

FIRST 5 SAN DIEGO
STRATEGIC PLAN
2025 - 2030



First 5
San Diego



LETTER

FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Dear Community Partners and Leaders,

First 5 San Diego is looking forward to our future with the presentation of our 2025-2030 Strategic Plan. We will continue to build on the legacy of over 25 years of positive impact for pregnant women, children ages 0 through 5, and their families.

During the first five years, a child creates trillions of neural connections that become the foundation of their brain architecture. The healthy development of this architecture is dependent on a child's relationships and experiences. During these critical years, children need the support of safe, stable and nurturing relationships and environments. Young children's interactions in social environments, with their families, caregivers and communities, and their physical environments — where they live, play and explore — have long-term implications for their health and well-being. That's why we must work together to ensure children have a solid foundation — from early learning experiences — to reach their full developmental potential.

First 5 San Diego has been a leader in developing a stronger continuum of care that supports children, families, and caregivers in many ways: universal developmental and behavioral screening and services, home visitation services to targeted populations, oral health services, and high-quality early care and education. In this plan, we continue our ongoing commitment to strengthening and connecting our early care and education systems, supporting families throughout the region, and impacting the overall well-being of our youngest children. As we look to the emerging future, our declining revenue calls for us to consider a greater strategic focus on our investments.

The 2025-2030 Strategic Plan reflects our commitment to systems change efforts, building strategic partnerships, equity centered approaches, and continuing to function as a convener, an expert leader, and thought partner to improve the overall system of care for our region's youngest children and their families.

First 5 San Diego is well positioned to support systems change efforts, develop a stronger network throughout our region, support greater connectedness among the systems of care, leverage additional funding to sustain and bring our initiatives to scale, and advocate for policy changes that will support our children and families for years to come.

On behalf of First 5 San Diego, we thank you for your ongoing commitment and partnership in improving the lives of our youngest children and their families.

Sincerely,



Sincerely,

Alethea Arguilez

Executive Director

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This work cannot be done without deep collaboration. It takes many hands, smart brains, and full hearts to focus, sustain, and continuously improve the services, supports, and systems that families rely on. We embark on our next chapter with passion, commitment, and strong resolve to work in partnership to realize the very best outcomes for our county's youngest children.

Thank you to all the people who help move this movement, including committed partners and grantees, the passionate First 5 staff team and broader County community, our devoted Commissioners, and the individuals who developed this plan through thoughtful conversations, clear guidance, and valuable insights.

First 5 Commission of San Diego

Monica Montgomery Steppe, Chair,
District 4 County of San Diego Board of Supervisor

Sandra McBrayer, Vice Chair, CEO The Children's Initiative

Rick Richardson, MA, MMAS, MS, Secretary,
CEO Child Development Associates

Dr. Kelly Motadel, MD, MPH, Chief Pediatric Officer HHSA

Dr. Kimberly Giardina, DSW, MSW,
Deputy Chief Administrative Officer HHSA

Community Based Organization Partners

All Kids Academy Head Start

Casa Familiar

Episcopal Community Services

Metropolitan Area Advisory Committee
on Anti-Poverty in San Diego County

Neighborhood House Association

Special Thanks to the Many Families who Participated in the Community Listening Sessions Hosted by our CBO Partners

Interviewees

Abdi Mohamoud, Executive Director, Horn of Africa

Andrea O'Hara, Executive Director,
Office of Child and Youth Success, City of San Diego

Katie Rast, Director of Community Impact,
San Diego Foundation

Laura Neal, M.Ed., LPC, Senior Director,
Casey Family Programs

Dr. Marsha Spitzer, MD, Chief of Pediatrics,
Family Health Centers of San Diego

The Project Team

First 5 San Diego

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Ramona McCabe, Project Manager

Joey Nielsen, Project Associate

Ad Hoc Advisory Committee

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Retired County of San Diego Public Health Officer

Rick Richardson, MA, MMAS, MS, Commissioner,
First 5 Commission of San Diego

Kelly Motadel, MD, MPH, Chief Pediatric Officer,
County of San Diego

Tianna Travis, Program Director,
YMCA Youth and Family Services Department

Dale Fleming, Retired County of San Diego Director,
Community Leader and Advocate

Miren Algorri, Family Child Care Provider,
Early Childhood Educator and Advocate

Alexis Aviña, EDD, MPH, Chief Early Childhood Education
Officer, MAAC Child Development Program

Aimee Zeitz-Gruber, MFT, Executive Director
of Community Well-Being and Project Director

Dr. Jeffrey Rowe, MD, Retired County of San Diego
Forensic Psychiatrist, Private Practitioner Child and
Adolescent Psychiatry

Sarah Garrity, EdD, Senior Associate Dean,
College of Education, San Diego State University

Erin Hogeboom, Director, San Diego for Every Child

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REFLECTING ON TODAY, PREPARING FOR TOMORROW

For over 25 years, the First 5 Commission of San Diego County (First 5 San Diego) has been a champion for the health, education, and well-being of the region's youngest children and their families.

As we look ahead to the next five years and beyond, our vision remains unwavering: All children, ages 0 through 5, are safe, healthy, actively learning, and embraced by loving families and supportive communities.



INTRODUCTION

Established in 1998 through California voters' approval of the California Children and Families Act (Proposition 10), First 5 California was created to improve the early development of children from the prenatal stage to age five. Funded by tobacco tax revenues, the act mandates that each county develop and update a strategic plan for the support and improvement of early care, education, and development systems for children and families.

These investments statewide have not only created meaningful outcomes for individual children and families but have also strengthened the broader systems of care, ensuring that each region's support structures are effective and sustainable. In San Diego County, as we enter this new planning cycle, our focus remains on ensuring equitable access to services and improving outcomes for all children, particularly those from underserved communities.

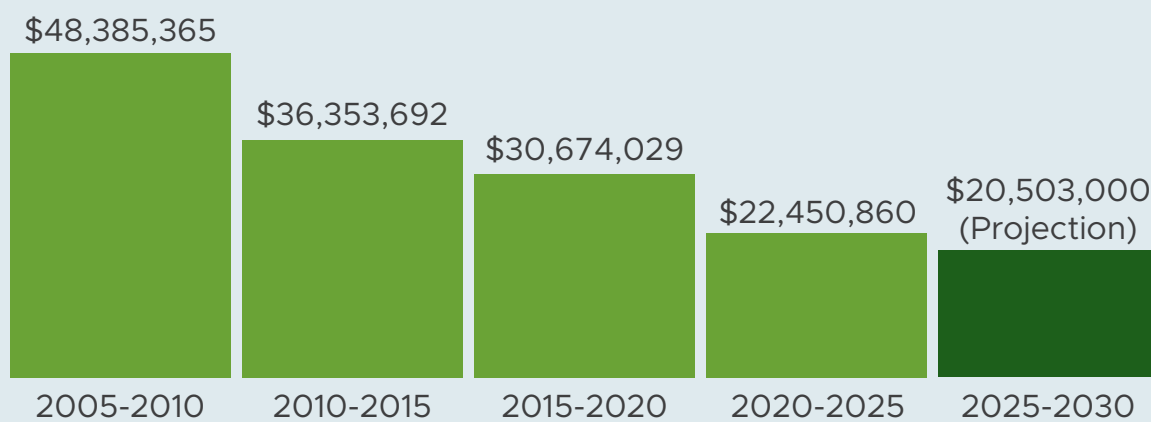
Through strong partnerships and collaboration with service providers from across the region, First 5 San Diego has created a comprehensive system of support for children ages 0 through 5 and their families, which includes:

- **Developmental check-ups** and early intervention programs to address developmental and behavioral concerns.
- **Home visitation** family support services tailored to high-risk populations, including military, immigrant, refugee, and low-income families.
- **Oral health initiative** that provides oral health services, coordination, education, and increased provider capacity.
- **High-quality early care** and education support across the region, with a focus on elevating quality in targeted communities.
- **Education and support for parents** and caregivers, empowering them as their child's first and most important teachers.



Despite considerable progress, we face growing challenges in providing support and meeting the needs of our youngest children and their families. The continuing decline of the statewide tobacco tax revenue is placing strain on First 5's across the state, including San Diego County. However, First 5 San Diego remains committed to developing innovative, equity-centered, and sustainable approaches to address the critical needs of children and families across the county.

DECLINE IN AVERAGE ANNUAL PROGRAM REVENUES BY PERIOD



THE FIRST 5 SAN DIEGO STRATEGIC PLAN 2025-2030

First 5 San Diego's Strategic Plan serves as a roadmap for the next five years, guiding our efforts to support the critical early years of children's lives. This plan is updated every 3-5 years to ensure it reflects emerging trends, community needs, and the evolving landscape of early childhood care and development. Complemented by annual implementation action plans, a Financial Spending Plan and an Evaluation Framework, this document lays out the strategic priorities for investments, outlines key outcomes, and holds us accountable in our mission to serve San Diego County's youngest children.

This updated 2025-2030 Strategic Plan builds on past successes while addressing new challenges and opportunities. This plan will set the stage for how First 5 San Diego will continue to innovate and evolve over the next 5 years.

PLANNING CONTEXT

As First 5 San Diego embarks on its 2025-2030 Strategic Plan, the planning context is shaped by a range of significant factors that influence our priorities for the next five years, such as the declining revenue from the state tobacco tax, the development and implementation of the new Department of Child and Family Well-Being, the transformation of Medi-Cal, and the compelling need for a focus on addressing inequities in access and opportunity. Also included in new factors that shape the landscape of services for children and families is the City of San Diego's Child and Youth Plan (2024) developed by the Office of Child and Youth Success, and the San Diego County Child Care Blueprint (2023), which was adopted by the San Diego County Child Care and Development Planning Council (LPC) as the local child care plan. Together, these elements highlight both challenges and opportunities as First 5 San Diego strives to meet the needs of children ages 0 through 5 across the region.

The decline in revenue, due to reduced tobacco consumption and the flavored tobacco ban under Proposition 31, has introduced financial constraints on services funded by the California Children and Families Act. This trend is expected to continue, underscoring the need for First 5 San Diego to adopt new and innovative approaches to sustain critical programs. In response, First 5 San Diego is committed to diversifying its funding sources, enhancing partnerships, and advocating for systemic changes that ensure all children and families, especially those in greatest need, receive essential support.

Equity remains central to all First 5 San Diego initiatives, guiding how we design and deliver services to reach out to every child and family. The child care sector, in particular, serves as a significant platform to advance equity, as many child care providers come from historically marginalized communities. Supporting these providers—who are often women of color, immigrants, or individuals from low-income backgrounds—is essential for creating a high-quality, inclusive child care system. This involves ensuring fair wages, providing professional development opportunities, and equipping providers with resources that enable them to offer culturally relevant care to diverse communities. By centering equity in its programs, First 5 San Diego is working to dismantle barriers that disproportionately affect disadvantaged families, fostering a more inclusive and accessible support system.

Demographic trends further underscore the importance of an equity-centered approach. With San Diego County home to approximately 220,000 children under the age of five, the region's population is becoming increasingly diverse, with over 45% of young children identifying as Hispanic or Latino. Moreover, the county continues to welcome immigrant and refugee families, adding to the complex and varied needs of First 5 San Diego's target population. By prioritizing culturally sensitive programs, First 5 San Diego is committed to ensuring that every child, regardless of background, has access to resources that foster healthy development and school readiness.

The integration of First 5 San Diego into the Child and Family Well-Being Department presented a transformative alignment opportunity, starting in 2023. This Department, and its Office of Child and Family Strengthening, focuses on prevention and family empowerment, and positions First 5 San Diego to coordinate with County efforts more effectively, aligning resources and services for children and families. The Office of Child and Family Strengthening emphasizes proactive, strength-based practices, supporting families before challenges escalate. This approach aligns closely with First 5 San Diego's goals and offers a pathway to enhance support for BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Color) children and families, particularly as fiscal resources become more constrained. By collaborating under this new structure, First 5 San Diego and the County can build a comprehensive network of health, education, and family services that respond to community needs. As part of that effort, First 5 San Diego will help realize the County's vision for a Family Connection Hub to help families navigate and access the service array in a friendly, accessible, and culturally sensitive way.

Additionally, the recent launch of the San Diego County Child Care Blueprint implementation process addresses one of the region's most pressing challenges: the shortage of affordable and accessible child care. The Blueprint contains strategies to increase the availability of child care, enhance workforce support, and advocate for better compensation for providers.

First 5 San Diego will align its investments with these goals to help boost child care quality and increase accessible child care options for all families, regardless of their income or location. This shared commitment to affordable care for working families will remain a high priority in the coming years.

In tandem with these local efforts, the statewide Medi-Cal Transformation initiative, CalAIM, presents additional opportunities to strengthen services for young children. As CalAIM enables providers to bill Medi-Cal for a wider range of preventive services—such as home visits and care coordination—it aligns with First 5 San Diego's emphasis on early intervention and whole-family support. The potential for First 5 San Diego to connect managed care plans with community needs strengthens the case for equitable, culturally responsive care throughout the county. By leveraging Medi-Cal's expanded service options, First 5 San Diego can offset some of the funding challenges posed by declining tobacco tax revenues, ensuring that children and families continue to receive vital support.

By navigating these interwoven challenges and leveraging new partnerships, First 5 San Diego will play a vital role in shaping a resilient, inclusive future for young children and their families. Through collaboration, resource innovation, and a steadfast focus on equity, First 5 San Diego will remain a leading force in supporting the health, education, and overall well-being of San Diego's youngest residents in the years ahead.

REFLECTING

ON TODAY, PREPARING FOR TOMORROW



A STRATEGIC PLAN FOR A NEW DAY

The 2025-2030 Strategic Plan for First 5 San Diego represents a renewed commitment to meeting the evolving needs of children and families across the county. This plan builds on the strengths of the 2020-2025 Strategic Plan and its companion document, the Roadmap for Systems Change, while also responding to new challenges and including the impact of post-pandemic life for all, and the systemic inequities faced by BIPOC children and families. At its core, this plan was shaped by an inclusive, participatory process, ensuring that community voices, expert insights, and cross-sector partnerships, as they will continue to guide our future investments and priorities.



VISION

All children, ages 0 through 5, are safe, healthy, actively learning, and embraced by loving families and supportive communities.

MISSION

We promote the health, learning, and well-being of young children and their families by fostering collaboration and making equity-centered investments to help every child have the very best start in life.

VALUES



Love



Integrity



Justice

GUIDING PRINCIPLES



Family-Centered



Partnership



Systems Change



Prevention



Advocacy



Capacity



Impact

GOALS AND STRATEGIES

Build strong, integrated systems through deep collaboration, policy advocacy, and innovative funding approaches to better serve our children 0-5 and their families.

- Equity-Focus
- System Coordination and Integration
- Sustained Funding
- Policy Advocacy

HEALTH

Promote each child's healthy physical, social, and emotional development.

Early Identification and Treatment

Collaboration with Health Plan Partners

LEARNING

Strengthen the system to improve the quality of early care and education.

Quality Enhancement of Early Education

FAMILY

Build on each family's strengths in providing safe, nurturing, and stable environments.

Care Coordination

Maternal and Caregiver Mental Health

Home Visitation Support

COMMUNITY

Partner with communities to grow their capacity to support families and children

Public Education

Parents and Caregivers Education

Decision-makers Education

THE FRAMEWORK FOR IMPACT

The following components are our best articulation of who we are and what we are striving for, what guides our work with families and partners, and how we plan to deliver real results that impact lives for the better. The strategies shown will be complemented by annual action plans, in addition to our 5-year Financial Spending Plan and corresponding Evaluation Framework.

VISION

All children, ages 0 through 5, are safe, healthy, actively learning, and embraced by loving families and supportive communities.

MISSION

We promote the health, learning, and well-being of young children and their families by fostering collaboration and making equity-centered investments to help every child have the very best start in life.



VALUES

Love: We stand for love for every child; we believe that every child deserves love, nurturing, and opportunity.



Integrity: We stand with integrity and transparency in all we do, and we are accountable and responsible to our Commissioners, partners, families, and community.



Justice: We stand for justice and equity for all children and families in San Diego County and actively work to dismantle racism and other forms of oppression.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES



Family-Centered: We honor and celebrate every child, and support parents, families, and primary caregivers to be their child's first and best teachers. We center the experiences and voices of children and families in our planning and oversight of programs and other investments.



Partnership: We forge authentic partnerships to co-create a seamless system of care and support for children and families.



Systems Change: We bring experts, partners, and families together to coordinate, leverage, and expand existing resources—facilitating systems change that will lead to improved outcomes for children and families.



Prevention: We invest “upstream” to create and promote opportunities for all children, families, and communities to be healthy and strong.



Advocacy: We are advocates for policy change at all levels of government; we support families to lift their voices in advocacy for their children and communities.



Capacity: We collaborate with families, communities, and organizations to build capacity to support their goals.



Impact: We are results- and outcomes-oriented, leveraging proven and promising practices, continuous learning, and data-informed decision-making to guide our work.

GOALS AND STRATEGIES

1. Overarching Goal

Build strong, integrated systems through deep collaboration, policy advocacy, and innovative funding approaches to better serve our children 0 through 5 and their families.

- a. Equity-Focus:** Prioritize families with the greatest needs to identify and fill gaps in the system and address disparities.
- b. System Coordination and Integration:** Promote system coordination and integration across partner organizations to leverage the unique strengths of each partner to provide a more streamlined, efficient, and navigable experience for families needing services.
- c. Sustained Funding:** Leverage new and existing funding sources from across sectors to ensure the long-term sustainability of operations.
- d. Policy Advocacy:** Advocate for policies that prioritize families of young children, expanding resources and services for the youngest children and their families.

2. Health

Promote each child's healthy physical, social, and emotional development.

- a. Early Identification and Treatment:** Promote overall mental health and well-being of young children through partnerships that provide developmental early identification and treatment services.
- b. Collaboration with Health Plan Partners:** Collaborate with local managed care plans to develop robust, child- and family-centered systems of care through the implementation of Medi-Cal Transformation.

3. Learning

Strengthen the system to improve the quality of early care and education.

- a. Quality Enhancement of Early Education:**

Provide parent and provider engagement and targeted provider supports to increase the quality of early care and education.

4. Family

Build on each family's strengths in providing safe, nurturing, and stable environments.

- a. Care Coordination:** Ensure all families that are referred are connected to the services and resources they need through trusted care coordination support and centralized intake system.
- b. Maternal and Caregiver Mental Health:** Promote early screening and services for maternal and caregiver mental health through partnerships with health care and home visiting providers.
- c. Home Visitation Support:** Provide targeted home visitation to support family strengthening through care coordination, direct services, and parent education.

5. Community

Partner with communities to grow their capacity to support families and children.

- a. Public Education:** Provide broad-based education about the critical importance of the first five years of life and the lifelong benefits of early childhood development.
- b. Parents and Caregivers Education:** Equip parents and caregivers with the knowledge and resources they need to support their children's early development through community-based partnerships and culturally relevant materials.
- c. Decision-makers Education:** Build partnerships and enhance collaboration with local leaders and policymakers to raise awareness of the challenges and available resources within the child care system.

PARTICIPATORY PLANNING PROCESS

Recognizing that the most effective strategies are those developed with meaningful input from the community and stakeholders, First 5 San Diego adopted a participatory planning process. This approach was designed to be comprehensive, inclusive, and reflective of the diverse experiences and needs of families with young children in San Diego County.

Throughout the planning process, we prioritized collaboration with key stakeholders, experts, community-based organizations (CBOs), and, most importantly, the families we serve. Our approach involved multiple engagement strategies, including forming an Ad Hoc Committee, conducting interviews with subject matter experts, and hosting listening sessions in partnership with CBOs. These engagement efforts ensured the voices of all participants, particularly those from historically marginalized communities, were heard and their input incorporated into the development of the strategic plan.

AD-HOC PLANNING COMMITTEE

To support the strategic planning process, First 5 San Diego convened an Ad Hoc Committee composed of experts in early childhood development, racial equity, public health, and strategic planning. The committee was tasked with providing technical support and guidance to the project team as the plan took shape. While the committee itself did not make final decisions, it played a crucial advisory role, offering insights and recommendations to ensure the plan addressed the most pressing needs of children and families in San Diego County.

The committee's discussions were instrumental in shaping key aspects of the plan, including community engagement strategies, identifying partners for collaboration, reviewing feedback from listening sessions, and refining strategic directions. Throughout the planning process, the Ad Hoc Committee provided valuable feedback on draft elements of the plan and helped ensure the strategies and investments outlined were equitable, forward-looking, and aligned with the mission of First 5 San Diego.

INTERVIEWS

Another key component of the planning process was conducting interviews with experts across the county. These interviews were designed to solicit input from trusted leaders in the early childhood, health, education, and equity spaces. The purpose of the interviews was to gather insights on the strengths and areas for improvement within First 5 San Diego's programs, the barriers families face in accessing services, and the broader landscape of early childhood development post-pandemic.

Interviewees were asked to share their thoughts on the effectiveness of existing programs, the gaps they observed, and the aspirations they had for their communities. Their input provided valuable context and helped the planning team understand the current needs and priorities within the field. By drawing on the knowledge and experience of these experts, First 5 San Diego ensured the plan was grounded in the realities of those working directly with children and families.

COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS AND LISTENING SESSIONS

The voices of families themselves, as true experts based on lived experience, were central to the development of the strategic plan. First 5 San Diego partnered with five CBOs to host a series of ten listening sessions with parents of young children from across San Diego County. The listening sessions were an essential opportunity for parents to share their experiences, priorities, and challenges related to raising young children. Through these sessions, we gathered firsthand perspectives on the issues that matter most to families, helping us shape a strategic plan that addresses their real-life concerns.

We selected CBOs for their deep connections to their respective communities, ensuring we heard from parents from a wide variety of backgrounds, including immigrant, refugee, low-income, and BIPOC communities. The CBOs conducted sessions in both English and Spanish, ensuring language accessibility, and we provided each CBO with the tools and resources needed to facilitate rich, meaningful discussions. The input gathered during these sessions has been pivotal in informing the goals and strategies outlined in this plan.



LOOKING AHEAD

The participatory planning process that shaped the 2025-2030 Strategic Plan for First 5 San Diego ensures the plan is community-centered, equity-focused, and grounded in real-world expertise. By integrating the knowledge of the Ad Hoc Committee, expert interviews, and community listening sessions, First 5 San Diego has developed a plan that responds to the changing landscape and addresses the critical needs of children and families in our region.

As we move forward, this strategic plan will guide our efforts to invest in the systems and services that have the greatest impact on young children, with an unwavering focus on equity and innovation. Together with our families and partners, we will continue to build a brighter future for all children in San Diego County.





