

# Commission for Behavioral Health Parent/Caregiver Advocacy Spotlight

March 26, 2026

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# United Parents



- Mission: Provide resources to empower, strengthen and support parents and other caregivers who have youth and/or children with mental health, behavioral, and/or emotional disorders
  - More than 50% of Board & Staff are parents and caregivers with lived experience
- Programs & Services – Ventura County
  - Family Access & Support Team (FAST) Program
  - Respite Program
  - Educational Advocacy
  - Parent Drop-In Centers
  - Support Groups
- Programs & Services – Statewide
  - Parents & Caregivers for Wellness
  - Virtual Rural Support Groups



# Parents & Caregivers for Wellness

- Parents and Caregivers for Wellness (PC4W) is a collaborative project, lead by United Parents, was launched in 2017 to strengthen the voice of parents and caregivers and improve services and supports for families.
- Project partners consist of parent and caregiver-run organizations from across California. These partners (LLEs) align with the population we serve and focus on the underserved and rural communities.
  - African American Health Coalition (Southern Region)
  - California Alliance of Caregivers (Central Region)
  - California Mental Health Advocates for Children and Youth
  - Plumas Rural Services (Superior Region)
  - Side By Side (Bay Area Region)
  - The Whole Child (LA Region)



# Defining “Parents and Caregivers”

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- Adoptive parent
- Biological parent
- Foster parents/resource parent
- Kinship
- Family friend
- Court appointed special advocate
- Guardian
- Legal representative



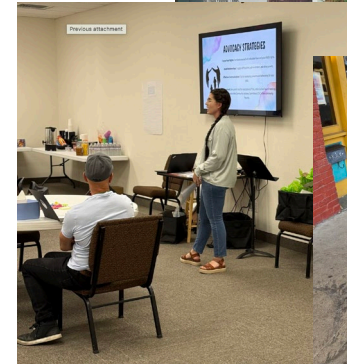
# Regional Events

- Five per year, one county in each Mental Health Region
- Focus on Rural/Frontier Counties and Un/underserved Populations
- Full day training/education based on needs expressed by parents/caregivers of that County
- Post Event Advocacy Meeting with Local Decision Makers



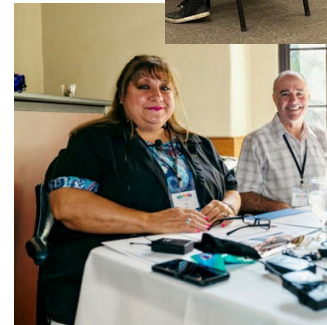
# Frontier/Rural Communities

- Addressing Barriers
  - Critical services far away
    - Connecting LLE (Plumas Rural Services etc.) with local families and decision makers
    - Creating support systems at events as an extension of support
  - Lack of privacy
    - Fear of neighbors and others knowing too much
  - Families take matters into their own hands
  - 2026 Advocacy Day will be focused on Rural Communities
  - Online Rural Support Groups



# Serving Diverse Communities & Needs

- United Parents and the Parents & Caregivers for Wellness (PC4W) collaborative are rooted in the belief that families are best supported when services reflect the communities they come from.
  - Survey
    - Collected data on nearly 10,000 Parents & Caregivers
- Services
  - Services in English & Spanish- other languages/support as needed
- LLEs- diverse as the populations they serve:
  - African American Health Coalition (Southern Region)
  - California Alliance of Caregivers (Central Region)
  - California Mental Health Advocates for Children & Youth
  - Plumas Rural Services (Superior Region)
  - Side by Side (Bay Area Region)
  - The Whole Child (Los Angeles Region)



# Annual Advocacy Day at the Capitol

- United Parents' policy positions are based on the core belief that the emotional and behavioral healthcare needs of children in California must be effectively addressed.
  - Parents/Caregivers have the opportunity to advocate for children's behavioral and mental health rights with state representatives in Sacramento.
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- 100 Parents & Caregivers from all over the state are invited.
  - Meet with Local District Representatives
  - Advocate for Children's Behavioral and Mental Health
  - Network with Like-Minded Parents and Caregivers
  - Connect and Share Stories



# Annual Advocacy Day at the Capitol

- Bills we have advocated for
  - SB 14 (Portantino) & SB 224 (Portantino) - 1st Annual (2021)
    - SB 14-Expanded the list of valid reasons for an excused school absence to include a student's mental or behavioral health
    - SB 224- Mandating mental health education in middle and high school health courses
  - AB 552 (Quirk-Silva) - 2nd Annual (2022)
    - Established the Integrated School-Based Behavioral Health Partnership Program, allowing collaboration between county behavioral health agencies and local educational agencies.
  - SB 509 (Portantino) - 3rd Annual (2023)
    - Requires K-12 school staff to receive behavioral health training to better support students.
  - AB 2173 (Addis) & AB 2711 (Ramos) - 4th Annual (2024)
    - Allows the term "emotional disability" to be used as an alternative to "emotional disturbance" in state SPED law
    - Revised school discipline policies for students who use controlled substances, alcohol, or tobacco products
  - SB 531 (Rubio) - 5th Annual (2025)
    - Expanding mandatory mental health education to all students in grades 1 through 12



# Connecting Local with State Work

- Provide feedback to the Counties/State
- Advocacy Meetings w/ County Leaders
- Infographic Sharing Back: We bring what we learn across the state directly to county decision makers.
- County & State Advocacy: Participate in meetings with leaders to ensure caregiver voices shape policy and planning.
- Post-Event De-briefs: Collect parent/caregiver input after each regional event and translate it into concrete recommendations.
- Statewide Survey Data: Use our Parent/Caregiver Voice Infographic to show counties the trends we're hearing from nearly 10,000 families across California.



*“Advocacy for children’s mental health is an important pillar in shaping the outcomes of future generations.”*

*“This was my first time and I feel like I took so many notes and plan on looking more things up and learning more even past today and keep advocating for mental health services for our children. Prevention measures are what will stick with me, just like advocating for early intervention services for kids with disabilities, I will now be an advocate for prevention services for mental health.”*

*“Investing in preventive behavioral health care needs is never wasted. Collectively, we can do more than we could alone- and every story matters.”*

*“This advocacy day is so empowering and positive. We are all leaving with more confidence and purpose. Thank you all.”*

*"PC4W always treats its participants with so much care and respect. I always leave events feeling inspired and empowered"*

# Personal Story

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- Jolene Freschi, Parent



# Recommendations for Commission

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- Commissioner from the population of focus becomes a liaison between CBH and the stakeholder group.
- Sustain & expand peer-driven supports and respite care (critical for placement stability and caregiver wellness) for Caregivers
- Tailor Approaches to Reach Both Rural and Frontier Families.
- Strengthen Community-Based Organizations as Key Partners.
- Ensure Sustained Funding for Family Supports in BHSA Reform.

# Contact Us

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- Visit our website
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- Email or Call us
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  - <https://www.facebook.com/ParentsAndCaregiversForWellness/>
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**THANK  
YOU**