

THE POST-PANDEMIC PROGRESS REPORT

Breathe Healthy



**BREATHE
CALIFORNIA**
of the Bay Area, Golden Gate, and Central Coast



**BREATHE
CALIFORNIA**



Working Wonders in Challenging Conditions

Continuing to provide our communities with life-saving services through the COVID-19 pandemic, our education, advocacy, and support efforts have helped thousands of area families. Join us as we look back at the outstanding successes we have enjoyed between 2020 and 2023. Breathe California is still here, even stronger than before.

Also Inside:

AN UPCOMING CHANGE IN LEADERSHIP
ATTEND OUR STATE OF THE AGENCY RECEPTION

A Change in Leadership



Margo Sidener, MS, CHES

On July 1st, I will step down from my position as CEO and begin working part-time as the Deputy Executive Director, supporting our new CEO, Tanya Payyappilly. Later, sometime next year, I will return to my original position with the agency— volunteer! Forty years of work in air quality and lung health have sped by as fast as my children's growing up, with bittersweet memories of how fast it all went, and gratitude for the many blessings that I have received. I am thankful for the great staff, board, and volunteers along my career journey, who implemented all those projects that I dreamed up and provided a stimulating and fun workplace. I was NEVER bored in 40 years! I am thankful for family who shared my time with Breathe California, ensuring my success, and who pitched in to work themselves so often. I am thankful for my nonprofit and health education colleagues and mentors who set me on the right path and supported our agency. I am sooo thankful for someone talented, competent and caring to succeed me! Most of all, I am thankful for meaningful work that allowed me to make a difference—to see tobacco use plummet from 27% adults/24% youth to 7% adults/1% youth (until the vaping epidemic dove it to 13%); to put into service the first full-size electric school bus; to see asthma better and better controlled; and so much more.

Margo Sidener



Tanya Payyappilly, MD, MPH

Growing up in Mumbai, I saw TB, polio, and other serious diseases. As a child, I suffered from malaria and typhoid for a whole year, even though they are preventable and treatable. Pollution caused a variety of serious respiratory problems, including asthma in both my parents. These circumstances drove my decision to become a doctor. I wanted to find ways to help people prevent and treat these diseases. This also led me to intern with Breathe California, where I was amazed at how the agency's resources and health education helped people in underserved communities—kids with asthma, seniors with COPD, and their families—live better. We reached people from all walks of life. This amazed me and I thought, "What if there were a grassroots agency working for me back when I was kid?" This opened my eyes to being a public health advocate so that I could raise awareness of issues and work to improve the quality of air we now breathe and reduce the risk of infections. With climate change on the horizon and wildfires increasing, we need to address these issues now more than ever. I am greatly honored to lead Breathe California's team. Our mission is critically important. This is absolutely why I chose to work with the agency. I am incredibly excited and looking forward to using my expertise to extend this 112-year-old organization's reach to all Bay Area families.

Tanya

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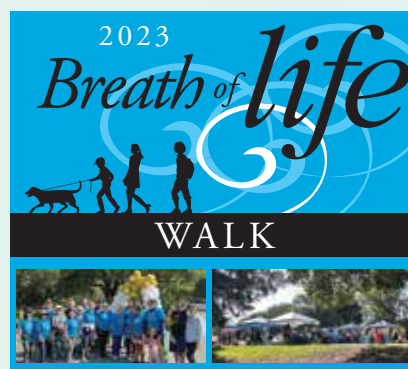
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Upcoming Annual Events

We hope that you'll join us at Breathe California's fall events: Meet new people, learn about clean air and lung health, win prizes, and have lots and lots of fun!



San Jose Ride-and Drive
Saturday, August 26 - 10AM-2PM
Lake Cunningham Park, San José
This is a great chance to get behind the wheel of an electric car, experience the latest technology, win prizes, and more: Lots of electric vehicles, food trucks, music, games, and raffle giveaways!
RSVP at lungsrus.org/ride-and-drive.



21st Annual Breath of Life Walk
Saturday, September 23 - 9:30AM-12PM
Hellyer County Park, San José
Come with you friends, family, and pets to show your support and raise funds to support our work in Bay Area communities. Warm up with Zumba, enjoy raffle and incentive prizes, and learn about our lung health programs.
Learn more at www.breathoflifewalk.org.

The Paradox of Asthma in Pandemic Times and How We Faced It

The last few years have been scary times for parents of kids with asthma. COVID-19 was expected to hit children especially hard, as asthmatics of all ages react negatively to viruses. Most viral infections, even the common cold, may “trigger” exacerbations of asthma. Although we acted immediately to educate parents about the importance of good asthma management and adherence to all CDC COVID recommendations, we were also anxious.

Good News: Our fears did not materialize in children and adults with good asthma control. In fact, across the globe there were FEWER asthma visits to emergency rooms and physicians during the pandemic, while the death rate for those with uncontrolled asthma increased. Although the exact reason is unknown, it seems that a combination of behavioral changes—social distancing, wearing masks, washing and sanitizing hands, and the lockdown itself—and improved air quality definitely contributed.

Ironically, at lockdown Breathe California had just received its largest asthma grant ever, to do home asthma education and home environmental assessments, as part of a statewide Asthma Management Project along with 19 other funded agencies. Funded by the Sierra Health Foundation with funds from the California Department (cont.)

of Health Services, we were at first stymied; how could we deliver those services safely for either patients or personnel? But it was amazing to see the quick pivot we made to doing everything virtually! Zoom programs were written, staff were trained to navigate the technology, many items were shipped by snail mail again, including the free air filters and other remediation supplies, and we set up contactless “porch deliveries.”

As we end the three-year grant, we have served 272 families with asthma with three to five visits each, offered remediation from green cleaning supplies and vacuum cleaners to fixing leaks, installing ventilation fans, purchasing a refrigerator, and correcting a hoarding situation, and distributed 143 air filters, 103 of them under another grant from the Bay Area Air Quality Management District. Plus, we have educated 841 parents, 1,157 children, and 37 school nurses and medical personnel through other grants from El Camino Health, Peninsula Health Care District,

Central California Alliance for Health, and the Moca Foundation. The patients assisted were 95% low income, 84% on Medical, and 71% Latinx and people of color.



Breathe California staff teaches a young girl with asthma how to use a peak flow meter to measure her current lung capacity.

Community Health

Members of the Breathe California team are out in the community every week delivering services at schools, senior centers, community centers, and other places that our neighbors gather. While our ability to do tabling and interact with individuals at these locations was greatly curtailed by the pandemic, we are almost back to normal in engaging community. Staff ingenuity was at its peak during the lockdown and devised many ways to serve: Direct mailings to medical professionals and senior centers to pass on to patients and members;

Direct mailings of health education materials to individuals; A system of drop-boxes and needs assessment cards that were then filled by mail or phone assistance; Distribution of educational materials in wellness kits at nutrition site drive-throughs; Virtual health fairs; and a new Wellness Wednesday webinar series in conjunction with a pharmacy. Over the ensuing two years, more places have reopened, and this year we reached 86,433 people at health fairs again.



Kaiser Permanente's Wheezeless Walkers have participated in Breathe California's annual Breath of Life Walk for many years.



Health fair attendees visit Breathe California's display table, take informational brochures and handouts.

COPD: Reaching At-Risk Populations in Risky Times

Those with COPD in California have greatly reduced quality of life: 43.9% self-described their health status as only fair/poor, compared to 17.3% of those without COPD, and 55.2% said that their health condition limited their activities, compared to 20.4% without COPD. In recent surveys, 56.2% said that shortness of breath affected their quality of life and that 16.1% had been to the ER or hospitalized for their COPD in the last 12 months.

Three years of another grant to address COPD from the *Learn More, Breathe Better* program of the National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute have also brought exceptional results. To educate current and potential victims of this third leading killer in the US, Breathe California focused on poor populations with high rates of asthma and smoking, those with growing health disparities, and communities vulnerable due to language barriers. Through culturally-tailored efforts, working with established community partners, such as senior centers and ethnic-focused community-based organizations, and providing resources that were translated from English into other languages, we were able to reach 18,928 people with direct services in these diverse communities and 703,901 through media campaigns, and we translated brochures into Vietnamese, Chinese, Urdu, and Tagalog.

Despite the pandemic, we were able to conduct two-hour World COPD events each year. 277 attendees heard from noted experts who gave the latest updates on medication, research findings, and practical tips for managing the disease, saw

demonstrations, and participated in breathing exercises and fun COPD games. Two were virtual, but last fall's was a "hybrid" event with a healthy lunch, health screenings, and educational displays.

We trained 49 community workers and promotores to deliver a COPD educational program, and on their own they reached 582 of their Spanish-speaking neighbors in disadvantaged rural areas. We also conducted 78 presentations in multiple languages at senior centers and libraries for 1,012 attendees; ran breathing exercise sessions for 1,110 people; and produced and ran 4 30-minute TV shows that reached 300,000 people.

Through the training of 92 interns and volunteers, and development of web resource pages and posting videos of many of the activities, we will sustain this work into the future.



Board Member Dr. Sullochina Lulla gives a public health presentation on COPD and COVID-19.

TB and Equipment Provision

Our TB program suffered a set-back when most ESL and adult education classes were closed in the pandemic, but we were able to offer some virtual classes through libraries and other on-line partners. And now, things are almost back to normal. This year we completed 24 of our regular 30 presentations, along with 48 tabling events. Our equipment provision program, which mostly provides CPAPs and accessories for Sleep Safe clients, was able to continue throughout

the pandemic. We set up an elaborate protocol to rotate where donated items were stored and how they were disinfected and dealt with clients virtually, through the mail, and with curbside exchanges. The last three years we have distributed 868 pieces of equipment to those in need. We also participated in a humanitarian shipment of 34 machines to India, where they could be used for creating ventilators if necessary.

Clean Air and Climate Change

Transitioning to Electric Vehicles and Electrification of Buildings

As the host and coordinating agency for the Silicon Valley Clean Cities Coalition, Breathe California has recently provided trainings on: the new Renewable Diesel that cuts emissions 70% with no engine retrofits; using telematics to save fleets time and money; and three special trainings for first responders (mostly firefighters) that prepare them for working with advanced vehicles and fuels including hydrogen. We have conducted listening sessions (focus groups) to document the real-world experiences of: police who use electric vehicles or need to; owners of hydrogen powered vehicles; electric school bus drivers; regular school bus fleets that want to cut idling; fleets that use natural gas (renewable, liquified, compressed); electric shuttle operators from the VTA that service the San Jose Mineta International Airport; and independent trucking company operators that service the Port of Oakland. The Coalition also provided coaching and technical assistance to 39 fleets to assist them with solutions for vehicle and charging infrastructure needs.

Finally, Breathe California/SVCCC sponsored three San Jose EV Ride and Drive events (one virtual) and will host their fourth one this coming August. The Ride and Drive events allowed participants to drive or ride along in an electric vehicle from practical to sporty and provided a “vehicle fair” with booths on how to get rebates, how to get charging or solar, and other considerations. Food, music, family fun like face painting and lawn games, and door prizes rounded out the days.



Ride and Drive exhibitor demonstrates electric vehicle's features.

Environmental Justice (EEJ) & Disadvantaged Community (DAC) Engagement

The Bay Area Air Quality Management District has also been funding a project in downtown and East San Jose for three years in which we train local “emerging community leaders” in a community action model project to have them identify community air quality issues, work with their communities to find solutions, educate, serve as spokespeople with public agencies and get solutions passes/implemented. The first two years of the project were impacted by the pandemic but still resulted in actions including work on the Charcot highway extension that would have taken part of a school yard in North San Jose to put in a highway ramp (took two years to stop), the Great Oaks Back-Up Generator Facility in South San Jose, which went forward despite protests, and a proposed hotel in downtown that was stopped.

Additional work: 1) recruited/trained 16 emerging community leaders from local communities (9 trainings); 2) collected 186 opinion surveys, had 20 in focus group; 56 wildfire surveys; 3) Participated in 33 public hearings and testified at 3; 4) Sent 14 letters to the editor, planning commission, city council. Last year we worked with Burbank, a mostly Spanish-speaking unincorporated County area on the West edge of downtown San Jose with the following results: collected 202 community surveys; assisted 67 families to apply for utility fee reductions; led a focus group of 15 residents; ran a 20-block area door knocking campaign; hosted a community meeting for 40 about local air quality and climate change impacts. In November, the National Clean Cities program presented us with special recognition award for the work we have done in EEJ/DAC communities.

**Breathe
California:**



Empowers
communities



Educates
about lung
disease



Provides
support
services



Advocates
for clean air and
public health



Supports
lung health
research

Tobacco-Free Communities

Helping Students Stay Smoke-Free

Most colleges in California, and the entire UC system, are 100% smoke-free. But many community colleges still have designated areas where students may smoke and vape. Breathe California has worked hard the last few years to change that. They have had notable success with the San Mateo County Community College District, where a district policy was passed to go 100% smoke-free, and with the Foothill-DeAnza College District in Santa Clara County, which will soon decide on a policy. Breathe California has supported these efforts with public opinion surveys, participation in committees, educational tabling on campus, recruiting volunteers to assist, making physical observations on campus regarding where there is smoking and signage needs, supplying signage, and notification/promotion of the policies through fliers and newspapers. Work is also being done at Evergreen Community College, City College, West Valley and Mission Colleges.



Breathe California teaches youth about critical thinking, trains students to educate their peers about the dangers of tobacco.

Kicking Out Flavored Tobacco

The vaping epidemic still greatly affects our younger, junior and senior high school students, the group most likely to become addicted when experimenting with flavored tobacco and e-cigarettes. Breathe California has spent three years advocating for policies to ban flavored tobacco and has scored big with ordinances passed in San Jose, Milpitas, City of Seaside, City of Soledad, Scotts Valley, King City, and unincorporated Santa Clara and Monterey Counties. This has heightened importance because these products are most marketed to the poor, LGBTQ populations, and people of color, all groups with other health inequities. In addition to getting policies enacted, Breathe California recently began offering its Smokeless Saturday School youth tobacco cessation program at a local school, which includes a parent component. One parent said, "We did not know how to speak with our daughter," and thanked us for strategies to approach their teenager. A student said that she had learned a lot, which now makes her want to quit. Most importantly, the agency sends staff and trained volunteers to conduct prevention interventions at local schools, most notably in San Mateo County where 3,339 students were reached in the last three years, thanks to funding from Peninsula Health Care District and AstraZeneca. 84% of these students reduced their susceptibility to using these products according to evaluations! 954 more students were reached in Santa Clara and Monterey Counties.

Here are several ways you can support our “breath-saving” work:



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Online**



**Donate
By Mail**



**Donate a
CPAP Machine**



**Donate a
Vehicle**

Learn more at www.lungsrus.org/donate



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