

2025

# Napa County's Pathways to Prevention

Mandated Reporting to Community Supporting



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# Executive Summary

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Napa County is at the forefront of a critical shift in child welfare—moving from a system centered on mandated reporting to one that prioritizes community support and prevention. The Child Abuse Prevention Council of Napa County (CAPC) leads this effort, working with a strong network of local organizations to protect and uplift children and families.

Child maltreatment remains a significant concern, with general neglect being the most common allegation—often linked to economic hardship rather than intentional harm. The financial burden of child abuse in Napa County exceeded \$42.8 million in 2023, a cost that will persist unless prevention efforts are strengthened. Research shows that preventing child abuse is 100 times more cost-effective than treating its aftermath. Addressing root causes—poverty, housing instability, food insecurity, and lack of childcare—can drastically reduce unnecessary family separations and system involvement.

Systemic barriers continue to disproportionately impact immigrant, LGBTQ+ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer), and BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, People of Color) families. Recent legislative changes, including AB 2085 and SB 1085, aim to prevent family separations based solely on poverty, ensuring economic hardship is not misclassified as neglect. Napa County's Health & Human Services Child Welfare Services Division (HHSCWS), in partnership with CAPC, is actively integrating these reforms into mandated reporter training and community outreach.

In 2024, reports of suspected child maltreatment increased by 5%, yet only a small fraction met the legal definition of abuse. The decline in substantiations and out-of-home placements highlights the success of Napa County's efforts to keep children safely with their families whenever possible. Key strategies include early intervention, trauma-informed practices and expanded family support services.

## Executive Summary cont.

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To sustain this progress, CAPC recommends:

**1. Policy and Funding Advocacy** – Expanding investments in family resource centers, school-based wellness programs, and community supports.

**2. Strengthening Partnerships** – Enhancing collaboration between local government, schools, and businesses to address poverty and family stability.

**3. Expanding Community Engagement** – Encouraging residents to participate in CAPC meetings, agency visits, and Mandated Reporter Training to increase awareness and support.

By investing in prevention and shifting toward a #SupportBeforeReport approach, Napa County can create a future where all children grow up in safe, stable, and nurturing environments. CAPC remains committed to leading this transformation, ensuring every family has the resources they need to thrive.

# **Napa County's Pathways to Prevention**

Napa County benefits from a robust collaborative of organizations that work collectively to address child maltreatment in the community under the umbrella of the Child Abuse Prevention Council of Napa County (CAPC). Our CAPC remains steadfast in its mission to protect and support children and families, even as systemic challenges and policy shifts threaten the well-being of our most vulnerable communities. In the current national climate, immigrant and LGBTQ+ families face heightened risks due to federal policies that undermine their stability and security. At the same time, longstanding racial disparities in the child welfare system continue to disproportionately impact Black, Indigenous, and other families of color, perpetuating cycles of surveillance and separation rather than support and healing.



**The cumulative financial impact to Napa County for the survivors of maltreatment in 2023 was over \$42,800,000 [i]**

For comparison, the money saved by preventing all abuse in Napa County could:

- Send 2,260 kids to preschool
- Pay for 292 kids to receive a 4-year college education
- Purchase 46.6 median priced homes in Napa County
- Cover 6% of the budget for Napa County
- Build 1.29 miles of new interstate highways

Over the last four years, our CAPC members have been working with regional and state partners to shift the child welfare paradigm from mandated reporting to community supporting—a transformation that prioritizes prevention, family strengthening, and economic justice over unnecessary system involvement. This shift aligns with recent legislative reforms, including AB 2085 (Holden) and SB 1085 (Kamlager), which recognize that poverty alone should never be a reason to remove a child from their home. By clarifying the legal definitions of neglect and reinforcing that economic hardship does not equate to parental failure, these laws represent a critical step toward reducing the overreporting of families—particularly Black and Native American families—who are struggling financially but are not placing their children at risk of harm.



# The Economic and Social Conditions Affecting Napa County Families

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Decades of research show that family poverty is a significant driver of harm to children. Children living in poverty are three times more likely to experience abuse and seven times more likely to experience neglect than children in higher-income households [ii]. Economic hardship places immense stress on families, making it more difficult to provide safe, stable, and nurturing environments for children.

**In Napa County, too many families are struggling to meet their basic needs, increasing the risks of family instability and child welfare involvement.**



## Continued

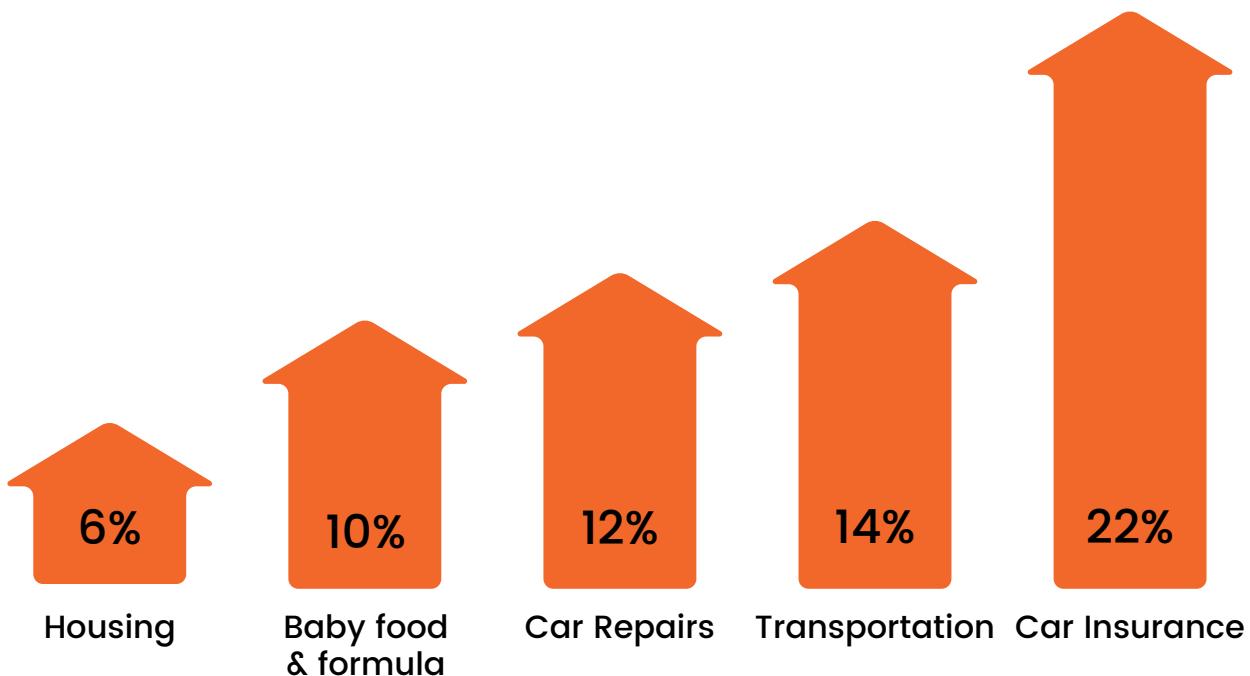
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- Nearly 40% of families lack the income needed to cover fundamental necessities like housing, childcare, and food.
- Over 78% of children in Napa County do not have access to a licensed childcare space, forcing families to make difficult choices between work and safe care for their children.
- 9% of children live below the poverty line, with many more living just above it but still facing severe financial hardship [iii].
- 20% of children live in single-parent households, often with limited financial and social support.
- 22% of households experience housing problems, including overcrowding, unaffordable rent, and inadequate kitchen or plumbing facilities.
- 18% of households are severely burdened by housing costs, making it difficult to afford other essentials.
- 19% of children live in food-insecure households, lacking consistent access to nutritious meals.
- 69% of middle and high school trans students have experienced harassment at school by the time they reach the 9th grade, compared to 37% of non-trans students; and over half of lesbian, gay or bi-sexual students have experienced harassment (67%) compared to straight students (31%). An alarming 47% of NVUSD 7th grade trans students have considered suicide in the last 12 months, nearly three times as many as non-trans students (16%). Lesbian, gay or bi-sexual 9th graders consider suicide at nearly five-times the rate of straight students (38% vs. 8%). In addition, two-thirds (64%) of lesbian, gay and bi-sexual 7th graders in NVUSD report feeling chronic sadness / hopelessness compared to 27% of straight students [x].

## Continued

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The rising cost of living has intensified these struggles. Napa County's economy is fueled by agriculture and hospitality, two industries that often come with low wages and poor working conditions. Income disparities are striking across the community: only 60.8% of Latine residents earn a living wage, compared to 83.9% of their White peers [iv]. Over the past 12 years, inflation has increased 36%, far outpacing wage growth [v]. While the overall inflation rate in March 2024 was 3.5%, core necessities saw even sharper increases: hopelessness compared to 27% of straight students [x].



Meanwhile, wages increased by an average of just 0.6%, leaving many families further behind and deepening financial insecurity.

# **Beyond Economic Hardship: The Broader Risks to Napa's Children**

In addition to poverty and related stressors such as food insecurity and housing instability, families in Napa County face other significant risks linked to child abuse and neglect, including:

**Household trauma** such as domestic violence, mental health struggles, and substance use.

**Natural disasters** like earthquakes and wildfires, which have repeatedly displaced families and disrupted economic stability.

**Racism and discrimination**, particularly for BIPOC families, who continue to be disproportionately surveilled and reported by the child welfare system.

**Threats to LGBTQ+, BIPOC, and immigrant children** due to harmful policies and rhetoric that increase family stress, limit access to services, and create unsafe environments for children.

The current administration's renewed attacks on immigrant rights, LGBTQ+ protections, and racial equity policies further threaten the safety and stability of many children in Napa County. Anti-immigrant policies increase the fear of deportation and deter families from accessing essential resources. LGBTQ+ youth face heightened risks of discrimination, bullying, and family rejection, while BIPOC families continue to experience systemic disparities in child welfare interventions.

# Impact on Adverse Childhood and Community Experiences (ACEs) on Children

Adverse Childhood and Community Experiences (ACEs)—such as abuse, poverty, and natural disasters—trigger toxic stress that harms individuals and weakens community resilience. Prolonged toxic stress disrupts brain development, affects organ systems, and increases the risk of lifelong challenges, including unstable relationships, financial struggles, and mental health issues. These effects can be compounded by systemic racism and economic hardship, impacting future generations [ix].





More than one in four people have experienced at least one ACE, and one in eight have faced four or more. In Napa County, 16% of residents report four or more ACEs, which significantly increases health risks:

### **Physical Health [vii]:**

- 10% higher risk of obesity
- 7% higher risk of cardiovascular disease
- 17% higher likelihood of smoking

### **Mental Health [viii]:**

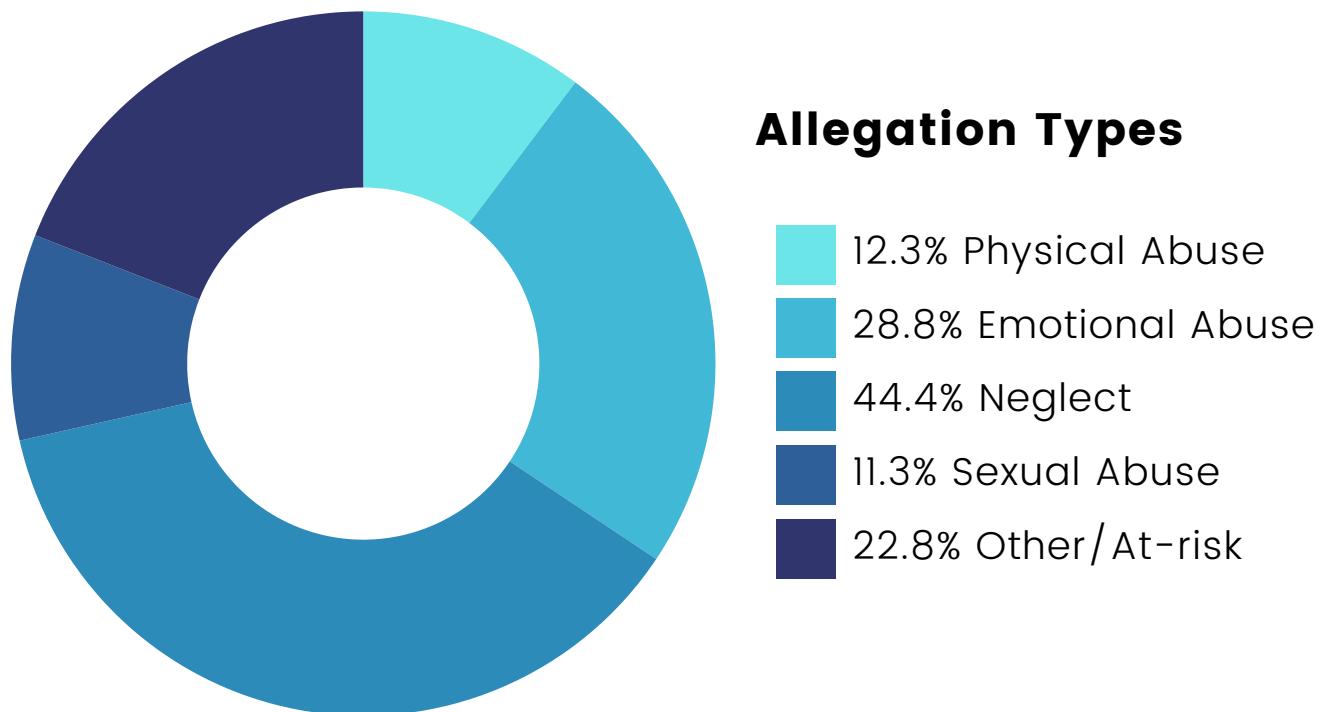
- 18x higher risk of suicide attempts
- 5x higher likelihood of substance abuse and addiction

Access to healthcare, mental health services, and economic stability plays a crucial role in mitigating these impacts. Napa County's most recent Community Health Assessment and Community Health Improvement Plan highlights the need to address these physical and mental health issues through specific strategies led by CAPC members.

# Child and Family Well-Being in Napa County

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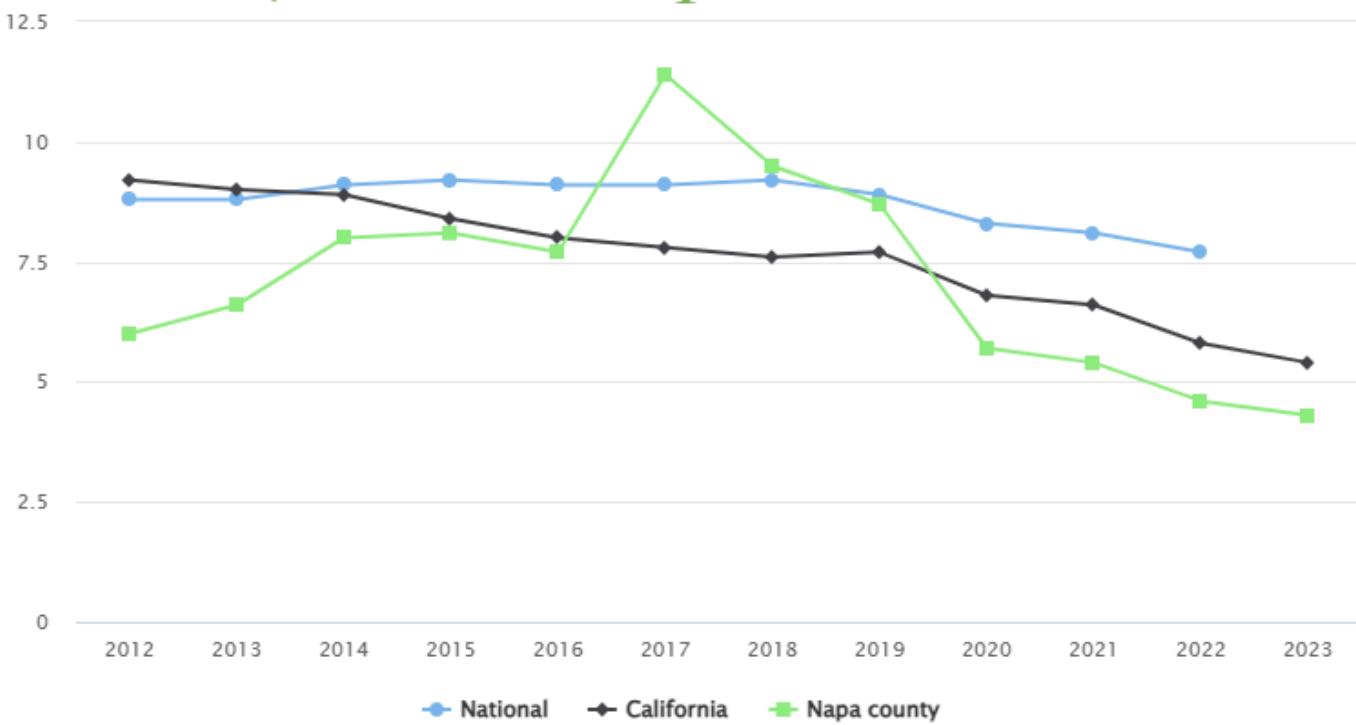
In 2024, HHSA's Child Welfare Services received 1,699 reports of suspected child maltreatment, a 5% increase from 1,613 in 2023. Despite this rise in reports, only 64 cases met the legal definition of maltreatment—a 70% decrease from the previous year.



While local allegations remain higher than the state average, several positive trends highlight progress:

- Substantiation rates have steadily declined over the past eight years.
- The rate of children in care has been lower than the state's since at least 2013.
- Entries into care have been decreasing since 2019.

## Substantiated Survivors in: Napa County, California, and Nationally



\* Abuse and neglect rates per 1000 Children. In some cases, information was not available for a given year.

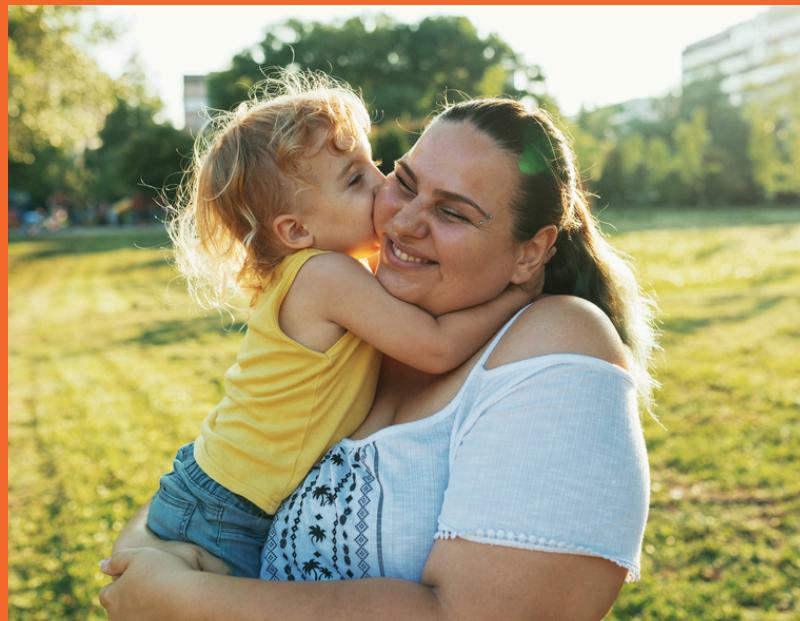
These improvements reflect key adjustments made by our Child Welfare Services team, including:

1. Greater adherence to the research-based Structured Decision-Making Tool, ensuring consistency at every stage of abuse/neglect reporting.
2. Case openings based on family characteristics linked to a higher risk of future maltreatment.
3. Fewer child removals due to preventative family stabilization efforts, such as intensive case management, trauma-informed interventions, and expanded non-court family maintenance services.

Our Child Welfare Department prioritizes system entry as a last resort. CWS staff have successfully kept more children with relatives in Napa County, allowing them to remain in familiar schools with trusted adults and friends, minimizing the disruption and trauma of removal. General neglect continues to be the most reported concern, while reports of emotional abuse related to domestic violence are on the rise.

# Mapping the Course to a Community Supporting Model

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// CHILD ABUSE PREVENTION COUNCIL OF NAPA COUNTY  
NAPA COUNTY'S PATHWAYS TO PREVENTION

For the last three years, led by Napa County's Child Welfare Department and the Interagency Leadership team (which includes multiple CAPC members), has been developing and refining our Comprehensive Prevention Plan to map a course from 'mandated reporting to community supporting.'

The current child welfare system is primarily reactive, responding after crises occur rather than addressing root causes. Nearly 50% of maltreatment allegations in California over the past 12 years involved **general neglect**, which is often tied to poverty, lack of childcare, housing instability, and unmet health needs. Alarmingly, over 80% of these cases were **unsubstantiated**, meaning many families endured a traumatic investigation without meaningful support, disproportionately affecting marginalized communities. In 2024, Napa County reports involved 44% of general neglect, of which 82% were unsubstantiated.

HHSACWS and CAPC members are making good progress toward this shift toward a **community-based support model** that prioritizes family stability and child well being. This approach strengthens social connections and **key social determinants of health**—such as access to childcare, education, healthcare, and economic stability—by offering **voluntary, trauma-informed, and culturally relevant services** through trusted community partners.

By centering families, this model:

- Strengthens protective factors to prevent child welfare involvement
- Provides early intervention to identify and mitigate risk
- Builds community-driven alternatives to child protective services engagement
- Ensures concrete supports—food, housing, healthcare—are available before crises arise

Key partners in our local plan include Cope Family Center, Children's Resource Center, On the Move, ParentsCAN, UpValley Family Centers, Health and Human Services agencies, Napa County Office of Education, Napa County Probation, and other community organizations. Unlike traditional child welfare interventions, this model ensures that seeking help is voluntary, non-punitive, and free from CPS tracking—empowering families to access the support they need without fear. Funding for this work comes from a diverse array of sources, including the Families First Prevention Service Act (FFPSA).

## **Recent Bills Aim to Distinguish Poverty from Reportable Neglect**

A good deal of advocacy by child welfare and family support representatives has resulted in two pieces of legislation to update our Mandated Reporting System. Chapter 770 (AB 2085) clarifies that economic hardship alone does not constitute neglect, defining "general neglect" as a substantial risk of serious harm or illness to a child. Chapter 832 (SB 1085) reinforces that financial difficulty cannot justify juvenile court jurisdiction unless willful or negligent actions create such a risk. These laws aim to reduce unsubstantiated neglect allegations that disproportionately impact Black and Native American children (AB 2085) and prevent family separations based on poverty (SB 1085).

With this new legislation comes modifications to our local mandated reporting training and community education efforts to ensure that mandated reporters are aware of these new definitions and procedures. Napa County Child Welfare and CAPC are working together to make these updates and conduct training across the county.

# **The Child Abuse Prevention Council of Napa County's 2025 Policy and Programmatic Recommendations**

**Our community must continue to prioritize policies and programs that address the root causes of family instability, ensuring that all children—regardless of race, immigration status, gender identity, or socioeconomic background—can grow up in safe, healthy, and supportive environments.**

**CAPC remains committed to shifting from mandated reporting to community supporting, advocating for family-first solutions that prevent unnecessary system involvement and keep children safely with their families. To support this shift in Napa County, the following recommendations are submitted for the Board of Supervisors consideration:**

## **1. Advocate for the legislative, legal, policy and practice reforms.**

To make this shift, there needs to be policies and practices in place that provide the community with resources to offer the services and supports that are needed, with a sufficient level of assurances that concerns about the child's health and well-being will be addressed. Examples of reforms include centering and fully funding family resource centers, health centers and school-based wellness centers to create community access to supports that address poverty, use of group decision making models and use of Peer Partners and Advocates.

**2. Encourage collaboration between colleagues at cities, school districts and the businesses to leverage resources** (funding, technical expertise, improved access to services) to create a “community supporting” approach. Options include investing in basic supports like guaranteed income programs, providing trauma informed connections between families and service providers and investing in shared technology to improve coordination between agencies with an accurate inventory of services.

**3. Get involved in supporting Napa County’s children and families by attending a CAPC meeting, visiting a member agency, or participating in Mandated Reporter Training.**

With as little as an hour of your time, you can gain valuable insight into the vital work being done locally and learn how to contribute to a strong network of organizations dedicated to child well-being.

## CONCLUSION

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At the Child Abuse Prevention Council of Napa County, we recognize that everyone plays an important role in the fight to prevent child abuse and neglect and create a family well-being continuum. We also understand the importance of providing concrete support to address neglect. We want to pave the way to changing how neglect is determined; we want to **#SupportBeforeReport**.

As we move forward, CAPC remains dedicated to building a community-based safety net that supports families before crises occur, rather than relying on punitive systems that have too often exacerbated harm. Through advocacy, education, and strategic partnerships, we will continue working to dismantle inequities and create a future where all children in Napa County can thrive—safe, supported, and surrounded by a network of care.



# Acknowledgements & Sources

This Report Prepared By The Child Abuse Prevention Council of Napa County (CAPC)



## THANK YOU TO OUR FUNDERS

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# Acknowledgements & Sources

**We thank you for your continued support in protecting children and strengthening families.**



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