

Issue Brief

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Improving Access to Care for Families of Children with Special Health Care Needs in San Joaquin County

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Many of our families do not have a vehicle. Or, if they do, the father is taking it because he's going to work. And the mother is left at home with three kids and one of them is a [kid with disabilities] who needs specialty care outside the county.

– Armando Valerio, Therapy Services Manager, California Children's Services Medical Therapy Program

No local children's hospital. A shortage of pediatric specialists. Few licensed vendors willing to provide medical transportation to the Bay Area, a four-hour round trip, plus waiting. Those were among the issues facing children with complex health conditions and their families in San Joaquin County in 2016.

Addressing this alarming lack of access to care became a top priority for the San Joaquin County Community Care Coordination Collaborative (SJ 5Cs), a coalition led by the Family Resource Network that brings together representatives from a wide range of children's services agencies. The coalition, which is funded by the Lucile Packard Foundation for Children's Health, works to improve care coordination services for children with special health care needs and their families in the county, where 16% of children are estimated to have special health care needs (CSHCN).

After reviewing the challenges and opportunities, the SJ 5Cs decided to focus its efforts on enhancing the county's non-emergency medical transport services (NEMT). This issue brief summarizes a [case study](#) about their efforts and the lessons learned.

Seeking Systems Change

The focus on improving access to NEMT led SJ 5Cs to a new partnership with the San Joaquin Council of Governments (SJCOG), the body that oversees changes to local transportation systems. Increased funds towards NEMT services depend on SJCOG approval. With the goal of advocating for better transportation for CSHCN, SJ 5Cs representatives joined SJCOG committees as community representatives.

SJ 5Cs successful advocacy included compelling testimony to SJCOG, whose members had concerns about insufficient ridership information and cost effectiveness. To address those concerns, SJ 5Cs leveraged their multi-agency membership by:

- collecting surveys to document residents' transportation needs;
- collecting data from social workers and medical personnel on unmet transportation needs;
- providing letters of support from key county agencies;
- providing testimony from public health leaders and health providers, as well as a video of a family and their child; and

- collaborating with other agencies to expand the focus of the work beyond children to include adult and senior transportation needs.

SJCOG responded to this effort and approved a \$250,000 planning grant and directed the San Joaquin County Regional Transit District (RTD) to implement a one-year pilot program. SJ 5Cs collaborated with RTD to plan the new NEMT service and to promote it.

In spring 2018, RTD launched Care Connection, a transportation service to take patients from their homes to their approved providers in Sacramento and the Greater San Francisco Bay Area. The service included a Medivan to the Bay Area and a bus to Sacramento as well as connection services from patient homes. Care Connection featured telephone access to a trained outreach specialist to advise about routes and coordinate connections. At the end of the one-year pilot, SJCOG discontinued support for Care Connection due to low ridership.

During the pilot, transportation became less of an issue for families because the Medi-Cal managed care plans conformed with updated legal requirements and assumed responsibility for payment and coordination of out-of-county transportation services. SJ 5Cs continues to monitor the challenges faced by families, as the county still struggles with access to specialty care.

The SJ 5Cs coalition was able to draw on members' collective knowledge and networks to marshal data and information to support system change and to advocate on behalf of CSHCN. The development of RTD Care Connection is an example of how a coalition that connects with committed partners and forges new relationships can affect systems change.

Read the [full case study](#) to learn more.

ABOUT THE FOUNDATION: The Lucile Packard Foundation for Children's Health is a public charity, founded in 1997. Its mission is to elevate the priority of children's health, and to increase the quality and accessibility of children's health care through leadership and direct investment. Through its Program for Children with Special Health Care Needs, the Foundation supports development of a high-quality health care system that results in better health outcomes for children and enhanced quality of life for families.

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