



*Building Towards
Antiracist Governments*

Monterey County: Building Community Power



California Pan-Ethnic
HEALTH NETWORK

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Monterey County is a medium-sized county located on the central coast of California and home to Salinas Valley, a rich agricultural region. Sixty percent of the county's residents are Latinx/e, and more than half speak a non-English language at home. The county has a long history of community organizing to improve working conditions for farm workers.

Starting around 2010, Monterey County embarked on racial equity work involving a broad array of actors, from philanthropy to city and county leaders to national nonprofits to local community advocates in an approach called "Towards a Racially Equitable Monterey County." Grounded in this ecosystem approach, Monterey County has advanced six critical efforts to address racial equity over the last decade:

1. **Became a Building Healthy Communities Hub and Hosted Joint Racial Equity Trainings.** In 2010, East Salinas became one of 14 BHC sites in California. The BHC hub helped develop and host unified trainings on healing-informed racial equity for the community and government leaders.
2. **Adopted a Health in All Policies (HiAP) Approach.** Starting in 2012, the Monterey County Health Department adopted the collaborative approach of HiAP to address health inequities and center health considerations for all communities into policymaking.
3. **Centered Community Leadership and Organizing Power.** The Building Healthy Communities hub has been at the forefront of developing trainings and leadership opportunities to engage local residents and build community power.
4. **Developed COLIBRI (Collaboratively Organizing for Liberation Inclusion and Breaking Racial Inequities).** In 2019, the county launched COLIBRI, a local cohort where residents, community leaders, and government staff and leaders learn and work together to advance racial equity in the county.
5. **Developed Equitable Budgetary Tools.** The Monterey County Civil Rights Office developed a tool designed to integrate equitable budgetary practices across county departments and built momentum for more participatory budgeting practices in the future.
6. **Declared Racism a Public Health Crisis.** In February 2022, Monterey County Board of Supervisors passed a resolution declaring racism a public health crisis.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Monterey County has built power and resilience by investing in community organizing and collaboration between multi-sectoral actors. However, Monterey County equity leaders highlight four key challenges for continued progress.

1. Securing Equity Leadership and Staffing Capacity for Racial Equity Work.
2. Institutionalizing Community Engagement Best Practices.
3. Adding Accountability and Funding to Racism as a Public Health Crisis Resolution.
4. Rethinking Community Safety.

By continuing to center community self-determination and multi-sectoral collaborations, Monterey County can achieve future transformations in racial equity.

Overview of

MONTEREY COUNTY



Monterey County, located on the central coast of California, is a picturesque and diverse region known for its stunning coastline and rich agricultural heritage. The county has a medium household income of \$82,013 in 2021, lower than the California state average (\$84,097). The county leans liberal with an all-Democratic Board of Supervisors and almost 70% of its voters voted Democratic in 2020.

Salinas Valley, known as the “salad bowl of the world” [i] has a long history of labor and community organizing, which has had a significant impact on Monterey County’s racial dynamics. In the 1930s, there were violent confrontations between White farm owners and Filipino and Mexican farm workers and union organizers, who were advocating for worker health care and other human rights. [ii] In the 1970s, the United Farm Workers, led by Cesar Chavez, organized a series of strikes and boycotts in the lettuce farms in Salinas Valley, which became the largest farm worker strike in U.S. history and directly led to the passage of the California Agricultural Labor Relations Act of 1975. [iii] Today 90% of the agricultural workers in Monterey County are Latinx/e. [iv] With the annexation of the Alisal community in 1963, the city of Salinas became divided by the 101 freeway. East Salinas, or Alisal (“grove of sycamores”), where many Latinx/e farm workers historically settled, has been systematically deprived of community development funds and civic infrastructure resulting in large disparities in housing, education, and policing rates. [v]



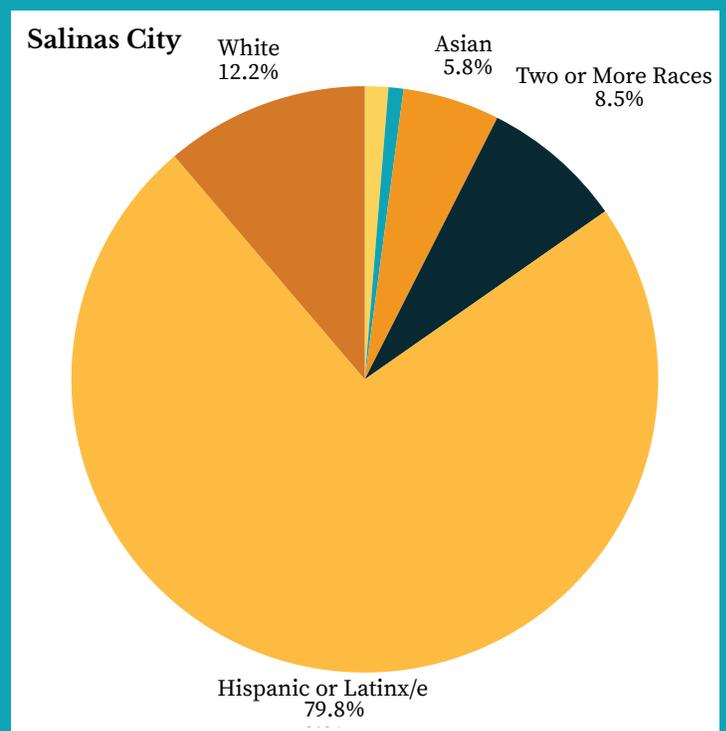
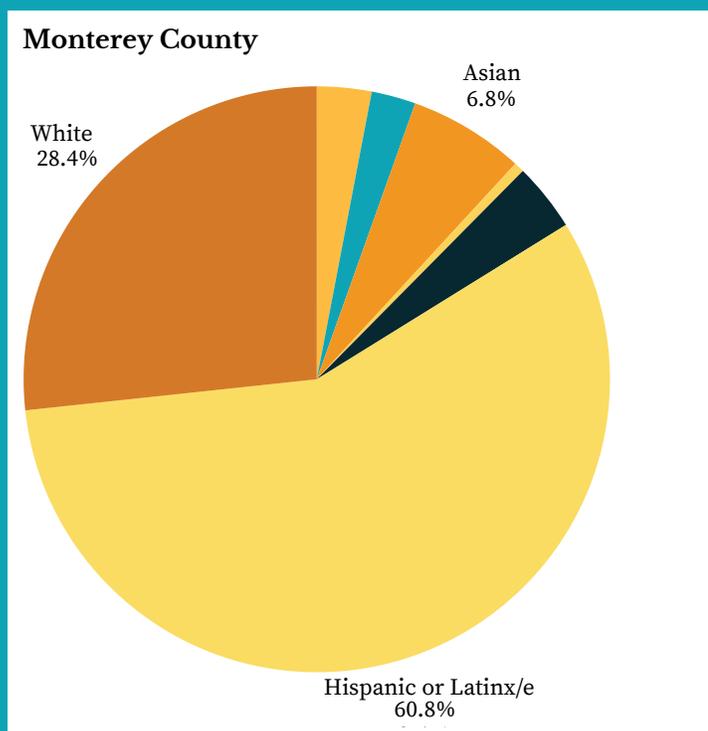
Figure 1: Salinas Valley, Monterey County

Demographics and Diversity

With a population of 432,858, 60% of Monterey residents are Latinx/e, 3.2% are African American or Black, and 6.8% are Asian (figure 2). In the City of Salinas, Monterey’s County seat where a third of Monterey’s residents live, Latinx/e communities make up close to 80% of the total population. More than half of the county residents speak a non-English language at home, and almost a third are foreign born. [vi]

Figure 2: Demographic by Race/Ethnicity in Monterey County and Salinas City

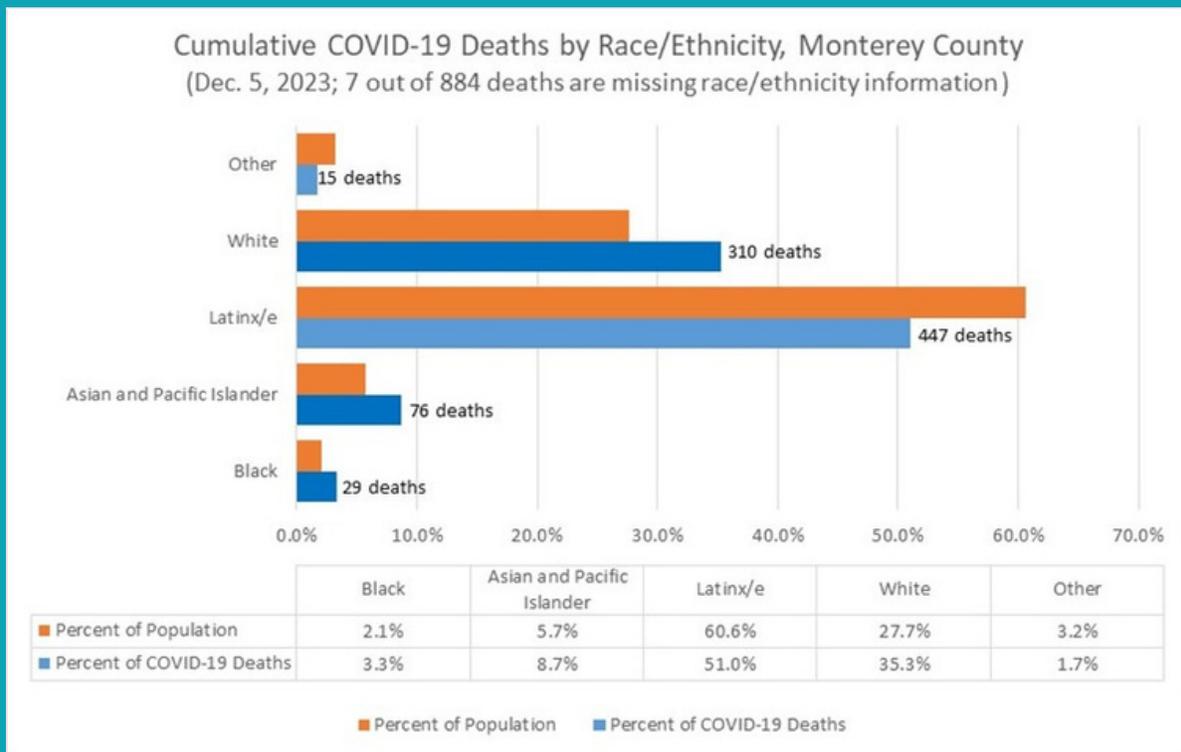
Race/Ethnicity	Monterey County	Salinas City
Black or African American alone	3.2%	1.4%
American Indian and Alaska Native alone	2.6%	0.9%
Asian alone	6.8%	5.8%
Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander alone	0.6%	0.0%
Two or More Races	4.0%	8.5%
Hispanic or Latinx/e	60.8%	79.8%
White alone, not Hispanic or Latinx/e	28.4%	12.2



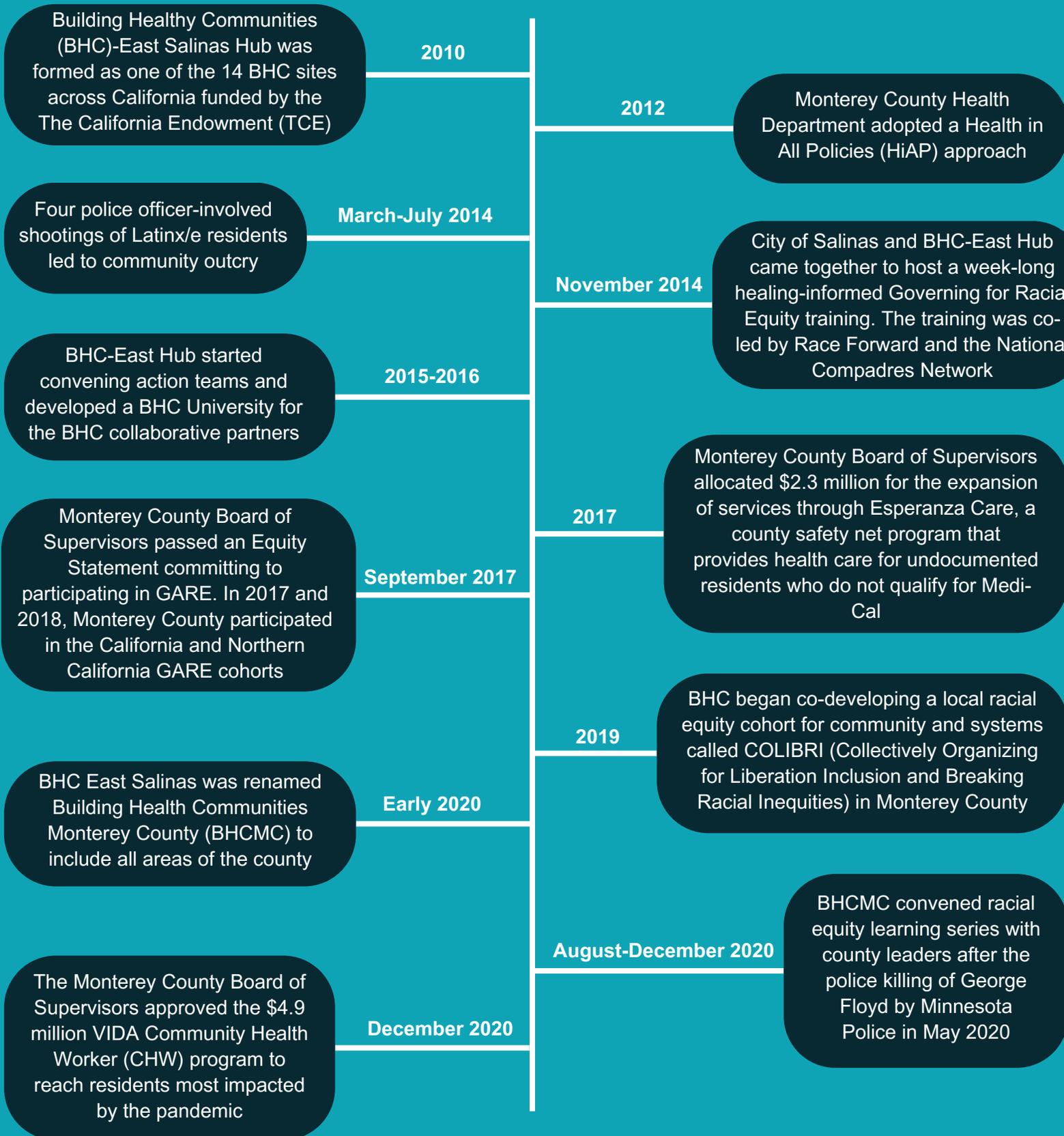
COVID-19 Disparities

The COVID-19 pandemic further revealed existing racial inequities within the county. In August 2020, Monterey County released a “Disparate Impacts of COVID-19 Report” which noted that Latinx/e individuals were more likely to be hospitalized from COVID-19 when compared to the population distribution of Monterey County. [vii] Analyses from CPEHN on cumulative COVID-19 death data as of December 5, 2023 showed Black (3.3%/2.1%=57% higher), Asian and Pacific Islander (8.7%/5.7%=53% higher) and White (35.3%/27.7%=27% higher) communities experienced excess COVID-19 deaths when compared to their share of the Monterey population. [viii]

Figure 3: Cumulative COVID-19 Deaths by Race/Ethnicity in Monterey County



TIMELINE OF ACTIONS



TIMELINE OF ACTIONS

January 2021

The COVID-19 VIDA project was launched, recruiting 125 CHWs across 10 community-based organizations to provide COVID-19 education, outreach, and wrap-around services

2022

The COLIBRI cohort starting creating racial equity action plans

January 2022

Civil Rights Office became the central coordination for Monterey County's racial equity work

February 2022

Monterey County Board of Supervisors passed a resolution "Declaring Racism as a Public Health Crisis in Monterey County and pledging to promote equity, inclusion, and diversity in housing, employment, economic development, health care, and public safety in Monterey County" [x]

April 2022

The Monterey County Board of Supervisors approved a further \$1.5 million in funding for the VIDA program to continue through June 30, 2023

November 2022

Monterey County Board of Supervisors passed a resolution "Declaring Racism a Public Health Crisis in Monterey County and pledging to promote equity, inclusion, and diversity in housing, employment, economic development, health care, and public safety in Monterey County" [xi]

MONTEREY COUNTY'S EFFORTS TO ADDRESS HEALTH DISPARITIES AND RACISM

Monterey County is a unique case: its racial equity work dating back to the 2010s grew from the city to the county and involved an ecosystem of actors including philanthropy, city and county governments, national capacity building non-profit organizations, and local community advocates and resident leaders. According to Race Forward, this ecosystem approach is known as “Towards a Racially Equitable Monterey County”, which focuses on clarifying the unique strengths and assets of each actor in the system and unlocking community collective power. [ix] Multi-year efforts from The California Endowment and national organizations such as Race Forward and National Compadres Network helped build out the resources and capacity for local communities and government leaders to advance racial equity. Local community organizers and facilitators also worked tirelessly to ensure these cross-sectoral equity efforts follow the lead of Monterey communities’ wants and needs.

CPEHN interviewed Andrea Manzo (Executive Director at Action Council of Monterey County and Building Health Communities Monterey County), Vincente Lara (Management Analyst III at Monterey County Health Department Planning, Evaluation, and Policy Unit), Krista Hanni (Program Manager at Monterey County Health Department Planning, Evaluation, and Policy Unit), Maria Elena Manzo (Director at Mujeres en Accion), Juan Rodriguez (Civil Rights Officer at Monterey County Civil Rights Office), Natalie Alfaro Frazier (Senior Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Analyst at Monterey County Civil Rights Office), and Christina Santana (Chronic Disease Prevention Coordinator at Monterey County Health Department). Specifically, Monterey County government and community embarked on six critical efforts to address racial

equity over the last two decades:

1. Became a Building Healthy Communities Hub and Hosted Joint Racial Equity Trainings
2. Adopted a Health in All Policies (HiAP) Approach
3. Centered Community Leadership and Organizing Power
4. Developed COLIBRI (Collaboratively Organizing for Liberation Inclusion and Breaking Racial Inequities)
5. Developed Equitable Budgetary Practices
6. Declared Racism a Public Health Crisis

1. Became a Building Healthy Communities Hub and Hosted Joint Racial Equity Trainings

In 2010, East Salinas or Alisal, a neighborhood with longstanding disenfranchisement and underinvestment, became one of the 14 Building Healthy Communities (BHC) sites in California. [xii] BHC is a 10-year, \$1 billion initiative led by The California Endowment (TCE), a private foundation, aiming to “build power and organizing capacity locally, advance statewide policy, change the narrative, and transform 14 of California’s communities devastated by health inequities into places where all people and neighborhoods thrive.” [xiii] The BHC East Salinas hub (now known as BHC Monterey County hub) was first facilitated by TCE program staff and staffed by Salinas community leaders, and convened community organizations to build their leadership capacity.

In response to the 2014 fatal shootings of four Latinx/e men by police and the citywide protests and heightened conversations around police violence and

systemic racism that followed, [xiv] the City of Salinas and East Salinas BHC hosted a joint training on healing-informed racial equity for community organizations and local government leaders collectively. Two national non-profit organizations Race Forward and the National Compadres Network co-created and led the training. Prior to this, county trainings around racism and racial equity happened separately for the community and for government. [xv]

Providing space where communities and governmental officials, including the Salinas Police Chief, could discuss systemic racism in the same room helped address the feelings of distrust and marginalization from the community side. [xvi] In addition, focusing on healing, that is “addressing traumas and disconnections while cultivating trust and deepening relationships,” helped combat community cynicism about government’s commitment in dealing with race and racism. [xvii] The healing centered racial equity training was “a balance of both mind and heart capacity-building.” [xviii] Indeed, centering healing in racial justice work has continued to be a theme throughout BHC’s organizing work in Monterey County.

“The 2014 training served as the foundation for Salinas City and Monterey County’s racial equity work that ensued,” said Manzo (Action Council). Immediately after the training, a steering committee was launched consisting of five city staff and five community advocates to continue the healing-informed racial equity work. TCE funded the National Compadres Network and Race Forward to provide coaching to the steering committee. Steering committee members, including Manzo, developed a racial equity framework for the City of Salinas. This collaboration resulted in half of city staff getting trained on healing-informed governing for racial equity, a city-wide racial equity impact assessment, the hiring of a racial equity coordinator, and new and more equitable city hiring practices between 2016 and 2017, according to a TCE report. [xix] However, as Race Forward’s 2020 report pointed out, looking back, this

collaboration between city and community was unsustainable as the community was at a disadvantage and tended to suppress criticism to ensure an amicable relationship with city departments; and that true community power building was needed to put real pressure on policy and decision makers and hold systems accountable. [xx]

Despite the initial success of this joint training with the City, it wasn’t until organizers and community leaders at the BHC East Salinas hub “pushed”, that the Board of Supervisors and Department Heads at the Monterey County government level started to attend trainings on governing for racial equity in 2016. In September 2017, Monterey County Board of Supervisors adopted an equity resolution, proclaiming the county’s commitment to advancing racial equity and participating in GARE learnings. [xxi] Subsequently, Monterey County leadership attended the GARE California cohort in 2017 and Northern California cohort in 2018. [xxii] Rosemary Soto and others at the Monterey County CAO served as liaison for the county’s GARE participation.

2. Adopted a Health in All Policies (HiAP) Approach

Monterey County Health Department, particularly the Planning, Evaluation, and Policy (PEP) unit, has served as an inside champion for the county’s racial and health equity work with its Health in All Policies (HiAP) strategy. Monterey’s Health Department has an annual budget of \$352 million (Fiscal Year 2023-2024) and houses many county functions such as public health, behavioral health, environmental health, and clinic services.

In 2012, Monterey County Health Department introduced a HiAP strategy, a commonly used public health framework, to “address health inequities and focus on identifying the root causes of poor health.” [xxiii] According to the Centers on Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), “Health in All Policies (HiAP) is a collaborative approach that

integrates and articulates health considerations into policymaking across sectors to improve the health of all communities.” [xxiv] HiAP has been adopted by local governments nationwide including the California state government as a step to advance health equity. [xxv] Monterey County’s efforts contributed to health-focused elements for City of Salinas’ and Gonzales’ general plans.

Interestingly, Monterey County Health Department does not have an explicit health equity position. The HiAP manager position currently serves the role as a health equity co-lead for the Health Department, said Vicente Lara who is the HiAP manager at Monterey County Health Department. Lara’s unit, the Planning, Evaluation, and Policy (PEP) unit also serves as an important community-facing unit at the department. For example, Lara currently helps facilitate the housing cohort at COLIBRI. However, as CPEHN’s interviews indicated, many government or systems leaders in Monterey County are still learning how to effectively work with communities and co-create solutions.

3. Centered Community Leadership and Organizing Power

At the center of Monterey County’s ecosystem approach to racial equity is community organizing and power building facilitated by Building Healthy Communities Monterey County (BHCMC). Since its launch in 2010, BHCMC has evolved significantly. Its scope and impact expanded from focusing on the neighborhood of East Salinas, through the TCE-funded project, to all the communities in Monterey County, driven by local residents. Its aims and strategies expanded from initially serving as a multi-sectoral convener between government, community, and national training organizations, such as through the 2014 healing-centered racial equity training, to building leadership capacity and power of residents and directly advocating for policy change targeting city and county governments. To facilitate this transition, BHCMC has been discussing merging with a key partner,

the Action Council of Monterey County, a 501(c)(3) organization, since May 2021.

Looking back, Manzo (Action Council) said that BHCMC realized early on the importance of community power building, defined as “*supporting residents to really influence or enact change in their community with appropriate tools [and] resources.*” “*Little by little, Building Healthy Communities realized, there was a gap in organizing as all these organizations were being brought together [...] If we want to be able to change and shift people’s outcomes, knowing that racism is the number one indicator of outcomes, we need to organize. We need to build community power around it,*” said Manzo.

Following the 2014 unified training on healing-informed racial equity for community organizations and local government leaders, philanthropic leaders including The California Endowment, Community Foundation for Monterey County, and First 5 Monterey County went through a strategic re-alignment process with BHCMC and committed to dedicating more resources to community power building in Monterey. BHCMC then set its “North Star” to “activate resident voice and power for a healthy inclusive democracy”. In the following years, the BHCMC convened and conducted a range of capacity and leadership building activities with community partner organizations and community residents, transitioning BHC from a private foundation-funded project to a community-led initiative. [xxvi] Meanwhile, the BHCMC team grew its capacity from an initial staff of two to 22, with several full-time community organizers and youth organizer positions.

The community organizing and advocacy work spurred by BHCMC’s power building model has successfully advanced equity in the county’s health care and public health services. First, organizers such as those from Communities Organized for Relational Power in Action (COPA) pushed for the creation and expansion of “Esperanza Care”, a

Some of the most notable capacity and leadership building activities from BHCMC include:

- In 2015, BHCMC started convening “action teams” based on issue areas including education equity, justice reform, land use, and health for all. [xxvii] One of the action teams currently focuses on Black power building and engaging youth of color. [xxviii]
- Between 2015 and 2016, BHCMC developed a “BHC University”, providing skill and relationship building for the BHC partner organizations on topics such as facilitation, media strategy, community organizing, participatory evaluation, and data literacy. [xxix]
- In 2017, BHCMC started a “Resident Leadership Academy,” a 9-month program organized by the Monterey Bay Central Labor Council. The Academy provided training for resident leaders on community organizing, the history of social movements, racial equity, and community-driven leadership approaches. The first cohort of resident leaders took on housing as their core issue. The second cohort focused on increasing health care access for undocumented residents in Monterey County. The third cohort focused on creating a people’s budget. According to Race Forward, the next phase of this work is to help community leaders who have been trained through the Academy find key decision-making positions. [xxx]

county safety net program that provides health care for undocumented residents in Monterey County who do not qualify for Medi-Cal. The project started as a pilot from 2010 to 2015 that offered primary care to about 588,000 undocumented residents in Monterey. BHCMC partners’ advocacy led to an expansion of the program. [xxxi] In 2017, Monterey County Board of Supervisors allocated \$2.3 million

for the expansion of services through Esperanza Care, covering an additional 25,000 people. [xxxii]

In December 2020, the Monterey County Board of Supervisors approved \$4.9 million for the COVID-19 VIDA (“Virus Integrated Distribution of Aid”) program to hire 125 community health workers (CHWs) across 10 different organizations to provide COVID-19 outreach, education, and wrap around services for communities most impacted by the pandemic. According to Manzo (Action Council), COPA, Mujeres en Acción and BHCMC worked with the Monterey County Health Department PEP unit to “make the case” to hire a community-based workforce to provide culturally and linguistically services to mitigate COVID-19. At the height of the pandemic, the VIDA project served 7,000 residents per month through phone calls and personal outreach. By December 2022, VIDA CHWs had logged over 600,000 interactions with residents in the most hard-to-reach communities in Monterey County. [xxxiii] In addition to English and Spanish, information was shared in indigenous languages such as Triqui, Zapoteco, and Mixteco by partner organization Centro Binacional para el Desarrollo Indígena Oaxaqueño (CBDIO).

The county has increased the VIDA funding three times since its launch; although the number of CHWs have drastically decreased, the county extended the program through December 2023. Maria Elena Manzo, Program Director at Mujeres en Acción, an organization that helped make the project a reality, said that “*we showed that if you invest in the community, none of [whom] would have gotten an interview [or] have been taken into consideration, they were the right people for the job.*”

Manzo (Action Council) said the VIDA project was a great example of partnership between community leaders and government because when the plan co-created by government and community was presented at the Board of Supervisors meetings, advocates were already

there to voice support: *“yes, it does take more time. But if you spend the time working with community and sharing that power and decision making, by the time it gets to a level of being approved, you have all these folks to rally behind you versus against you or questioning.”*

Manzo (Action Council) also spoke about the importance of organizing with inside-government equity leads. For example, health departments can provide data that CBOs do not have access to. Manzo said: *“a lot of this work happens because there’s someone inside the institution that believes in the type of work we’re doing. That is building enough relationship, that they can start rallying their colleagues and bringing them to spaces and having them be more open minded than they would have, if it would have come from the outside.”*

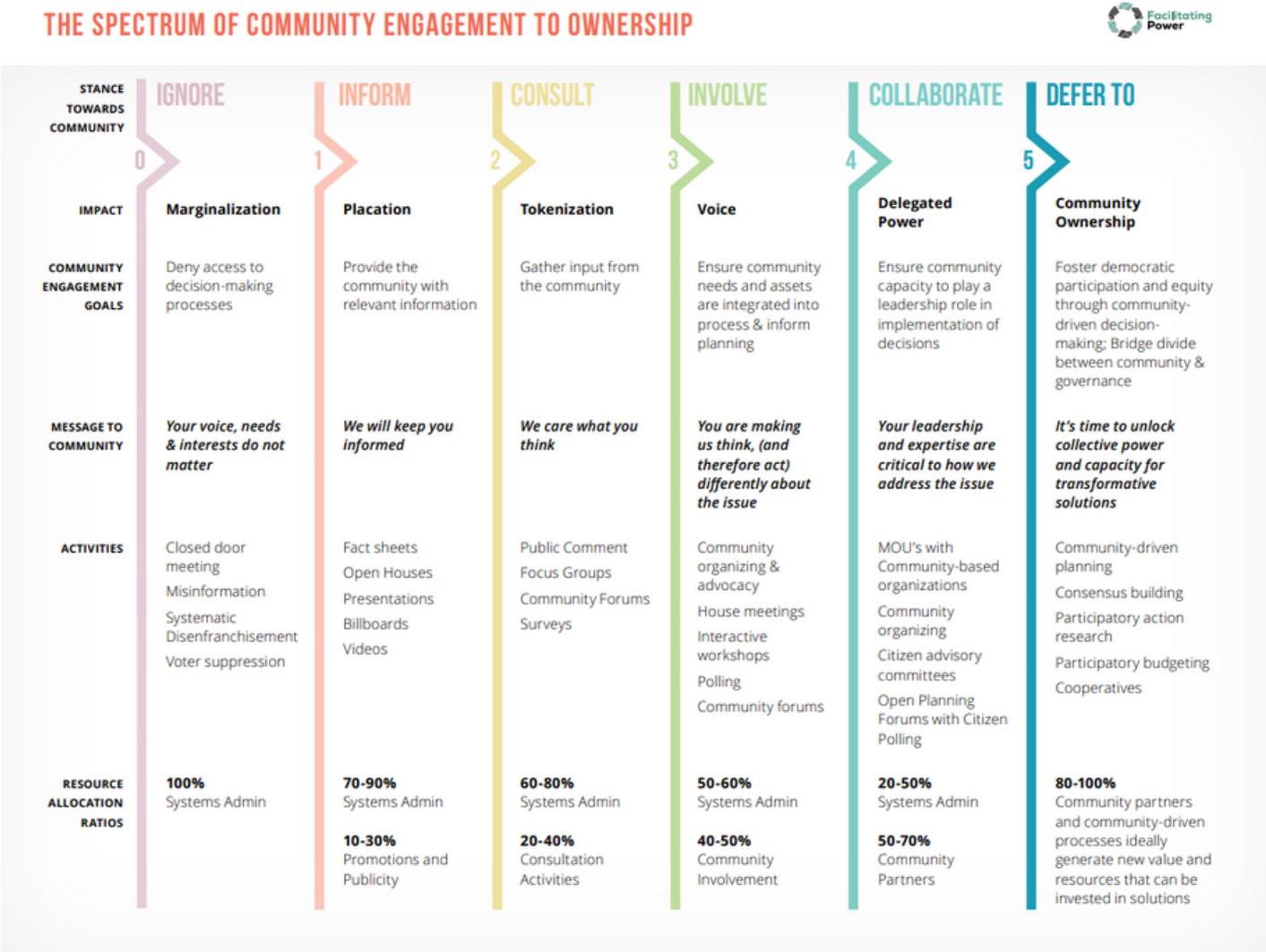
The BHCMC Collaborative frequently used a “Spectrum of Community Engagement to Ownership,” a tool developed by Rosa González of Facilitating Power, [xxxiv] to promote co-governance and community in the driver seat of decision-making (see Figure 4). Monterey County Health Department also uses the spectrum tool within the department. *“Some of the work that our team really focuses on is recognizing that a lot of historical inequity is the result of the lack of meaningful participation in decision making [...] so what strategies could we try to integrate into our work so that we are moving more towards community ownership and more equitable power sharing? The participatory budgeting work that we’re doing right now is a really great example of that,”* said Lara (Monterey County Health Department). The Health Department, in partnership with the Transportation Agency of Monterey County and Ecology Action, is currently working on a participatory budgeting process to engage residents better in how local active transportation funding is invested in Monterey County.

4. Developed COLIBRI (Collaboratively Organizing for Liberation Inclusion and Breaking Racial Inequities)

A keystone on Monterey County level happened in 2019 when BHCMC collaborative partners pushed for the formation of COLIBRI (Collaboratively Organizing for Liberation Inclusion and Breaking Racial Inequities). COLIBRI is a cohort of 10 equity-centered teams made up of residents, organizers, community-based organizations, and government or systems participants, working to advance racial equity on 10 issues in Monterey County. Manzo (Action Council) talked about the rationale behind forming COLIBRI: *“what was happening with GARE was that government was doing their learning and they went into a cave, and [the community] never knew what happened after that. And so, we thought, why don’t we develop a local cohort where we can learn together with residents, community-based leaders and governments and learn about the systemic issues and try to develop solutions together.”* The formation of COLIBRI truly solidified the “Towards a Racially Equitable Monterey County” ecosystem approach in Monterey County and was a result of years of BHCMC-led community power building.

“Colibri” is Spanish for “hummingbird.” The symbolism is powerful with hummingbirds being pollinators and essential for a healthy ecosystem. According to Manzo (Action Council), the goal with this cohort is to cultivate a thriving ecosystem for advancing racial equity in Monterey County. The COLIBRI model was developed by Rosa González, one of the main facilitators of the cohort, drawing from the vision of the cohort, the bird’s beak refers to “targeted universalism”, wings “collaborative teams that balance power”, heart “community-driven solutions, and tail “race explicit, intersectional analyses.” Manzo shared phase one of the COLIBRI work involved learnings and discussions around the goals and strategies to achieve targeted universalism for each cohort’s issue. Phase two of the COLIBRI work, which is the present phase, has focused on building resident power, specifically building the capacity

Figure 4: Spectrum of Community Engagement to Ownership from Rosa Gonzalez at Facilitating Power



and leadership of “community anchors” or community organizers to lead the different bodies of work identified in COLIBRI. Manzo said around 50 community resident leaders have been consistently engaging in the COLIBRI cohorts, resulting in over 500 community residents participating indirectly.

Lara (Monterey County Health Department) shared that one of the biggest benefits from COLIBRI’s trainings is that it provides a shared language that government officials and policymakers can use to “differentiate between institutional, systemic and individual racism.” This lens is crucial for viewing their work and enables them to discuss the consequences of past policies and practices and how they contributed to current inequities.

When asked about his participation in the COLIBRI housing group (see figure 5), Lara (Monterey County Health Department) said, “a lot of this work is step outside [systems folks’] comfort zone and start engaging residents. We talked about [housing] data, then we ground the data with real life experiences, and that’s where the residents began to step in and the systems folks really heard the stories of the challenges of housing here in Monterey County.”

At the time of our interview in May 2023, each COLIBRI cohort was developing a racial equity action plan, which cohort participants would be implementing in the upcoming years.

Figure 5: 10 COLIBRI Teams in Monterey County as of 2022

COLIBRI Teams	Government Lead	Community Anchor
Participatory Budgeting	City of Salinas	BHC Monterey County
Participatory Budgeting	City of Seaside	BHC Monterey County
Housing	Monterey County Health Department	Mujeres en Acccion
Black Power Building (formerly: Justice System Reform)	County of Monterey	Monterey County Black Caucus
Authentic Community Engagement in Education System	Salinas Union High School District	BHC Monterey County
Authentic Community Engagement in Education System	Monterey Peninsula Unified School District	BHC Monterey County
Alternative Education & Increasing Resident Engagement	Monterey County Office of Education - Alternative Education	BHC Monterey County
Early Childhood Care and Education	Monterey County Office of Education	BHS Monterey County
Racial Equity in Grantmaking	First 5 Monterey County	BHC Monterey County Padres Unidos & Bright Beginnings

5. Developed Equitable Budgetary Tools

In early 2022, Monterey County’s CAO started transferring its racial equity work from the County Administrative Office to the County Civil Rights Office, an existing office that “handles complaints of discrimination and retaliation, or unlawful harassment” at the county, according to Juan Rodriguez, Monterey County’s Civil Rights Officer. During the pandemic, the Civil Rights Office provided virtual trainings, adapted from GARE, for county employees on topics including biases,

microaggression, health effects from racism, and racialized health inequities. The Office created a monthly standing meeting open to every department, and more than half of the county departments participated each month. The office also created an employee resource group to “mobilize folks within their sphere of influence, to feel supported and know that they have at least peer support and colleagues support and that can be enough to start to push the inertia one way or the other,” said Natalie Alfaro Frazier at the Civil

Rights Office. Each county staff can use two hours of paid work time with supervisor approval to participate in the employee resource group. [xxxv]

The Civil Rights Office has developed a budget equity tool, adapted from existing tools from other states, with the goal of implementing equitable budgetary practices across county departments and building momentum for more participatory budgeting practices in the future. Recognizing that county departments are at different levels of readiness, the budget equity tool uses “a tiered model.” Tier one questions invite departments to self-assess funding gaps and limitations, recommended strategies, and existing policies and practices to advance equity through budget. Tier two questions assess additional detailed areas such as hiring practices and use of data including demographic data to advance equity in budget. Tier three looks at participatory processes and engage with community and residents to further the inside-outside model. [xxxvi] Natalie Alfaro Frazier (Monterey County Civil Rights Office) who has been spearheading this tool said *“departments can come to the Civil Rights Office to learn how to use the tool, though eventually the goal is for departments to have conversations with each other so they can share data and lessons and breakdown silos.”*

Rodriguez (Monterey County Civil Rights Office) said, *“there’s a lot to [the county’s budget process] that we still don’t understand because it is so complicated and there’s all these nuances.”* The office is hoping that the budget equity tool is a stepping stone to a future participatory budget process at the County. *“If we can start doing the budget equity tool internally, it’ll build those blocks so that when we start to talk about a participatory budget process, people aren’t afraid of change, like no way we can’t do that. Because as we know, this is slow work. So, we can commit to that marathon and let’s build momentum,”* said Rodriguez.

6. Declaring Racism a Public Health Crisis

In February 2022, Monterey County Board of Supervisors passed a resolution “declaring racism a public health crisis in Monterey County and pledging to promote equity, inclusion and diversity in housing, employment, economic development, health care, and public safety in Monterey County.” [xxxvii] The resolution acknowledged disparities between race/ethnicity groups in Monterey County such as in homeownership, educational achievement, and incarceration. In the resolution, the county also committed to continued participation in the Government Alliance on Race and Equity (GARE) and partnerships with Towards a Racially Equitable Monterey County, an initiative that supports and encourages a healing informed governing for racial equity practice across and within Monterey County by coordinating an ecosystem of institutions including philanthropy, government, and resident organizing.

Government equity leaders praised the resolution for helping promote conversation and encourage racial equity work. Vicente Lara at the Monterey County Health Department believes that the declaration helps to continue raising awareness and changing narrative around racism and racial equity work. Christina Santana, a Chronic Disease Prevention Coordinator at the Health Department, said that the resolution *“allowed for county staff to talk about how it impacts us especially BIPOC staff, as county employees to talk about collective trauma.”* Civil Rights Officer Juan Rodriguez shared that the declaration gave his office leverage to continue with racial equity work. The county had previously passed similar resolutions around equity, including a formal apology for racist comments from 1943 towards Japanese Americans being released from WW2 encampment. [xxxviii]

Looking Forward:

THE FUTURE OF MONTEREY COUNTY'S EFFORTS TO ADDRESS RACISM

Monterey County's racial equity work is commendable as it has actively involved an ecosystem of actors including philanthropy, city and county governments, national capacity building non-profit organizations, and local community advocates and resident leaders working in synergy to advance equity. This ecosystem adds resilience and alignment in Monterey County's efforts in addressing racism, through its investment in building the leadership and organizing power within community organizations and residents, especially youth leaders, that could continue to transform systems and hold governments accountable.

On the other hand, Monterey County government faces many challenges ahead, including:

1. **Securing Equity Leadership and Staffing Capacity for Racial Equity Work.** The county does not have any dedicated equity offices, nor does it have any full-time, dedicated racial equity or health equity leadership or staff positions. Civil Rights Office has taken on the county's racial equity work without any added staff capacity, while the Health in All Policies team at the Health Department still functions as the county's health equity leads. This approach could be unsustainable for the county in the long run. Natalie Alfaro Frazier (Monterey County Civil Rights Office) said: *"if we could, we would put 100% of our time into these [equity] ideas and projects, but most of us have to split our time with other duties and responsibilities."* Manzo (Action Council) also pointed out that *"if we really want to make a change, it has to be institutionalized. It can't just live with one person."*

The departure of Rosemary Soto at Monterey County Administrative Office, who for years held the equity and community engagement work from within the county, *"left a really big gap,"* said Manzo (Action Council). Manzo shared it is important to have equity champions inside of government, working in synergy with outside community advocate, *"not just for information sharing, but knowing critical moments of impact and decision making and trying to bring folks together."* Manzo said unfortunately the county currently lacks someone with a critical bird's eye view who actively seeks partnership from community organizers outside, and that the county easily reverts back to its old way of operating: *"it was really frustrating with the levee breach on Pajaro river [response]. [xxxix] It was like where did where did all of our learning go? Where did all the collaboration that we had started to build go?"*

2. **Institutionalizing Community Engagement Best Practices.** One key lesson in Monterey County is that trust and relationship building is not just a means to an end and that community power and self-determination should be at the center of decision making. However, challenges lie in government commitment to implement and institutionalize those best practices of co-governance with community, as shown in the Spectrum of Community Engagement to Ownership (figure 4). As Lara noted many government leaders aren't sure how to engage the community authentically. Maria Elena Manzo (Mujeres en Accion) emphasized, *"people with very good intentions come in and make decisions without thinking of consequences because they're not part of the community."* Natalie Alfaro Frazier (Monterey County Civil Rights Office) said, *"We have a set of folks that just have no interest in doing [community engagement] because it takes time and energy to involve the community and conversation."* Government

staff at all levels from the Board of Supervisors to departmental heads, to frontline workers, need to understand the why's and how's of co-creating racial equity solutions with impacted communities. Governments also need to continue to support and fund such community power building work.

3. **Adding Accountability and Funding to Racism as a Public Health Crisis Resolution.** Despite broadly affirming the county's commitment to the racial equity ecosystem approach, the county's resolution declaring racism as a public health crisis did not include any budgetary allocation for racial equity work, nor did it name a government entity that would implement the commitment. Further, it missed the opportunity of co-creating and co-implementing priorities with community organizers in the BHCMC collaborative who have been instrumental in transforming systems at the city and county level. *"It could have helped elected officials really tied the resolutions to the work,"* Manzo (Action Council) said, *"elected officials like the words racial equity, racial justice. They have a resolution that's very symbolic, but I don't know to what capacity they actually understand what racial equity looks like in practice".* Manzo spoke about the county's habits in continuing to make closed-door decisions in many instances, *"acting as experts without talking to the community, without engaging [community] as part of the process."*
4. **Rethinking Community Safety.** Finally, the county is yet to take on a transformative approach to address police violence and police accountability. After the 2014 racial equity training in response to the fatal shootings of four Latino men, the Salinas City Police Department (PD) brought in the federal Department of Justice's Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS), who then produced a report in 2016 [xlv] offering Salinas PD 116 recommendations for "better policing practices." These recommended practices were primarily reformist [xl] and gave traditional law enforcement more resources. Over the following years, Salinas PD's annual budget steadily increased. In the recent budget year in 2023, Salinas PD annual spending is at \$57,452,491, making up 43% of the city's total budget. [xlix]

In 2017, BHCMC partners organized a campaign against the placement of School Resource Officers (SROs) on Salinas Unified campuses. [xlvi] Community partners also organized against a third-party program called "Why'd You Stop Me (WYSM)," in which officers "educated" community members on how to behave while being stopped by police. [xlvii] There were continued violence perpetuated by police. [l] In 2019, Salinas PD filed 18 rifle shots at a 20-year-old Mexican girl, Brenda Rodriguez, who was homeless and suffering a mental health crisis. Monterey County prosecutors then declined to charge Salinas police in the fatal shooting of Brenda. [li]

For Monterey County and City governments, there is much need to rethink fundamental approaches to community health and safety and learn from evidence-based alternatives to policing in other jurisdictions [xli]. Just as importantly, the governments can leverage the infrastructure of community engagement built by the BHCMC collaborative and to actively involve its residents, especially BIPOC communities who are disproportionately harmed by traditional law enforcement, in the design of community safety solutions.

Monterey County has built a powerful foundation to advance racial equity by investing in community organizing and leadership and collaboration between multi-sectoral actors. As Lara (Monterey County Health Department) pointed out, *“Where we are today didn't just happen overnight. It took a lot of relationship building, investment and resources, investment in staff time. And just being willing to be open to a paradigm shift. Not just handing out information or a one-way kind of relationship, but really trying to establish more of a mutual relationship with residents and leaders and community based organizations.”* Government leaders in Monterey County should continue to center community self-determination and multi-sectoral relationships in their decision making to secure future gains in racial equity.

About

The California Pan-Ethnic Health Network (CPEHN) is 501(c)(3) non-profit organization in California dedicated to building power with communities of color through policy advocacy, research, network and leadership building, and storytelling.

Building Towards Antiracist Governments is a policy research project aiming to highlight how local governments can take meaningful steps to advance racial equity. “Monterey County: Building Community Power” is one of the three county stories CPEHN produced in 2023 to document best efforts and lessons learned in the journey of government and community working to address systemic racism and inequities in a local jurisdiction.

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- Public Health Alliance of Southern California
- Berkeley Media Studies Group
- Prevention Institute
- Race Forward and Government Alliance on Race & Equity (GARE)
- Praxis Project
- Network for Public Health Law
- Big Cities Health Coalition
- Human Impact Partners
- ChangeLab Solutions

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