed to “connect the dots” between critical community and social issues, because good solutions solve multiple problems.

We call on California's community members, including youth, decision-makers, and lawmakers to:

Defend the Affordable Care Act, Assert the Right to Universal Healthcare Access, and Invest in Community-Based Prevention

Every Californian has the right to access healthcare *and* to maintain their health. As we work to preserve the Affordable Care Act, we must also encourage bold actions in California that set the gold standard for a true system of health. This includes investing in the resources, infrastructure, and opportunities that help prevent illness and injury in the first place, and ensuring high-quality healthcare services for all. A sustainable healthcare plan depends on serious investments in quality prevention and effective public health, with a focus on the communities that need these resources the most. Establishing a Prevention Fund would make it possible to pool revenues from multiple sources, including taxes and fees on products like sugary beverages and tobacco, and reinvest a portion of the savings when prevention efforts are shown to save money.

Protect Environmental Regulations, Stand Strong on Bold Environmental Targets, and Invest in Infrastructure that Ensures Health and Climate Justice

California's health-protective standards serve as a benchmark for clean air, safe water, and climate protections needed across the United States. Our state has gone even further—through strategic investments in active transportation, public transit, urban greening, affordable housing, and sustainable agriculture—to safeguard the health and resilience of our communities in the face of climate change. To ensure that all residents are protected to the greatest extent possible, we must uphold these standards and prioritize investments in the communities that experience the greatest cumulative burden from climate change, environmental injustice, and economic and health disadvantages.

Sustain Funding for Public Infrastructure that Supports Health, and Protect and Strengthen Public Oversight of Public Sector Functions, from our Streets and Freeways to our Education System and Prisons

California's future success depends on our public resources and investments, created for the benefit of all residents. Our ability to decide and act *together* to revitalize our public schools, restore parklands, and set health and safety standards, for example, shape our quality of life now and for generations to come. Public institutions have an explicit responsibility to ensure the public good by creating the conditions that enable all people to be healthy, including low-income people and people of color. By rejecting the privatization of public structures, assets, and services, California can lead the way in demonstrating how effective government, responsive to the needs and aspirations

of its constituents, can advance the health and well-being of its people and environment.

Support the Critical Role of Government to Assure Health and Well-being for Low-Income People, Including Strengthening the Safety Net and Creating Pathways Out of Poverty

Too many Californians struggle to make ends meet. When cost of living is taken into account, California has the highest poverty rate in the United States. Our largest safety net programs—including CalFresh, CalWORKs, state and federal Earned Income Tax Credit and Child Tax Credit, Supplemental Security Income, federal housing subsidies, the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children, and school meals programs—kept an estimated 8.2% of Californians from slipping into poverty in 2014. Sustaining our safety net programs, along with systematic efforts to expand access to quality K-12 and higher education, affordable childcare and housing, and livable wages will be central to addressing inequality and ensuring economic opportunity for all.

Create Sanctuaries in our State, Counties, Cities, and Public Spaces, and Protect the Ability of Undocumented Families to Stay Together

California's diversity is one of our greatest strengths, as well as a calling to serve as a refuge of justice and opportunity for all people regardless of how we look, our religious beliefs, where we come from, what languages we speak, our level of ability, or who we love. In this current climate, as cities, counties, and the state of California seek to establish sanctuaries for those members of our communities that are undocumented, let us also elevate policies and norms that create sanctuaries for all those who experience discrimination and violence based on their identities. Public and nonprofit institutions can serve as partners in creating sanctuaries, expanding protections to schools, parks, and organizations that provide community services and healthcare.

Strengthen Public Programs Focused on Preventing Violence, and Oppose the Criminalization of Immigrants, People of Color, Residents Experiencing Homelessness, and People Living with Mental Illness

Many communities in California have successfully improved community safety and reduced violence through broad-based partnerships with education, parks and recreation, public health, and other sectors. Together, our state and local governments should continue to develop cross-sector approaches that prevent violence before it occurs and build resilient communities. Further, as policies and rhetoric from the federal administration threaten the safety and stability of our most vulnerable neighbors, California has a responsibility to protect its communities from systematic and structural violence and the resulting community-level trauma.

Focus on health equity and social justice. Inequities in health are, by definition, preventable, so wherever inequities exist, it means people needlessly suffer. No one should get sick or injured when we know what to do to prevent illness and injury. And *nobody* should experience the prospect of even greater illness, injury, or trauma because they face systematic discrimination based on race, ethnicity, gender identity, sex, sexual orientation, income, age, disability, religion, or immigration status. California's institutions and policies should be guided by the goal of undoing the systems and structures that have created and reproduced historical and present-day racial injustices and other forms of inequity.

Ensure that all policies, programs, and investments are designed to protect against displacement. Our communities cannot truly support health and serve as sanctuaries if they are not affordable for our working families and low-income residents. We must protect people's right to stay in their communities at the same time that we make neighborhoods healthier, safer, and more livable. While strategies will vary from community to community depending on the local context, all of us have the opportunity to ask: *What are some concrete steps we can take to promote health equity and prevent displacement in our own work and through our partnerships?*

For more information
about this statement contact
Juliet@preventioninstitute.org

WHO WE ARE

As organizations, coalitions, and leaders committed to advancing a healthy, safe, and equitable California, we stand boldly alongside our partners, networks, and those most impacted by unhealthy community conditions and the effects of structural racism and inequities that lead disproportionately to poor health outcomes and community trauma. Together, we will work in pursuit of a future that is fair, just, and prosperous for all of our state's residents.

