

# POLICY BRIEF: EAST COACHELLA VALLEY

## HEALTH CARE ACCESS DISPARITIES

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### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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Environmental injustice includes the lack of access to needed services within a region. In the East Coachella Valley, low-income people of color lack access to essential resources, including health care. The estimated percentage of the adult population lacking coverage ranges from 36% to 70%. In addition, the number of patients per doctor in the region exceeds the federal government recommendation by 4 times.

### STATEMENT OF THE ISSUE

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Healthy People 2020, a project of the US Department of Health and Human Services, defines a HEALTH DISPARITY as “a particular type of health difference that is closely linked with social, economic, and/or environmental disadvantage. Health disparities adversely affect groups of people who have systematically experienced greater obstacles to health based on their racial or ethnic group; religion; socioeconomic status; gender; age; mental health; cognitive, sensory, or physical disability; sexual orientation or gender identity; geographic location; or other characteristics historically linked to discrimination or exclusion.”<sup>i</sup>

A study done by The California Endowment<sup>ii</sup> showed that 36% of all adults in the East Coachella Valley lack health insurance. A large number of residents in the unincorporated areas of the Valley work on local farms. The California Agricultural Workers Health Survey found that 70% of adult employed farmworker respondents had no health insurance.<sup>iii</sup> The Bi-national Farmworker Health Survey<sup>iv</sup> noted a somewhat lower rate of 58 percent. All of these estimates are well above the national percentage of people without health coverage in 2010 which was 16%.<sup>v</sup>

In 2010, the Coachella Valley Healthcare Initiative found that East Valley has 8,407 residents for every doctor. That’s more than four times the federal government’s minimum recommendation of one doctor per 2,000 people.<sup>vi</sup>

- In late 2010, The Coachella Valley Volunteers in Medicine clinic (CVVIM) opened in Indio; it is the only free clinic in the valley.
- The Riverside County Mobile Clinic visits Oasis once a month and is open only between the hours of 9 am and 3 pm.
- There is one ambulance service for residents of the East Coachella Valley and it is located in Indio.
- Los Médicos Voladores, *The Flying Doctors* (LMV) serves many regions including the East Coachella Valley. The largest LMV clinics are held twice a year in Thermal.<sup>vii</sup>
- The nearest Emergency Room for ECV residents is in Indio which can be as more than 25 miles for some residents.
- East Coachella Valley residents frequently travel to Moreno Valley for services covered by Medicaid.<sup>viii</sup>

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### PRE-EXISTING POLICIES

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In 1994, the US government passed an executive order stating that “each Federal agency shall make achieving environmental justice part of its mission by identifying and addressing, as appropriate, disproportionately high and adverse human health or environmental effects of its programs, policies, and activities on minority populations and low-income populations in the United States and its territories and possessions.” ix

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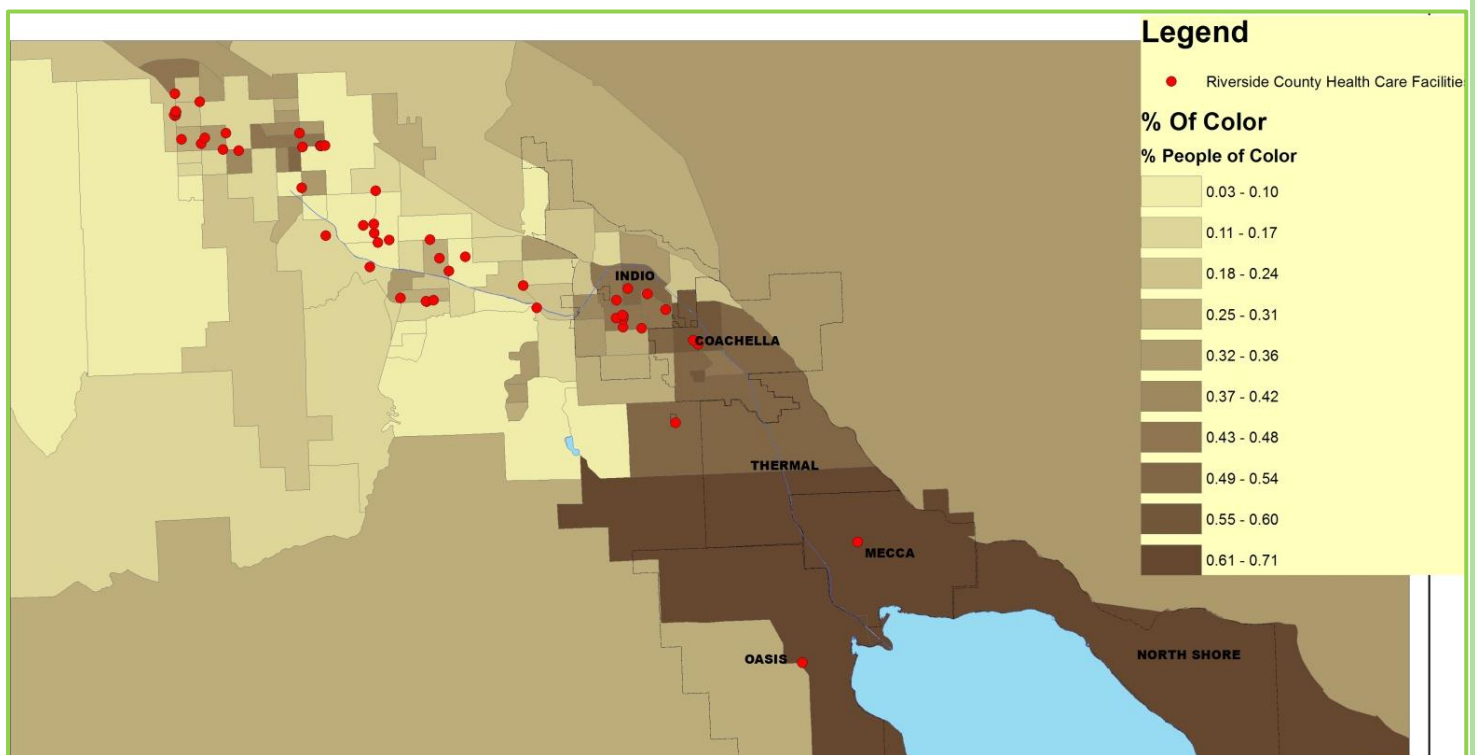
- Federal money for health care and social service programs cannot be used to support programs or activities that discriminate on the basis of race, color or national origin.
- Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 was enacted for enforcement of environmental justice. Title VI states that no one in the US shall be excluded from participation in, denied benefits of, or subjected to discrimination under federal assistance programs based on their race, color or national origin. President Clinton signed Executive Order 12898 in

1994 (see above) to direct Federal agencies in their actions to achieve environmental justice. Federal agencies are directed by these policies to work for equitable health outcomes for all members of our communities.

- Through its Adolescent Outpatient Substance Abuse Program, the Latino Commission<sup>x</sup> is helping teens to reduce alcohol and drug use while improving social and family functioning. The Commission works with the Coachella Valley Unified School District to provide a strong teen driven aftercare program, which continues to address relapse prevention, aftercare plans, and follow-ups.<sup>xi</sup>

### Affordable Care Act Legislation

- As a result of funding and authorization in the Affordable Care Act, 350 new community health centers were built nationwide in 2011. A provision in the Affordable Care Act will increase funding to more than 1,100 community health centers across the nation.<sup>xii</sup>
- Public health programs have expanded. This will eventually allow the 39 percent uninsured Latino children in the US to receive coverage. Children are also now allowed to remain on their parent's health policies until the age of 26.
- Children are no longer denied coverage due to chronic illness. By 2014, insurance companies will not be allowed to consider pre-existing conditions as a reason for denying any American coverage. This is a huge benefit for Latino seniors suffering from a previously diagnosed medical condition.
- Spanish-speaking and low-income communities have been allocated 11 million dollars to create community health centers with bilingual caregivers.
- Employers are now given tax credits to allow low-income families to purchase affordable health care.
- Brand-name prescription drugs for low- to moderate-income families are reduced by 50 percent.
- A new division of public health, the Office of Minority Health, was created to monitor issues regarding health care trends, quality of health, and health issues within the nation's minority populations.
- New funds have been allocated for research on health disparities.<sup>xiii</sup>



### POLICY OPTIONS

- Increase the number of mobile clinic visits to the region. Extend the hours of service of the current mobile clinic to allow for the care of farmworkers and others who work during open hours and have no paid sick leave.
- Locate ambulance services in more communities in the East Coachella Valley.

- Expand public transportation routes to create access to the county’s health care facilities for residents who are most remote.
- Develop new school-based health initiatives <sup>xiv</sup> or expand existing ones.
- Expand population-specific, comprehensive health home models such as promotoras de salud. <sup>xv</sup> Defined as an integrated system of health care designed to meet the needs of individuals, families and communities in their local settings, this includes primary prevention, secondary prevention and intervention, and tertiary prevention, rehabilitation and terminal care.
- Petition the population to create initiatives locally that will improve health by creating dedicated bond funding for necessary services.
- Make sure that all residents know about the changes to health insurance available through the Affordable Care Act.
- Access federal funding for community health centers in the East Coachella Valley.

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## POLICY DISCUSSION

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### BENEFITS OF PROPOSED POLICIES

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- Mobile clinics are inexpensive and can create health care access in low resource communities that are also isolated such as those in unincorporated East Coachella Valley. Mobile clinics offer, on average, a \$19 return on each dollar invested. One study showed that costs for an emergency room visit averaged \$923 while a visit to a mobile clinic averaged \$117. <sup>xvi</sup>
- Emergency Medical Services are an integral part of any healthcare system and are especially important in remote rural regions where access to health care services requires long distance travel. Public transportation allows residents without other means of transportation to travel to medical services.
- School health initiatives already exist. Expanding them to cover parents of school children would be beneficial.
- Promotoras de salud are members of the Latino population and thus share social, cultural and economic characteristics with the community being served. As trusted members of their community, promotoras provide culturally appropriate services and serve as a patient advocates, educators, mentors, outreach workers and translators.
- The California Initiative process allows voters to collect signatures to get an issue on the ballot to place before voters.
- Community health centers play a critical role in providing primary care services to medically underserved areas, which are often rural and funding is available in the Affordable Care Act.

### OBSTACLES TO PROPOSED POLICIES

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- Although the return on investment for mobile clinics is favorable, municipalities are cash strapped and may not be able to afford the initial costs.
- Rural areas that most need EMS services have a severe shortage of career personnel because of the scarcity of resources and lower demands for services. Recruitment of personnel is hampered by low pay, lack of benefits, aging facilities and equipment, long hours, lack of collegial support, and slim social amenities. Ninety percent of EMS personnel in rural frontier areas are volunteers. <sup>xvii</sup>
- Schools may not have the ability to expand services to families.
- Promotoras de salud may have to travel long distances in rural regions and may not have access themselves to referral services in these regions.
- Ballot initiatives require detailed work, acceptance by the state and a large number of signatures. All signatures must be from registered voters.
- Although the Affordable Care Act increases public funding for healthcare and creates avenues for low income citizens to buy their own coverage, it excludes all undocumented immigrants from coverage despite their employment status.

## END NOTES

- <sup>i</sup> <http://www.healthypeople.gov/2020/about/DisparitiesAbout.aspx#six>
- <sup>ii</sup> Building Healthy Communities, Eastern Coachella Valley Health Profile, The California Endowment, November 2011. [http://www.calendow.org/uploadedFiles/Health\\_Happends\\_Here/Communities/Our\\_Places/BHC%20Fact\\_Sheet\\_Coachella.pdf](http://www.calendow.org/uploadedFiles/Health_Happends_Here/Communities/Our_Places/BHC%20Fact_Sheet_Coachella.pdf)
- <sup>iii</sup> Access to Health Care for California's Hired Farm Workers: A Baseline Report, 2001. Villarejo, etal. California Institute for Rural Studies. <http://www.cirsinc.org/index.php/component/search/?searchword=suffering&ordering=newest&searchphrase=all&limit=20>
- <sup>iv</sup> The Binational Farm Worker Health Survey, 2001. Mines, etal. California Institute for Rural Studies. <http://www.cirsinc.org/index.php/component/search/?searchword=binational&ordering=newest&searchphrase=all&limit=20>
- <sup>v</sup> US Department of Health and Human Services, September 2011. Overview of the Uninsured in the United States: A <http://aspe.hhs.gov/health/reports/2011/cpshealthins2011/ib.shtml>; <http://aspe.hhs.gov/health/reports/2011/cpshealthins2011/ib>.
- <sup>vi</sup> <http://www.healthycal.org/archives/7800>
- <sup>vii</sup> LMV Blog, <http://socialflyingdocs.blogspot.com/>
- <sup>viii</sup> Laura Massie, CRLA, personal communication.
- <sup>ix</sup> Section 1-1, Executive Order No. 12898, Federal Actions to Address Environmental Justice in Minority Populations and Low-Income Populations
- <sup>x</sup> <http://www.thelatinocommission.org/>
- <sup>xi</sup> <http://www.latinocommission.com/>
- <sup>xii</sup> Center for Rural Affairs. Real Help for Rural People, April 2012. <http://www.cfra.org/policy/health-care/research>
- <sup>xiii</sup> <http://www.voxxi.com/affordable-care-act-upheld-hispanics/>
- <sup>xiv</sup> Formed in 2010, the James Morehouse Project (JMP) grew out of lack of community support services for students and families at El Cerrito High School. Parents, students, teachers, and community service providers organized to launch a school-based health clinic that now boasts of partnerships with various community agencies to provide health services, counseling, academic support, and after school programs. <http://www.jamesmorehouseproject.org/>
- <sup>xv</sup> Through its Social Services Department, the West Oakland Health Council provides referral and information services to address several non-medical issues that impact patients and members of the community, including: transportation, employment, housing, benefit programs, and legal assistance. These exemplary health service delivery models provide accessible, comprehensive, coordinated, family-centered, culturally competent, and prevention oriented care. <http://www.wohc.org/>; <http://www.laclinica.org/>
- <sup>xvi</sup> Mobile Health Map. <http://www.mobilehealthmap.org>
- <sup>xvii</sup> Rural Emergency Medical Services, 1989. U.S. Congress, Office of Technology Assessment, Rural Emergency Medical Services—Special Report, OTA-H-445 (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, November 1989).

