



# Fresno

**People Power for Public Health (PPPH) is a community-based initiative led by the California Pan-Ethnic Health Network (CPEHN), a statewide health advocacy organization dedicated to improving the health of communities of color in California.** PPPH researches how local advocacy can be utilized as a critical strategy to build community power and public health, especially for and with communities of color. We highlight the experiences of communities of color in five counties – Sacramento, Fresno, Kern, Orange, and San Diego – in accessing quality care. Lastly, we uplift community solutions that must be funded and passed at the local and statewide level in order for communities of color to thrive and live in healthy communities.

In Fresno County, CPEHN partnered with the Central Valley Urban Institute, an organization based in the Central Valley with the goal of building economic and social mobility for low-income communities. Together, we co-led three total listening sessions from grassroots organizations and local agencies consisting of a total of twenty-one participants. Two of these sessions were focused on the Black and African American community and the third involved a group of multi-racial people. Sessions were conducted via Zoom through group discussions and breakout sessions with goals to identify and understand barriers to healthcare and community demands for public health.

**For each listening session, we asked participants questions with the following themes:**

- 1** What has been your experience in accessing healthcare in Fresno County?
- 2** What resources have been helpful in pursuing healthy living?
- 3** Where have you encountered challenges in this pursuit of healthy living?
- 4** What should Fresno County fund to create a healthier community?

## Key Conversation Themes

### Limited Access to Mental Health

**Participants in multiple sessions brought up difficulties accessing mental health services. They stated many people did not know what services are available and how to access those that are available. Community leaders discussed concerns about poor mental health funding and how they felt mental health access was a top concern for youth in their communities. Participants also commented on police response to mental health and how this response has been inadequate and inappropriate.**

“ Many people don't even know what resources are even available and where to find them, how to access them... I have had stories of folks that I know who have had to call in 5150s and things like this, but they don't really understand how to help their loved ones.”

“ Fresno has historically had a very bad police department that isn't very adept at dealing with those kinds of issues”

### Limited Access to Healthcare, especially Culturally Responsive Care

Participants in every listening session brought up difficulties with accessing medical providers, lack of diversity among those providers, and barriers to receiving adequate care including long wait times, complicated paperwork, and difficulty with transportation. Difficulty accessing primary and specialty care was mentioned multiple times with a reliance on emergency rooms for many. For those who do access care, there was mention of an intense police presence and dismissive behavior of providers.

“ I have not had a doctor that looks like me in probably 20 years. So for me as I'm getting older, that is of concern to me.”

“ Right now because of COVID-19, it's really insecure. You're getting approached by a security officer before you even get in no matter if you're bleeding out your head or whatever.”

“ Providers don't take the health concerns of Black and Brown patients seriously, and assume they don't have real health issues.”

### Affordable Housing

There were multiple discussions of lack of affordable housing and poor quality of the affordable housing that is available.

“ So many people in Fresno, in the Central Valley, are spending exorbitant amounts of money on their housing costs, way more than 30% of their income, so that they unfortunately need to forgo other expenses.”

“ They found a home that they can afford and it's riddled with mold, and they've been sick for the entire year.”

“ Folks who are experiencing housing insecurity in some sort of way, it's most likely in intersection with another crisis, whether that's food or health access.”

## Access to Healthy Foods

**Participants of multiple sessions discussed troubles accessing healthy foods in their communities. However, some discussed schools and recently added farmers markets as recent improvements.**

“ Having access to good healthy food [in school] is amazing... our district has taken full advantage of shifting the dollars to actually add a chef to create our student meals. The meals are a lot of locally sourced foods.”

“ Well, you know, in our urban and rural areas, we have nutrition deserts, easy to find unhealthy foods cheaper, the unhealthy high sugar, high salty foods, you know, sugar and salt addictions that are very easy and very common.”

## Need for More Green Spaces/Parks and Community Engagement

**Adults and youth in multiple sessions discussed wanting to see more green spaces and parks in their communities including community gardens. Youth participants also stressed community engagement events like sports and adult participants echoed these wishes. Participants expressed a desire to have more ability to engage in safe physical activity.**

“ We’ve started to do a lot of bike laning but that’s only for a very specific group of people... Community gardens - I’d love to see that reignited along with, of course, education on agriculture”

“ Fresno is one of the worst large cities in the country in terms of parks in relation to its population.”

## Transportation

**Lack of public transportation was discussed multiple times. One participant also brought up a lack of ADA compliant transportation which affects some of the most vulnerable people.**

“ We work alongside some folks who have a wheelchair and don’t have an ADA compliant vehicle, so they rely on public transportation if they’re going to see someone for mental health support... ADA compliant public transportation service just isn’t where it’s supposed to be to help folks get what they need. So a lot of the folks that I work with, they go without any type of mental health support, even though they know they need it.”

## Other Secondary Themes

### Community Engagement and Programs

Participants discussed community engagement in multiple ways including requests for community centers, youth programs, senior programs, community health education for new families, and violence prevention programs.

“ But we have a lot of seniors who have a lot of needs that are living in poverty and are doing without food ...and they don't know how to access things.”

## Policy Recommendations & Community Reinvestments

### High Quality, Affordable Housing

✓ Invest in affordable housing options in Fresno with dignity, safety, and quality in mind.

“ ...that's a major stressor on people with affordable housing and substandard housing.”

### Improved Public Transportation with ADA Compatibility

✓ Fund reliable, ADA compliant, easily accessible transportation taking into concerns about air pollution and ability to access appointments.

“ There's not really full access to public transportation in every part of the city... They really rely on their cars, which creates more pollution.”

“ [Transportation] seems to be the number one barrier and the primary challenge a lot of our residents are experiencing, actually about 80% of them.”

### Mental Health and Primary Care Investments

✓ Increase mental health appointments and resources in the community with education about available resources.

“ [We need to] not just treat the medical concerns of patients, but the mental health related needs of our patient population”

**Green Areas and Spaces for Communities to Congregate**

- ✓ **Invest in green spaces, parks, and safe areas for youth to play sports and congregate.**

“ And I’m encouraged by the thought that we could have more available green space with a priority given to communities that don’t already have green space available to them.”

**Community Education with Youth and Senior Programs**

- ✓ **Fund community centers, youth programs, senior programs, and education sessions for community members.**

“ I think we need to do a more health type of education, understanding of, you know, just regular, good health prevention education that years ago used to be in the schools and no longer is it.”

**Increased Funding for CBOs**

- ✓ **Increase funding for community based organizations. Community leaders discussed that CBOs are doing great work in the communities but need more funding.**

“ I appreciate seeing neighborhood level organizations who are doing work and making change... increasing their ability to have a larger impact and scalability... there are some great folks doing the work on the ground who need the funding and resources to take it to the next level.... Our number one issue for our community and our residents in the West Fresno neighborhood that we’re serving is access to fresh and healthy foods. So how do we begin to fund and provide.... opportunities to expand the work of those who are already doing that?”