

SPRING 2023



COMMUNITY CONVERSATIONS REPORT



UNITED WAY OF GREATER LOS ANGELES

Insights on How Poverty Impacts Angelenos –
and How We Can Help



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LETTER FROM THE CEO

Dear Friends,

Our Centennial Year has given us a unique opportunity: to pause, reflect, listen and plan – together.

As United Way of Greater L.A. celebrates its Centennial Year, we have taken the time to both assess our past community impact work as well as meet with community members, partners and supporters to identify the most impactful role our organization can play going forward, as we enter our organization's next 100 years.

This report is a key part of listening to what our neighborhoods need and adjusting our strategies to better meet those needs.

One theme is clear above all others: the people living in L.A. County know what they need, and they are currently not getting the support, partnership, or investment necessary to meet those needs.

This is our opportunity and challenge. To meet our neighbors where they are, bring our resources, but not our privilege, and co-create a very different future for L.A. County.

By taking time to review this report, you are taking time to listen to our neighbors who are most in need. We know their voices will inspire you to do more to help.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Elise C. Buik'.

Elise Buik

President & CEO, United Way of Greater L.A.

CENTENNIAL COMMUNITY CONVERSATIONS AT-A-GLANCE

Over **160** voices engaged throughout all mediums

25 one-on-one conversations with community partners

3 neighborhood conversations engaging

43 community members in South Los Angeles, San Fernando Valley, and Westlake/ Pico Union

9 community conversations engaging

63 non-profit, philanthropic, and civic leaders

- Seniors, adults and youths included
- Individuals that represent the following lived experiences: L.A. natives, community organizers and leaders, mothers and fathers, formerly unhoused, immigrant and undocumented, dropped out/ pushed out of the education system, formerly incarcerated, and veterans
- Partners representing all four of UWGLA's issue areas of education, homelessness, housing, and economic mobility

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY & INSIGHTS

No single person or organization alone can create a just and equitable Los Angeles County. Our collective vision can only be realized through radical collaboration. Neighborhood leaders, community organizations, small businesses, large businesses, elected officials – everyone has a role to play and the strategies must begin with the people most directly impacted by the daily inequality.

To help aggregate a sense of the most pressing community needs, we facilitated a series of surveys, one-on-one and collective conversations with our community partners, thought leaders, civic leaders, corporate partners, and community members. We engaged in conversations with our most trusted partners about where we've been, how we've shown up for the community, and where we should prioritize our work going forward.

As neighborhoods across Los Angeles County work daily to overcome a long history of systemic racial injustice and inequality, all while on the heels of a global health pandemic that disproportionately harmed low-income Black, Indigenous and People of Color (BIPOC), the need for our collective investment and support was more apparent than ever.

The needs that emerged are clear:

A Stable Home

- **People from every income level and sector believe the housing crisis is this region's most pressing issue.** Some reference long standing policies and realities such as redlining, multigenerational poverty, or the lack of rent stability/control as significant barriers; while others facing the housing crisis themselves name pressures to find affordable housing or limits on the number of individuals allowed to live in each rental household.

Support to Weather Crises

- ▶ **People do not have what they need to navigate crises.** Partners reported many Los Angeles County residents they serve do not have enough cash on hand to withstand unexpected crises such as health or medical issues, or the loss of a job. Community members and partners said that many do not have access to the right information and resources currently available to navigate difficult circumstances.
- ▶ **Partners share that they struggle to meet the needs of their clients in Los Angeles County** because they are often facing many more factors and challenges than what their organization is equipped to address.

New Tools to Build Wealth & Prosperity

- ▶ **Cycles of systemic racism and generational poverty concentrate and compound disadvantages. The consequences are unacceptable: health disparities, an inability to generate wealth, a cycle of low-paying jobs, and interpersonal racism for a disproportionate number of BIPOC people.** Community members and partners report how multiple disadvantages converge for BIPOC communities—leading to persistent cycles of poverty. Recognizing the interpersonal and systemic component of the challenges Los Angeles County residents face points to the need for individual, familial, community-level, and systemic solutions.

Meeting the challenges of multi-generational poverty will require United Way of Greater L.A. and its partners to be nimble and rethink the way we prioritize and communicate our work. This report highlights the perspectives from community members and partners on how we can capitalize on our existing work, invest in partners embedded in the community, and stand behind the community.



Sometimes I get to thinking and I say to my husband, ‘I’m going to work because we want to get an apartment.’ I have four children, and where I live is a small apartment. Now I tell him, ‘I’m going to work and I’m going to help you, and we’re going to get a—’ Maybe not a luxurious apartment, as you say, to my children, but at least where they can sleep comfortably, where they can do homework when they come home from school.”

— Community Partner

Partners and community members are calling on us to: Prioritize Housing

- ▶ **Because our housing crisis is a result of failed policies, continue to engage in policy reform and politics.** Partners acknowledge this can lead to challenges for the organization given its role in bringing together individuals with divergent political perspectives and interests. However, the vast majority of partners see engaging in this work as essential for systems-level change.
- ▶ **Support new housing ownership models and structures that help residents build wealth.** Partners named access to housing and homeownership as a key lever for wealth building in BIPOC communities. Strategies that create pathways to homeownership are another essential piece of the puzzle.

Do More to Help People in their Daily Lives

- ▶ **Currently, 1.4 million working families in Los Angeles live in poverty**, one quarter are food insecure, and around two-thirds pay more than 30% of their total income towards housing.
- ▶ **Continue convening individuals from all walks of life and catalyzing coalitions in the Los Angeles community.** Partners felt strongly that one of UWGLA's primary strengths lies in our reach and reputation in the community, and our ability to convene diverse stakeholders.
- ▶ **Supplement our countywide systems-change work with intentional focus on BIPOC communities.** Partners and residents reported that systems and issues compound in our most marginalized communities, and a practical way to be more equitable is to disproportionately invest resources and attention on BIPOC communities.
- ▶ **Address the safety net.** One of the community conversations also revealed that some residents formed informal groups to pool their funds to then provide emergency financial support to participating members. According to community members, ideal supports for navigating crises include referrals to resources, simplifying bureaucratic processes, and having a centralized system or location to receive aid.

Collaborate with Neighborhoods to Build New Economic Engines

There was also general agreement that the priority for future work should be bolstering UWGLA's countywide work with a place-based strategy that prioritized BIPOC individuals. Partners and community members specifically named the importance of retaining and returning wealth to BIPOC residents/households.

During the community conversations, staff members highlighted the need for UWGLA to serve as a leader in "asset-framing," a narrative model developed by the non-profit organization BMe³, that "defines people by their assets and aspirations before noting their challenges and deficits." The majority of partners shared that few organizations in the region practice asset-based framing when uplifting issues of social justice in our communities. The vast majority believe UWGLA should be a leader in this work moving forward.

Finally, partners shared that United Way of Greater L.A.'s unique advantages are its network, reputation and visibility. However, they also noted that we can be perceived as a pass-through organization, rather than an entity with its own mission, vision, and strategy. Moving forward, it will be important for us to better communicate about our own work and its impact.

We hope this report provides a roadmap for not just United Way of Greater L.A., but for anyone who cares about addressing our most pressing challenges across L.A. County. Although Los Angeles has a long road ahead to make that vision a reality, the heart of change lies in the region's greatest asset: our communities.



When the generational cycle of doing what it takes to survive and never being able to catch up, never being able to think about college, just maybe not even finishing high school going right to work, taking care of younger siblings, it just perpetuates itself and it further exacerbates the ability of people of color to be able to see themselves as able to break that cycle."

— Community Partner

“

I’m all for the community engagement. That’s how everything is going to proceed. That’s how we’re going to win by our community coming together and we’re all going as a whole to make sure everything is accomplished. Everybody’s wants and needs are taken care of. You can’t get nowhere by yourself, but you can get somewhere with a community.”

– Community Partner



INTRODUCTION

INTRODUCTION

As United Way of Greater Los Angeles (UWGLA) celebrates a century of service to the Greater Los Angeles community, we launched a Centennial Campaign to reflect on our collective work over the last 100 years, redefine our values and vision, launch new ways to connect and engage with partners, and establish a bold vision for future work.

One key component of our Centennial Campaign was a series of one-on-one and collective conversations with community partners, thought leaders, civic leaders, corporate partners, and the community at large. The goal of these conversations was to initiate an honest dialogue about the challenges facing Los Angeles County, and identify ways UWGLA and our partners can provide solutions to those challenges moving forward.

This report summarizes the insights from those powerful community conversations. We start with a brief look at UWGLA's history, a summary of the community engagement and research process, an exploration of the most pressing issues Los Angeles County residents currently face, and possible solutions raised by participants. Finally, we conclude with a reflection and assessment of UWGLA's past work and unique contributions to the Los Angeles space.

One important message from this endeavor is clear: **while Los Angeles faces many challenges, our communities have the power to collectively create a better future together.**

Our partners are calling for UWGLA to re-focus on emergency basic needs like never before. Food lines have never been longer in our lifetime. Rents have never been more tenuous. Paying for gas has never been more expensive. At the same time, we have the same number of requests for wealth building and ownership (supporting families in poverty to build economic advantage such as homeownership and income outside of wages) as ways to survive and make it beyond the next day. We center both of these calls to action in the report because it is essential UWGLA's future work addresses both immediate needs and focus on the root causes of inequity and poverty in our city.

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UNITED WAY OF GREATER LOS ANGELES' PAST, PRESENT, AND FUTURE



Our Founding Story

The United Way of Greater Los Angeles has its roots in a local collective action endeavor that took place in 1922, as well as in the national foundation of the United Way in 1887. The national United Way organization was founded in 1887 by a Denver woman, two ministers and a rabbi. They came together because of a shared belief that there was a better way to meet the needs of local residents, coordinate relief efforts, and refer clients to services in Denver, Colorado. What began as a simple effort to share resources and collaborate on fundraising efforts has grown to an organization with over 1,800 local fundraising affiliates across the world.

In 1922, as the Los Angeles County population approached one million, the Chamber of Commerce took a bold step to simplify its fundraising efforts. The Chamber formed a “Community Chest” committee to plan a true federation of agencies that would all benefit from an organized public fundraising campaign. This Community Chest was the original strategy that led to the foundation of the Los Angeles chapter of United Way. Looking for an opportunity to create a broader financial base for operating funds, the Los Angeles Urban League became a charter member of the Los Angeles Community Chest in 1925. This first effort then spawned over 30 additional community chests across Los Angeles as communities came together in a new way to take care of each other. The unifying of 37 separate community chest campaigns ultimately became what is now known as the United Way of Greater Los Angeles.

Since its inception in 1922, UWGLA has functioned as a public-facing organizing hub to streamline fundraising to help communities solve their most pressing problems. While the organization has evolved since our founding days, three common throughlines have defined our role in Los Angeles: (1) collective action and collaboration, (2) community and crisis response, and (3) democratization of philanthropy.

► **Collective Action and Collaboration.**

At the root of UWGLA's identity is the belief that collective action and collaboration is the most effective way to address poverty. It is only through shared focus and shared goals that societal problems can be solved.

► **Community and Crisis Response.**

From inception, UWGLA has served as a trusted source across the region through our ability to act quickly and collaborate effectively in moments of crisis that affect various communities.

► **Democratization of Philanthropy.**

UWGLA helped relieve social service agencies of fundraising duties through democratized philanthropic efforts so agencies could devote their bandwidth to expanding services and touching more lives. Through democratizing philanthropy, UWGLA created a way for the working class to aggregate their dollars to make an impact in their own communities. In doing so, more people were given a seat at the table and were empowered to be part of change.

From the Past to Present

We have stayed true to our original roots in community collaboration and crisis response while evolving into a cross-sector, impact-focused mobilizing leader. While the fundraising and service coordination aspects remain fundamental to UWGLA, our approach has grown and changed with the needs of Los Angeles County. From 2007 to 2021, our flagship campaigns included Pathways Out of Poverty, convening community partners through campaigns or sustained coalitions focused on homelessness, education, and financial stability. Beyond the initial focus and strategies on coordination, crisis response, and fundraising efforts, our strategy evolved to address the systems that keep BIPOC communities in poverty through fostering cross-sector leadership, mobilizing communities, and focusing on pathways out of poverty.

► **Fostering Cross-Sector Leadership.** We leveraged our position as a regional leader by creating space for community organizations to collaborate and discover innovative ways to fix broken systems in service of the most vulnerable communities and individuals in Los Angeles. Our cross-sector leadership efforts have involved bringing together non-profit leaders, but we've also fostered their collaboration with businesses and government institutions.

► **Mobilizing Community.** Beginning in 2007, UWGLA did more than convene—we mobilized. Understanding the power of community and collective action, we leveraged that power to effect systemic change. Strong civic engagement ensures the government represents the will of those it serves and allows residents to work together to better their community. We shine a light on injustices and spark collective action that goes far beyond what any of us can do alone to house, teach, and lift one another.

► **Focusing on Pathways Out of Poverty.** UWGLA directed efforts toward our core Pathways Out of Poverty initiative, which reflected hard choices and intentional focusing on core strategies to help people meet their basic needs while increasing access to high quality education and economic opportunity. This was not an easy evolution for the organization, which had a much broader lens in our earlier work; but it was a clarifying moment and perhaps the most significant strategic decision we ever made—setting the course that continues to this present day.

Our Future

Los Angeles is at a pivotal moment as communities work to overcome a long history of systemic racial injustice and inequality on the heels of a global health pandemic that disproportionately harmed low-income BIPOC communities.

When we went to work on housing, jobs, and better education, we were focused on the root causes of poverty; and we fought those fights at separate times with separate coalitions. But 2020 reminded us that those roots wrap firmly and consistently around the same households and communities. That's why we're evolving our focus from the core elements of poverty to the two main experiences our communities are seeking for themselves: to find support in times of crisis and to build shared prosperity. Focusing on these two key strategies instead of separate policy areas will allow us to center the people who have always been at the heartbeat of our work.

Ultimately, we are aiming to create a more democratic economy where everyone owns a share of our future success and a re-imagined social infrastructure that connects neighborhoods across Los Angeles County.

We intentionally embarked on a year-long process to **build community, listen to our partners and community, and collect invaluable input** to inform our future direction with a unique cross-section of individuals with lived experience in Los Angeles County—including non-profit leaders, individual or foundation donors, and residents of various neighborhoods.



OUR APPROACH

How We Engaged Our Partners and Community to Guide UWGLA's Next 100 Years

The goals of the Centennial Community Conversations were for the UWGLA senior leadership team to gather partners from all walks of life across Los Angeles and create a shared space to reflect on the needs of Los Angeles County residents, UWGLA's history and impact, and the possibilities of our work moving forward.

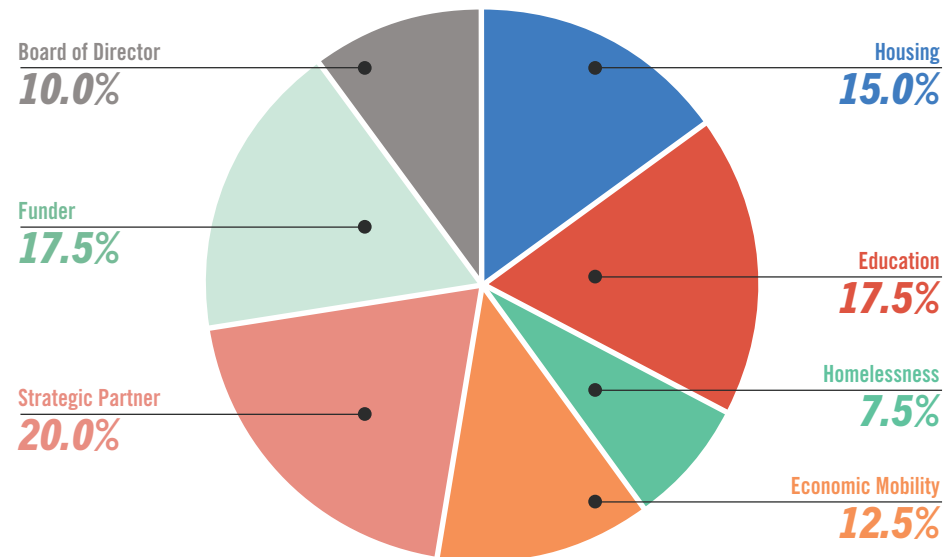
To achieve this, we worked closely with the the Estrada Darley Miller Group (EDMG), an external, independent research group to develop a process that would convene community members, partners, and UWGLA staff to participate in individual interviews, collective conversations (in focus group format), and/or a survey. UWGLA team members led 25 individual interviews from February to March 2022. The data were collected by the UWGLA and analyzed by EDMG to inform questions asked during the community conversations and in the survey.

Community Conversations with Partners and Staff

The EDMG team conducted nine focus groups, referred to as community conversations throughout the report, in June, July, and August 2022. In total, the team spoke with 63 individuals: 48 partners and 15 staff. These partners included past and present grantees (senior leadership from current or previous UWGLA grantees) and donors (individuals, employer-based donors, and foundations that donated to UWGLA). UWGLA staff included individuals at various levels of the organization. Each conversation included between seven and 13 individual participants. Partner and staff conversations consisted of the same set of questions, including general questions about issues Los Angeles County residents face and UWGLA's past and future work. Two community conversations were held virtually, and the rest were held in person. The partners who participated in the community conversations represented a wide variety of issue areas, which was intentional in the recruitment process. The largest groups represented include strategic partners, funders, and individuals working in education or housing (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. Number of Partner and Staff Participants By Issue Area or Role within the Organization

By Issue Area or Role within the Organization



Source: Community conversations/focus groups with a range of 8-24 participants per group. N = 48 individual participants for partners; N = 15 for UWGLA staff; N = 43 for community members.

Community Conversations with Individuals with Lived Experience in Los Angeles County

Directly following the community conversations with partners and UWGLA staff, the EDMG and UWGLA teams collaborated with several non-profit partners with longstanding presence in selected geographic communities across Los Angeles County in order to host focus groups with local residents. The team selected three communities and associated partners: a South Los Angeles Community Conversation hosted by the Coalition for Responsible Community Development (22 participants), a Westlake/Pico Union Community Conversation hosted by the Central City Neighborhood Partners (13 participants), and a San Fernando Valley Community Conversation hosted by New Economics for Women (eight participants). Each of these organizations worked closely with the EDMG team to recruit individuals in their service area to represent a diversity of experiences from that community. Two community conversations were conducted in English and Spanish, and one community conversation was conducted entirely in Spanish. All were held in person at the community partners' headquarters.

Community member focus groups represented a diversity of perspectives, including racial diversity, a wide range of ages (see Figure 1), individuals previously experiencing homelessness, undocumented residents, veterans, and formerly incarcerated individuals. Seventy-two percent of community member participants were Latino, 23% were Black, and the remaining participants were either White or multiracial.

Figure 2. Number of Community Member Participants By Age and Geographic Area
By Age and Geographic Area

	SOUTH LA	PICO UNION	SAN FERNANDO VALLEY	TOTAL
YOUTH (14-17)	3	0	0	3
YOUNG ADULT (18-39)	7	4	3	14
MIDDLE AGED (40-89)	6	3	7	16
SENIORS	6	1	3	10
TOTAL	22	8	13	43

Source: Community conversations/focus groups with a range of 8-24 participants per group. N = 48 individual participants for partners; N = 15 for UWGLA staff; N = 43 for community members. :

Survey

To reach another set of partners that could not attend virtual or in-person focus groups, the EDMG team administered a brief survey that included a parallel set of questions to the individuals included in community conversations. The survey was sent to over 300 partners and had a 12% response rate. The majority of survey respondents were former or current grantees of UWGLA (70%), and 29% were former or current donors. The respondents represented a variety of organizational sizes. Forty percent of respondents were Latino, 38% were White, 19% were Black, and 20% were multiracial.

The focus of our questions in community conversations and the survey were threefold:

- 1** What are the most pressing issues Los Angeles County residents currently face?
- 2** What solutions could address these issues at the individual, organizational, and systems levels?
- 3** How successful has UWGLA's past work been and what past context should inform its future priorities?

This report includes findings from both the community conversations and surveys, with an emphasis on the rich findings from the discussions. The sections that follow tell a unique story from an extremely diverse set of Angelenos who care deeply about the future of the Los Angeles region. To establish the broader context, we also incorporate the findings from recent reports on the state of Los Angeles County, with a particular look at the current state of poverty, pandemic conditions, the housing crisis, and other important measures of our region's conditions. Together, we hope these results inspire collective action and uplift the issues we believe are at the heart of improving the lives of Los Angeles County residents.



FINDINGS

STATE OF LOS ANGELES COUNTY

Currently, 1.4 million working families in Los Angeles live in poverty,⁴ one quarter are food insecure,⁵ and around two-thirds pay more than 30% of their total income towards housing.⁶ The hard truth is that BIPOC communities are disproportionately affected.⁷ The conditions struggling Los Angeles County residents face predate the COVID-19 pandemic, although we now clearly know how substantially the pandemic accelerated and worsened the economic and health conditions for many families in poverty.

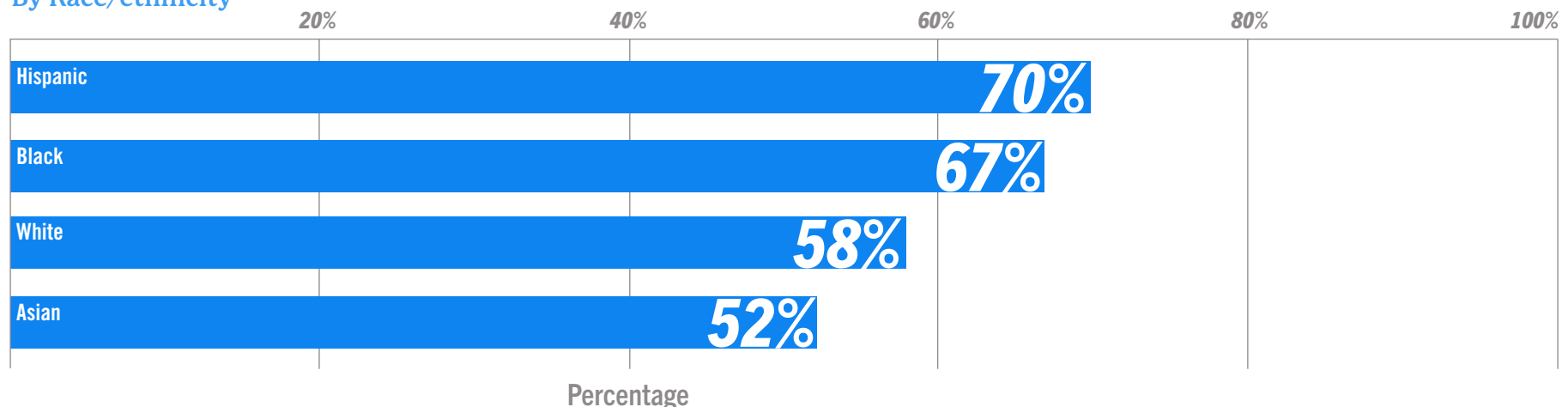
Many families—especially BIPOC families—are still grappling with the mental and physical health impacts of the pandemic. Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander communities faced the highest fatality rate from COVID-19 in Los Angeles, at 534 deaths per 100,000 people as of October 2022. In comparison, White and Asian residents faced the lowest rates, at 333 and 298 deaths per 100,000 people, respectively.⁸

The case rate is similarly higher among BIPOC families, which translates to a higher probability of long-term complications that negatively impact their health and ability to work. Not only have families been impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic itself, but it also left behind a historic level of inflation⁹ and a looming recession¹⁰ threatening the economic future of many, both in our region and nationally.

Amid these real social and economic challenges for Los Angeles residents, the pandemic also prompted some notable, necessary social progress and policy shifts. Assistance programs provided by the state and federal governments helped stave off some additional hardships, especially during the early pandemic when job loss was high.¹¹ An eviction moratorium and rent relief program instituted in California from October 2021 through March 2022 (retroactively applied to 2020) helped keep people in their homes. This particularly helped low-income families who were more likely to work high-exposure, non-remote jobs and subsequently lose work and earnings when sick. The rent relief program, which extended the eviction moratorium

Figure 3. Share of Los Angeles Renters Who Are Rent-Burdened

By Race/ethnicity



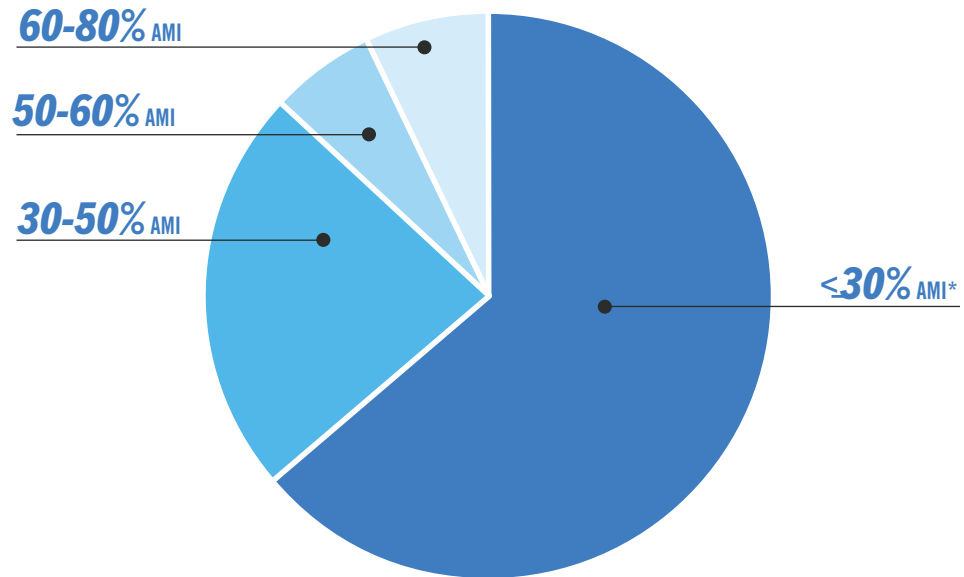
Source: LABarometer: The Affordability & Prosperity Report. (2021). USC Dornsife Center for Economic and Social Research. https://cesr.usc.edu/sites/default/files/Affordability_Wave1_Report.pdf

through June and beyond the state program expiration, served 188,378 households in Los Angeles. It disbursed an average of \$13,000 per household.¹² The growth of the Los Angeles County homeless population slowed dramatically during the pandemic compared to prior years,¹³ likely in large part due to the eviction moratorium and other temporary monetary relief policies like unemployment relief and the expanded Child Tax Credit.¹⁴

Though critical problems like food insecurity and economic instability have been exacerbated, threatening the health and security of many Angelenos, taken as a whole, these points of progress add important context to the story about the state of Los Angeles County. They illustrate the progress that is possible when leaders, like UWGLA and its partners, come together to push for smart, equity-minded and community-driven policy decisions.

Figure 4: Income Level of Rent Relief Recipients in L.A. County

By Area Median Income



*30% AMI for a household of four in LA County = X

Source: California COVID-19 Rent Relief Program Dashboard. (2022, November 10). California Business, Consumer Services and Housing Agency. https://housing.ca.gov/covid_rr/dashboard.html

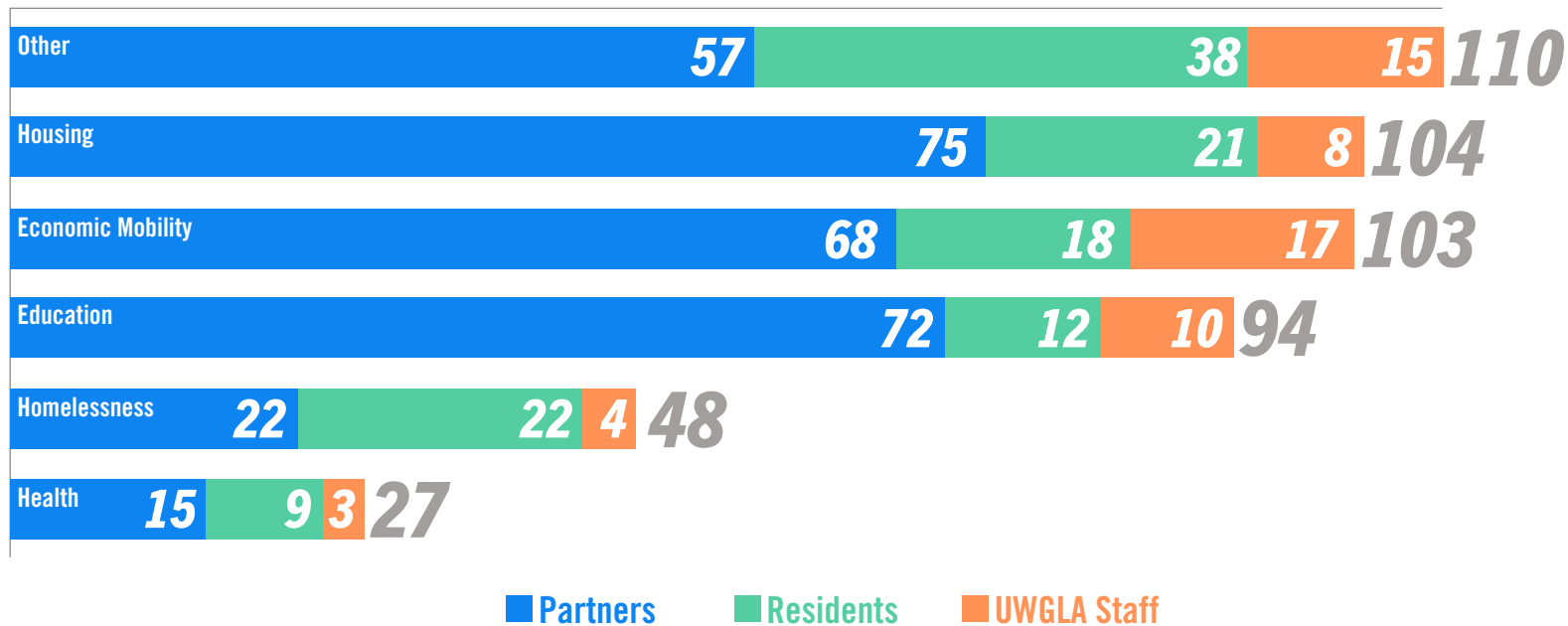
MOST PRESSING ISSUES FOR LOS ANGELES COUNTY RESIDENTS

One primary goal of our Centennial Campaign was to align the future priority areas with issues that stakeholders believe are most affecting Los Angeles County residents. To this end, a significant focus on the 12 community conversations with separate groups of partners, UWGLA staff, and community members, and the survey of partners explored what they considered to be the most pressing challenges that residents face today. Discussion with community members also included a question on how families navigate crises and what emergency supports would be the most helpful. After the community conversation transcripts and survey data were analyzed, the findings were compared to determine similarities and differences.



Figure 5: Most Pressing Issues that Los Angeles County Residents Face as Reported in Community Conversations

2022 Community conversations with partners, staff and community members



Source: Community Conversations/focus groups with a range of 8-24 participants per group. N = 48 individual participants for partners; N = 15 for UWGLA staff; N = 43 for community members.

Lack of affordable housing or shelter is the single most pressing issue that Los Angeles County residents face, followed closely by economic mobility and access to high-quality education.

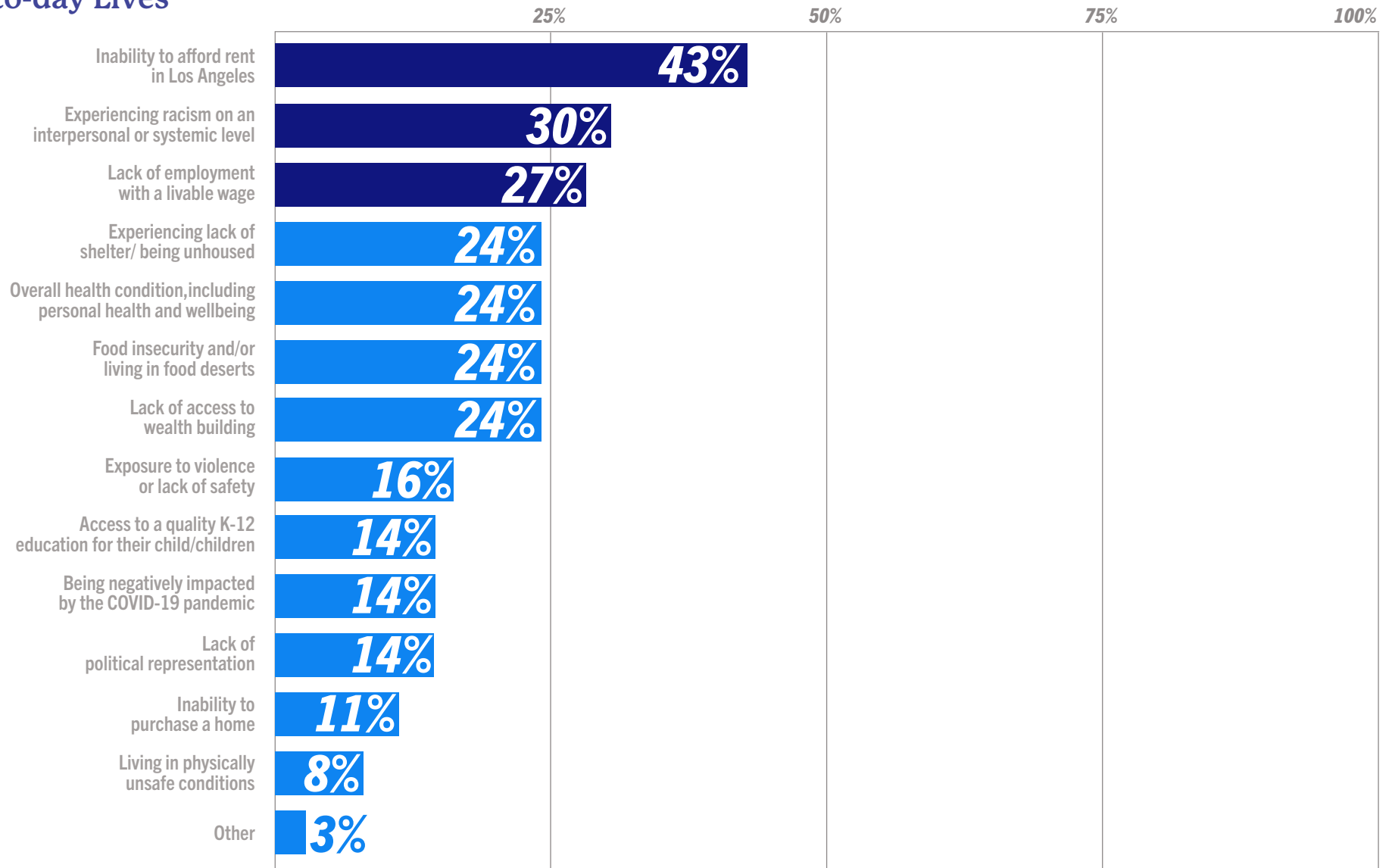
In the community conversations, partners, UWGLA staff, and community members unanimously spoke about challenges finding and securing affordable housing. Survey respondents agreed; partners who responded to the survey identified “inability to afford rent” as the top issue they believed negatively affected their clients on a daily basis. Community conversation participants attributed high housing costs to many factors, including an undersupply of housing in general and affordable housing specifically (including mixed income, government subsidized, and rent-controlled housing). High housing costs were also discussed in light of unlivable wages, even when all adult members of the household were working and/or when people worked multiple jobs. As one partner said, “... rents have quadrupled in the past 30 years and wages have gone up maybe 20%. Particularly for families who come from generations of being structurally shut out of high-paying jobs and families who have undocumented family members, it’s practically impossible to afford housing in the city.” What’s more, the creative solutions that residents have used are also being taken away: “Already in this area most of the buildings no longer accept two families... Practically what they want is to be kicking us out..they are making a lot of buildings, but we can’t all apply to them”



...it all boils down to home, where they’re living in the neighborhood. I don’t think any family wants to share an apartment with five other families. If they’re doing it, they have no other choice.”

– Community Partner

Figure 6: Issues UWGLA Partners Identified as Most Negatively Affecting Clients' Day-to-day Lives



Source: Survey of United Way Greater Los Angeles Partners (N = 37 partners, 12% response rate)

Consequently, community conversation participants note, households in Los Angeles are rent burdened and housing burdened Angelenos are also the most likely to be living in overcrowded situations, doubling and tripling up to just to avoid homelessness. Meaning, they are paying rents that exceed 30% of their income, and doubling up to reduce housing costs. One community member described this situation, "... it all boils down to home, where they're living in the neighborhood. I don't think any family wants to share an apartment with five other families. If they're doing it, they have no other choice." With little left to put into savings, rent-burdened households face challenges building wealth. They are also more likely to experience housing instability and homelessness which, in turn, can be a barrier to employment.

This is not at all surprising or groundbreaking given what Los Angeles County residents see in our neighborhoods and what various research studies show about the housing crisis in Los Angeles.

What was unique about our partners and community raising this single issue as the most pressing in community conversations is the diversity of individuals included in our conversations. Community members experiencing the housing crisis from different vantage points (renters, homeowners, landlords, and individuals who have previously experienced homelessness) shared the stories of how they personally experienced the housing crisis.

For example, community members in the Pico Union communities shared the struggle of balancing increased rental prices, already living with multiple families well above the occupancy of one household, and how current landlords are pushing harder to implement limits to the number of individuals that can live in units. One community member shared: "More than anything, the housing area impacted me the most. In this area [Pico Union] ... living two people, three people, or two families ... many times in all the buildings there are one or two low-income buildings. The others are exuberant rents that one cannot pay, unless both partners work."

UWGLA's Spotlight: Los Angeles County Affordable Housing Solutions Agency (LACAHS)

The flip side of Los Angeles County's beautiful array of distinct communities are the patchwork of laws and resources that govern the creation of housing city by city and result in an undersupply of housing. We were proud to sponsor Senate Bill 679, which created L.A.'s first countywide agency to build and preserve affordable housing. After passing this critical bill, the work is just getting started to make sure there are sufficient resources and smart policies to deliver on its promise of creating housing affordability from West Los Angeles to Pomona, and Long Beach to the Antelope Valley.



Community members noted that affordable housing is needed by vulnerable groups like the elderly and immigrants who are ineligible for government-based housing programs like Section 8.

Community conversations with partners also brought to light that Los Angeles County residents, especially residents living in low-income areas, lack access to high-quality, equitable educational opportunities. One partner stated, “I know everybody has access to school, but I think the quality in some of the more urban or poor communities is not on the same level ... A lot of kids aren’t motivated to go on to get a college education or other degrees because they’re not inspired in their early education years.” Other examples include not having the resources needed to fully engage in school (such as a computer and internet access), not completing A-G requirements, and lacking access to educational supports like tutors. Relatedly, UWGLA partners and community members spoke about a lack of knowledge needed to take advantage of the educational opportunities that are available. For example, they shared that many families do not know how to advocate for their children within the public school system and/or apply for financial aid for college.

Whether quality educational opportunities are absent or residents cannot access them, partners described the consequences as reduced life skills, employability, and readiness for college—all which they believe are barriers to building generational wealth. **In response, partners and community members envisioned a new purpose for educational opportunities: to provide clear pathways to well-paying jobs and financial literacy skills.** Clear pathways to jobs include exposing youth to lucrative career fields (especially vocations and trades), offering employment programs to high schoolers, and providing support during the transition from high school to college.

According to one partner, “I think we need to expand kids’ mindset on the opportunities that are out there and have a level of respect for all those different types of jobs that are needed to keep our communities and our economy running.” Additionally, partners and community members believed that the K-12 system should teach youth financial literacy skills like budgeting, banking, and how to manage credit cards. These educational opportunities are critical to adults as well as to younger students. We heard that basic literacy and vocational training are important milestones and points of deep pride. As one community member put it, “The education system needs to teach financial literacy and understanding how finances work.” Whether it was financial literacy, post-secondary success, or job opportunities, it was clear that educational attainment was not as clear of a pathway to economic opportunity for BIPOC communities as it is for others.

UWGLA's Spotlight: Community College Success

Access to higher and further education for Black and Latinx communities has advanced tremendously over the last decade. Sadly, a popular and affordable path to higher education: community college, often turns into a dead-end, with students on average spending six years in community college before graduating or dropping out. More Black and Latinx students are enrolled in just the Los Angeles Community College District than in the whole University of California (UC) and California State University (CSU) system statewide. And with collective transfer and graduation rates for Black and Latinx students hovering around 10%, we are moving our goal post from access to success. Even with just an associate's degree or a vocational certificate, future earnings immediately jump and generational trajectories are broken. With this in mind, one primary area of focus for the United Way will be increasing the transfer rates of community college students. We will do this by focusing on programs, practices and policies to support BIPOC students. Efforts will include increasing dual enrollment, developing paid internships in industries with strong future workforce projections, as well as, supporting policies that will increase funding for community college programs supporting students.

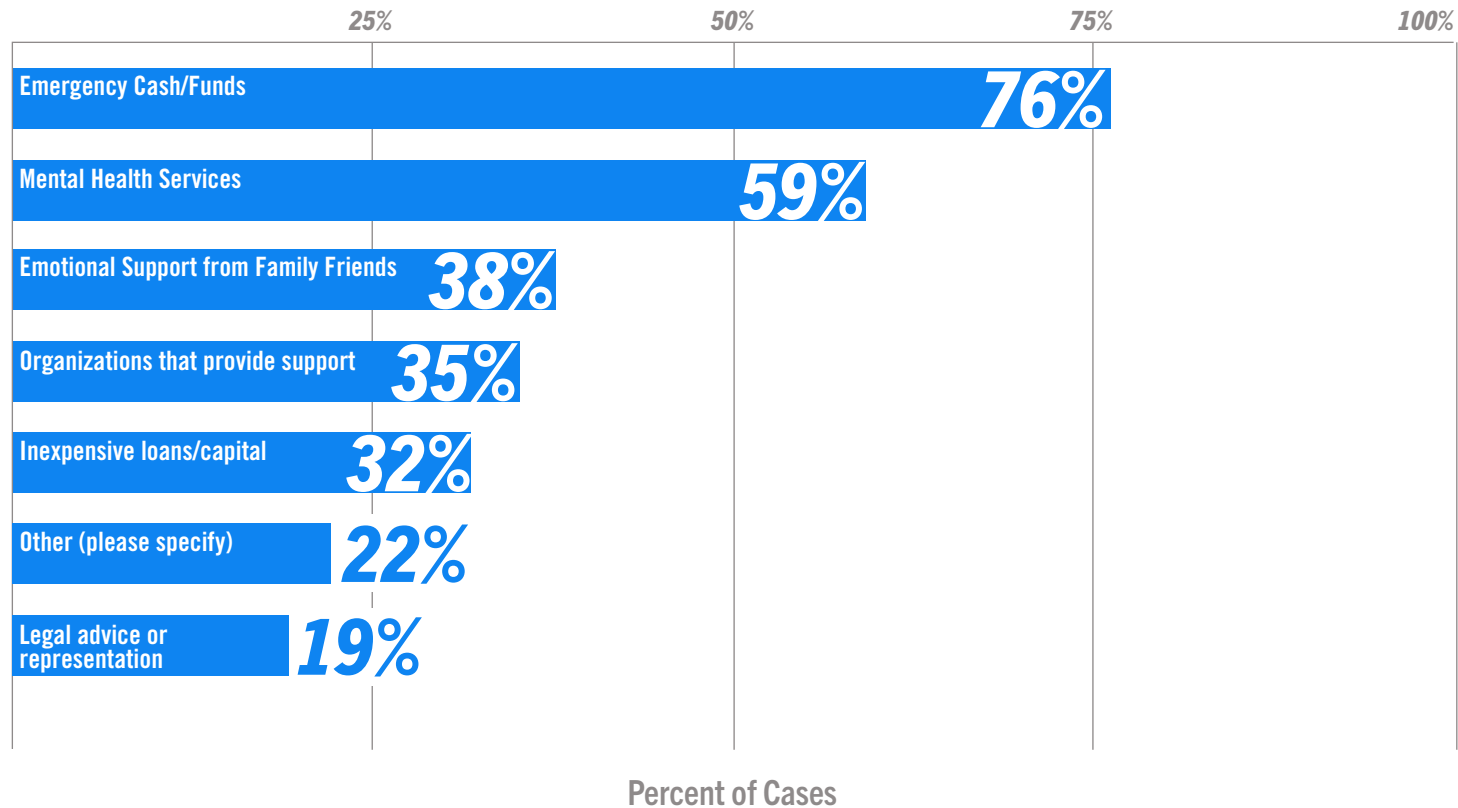
All community conversations brought up systemic racism and structural barriers as root causes preventing BIPOC individuals from breaking the cycle of generational poverty.

Similarly, partners who responded to the survey identified “experiencing racism on an interpersonal or systemic level” as the second most important issue negatively impacting their clients on a daily basis.

Community conversation participants named past and present instances of racism and structural barriers spanning housing, education, criminal justice, and employment. In housing, racism and structural barriers were described as redlining, racial covenants, county-wide zoning limiting the construction of apartments, and limited access to loans for homeownership. Not being able to access homeownership, in turn, impacts a family's ability to create and pass on wealth. In education, the issue was described as gaps in student outcomes by race (especially for Black students), discrimination in the classroom, and disproportionate disciplinary actions (i.e., the school-to-prison pipeline). Commenting on the unfair treatment of BIPOC individuals, one community member said, “The rent [in Los Angeles County] is expensive. Everywhere is expensive, but in Virginia I never saw the discrimination, bullying.” As a result, participants believe that BIPOC individuals in Los Angeles County have been, and continue to be, excluded from wealth building across generations. According to one partner, “...people start from very low poverty or no poverty, that it makes it even worse. It puts us all the way back, and so, most of our communities are not able to just recover. We're in a constant [state of] trying to recover from a system that was already set up to fail us.”

Figure 7: UWGLA Partners Identify Emergency Funds as the Most Lacking Support for Residents

2022 Survey of United Way Greater Los Angeles Partners



Source: Survey of United Way Greater Los Angeles Partners (N = 37 partners, 12% response rate)

Whether it is an unexpected medical issue or a pandemic resulting in unemployment, another challenge that Los Angeles County residents face is navigating crises.

In the survey, partners identified “emergency cash/funds” as the support that was the most lacking for their clients. Exploring this more, conversations with community members included a question about where they go for support in an emergency and what helpful supports look like.

The community conversations revealed that Los Angeles County residents experiencing crises have difficulties discovering and accessing resources. One community member, talking about a non-profit that provided her with emergency housing support said, “There are people who do not know that this program exists. I feel that it hurts Latinos a lot because we can’t get help because we don’t know where to go.” In addition to not knowing where to seek aid, residents face difficulties navigating red tape to receive aid, and piecing together support from numerous disconnected agencies. Nevertheless, community members spoke highly of organizations like 211, public schools, and non-profits because these organizations directed them to resources and directly provided supports. For example, one community member described schools as places “where the parents go when they’re in crisis,” making it an ideal place to provide referrals to crisis supports. Another community member shared that her child’s school distributed food and clothing aid to families in need.

in the absence of formal supports, community members also shared a variety of creative ways they provide aid to each other, demonstrating their resilience and resourcefulness. They reported sharing information about crisis supports and/or providing direct aid to friends and family experiencing emergencies. According to one community member, “... usually, 99% of the time, your family knows somebody who could do this for you or lead you this way [to the] services that you need.” One of the community conversations also revealed that some residents have formed informal groups to pool their funds to then provide emergency financial support to participating members.

According to community members, ideal supports for navigating crises include referrals to resources, simplifying bureaucratic processes, and having a centralized system or location for them to go to receive aid.





STRATEGIES TO ADDRESS THE MOST PRESSING ISSUES AND MULTI-GENERATIONAL POVERTY

One of the most salient throughlines in our community conversations was the role that structural racism plays in multi-generational poverty and inequities across income and racial/ethnic lines in Los Angeles County, particularly for BIPOC families and communities. This finding is not new and certainly not unique to Los Angeles County. Policies like redlining, discriminatory lending, and school and neighborhood segregation have created a long-standing, sophisticated network of structural inequities in communities across the country that perpetuate racial and economic oppression. We feel this is important to name at the outset of this section to highlight the complexity of the challenges facing UWGLA and their partners as they put forward solutions to these issues.

In this section, we highlight perspectives from partners and community members on the highest impact strategies UWGLA can engage in to begin disrupting those inequities for BIPOC families and communities.

Partners and community members called on UWGLA to consider systems-level change around housing and economic mobility that will explicitly shift wealth and resources towards BIPOC communities.

Despite the seemingly intractable nature of these issues, partners and community members were clear that UWGLA should continue to push for systemic change. They felt housing and economic policy work were two areas where UWGLA had historically excelled and was uniquely positioned to advance systemic change. There was also general

agreement that the priority for future work should be bolstering UWGLA's countywide work with a place-based strategy that prioritized BIPOC individuals. Partners and community members specifically named the importance of retaining and returning wealth to BIPOC individuals.

In addition to the need to focus on systemic change, partners and community members also identified specific housing, economic mobility, and wealth redistribution strategies they felt were the greatest opportunities for UWGLA to leverage its work.

Figure 8: Systems-level strategies identified by partners and community members to address multi-generational poverty

2022 Community conversations with partners, staff, and community members

HOUSING POLICY SOLUTIONS	ECONOMIC MOBILITY POLICY SOLUTIONS	RESOURCE AND WEALTH REDISTRIBUTION SOLUTIONS
GOAL: Increase access to accessible and affordable housing.	GOAL: Build income and increase access to liveable wages.	GOAL: Redistribute wealth and redirect resources towards BIPOC communities.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enact broader rent control • Increase housing supply • Limit speculative investments in housing by large corporations • Incentivize preservation of existing affordable housing • Consider progressive versus flat taxes for real estate • Increase access to subsidized housing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Automatic application of earned income tax credit for low-income families • Institute guaranteed basic income to consolidate the confusing mix of separate safety net programs • Reparations • Provide immigrant families with access to higher wages 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fund coalitions that pressure government to shift resources to community organizations • Shift resources from armed law enforcement toward education/wellness/jobs funding • Fund work in BIPOC communities specifically • Create enterprises and land trusts that promote shared advancement within communities of color

Source: Community conversations/focus groups with a range of 8-24 participants per group. N = 48 individual participants for partners; N = 15 for UWGLA staff; N = 43 for community members.

“ ... I think that’s the model moving forward, is that these multiracial, multi-issue coalitions that understand fundamentally we need to redirect resources to the communities and communities need power over those resources.”

– Community Partner

These solutions were multi-issue and cut across a range of policy areas. They reflect the diverse focus of UWGLA’s partners and the multi-pronged approach that is required to tackle the systemic issues like income and wealth inequality. Partners and community members identified the need to increase access to affordable housing, build income and increase access to livable wages, and redirect wealth and resources as top ways to improve the existing systems and create lasting change for BIPOC communities.

UWGLA’s Spotlight: Affordable Housing Initiative (AHI)

We’ve created a fund to ensure minority developers have access to the cheapest capital possible in order to build affordable housing. Similar to monthly home payments being determined by mortgage rates, monthly rents for an apartment are largely determined by the cost of the loans a developer can obtain. We issue bonds and use our national standing to source loans of which local developers might not otherwise have access. And then we bundle those dollars and deliver them in a simpler and more affordable package that ensures units are built for 40% less than traditional affordable housing.

There was a similar emphasis on investing in economic mobility strategies that lead to wealth building and authentically engaging communities and partners.

When asked what the highest leverage opportunities were at the community and individual level, partners, staff, and community members elevated similar themes around economic mobility and wealth distribution. At the community level, they felt this could best be achieved through cross-sector partnerships, such as establishing pathways for individuals to own property; and increased community engagement, outreach, and education around financial literacy. At the individual level, there was a focus on direct financial support to families in need, like emergency aid and basic universal income.

Figure 9: Short- and long-term community- and individual-level strategies identified by partners, staff, and community members

2022 Community conversations with partners, staff, and community members

SHORT-TERM SOLUTIONS	LONG-TERM SOLUTIONS
COMMUNITY-LEVEL SOLUTIONS	
GOAL: Increase awareness and build knowledge around financial literacy. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve education and awareness on available financial resources • Cross-sector partnerships/coalitions to improve coordination and alignment • Community building that extends beyond immediate families 	GOAL: Increase pathways to ownership and wealth building among BIPOC communities <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Policies that address past harm that restricted wealth building in BIPOC communities • Governmental and private investment in housing initiatives or other strategies that create pathways to ownership and wealth
INDIVIDUAL- AND FAMILY-LEVEL SOLUTIONS	
GOAL: Provide immediate relief for families so they can begin to build wealth. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide direct financial support to families (i.e., emergency aid, universal basic income) • Improve access to higher education and trade school opportunities for individuals 	GOAL: Provide pathways for families to build wealth. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Programs that connect families to ownership opportunities • Connection and access to quality education in order for BIPOC communities to attain higher paying jobs • Can also involve direct financial support to families, such as universal basic income

Source: Community conversations /focus groups with a range of 8-24 participants per group. N = 48 individual participants for partners; N = 15 for UWGLA staff; N = 43 for community members.





These shorter-term solutions were focused on increasing awareness and building knowledge around financial literacy and providing immediate relief for families so they can begin to build wealth. They are important stepping stones to achieving the larger, systems-level solutions.

According to UWGLA staff, partners and community members, two education reforms will promote wealth building: 1) incorporating financial literacy into the K-12 curricula, and 2) increasing access to vocational training programs for both youth and adults.

UWGLA's Spotlight: Women's Investment Network

Black and Latina women are the frontlines and the heart of our communities. Our Women's Investment Network provides them the opportunity to pool their hard-won resources together and invest in community-building projects, starting with affordable housing projects. They earn investor grade returns and exist as a mutual aid network to one another to advance individually and collectively.



UWGLA'S UNIQUE ADVANTAGES AND CONTRIBUTIONS TO ADDRESS IDENTIFIED ISSUES

Following the discussion of issue areas that community conversation participants found the most pressing for Angelenos and general solutions they offered to resolve these issues, we explored how UWGLA might be uniquely positioned to inform the conversation. Partners and UWGLA staff highlighted three main goals the organization should prioritize in future work. These include continuing to engage in politics and policy, being a convener and building coalitions, and continuously standing behind community in these spaces. Additionally, partners and UWGLA staff urge UWGLA leadership to consider adding place-based focused work and an asset-building framework into their overall future strategy.

Findings for this section only reflect the views of partners and staff members given their deeper knowledge and understanding of UWGLA and its mission, past work, and capacity for future engagement with the identified pressing issues in Los Angeles.



Partners and staff highlighted the top three ways UWGLA can uniquely address the top issues in Los Angeles: continue to engage in politics and policy, convene partners and catalyze coalitions, and deliver on its intended mission to stand behind community.

► **Continue to be engaged in politics and policy**

Both partners and staff cited the positive impact of UWGLA's prior work in policy advocacy and supporting legislative change. Specifically, they highlighted the effectiveness of UWGLA's prior policy advocacy work in education and, more recently, housing, such as supporting Measure H and Proposition HHH efforts in Los Angeles. When asked about how UWGLA could uniquely contribute to the issues Angelenos are facing today, partners and staff discussed the importance of continuing to address systemic challenges by pushing for more equitable housing, economic mobility, and education policies.

► **Convening partners and catalyzing coalitions**

Given their experience with and understanding of UWGLA's work in Los Angeles, partners felt strongly that one of the organization's main strengths lies in its reach and reputation in the community, and its ability to convene important stakeholders. Partners highlighted UWGLA's unique access to a network of politicians, for-profit donors and partners, and non-profit organizations as an asset and niche that many other organizations cannot easily navigate. Partners believe UWGLA's future work should focus on being a "catalyzer" of coalitions and convenings but not necessarily always leading in these spaces. Instead, UWGLA should leverage its access to key stakeholders and resources to support coalition work where communities are allowed to lead themselves.



I'm thinking about the United Way's organizing efforts and how important they were to our project specifically. I think just reflecting on how important they were in really pushing the public and the politicians to support affordable housing and specifically permanent supportive housing. Their efforts were beneficial for us because as a housing developer, we don't necessarily have an organizing arm. We don't have a team that can push that type of policy and support, and they were able to do it for a variety of projects throughout Los Angeles so that was very helpful."

— Community Partner

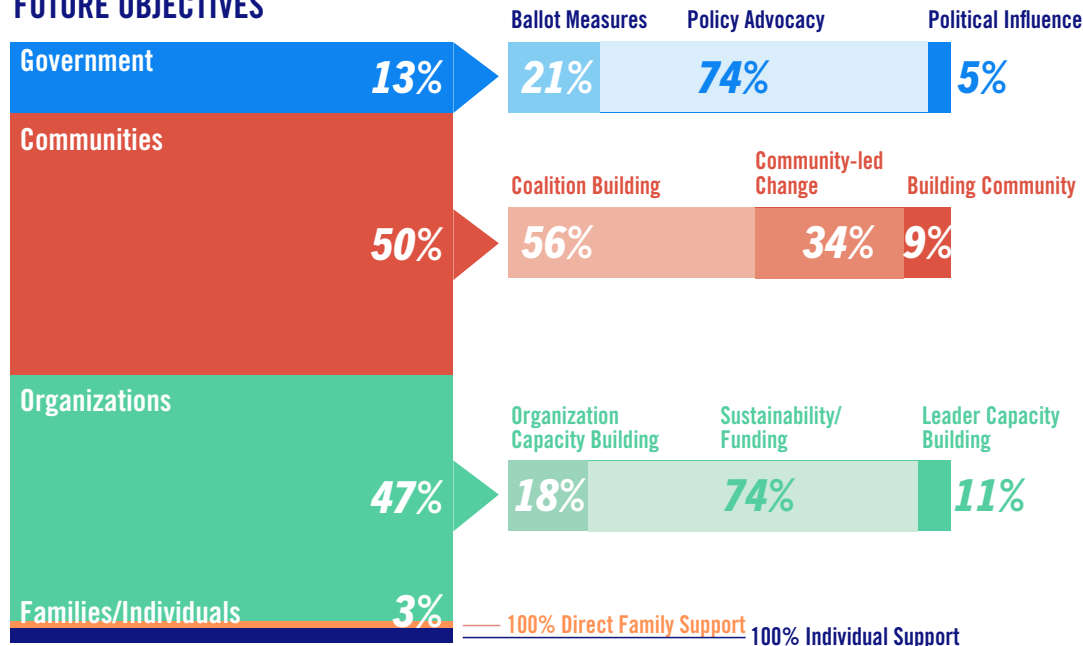
► **Deliver on its intended mission to stand behind community**

- Authentically listen to residents and local organizations about what they believe is the work that needs to be addressed in their communities.
- Meaningfully engage BIPOC or women-led community organizations and individuals with lived experience.
- Create and allow space for these individuals and organizations to take on leadership roles within coalition and policy work.
- Provide funding for these organizations and individuals that allows for flexible funding and/or to specifically take on leadership roles within coalition/policy work.
- Set the stage and get out of the way – allow systemic change for communities to be led by communities.

Figure 10: Where Partners and Staff Reported UWGLA Should Focus Future Work

2022 Interviews with partners and staff

FUTURE OBJECTIVES



Source: Community conversations/focus groups with a range of 8-24 participants per group. N = 48 individual participants for partners; N = 15 for UWGLA staff; N = 43 for community members.

Note: Sub-codes may not add up to the total number of codes because some quotes were coded multiple times.

Partners believe UWGLA should supplement its countywide work with a place-based strategy.

Partners recognized UWGLA's region-wide work in Los Angeles County is crucial to addressing the current, most pressing issues Angelenos face today. However, they also pointed out the organization's future efforts should include place-based work in communities that have been historically underinvested in or are routinely left out of county, city, and private investment efforts. During community conversations, partners suggested UWGLA invest time and funding into addressing issues in the neediest Los Angeles areas/neighborhoods. This was highlighted as a key strategy for addressing systemic inequities and issue areas that appear to have deeper negative impacts on low-income and BIPOC communities. In the survey to partners, 68% of respondents agreed that UWGLA should supplement its countywide work with place-based efforts that focus on BIPOC communities, while only 32% believed UWGLA should focus solely on county-wide efforts.



I do think United Way [of Greater Los Angeles] could do more ... to facilitate place-based work by bringing all the players together. I think that United Way has very unique relationships with a lot of the organizations that are really making an impact and addressing some of these underlying service needs. There is funding that's coming down through the state that if we do it right, we can make that impact. We can redefine the way that we're serving people."

— Community Partner

Figure 11: Perspectives on the Importance of UWGLA's Place-Based Work

2022 Survey of United Way Greater Los Angeles Partners

32%

UWGLA should focus on the top issues impacting Los Angeles County as a whole

68%

UWGLA should supplement its countywide focus with place-based work, with a focus on BIPOC communities

Source: Survey of United Way Greater Los Angeles Partners (N = 37 partners, 12% response rate)

UWGLA's Spotlight: Community Care & Power

As systems and services shut down during the COVID-19 pandemic, we saw everyday residents rise up to take care of one another's immediate needs and build new forms of community power and ownership for the future. We began investing in 87 of these Care & Power hubs across Los Angeles County focusing on efforts in BIPOC communities. Dynamic, and even volunteer-lead in many instances, they have exploded in numbers of people served, and we are excited to help sustain, grow and connect these efforts across neighborhoods and create a new civic infrastructure for Los Angeles' future.

Partners and staff agree it is important for UWGLA to be seen as a leader in “asset-framing” across the region.

“It’s how you frame ... the assets and aspirations that people inherently have before you talk about their despair [or their] suffering so that people start to see [those assets and aspirations] as valuable.”

— UWGLA Staff



During the community conversations, staff members highlighted the need for UWGLA to serve as a leader in “asset-framing,” a narrative model developed by the non-profit organization BMe, that “defines people by their assets and aspirations before noting their challenges and deficits.” UWGLA staff members suggested that UWGLA utilize asset-framing in future efforts as it works to address systemic inequities and engages in place-based work with disenfranchised communities.

To gauge partners’ understanding and reactions to asset-framing, the survey asked, “Do you believe most, many, few, or very few organizations that engage in social justice work in Los Angeles County regularly practice asset-framing?” More than half of respondents (57%) answered that either very few or few organizations use the asset-framing narrative model in their work. In contrast, when asked what UWGLA’s role should be in the asset-framing conversation, the vast majority of respondents (84%) felt it was important that UWGLA be seen as a leader in using asset-framing across the region.

Figure 12: Perspectives on Whether UWGLA Should be Seen as an Asset-framing Leader Across the Los Angeles Region, 2022

2022 Survey of United Way Greater Los Angeles Partners

Question asked:

How important do you think it is for UWGLA to become a leader in the practice of asset-framing when describing or reporting on the communities in which it serves?

Count who felt it was somewhat or very important	
PEOPLE OF COLOR	26
NON-PEOPLE OF COLOR	11
FUNDER	9
NON-FUNDER	27
OVERALL	25

Source: Survey of United Way Greater Los Angeles Partners (N = 37 partners, 12% response rate)



Teaching the asset-framing narrative model, as a way that we talk about impact is such a critical and a crucial opportunity because it doesn't really require adding new people, but if we can teach everyone within [UWGLA] to use asset-framing as a way to talk about our work and then everything that we push out of this organization is reflecting that, then that will permeate not only the workplace, but it permeates our individual supporter base. It'll permeate the community partnerships and permeate that community with our community partners. Also, then we can become a hub for teaching all of our community partners how to do that as well."

— UWGLA Staff

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

For over 100 years, generations of Angelenos have turned to the United Way to help make Los Angeles better. And we've known from our earliest days that the best way to do that is by uniting communities—building bridges between people and organizations from different perspectives to confront the challenges of the day. Together, we have navigated a pandemic, economic inequality, natural disasters, and more to lift each other up in difficult times and support the most vulnerable among us. Each decade brings new challenges and, with them, new opportunities to serve our communities and help our neighbors. While Los Angeles looks very different today than it did when we first began, our goal remains the same: making sure everyone has the opportunity to not just survive, but thrive.

Our future work is only possible if we stand behind the community and stand with our partners. The process of listening to our trusted colleagues in the fight to improve the lives of Los Angeles County residents and end cycles of poverty has taught us many important lessons: double down on systemic change by tackling true wealth building and ownership in BIPOC communities, to continue catalyzing the important work of coalitions and collective action, and to continue to bring individuals together from all walks of life.

Together, we can accomplish this and more.



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¹⁶The asset-framing model can be attributed to **BMe**, a non-profit organization that provides diversity, equity, and inclusion training for organizations, leaders, and individuals.



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