



## Equity on the Mall: The Valley Is Rising

*Thousands rally for a brighter, healthier Valley*

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(Sacramento, CA) – 2,000 Valley residents, advocates, and local elected leaders united on the Capitol Mall to rally for a Golden State for All at this year’s Equity on the Mall, an annual event conducted by the San Joaquin Valley Health Fund, a funding collaborative established by The Center at Sierra Health Foundation. Travelling from as far as Bakersfield, thousands of Californians from nine counties in the San Joaquin Valley made the early trek to Sacramento to bring much-needed attention to the health inequities faced by children and families living in the region. Long neglected and removed from opportunities that make California golden for other regions, Equity on the Mall participants joined forces to demand state leaders prioritize resources and create greater opportunities to advance change for the Valley.

“At the forefront of Equity on the Mall are the growing voices and influences of the people of the Valley. Since its inception four years ago, Equity on the Mall has grown from 70 participants to 2,000 Californians actively engaged in advocacy and policy change. By harnessing the people power of the Valley, we are changing the very conditions that have hindered progress for the Valley in the past,” said Chet P. Hewitt, President and CEO of Sierra Health Foundation and The Center. “With new energy and focus from Governor Gavin Newsom to newly-elected local, regional and statewide leaders, we see unprecedented potential for positive changes for Valley children and their families.”

Assemblymembers Dr. Joaquin Arambula (CA-31) and Susan Eggman (CA-13), along with Hewitt and 200 hundred community members kicked off Equity on the Mall by engaging in discussion, “Advancing Health and Racial Equities in the San Joaquin Valley.”

The day concludes inside the Capitol building with the launch of the Senate Select Committee on the Social Determinants of Children’s Well-Being led by Senator Holly J. Mitchell and Valley leaders Senator Melissa Hurtado and Anna Caballero, who bring new perspectives to the critical and urgent issues impacting our children. Recognizing that young children are the most vulnerable members of a community and the source of its greatest potential, the Committee’s first hearing focused on the in-depth barriers and impacts for children with no or inadequate housing.

“The time is now to think more broadly about the health and well-being of California’s children by focusing on social determinants like housing and homelessness given the negative impact homeless has on children’s developing brain, “ Mitchell said. “Through the Select Committee and events like Equity in the Mall, we can learn about what might be done and when we know better, we do better.”

“A child can’t put their childhood on hold until an affordable housing unit is built or the market adjusts, and solutions that allow low-income families to access existing housing are a critical component of ensuring children succeed,” said Alexander Harnden, Housing Policy Advocate with the Western Center on Law & Poverty.

The event culminated on the Capitol's West Steps, where Valley residents and over a dozen local and state leaders committed to work in collaboration to find solutions that protect immigrants and keep families together, close the education gap for children of color, reduce poverty, and increase access to healthy and nutritious foods for children, affordable housing for low-income families, and investments that strengthen neighborhoods and build vibrant communities.

The shared priorities and commitments addressed during Equity on the Mall are outlined in the San Joaquin Valley Health Fund's 2019 community-built policy platform tackling health and racial inequities in the San Joaquin Valley.

The policy platform tackles negative consequences of damaging policies and practices: communities overburdened by poor air quality, unsafe drinking water, failing schools, substandard housing, and environmental injustices. The Valley is ground zero for some of the state's worst outcomes:

- 1 in 3 families with children under 18 have incomes well below the Federal Poverty Line.
- An agriculturally-rich region, 1 in 4 children in the Valley still do not have access to healthy foods.
- Students in 1 in four schools in the Valley lack safe drinking water.
- Early education remains out of reach for children of color and, of the 800,000 students in the Valley, over 67% lack proficiency in English Language Arts by 3<sup>rd</sup> grade.
- The Valley exhibits an average rate of expulsion of 2.25 per every 1,000 students, double the statewide average of one per every 1,000 students.
- The housing crisis has left thousands of low-income families with no choice but to live in inadequate and unsafe housing.
- Historically poor land use and disinvestment have resulted in disproportionate exposure to and health impacts from pollution in disadvantaged communities and few safe places for physical activity.

The policy platform released at Equity on the Mall provides guidance to leaders and advocates committed to addressing key issues of immigration, health, housing, education, environment, and land use planning to improve the health outcomes of Valley residents.

“As California's future depends on the Valley, Equity on the Mall continues to lift up the collective action of community members and local leaders working towards one vision and one agenda – a healthy, vibrant San Joaquin Valley that rises above its barriers. When the Valley rises, California rises,” said Hewitt.

The San Joaquin Valley Health Fund (SJVHF), a cohort of 18 state and national foundations and its 90 community-based partner organizations, have invested well over \$10 million to tackle critical issues Valley communities face and bring about needed change.

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The San Joaquin Valley Health Fund [www.shfcenter.org/sjvhealthfund](http://www.shfcenter.org/sjvhealthfund)