



STRATEGIC PLAN
2025-2030

VISION 2030

MISSION

With dignity and respect, MEND's mission is to meet the immediate needs of individuals and families and increase their access to opportunities that strengthen their capacity to thrive.

VISION

All individuals and families served by MEND flourish for generations to come.

MEND - Meet Each Need with Dignity

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INTRODUCTION

For 54 years, MEND has served the most vulnerable families, individuals, and seniors, with dignity and respect. Over the decades, MEND has grown from an agency operating out of a Valley garage to become a trusted community anchor, responding to the needs of thousands of vulnerable community members with crisis services and long-term intensive case management supports. Our services have remained sensitive and responsive to the changing needs of the community even as the agency has operated with fiscal constraints.

Those who access direct services at MEND tend to be predominantly low-income, people of color, and homeless or at-risk of being homeless, who reside in the San Fernando Valley. From its founding, MEND has created and sustained a welcoming environment that embraces all races, cultures, and people. We approach our work as a partner with the people we serve, employing non-discriminatory practices at all times. We listen to our community and invite their feedback in surveys, focus groups and questionnaires.

The strategic plan reflects these values and engagement with the community.

MEND PROGRAMS & SERVICES

For more than half a century, MEND has been a lifeline for the most vulnerable families, individuals, and seniors, offering services rooted in dignity and respect. What began in a humble Valley garage has grown into a cornerstone of the San Fernando Valley community, supporting thousands with crisis services and long-term intensive case management. Despite operating within tight financial constraints, MEND has remained nimble and responsive to the evolving needs of those we serve.

The people who come through our doors are often low-income, predominantly people of color, and many are homeless or on the brink of it. From the very beginning, MEND has embraced all people, fostering an inclusive, welcoming environment where everyone feels seen and valued. We take pride in partnering with our community—listening to their voices through surveys, focus groups, and questionnaires—to ensure our services reflect their needs and aspirations.

This strategic plan is a testament to these values, solidifying our deep commitment to community engagement and empowerment.

Our services reflect our mission in two crucial ways: addressing immediate needs and empowering people for long-term stability, whether that be through better health, wellness, or job security.

COMMUNITY NOURISHMENT PROGRAMS

These include a Food Bank, Food Pantry, Buen Provecho Farmer's Market, and Little Health Market, that offer weekly, choice-driven access to fresh produce and culturally relevant pantry staples. These programs ensure that our community has the nourishment it needs to be food-secure..



HERE WE THRIVE RESOURCE CENTER

This hub of support offers a range of services tailored to the varying needs of our community, from emergency essentials to individualized coaching:

Hope and Care Services: These support services, offer resources, referrals, and system navigation for mental health services as well as supportive services, such as diapers, wipes, household items, utility assistance, personal care goods, housing support, and other necessities for families with children ages 0-5. *Hope & Care* also supports people who are homeless with hygiene products, clean clothing, and curated food bags, along with referrals to additional services.

Connections Resource Coordination: This service assists participants with navigating external social services such as utility assistance, public benefits, legal services, childcare resources, and more—ensuring access to support that might otherwise feel out of reach.

Pathways to Wellness: Focused on addressing chronic diet-related illnesses like obesity, diabetes, and hypertension, Pathways helps participants make sustainable changes for better wellness.. Starting with access to nutritious food, it offers group activities such as a walking group, health workshops, cooking demonstrations, as well as one-on-one health coaching. For older adults (55+), the *Living Wise & Well* program offers tailored wellness services, gentle physical activities, expert speakers, and specially curated food bags. And finally, *Enhanced Care Management* provides a whole-person approach that addresses both the health and social needs of Medi-Cal members, thus promoting overall well-being.

Gateways Employment Services: Designed for job seekers facing significant barriers, Gateways offers two avenues to success: Self-directed activities—using our computer hub for job searches, resumes, applications, and skill assessments. And one-on-one coaching with an employment specialist to develop a success plan to secure and retain employment. Regular job fairs connect participants with employers, and workshops build soft skills that are crucial for workplace success.

By continuing to adapt to the needs of our community, MEND remains a beacon of hope and opportunity for all who walk through our doors.

KEY ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Since 2017, MEND has undergone a significant transformation, redefining our role in the fight against poverty. We have shifted our focus from merely alleviating the symptoms of poverty to fostering resilience and "life security" for the people we serve. Simultaneously, we've strengthened our own organizational resilience, ensuring that MEND remains stable, strategically growing to meet the evolving needs of our community.

As we close out our 2021-2024 strategic plan, we proudly reflect on key accomplishments that lay a solid foundation for the next five years:

- **Diversifying Our Funding:** For the first time in our 50+ year history, MEND successfully applied for and received government funding. By 2023, this portion of our funding made up 40% of cash revenue, complemented by contributions from foundations, corporations, and individuals (43%) and other sources like program income, rent, and event income (17%). Additionally, in 2023 MEND received \$1.5 million from combined foundation and government investments, targeted to making critical capital improvements and expanding program capacity. Finally, we underwent our first single audit, a significant milestone as government-related expenditures exceeded \$750,000.
- **Building Financial Health:** MEND's independent auditors, the Harrington Group, praised our diverse revenue streams as a strong indicator of the organization's financial health—a contrast to many nonprofits that heavily rely on a single source of funding. We also made significant strides in growing financial reserves, including the establishment of an endowment. By the end of 2023, our reserves had grown from \$1.8 million (2020) to \$2.4 million.

New Program Partnerships: In 2023, we became a subcontractor with the Partners in Care Foundation, enabling us to offer Enhanced Care Management Services to Medi-Cal members, delivering holistic, whole-person care. This partnership marks a new chapter in our service capacity, broadening the ways we can impact on the lives of those we serve.

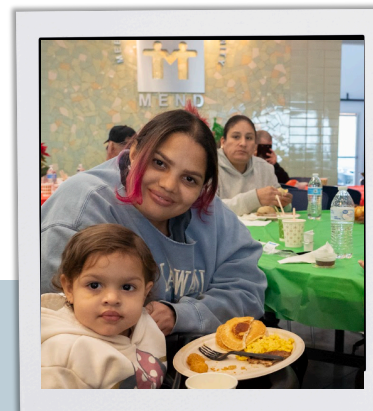
- **Government Grants and Opportunities:** Much of our government funding has come through pass-through grants, but in late 2022, we took a major step forward by successfully submitting Statements of Qualifications to the LA County Departments of Mental Health and Public Health. These submissions led to Master Agreements, opening the door for direct funding opportunities, such as the new \$952,000 grant with the Department of Mental Health for the United Mental Health Promoters initiative awarded in August 2024.

Capital Investments: In 2022 and 2023, we secured \$1.5 million in capital funding to address deferred maintenance, replace aging equipment, and expand our program infrastructure—ensuring that MEND remains equipped to meet the growing needs of our community.

COVID-19 Recovery Services: Originally planned as a 3-month CARES Act grant, our subcontract with the Westside Infant Family Network was extended through early 2024. This extension allowed us to continue offering crucial COVID-19 recovery services, addressing both the physical and mental health impacts of the pandemic on our community.

High Client Satisfaction: MEND's commitment to excellence shines through in the feedback from our participants. In 2024, an overwhelming 93.4% of clients rated MEND's services as "Very Good" or "Excellent," with the remaining 6.6% marking them as "Good."

These milestones demonstrate our dedication not only to meeting immediate needs but to building a stronger, more resilient community where all can thrive. We look forward to the next chapter in our journey, with these accomplishments as our foundation.



STRATEGIC ANALYSIS - Our work began with a SWOT Analysis with input from the Board of Directors and staff at all levels of the organization.

SWOT ANALYSIS

STRENGTHS

- Leadership Team & Board competent/committed, financial wisdom
- Staff committed & collaborative; promote from within
- Consistent, engaged, committed volunteers
- Services are consistent, strong, relevant, holistic, mobilize resources efficiently; strong adherence to strategic plan
- MEND provides participants with warmth, security, respect
- Ethical; strong financial stewardship/sound fiscal management – build trust with funders & donors
- Increased income diversity
- Solidified fundraising team
- Positive reputation, well established image/brand, long history of service
- Strong performance to meet grant outcomes has led to increased government funding and invitations to apply
- Achieved addition to DMH Master List for MHSA funding
- Culture of innovation.

WEAKNESSES

- Staff attrition – weak “bench”/inadequate talent pool; staff lacks professional experience and expertise
- Staff inexperience creates barriers to scale services
- Need to strengthen collaboration with partners, specifically homeless services; not fully leveraging partners services
- Awareness of changes at MEND in the larger community – people still asking about services sunsetted 4- 6 years ago; staff need to become ambassadors
- Limitations of physical plant/infrastructure, insufficient parking, aging technology
- Achievement of robust outcomes is limited or not captured in data systems
- Key processes are unclear or not followed
- Attracting & keeping quality Board members, Board members cycling off; succession pipeline for CEO
- Untapped legacy and major donors
- Many funding opportunities have been short-term, contributing to turnover & operational inefficiencies.

SWOT ANALYSIS

OPPORTUNITIES

- Develop and implement legacy giving campaigns
- Continued donor stewardship & diversification of revenue streams
- Expand donor pool to high wealth areas; grow long-term government support
- Medi-Cal expansion to undocumented
- Identifying mutually beneficial partnerships to fill service needs/gaps and amplify impact; expand partnerships with local businesses/CNP partners
- Invest in expansion to broader territory (Antelope Valley and/or LA)
- Grow ECM program for broader impact, territory expansion & revenue generation
- Leverage digital technologies/AI; employ innovative digital outreach tools
- Increase grass roots messaging to explain changes at MEND to community
- Merger of Kroger & Albertsons.

THREATS

- Uncertainties/possible volatility, e.g., CA budget cuts, election year, regulatory changes that impact funding or operational practices; reductions in public benefits/ COVID funding
- Public safety/health, risk of violence/ shootings, political tensions, another pandemic
- Changes in funders' priorities, stagnant funding, potential economic downturn could reduce giving, competition for funding; replacing funding on completed grants
- Growing needs among community members; need for services beyond our capacity
- Lack of awareness of and reluctance to accept operational/ programmatic changes at MEND can erode trust
- Rapid changes in technology; high cost to update/adopt new tech
- Wage competitiveness; shifts in generational workplace expectations; recruitment challenges; cost of training
- Catastrophic events
- Unknowns related to AI
- Funding uncertainties caused by corporate mergers of existing donors e.g. Kroger & Albertsons.

The SWOT analysis sparked fresh ideas on how MEND can expand its impact with transformative services across the region. Our last strategic plan, inspired by the phases of nonprofit growth from the monograph *Funding Performance: How Great Donors Invest in Grantee Success*, highlighted that we were entering a "stabilization" phase—after a period of realignment while navigating the pandemic. With this plan, we're cautiously excited about moving into a "Reimagining" phase, where we will explore innovative ways to deliver services to make a lasting difference.

1. **Crisis** phase is characterized by cost-cutting, renegotiation, and even fire sales of properties. Cash-flow planning is the most important financial tool.

2. **Survival** phase means the imminent danger of closing has passed, and leaders have the breathing room to develop six-months-and-beyond scenarios using conservative financial projections.

3. **Stabilization** phase lets organizations restructure to focus more on core mission or programs, pursue alternative management models, or become part of a more stable entity.

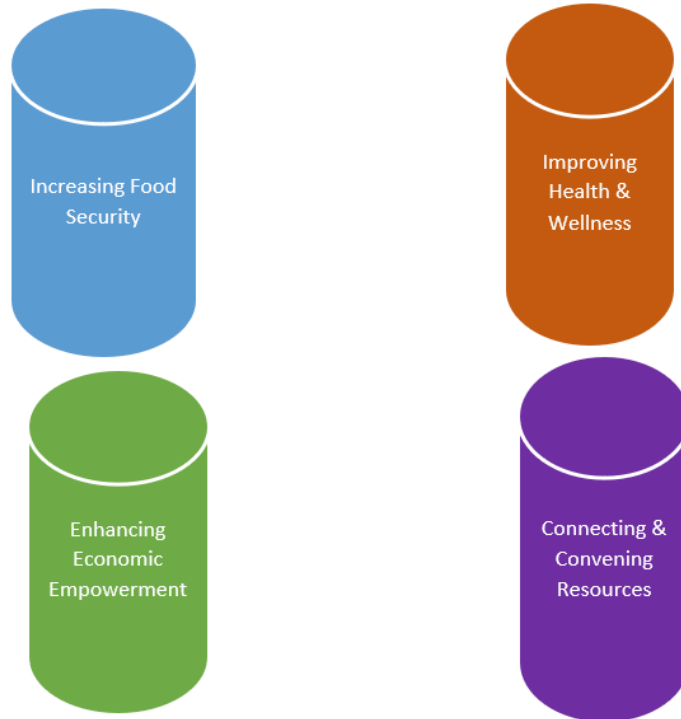
4. **Reimagining** phase provides an opportunity to rethink how mission and programs get done. *

[1] https://leapambassadors.org/funding-performance-monograph/?utm_medium=email&utm_source=sharpspring&sslid=MzMxNTQwMzc2NDA0AAA&sseid=MzlyMLM0NTGxtAAA&jobid=a3f479a5-8d4f-457b-8858-534830f23ec3



Strategic Framework

Over the last several years, MEND has solidified four primary pillars for service delivery and collaboration: Food Security, Health & Wellness, Economic Empowerment, and Connecting & Convening Resources. As in physical structures, MEND pillars provide grounding and support to our work and overall business strategy. These are the reasons MEND exists.



Since its founding, MEND has been a lifeline for the most vulnerable, increasing food security and providing vital nourishment to those in need. As our 2019 Dignity Awards Humanitarian Honoree, Lavonna Blair Lewis, so aptly put it: "Food is not discretionary." For us, it's about more than simply providing food – it's about offering choice-driven access to fresh, healthy options and creating a place where everyone feels supported and accepted, no matter their circumstances.

Closely linked to providing access to good food, we are committed to improving health and wellness by reducing the chronic diet-related illnesses that plague low-income communities (such as diabetes, hypertension, and obesity) through group and individual services that emphasize a healthy lifestyle.

The past two strategic plans expanded our focus to not only meet immediate needs but to empower individuals to thrive. Through economic empowerment initiatives, we help people bridge financial gaps—whether by accessing public benefits, utility assistance, or support services—or by opening doors to jobs, better jobs, and careers that offer stability.

With over 50 years of service, MEND stands as a trusted connector and convener of resources. Our reputation as a cornerstone in the community allows us to work alongside partner agencies, donors, and funders to make a deeper impact. And as advocates, we leverage our voice with elected officials, championing public policy initiatives and budget priorities that uplift the communities we serve.

Environmental Scan

According to a 2023 research brief from USC Dornsife Public Exchange[1], food insecurity in Los Angeles for the estimated one million low-income households in the County has reached a stunning 44 percent. In 2020, food insecurity spiked to 42 percent, dropping to pre-pandemic levels in 2021, then rising again in 2022 and 2023. Certainly, the increasing cost of grocery items has contributed to this as well as loss of pandemic era increases in CalFresh benefits which sunsetted in March of 2023. Still, 59 percent of eligible food insecure households are not receiving any CalFresh benefits.

Tufts University's Nutrition Policy Initiative[2] poor diets are harming our health and our economy. "Poor diets are the leading cause of death, with Americans with lower incomes, living in rural communities, and from historically marginalized racial and ethnic groups most affected." A majority (85 percent) of spending for healthcare is for managing chronic diet-related conditions.

While unemployment levels as reported by the Department of Labor's Bureau of Labor Statistics remain low, the overall picture for employment is complicated. According to SHRM[1], employers are facing a shortage of talent and skills gaps among candidates. Offering competitive pay and remote or hybrid work options are attractive to candidates. While artificial intelligence (AI) has the potential to assist job seekers with streamlining their job search and refining resumes[2] it may also contribute to widening the digital divide for those with limited access to technology[3]. In the U.S. 80 percent of jobs are solely posted online[4].

In 2023, the Surgeon General published a report[5] declaring social connectedness and loneliness as urgent public health concerns, highlighting an alarming trend. A 2022 study showed that only 39% of U.S. adults feel strongly connected to others, and almost half of Americans (49%) reported having three or fewer close friends—a significant drop from 1990 when only 27% felt similarly isolated. This growing social disconnection has been linked to rising rates of health issues like diabetes and obesity.

[1] <https://www.shrm.org/topics-tools/news/talent-acquisition/talent-scarcity-skills-gaps-challenge-recruiting>

[2] <https://www.rampedcareers.com/blog/the-evolution-of-job-search-from-newspapers-to-ai>

[3] <https://www.govtech.com/network/ai-is-going-to-cause-the-next-digital-divide>

[4] <https://www.cfr.org/blog/dont-let-ai-become-newest-digital-divide>

[5] <https://www.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/surgeon-general-social-connection-advisory.pdf>

In January of 2024, extremely low-income undocumented immigrants of all ages are now eligible to apply for full-scope Medi-Cal health insurance , making available for the first time the possibility to access preventive and primary care. What is unknown is the strain this will cause on the health system already experiencing a primary care shortage. According to Let's Get Healthy California , in Los Angeles County 61 percent of the population already face limited access to care.

These critical indicators underscore the importance of MEND's mission to expand services that build connections, support health & wellness, and address these pressing needs through new and existing initiatives outlined below.

Who We Are

At MEND, we are welcoming, collaborative, resourceful, and caring, always putting participants at the heart of what we do while staying fiscally responsible. Over the next five years, we're committed to being bolder, more entrepreneurial, and creative – evolving as principled industry leaders who deliver high-quality, inclusive, and culturally relevant services to those who need us most.



At the completion of this strategic plan, we envision MEND poised and ready for its next five-year cycle beginning in 2030. Building on the deep trust we've earned in the San Fernando Valley; we'll expand our impact by offering a combination of direct services and partnering with the region's most impactful community and faith-based organizations. Together, we'll create a seamless network of support that strengthens the safety net for historically marginalized communities.

This strategic focus will allow MEND to extend its reach, elevate its brand, and—most importantly—secure its financial foundation, ensuring we remain a steadfast source of support and hope for all who need us.

Strategic Initiatives, Priorities, and Objectives.

While MEND will continue providing its existing services, our new initiatives outlined below will be rolled out with the following guiding steps:

2025 (Year One) – Preparation: We'll start with a feasibility analysis, assess community needs, gather participant feedback, and clarify funding and resources needed.

2026 (Year Two) – Implementation: Using our findings, we'll begin putting our plans into action and address any new needs that have emerged.

2027 – 2029 (Years Three to Five) – Refinement: We'll focus on continuous learning and improvement to keep raising the quality of our services.

[1] <https://calmatters.org/health/2023/12/undocumented-health-insurance-new-california-laws-2024/>

[1] <https://letsgethealthy.ca.gov/goals/redesigning-the-health-system/increasing-access-to-healthcare-providers/#:~:text=Californiapercent20facespercent20apercent20statewidepercent20shortfall,inpercent202030percent20topercent20meetpercent20demand>

New Initiatives

Since the COVID-19 pandemic, challenging social and economic conditions have brought people from 54% more communities across the region to MEND in Pacoima for support with complex life situations. This increased demand led us to reconsider our service model and explore ways to reduce travel burdens while promoting greater equity and inclusion. By embracing a place-based approach, MEND aims to bring opportunity closer to where people live, maximizing our impact.

Staff brainstorming sessions led to three exciting new initiatives to expand access and extend MEND's reach:

- MEND as a Resource Hub – Building on our 2021-2024 strategic goals, we're expanding partnerships and making MEND a central resource where community members can receive onsite services for a wide range of needs.
- MEND Annex Sites – We plan to open satellite service locations in additional high-need, resource-poor areas. Based on early assessments, the Antelope Valley and parts of the West San Fernando Valley are top considerations, pending further community needs assessment.
- MEND Mobile – This exciting opportunity will bring MEND's services directly to the people. Since food distribution is the most requested service – with participants from 202 zip codes in 2023 (up from 131 in 2022) – we'll focus on mobile food delivery first, adding wellness activities, diaper distribution, and other services as data shows demand. Partner locations will help us expand our reach even further.

These initiatives are currently in the planning phase and will undergo thorough evaluation to ensure they meet the community's needs and are feasible to implement.

Strategic Priorities

In our previous strategic plan, MEND established the following four key priorities that will continue to serve as the foundation for this strategic plan over the next five years. Each year, our staff and leadership will create detailed work plans, indicators, and measures to ensure we can adapt swiftly to our community's changing needs.

Strategic Priorities, continued.



[1] <https://www.placebasedimpact.nationswell.com/#section-2>

PRIORITY 1:

Financial Integrity: Generating sufficient resources to support agency objectives and outcomes, and by doing so, engendering the trust of our funders and donors.

Objectives:

1. Maintain and grow government support for existing programs and new initiatives.
2. Maximize fee for service revenues.
3. Complete full cost analysis for new programs or services before launching.
4. Generate sufficient revenues to ensure staff are compensated fairly.
5. Increase annual giving from individuals, corporations, and foundations.
6. Engage donors to foster more legacy giving and major gifts.
7. Continue to explore opportunities for earned income through a social enterprise.

What Success Looks Like:

- Strong financial health now and into the future.
- Preserve and increase stability through a diverse stream of revenue sources.
- Audited financial statements that inspire donor and funder confidence.
- Maintaining 4-star rating with Charity Navigator.

PRIORITY 2:

Program Excellence: Provide high-quality, person-centered programs & services delivered with integrity leading to meaningful & impactful outcomes for our community.

Objectives:

1. Update our 2020 community needs assessment to identify service and equity gaps and develop a strategy to address them.
2. Complete a feasibility study to ensure any new program is financially viable and likely to produce intended outcomes.
3. Maximize both mission impact and financial viability for all existing programs.
4. Engage in continuous quality improvement.
5. Influence policy decisions that address the social and economic conditions that contribute to poverty.

What Success Looks Like:

- Data-driven program decisions.
- New initiatives are developed thoughtfully and sustainably.
- High-impact results and secure funding for current programs.
- Positive impact at both individual and community levels.

PRIORITY 3:

Robust Collaborations: Building a network with other top-quality community providers to strengthen our foundation.

Objectives:

1. Increase referral and linkage partners to help more people.
2. Leverage services and expertise of other high-performing safety net organizations that can equitably address the complex needs of people served onsite at MEND.
3. Build a coalition of nonprofits that offer reciprocal benefits and collective community-level impact.

What Success Looks Like:

- MEND uses its history & stature to build a vibrant hub of providers that work collaboratively to transform lives throughout the San Fernando Valley and beyond
- By leveraging each other's resources, talents and capability, the safety net is strengthened
- Demonstrated success in improving lives through shared data .

PRIORITY 4:

Organizational Vitality: Fostering a thriving team and infrastructure by investing in staff, volunteers, the Board of Directors, and MEND's physical and technological resources.

Objectives:

1. Amplify MEND's brand as a great place to work and/or volunteer.
2. Conduct annual salary surveys to ensure pay rates are competitive.
3. Support staff retention by investing in training that enables them to be successful in achieving program objectives and outcomes.
4. Attract, develop, and retain a skilled, diverse and engaged Board of Directors.

What Success Looks Like:

- The Board represents the community served and fulfills its governance and fiduciary responsibilities
- The Board contributes to MEND's success through strategic support of leadership and fundraising
- High staff retention with excellent service delivery.
- Up-to-date facilities and equipment, with no deferred maintenance.

Monitoring the Plan - The executive team – CEO, COO, CFO, and CDO – will review the plan monthly, assessing any areas that may fall behind and identifying necessary adjustments. Quarterly reports will keep the Board updated on progress and changes.



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MEND's Board of Directors, Program Participants, Staff, and Executive Team: Janet Marinaccio, President & CEO; Jenny Gutierrez, COO; Scott Mikels, (former CFO); Chanya Blumenkrantz, CDO

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