

# ALIGNING IN ACTION: *LIVE WELL SAN DIEGO*

- Lead organization: *Live Well San Diego*
- Lead sector: Government (County of San Diego)
- Location: San Diego, California
- Year founded: 2010
- Interviews with Nick Macchione, director County of San Diego Health and Human Services Agency, and Carey Riccitelli, director of the County of San Diego Health and Human Services Agency, Office of Strategy and Innovation

Health is impacted by factors outside of the health care delivery system, including housing, education, poverty, employment, food availability, transportation, and safety. Recognizing that addressing these socioeconomic determinants of health is needed to meaningfully impact health inequities, a national policy shift is taking place.

Government agencies, payers, and providers are all adopting a social determinants perspective. To effectively address these nonclinical needs, partners must work across sectors. Now, the question is how — what are the best practices for effectively aligning systems?

[Aligning Systems for Health: Health Care + Public Health + Social Services](#), supported by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF) and managed by the Georgia Health Policy Center (GHPC), is focused on learning from stakeholders across the nation about effective ways to align these three sectors to better meet people's goals and needs.

Given variance in the local context, there is no single model or formula to align systems. However, *Aligning Systems for Health* seeks to understand commonalities that drive successful efforts to align sectors. This series examines how communities that describe their work as aligning systems are doing it around four core components of the [Cross-Sector Alignment Theory of Change](#) that RWJF and GHPC are testing: purpose, governance, data, and sustainable financing.

*Live Well San Diego* uses a collective impact model to achieve the countywide vision of building better health, living safely, and thriving.

## LOCAL CONTEXT

The County of San Diego Health and Human Services Agency epitomizes aligning across sectors within the government domain. The “super agency,” created in 1998, brought together health, public health, and social services, and added housing, too, six years ago.

San Diego County has more than 3.4 million residents and is geographically the size of Connecticut. It has six health service regions, including North County, which is the largest. Nick Macchione, now director of the County of San Diego Health and Human Services Agency, credits his time from 1998 to 2008 as the deputy director of the North County service region within San Diego County with preparing him for his current role. Through the North County Collaborative, the service region was able to engage more than 60 different partners around a vision of whole-person well-being before it was a popular notion, and laid the groundwork for what would become *Live Well San Diego*.

“That was really almost a training camp for me,” says Macchione. “For 10 years we formulated a common culture of treating the whole person, the whole family, and the whole community. We had lived experience with this in our policy, in

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our program, in our practice, which prepared me for when I was selected as the director for the entire agency. I could take our learnings from the North County and replicate it for the whole county.”

## PURPOSE

As an entity, the County of San Diego Health and Human Services Agency developed the framework for *Live Well San Diego* from 2008 to 2010, which intentionally extends beyond traditional health care, public health, and social services to include safety and economic well-being. *Live Well San Diego* is a comprehensive vision for a region that is building better health, living safely, and thriving. Today, almost 500 partners have formally signed on to enact this vision through a collective impact model, committing to support of a common agenda, agreeing to track progress using common metrics, and coordinating efforts to positively affect quality of life.



“*Live Well San Diego* doesn’t belong to a single person, it is our way of life,” explains Macchione. “From how we have integrated our county budget of \$7 billion annually, to our partners, to how we operate, to even how we responded to COVID-19 — we do it all using the *Live Well San Diego* framework.”

Partners include schools and education, business and media, cities and government, and community and faith-based organizations, with the latter category accounting for nearly two-thirds of all partners. Under the vision of building better health, living safely, and thriving are four strategic approaches that include building a better service delivery system, supporting positive choices, pursuing policy and environmental changes, and improving the culture within.

## DATA

*Live Well San Diego* is a data-driven effort. Data is used to measure collective impact, to drive decision-making in community enrichment plans (formerly called community health improvement plans), and to inform the public health accreditation process. The County of San Diego Health and Human Services Agency collects and shares data not only with committed partners but the entire community.

The *Live Well San Diego* vision includes 10 indicators that measure impact across five areas of influence, including health (life expectancy and quality of life), knowledge (education), standard of living (unemployment and income), community (security, physical environment, built environment), and social (vulnerable populations and community involvement).

Further, *Live Well San Diego* provides training and tools for partners and residents alike to use the trove of data.

“Our signature data summit events happen each year and really evolved out of this deep conversation that we were having with our partners and our communities,” explains Carey Riccitelli, director of the San Diego County Office of Strategy and Innovation. “They understand that they have access to so much data that it can be overwhelming, yet we are asking them to help make decisions and to prioritize based on data. So giving them a forum to be able to come together to not only learn what’s available but to really look at these indicators helps us move the needle.”

## FINANCING

Although *Live Well San Diego* was never a “grant-funded program,” aligning existing funding and leveraging grant opportunities has resulted in over \$800 million in grant funding and Medicaid waiver money. The County of San Diego Health and Human Services Agency now has a \$2.5 billion annual budget, up from \$1.2 billion when Macchione started as agency director in 2008.

“For us it was never about treating funding like a grant, it was about making cultural change,” says Macchione. “We decided that if this framework is guiding the work that we do, then this is what we do. Initially, *Live Well San Diego* repurposed a couple of the agency’s staff working on health promotion, but we couldn’t departmentalize *Live Well* to a unit, it had to be the entire organization. *Live Well* is the entire county, our whole budget. You can’t cut out a movement when it is the whole essence of your organization.”

Macchione says he has seen other organizations that were too grant-centric and failed to transcend the vision beyond a subset of the organization. A line item can be cut, but strategically, an integrated vision is supported by the entire budget.

## GOVERNANCE

The County of San Diego Health and Human Services Agency serves as the backbone organization and provides *Live Well San Diego* the support team that maintains the website, manages partner engagement, and hosts signature events.

*Live Well San Diego* community leadership teams are located in each of the six service delivery regions. They vary in size from 40 to 100 members and include representatives from schools, businesses, community-based organizations, hospitals, providers, and residents. Some community leadership teams established smaller steering committees and workgroups.

Each region is co-chaired by a county executive and *Live Well San Diego* county-level leader, but the local playbook relies on priorities set by residents and local organizations using the *Live Well San Diego* framework. These priorities are captured in community enrichment plans that define local priorities based on data and community will. Priorities may differ region to region, but the process is managed similarly.

"Our community partners brought to our attention they didn't want to call them community health improvement plans anymore because they now span health, safety, and thriving goals," says Riccitelli. "We bring in training and data and presentations for them multiple times a year to help inform decision-making and set their priorities."

Since the early stages of *Live Well San Diego*, the County of San Diego Health and Human Services Agency and its partners have hosted the multiweek Resident Leadership Academy training program. Sessions focus on topics such as community leadership, crime prevention and safety, land use, active transportation, and healthy food systems. Residents learn skills and best practices to address the issues that most affect their communities. Upon graduation, attendees have the knowledge, tools, and access to a support network to help them lead community improvement projects.

"The voice of the resident has been the secret sauce of what we've been able to do," says Riccitelli. "Residents, community members, and neighborhood leaders come to our academies and learn about what it means to be an advocate for their community and how to effect change in a way that's actually going to be sustainable."

## INSIGHTS FROM THE COLLABORATIVE

"You have higher degrees of trust because it's not 'I own it and I'm inviting you,' says Macchione. "Rather, it's we are building it together and we need each other's strengths to do that, and let me be honest, visionary leadership is seeing what everyone is seeing and doing what no one else is doing at the cost of mockery by the present for the betterment of the future."

The vision has been and remains the driving force of *Live Well San Diego*, fortified by the human capital of the relationships that followed.

"We walked down Mockery Lane in the beginning of this in a big way," Macchione recalls. "People were like, 'Who appointed you?' 'This sounds like apple pie.' And then there was the conspiracy that we were promoting the Obama agenda. But we saw the vision and we stuck with it."

Even in a region with a strong history of collaboration, building engagement and getting buy-in for the vision is key.

"People started joining and we made sure they knew they weren't followers; they were leaders in their own right — leaders coming together for public good," Macchione says. "We moved away from the fidelity of the profession — the health care profession, the public health profession, the social service profession, and the housing or public safety profession — to fidelity of the cause. When you align the fidelity to the cause and you have an inclusive vision, you get a higher degree of sincere engagement."

A strong call to action also helped, leading to a bona fide social movement.

"We had a very tangible call to action — 3-4-50 — three behaviors cause four chronic diseases that lead to over 50% of all death worldwide," says Riccitelli. "When we calculated those numbers in San Diego County, it was over 62% at the time — 62% of all deaths in this county were preventable because they were due to behaviors that could be changed and chronic diseases that could be prevented. This resonated not just with our typical partners, like clinics and hospitals, but it resonated with the business community and with schools and others and got them to the table."

## INSIGHTS FOR ALIGNING

- *Live Well San Diego* serves as an exemplar in how it makes data and measures available to community partners and residents alike, better preparing them for contributing to decision-making.
- *Live Well San Diego* is built to last by designating its entire budget in support of the vision.
- *Live Well San Diego* empowers community voices by providing tools, training, and data to help residents be knowledgeable and engaged decision-makers in the governing process.
- The collaborative has built trust over time by cocreating the vision and the work side by side with community partners.

### ALIGNING IN ACTION DURING COVID-19

Having solid footing for the *Live Well San Diego* movement enabled the region to respond quickly and in a coordinated fashion to the COVID-19 pandemic.

"The best antidote for a pandemic is population health, but it's not time to plan for population health when you have a pandemic that shows up at your door," says Macchione. "We were able to activate our entire *Live Well* movement in how we responded to COVID-19."

San Diego was one of the first jurisdictions in the country to declare a local emergency, on Feb. 14, and immediately was able to convene the sectors to hear what the response needed to look like from their perspective.

"It became very clear to us that there were so many more sectors that needed to be included, but because we already had the framework, it was very easy to pivot and broaden our reach," says Riccitelli. "We went from four to nine formal sectors and 12 subsectors. For example, education is a very broad sector and the guidance and the recommendations that come out for childcare centers are vastly different from what are needed for universities. We were able to quickly begin to tailor our messages and the guidance and the recommendations by getting feedback from them about how it's going and what their pain points are. It was about being able to have this two-way communication."

Engagement with the sectors has remained high since the first week of March.

"We really have created this space for all of the county; whether it's an organization or a hospital or a church or an individual resident, they feel like they know where to go to get information," says Riccitelli. "They know that things are changing all the time. They know that there's a whole lot that we don't know, but what we do know, we get out to them immediately. And it was because we had that framework already in place through *Live Well San Diego* that we could act on it immediately."

## ALIGNING SYSTEMS FOR HEALTH

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