Dear Colleagues,

We are pleased to share with you this briefing paper on the San Joaquin Valley Health Fund. In October 2014, the Center for Health Program Management launched the Health Fund with initial investments from Sierra Health Foundation and The California Endowment. We offer this briefing paper to share with you what we've learned about the Valley’s challenges and opportunities, and to present why we believe now is an opportune time to invest in its communities and institutions.

Despite its rich bounty, the San Joaquin Valley is experiencing some of California’s worst health, social and economic outcomes. Residents of many communities are struggling to attain the basic elements of a safe and healthy environment, such as clean drinking water and nutritious food. Moreover, the region’s fast-growing population, high poverty rate and a lack of infrastructure contribute to numerous health, social, education and economic disparities, which seem isolated to the region but ultimately threaten the future prosperity of all Californians.

The San Joaquin Valley Health Fund aims to catalyze, accelerate and connect efforts that seek to make the region a healthier place to live, work and prosper for all of the Valley’s residents. Working with diverse cohorts of local leaders and funding partners, the fund will support the work of policymakers, funders, nonprofit organizations, businesses and residents committed to improving long-term economic, social, cultural and physical well-being in the region.

As we begin this effort, we look forward to joining forces with leaders in the San Joaquin Valley to expand the work they’ve undertaken to improve their communities. We are inspired by their extraordinary commitment and hope this report and others to follow will encourage additional public and private institutions to join in as investors, thought partners and advisers. Ultimately, our goal is simple, straightforward and difficult to achieve: to advance equity in the San Joaquin Valley to ensure all of California is vibrant, healthy and strong now and into the future.

Sincerely,

Chet P. Hewitt     Dr. Robert K. Ross
President and CEO    President and CEO
Sierra Health Foundation    The California Endowment
Introduction

A world away from California’s scenic beaches, renowned wine regions and bustling coastal cities sits the San Joaquin Valley, a 220-mile-long stretch of land that is home to several of the state’s fastest-growing cities. Depending on who one talks to, it is described as either the “food basket of the world” or “the Appalachia of the West.” Regardless of which description is used, the San Joaquin Valley is a region of deep contrast.

Along with its rich bounty, fertile soil and unobstructed skylines, the region is also becoming ground zero for improving the overall health status of California. The San Joaquin Valley is faced with some of the worst health outcomes in the state. The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation’s 2013 County Health Rankings placed several of the Valley’s counties, such as Fresno (ranked 46th), Tulare (ranked 49th), Merced (ranked 39th) and San Joaquin (ranked 42nd), as being among the “least healthy” of the state’s 58 counties.1 More than one-fourth of the households in the San Joaquin Valley earn less than the Federal Poverty Level, a higher proportion than any other region in the state and 7% higher than that for the state overall (27.5% and 18.7%, respectively).2 Poverty in the San Joaquin Valley disproportionately affects African-American, Latino and foreign-born residents.3 The most highly concentrated poverty areas are often those populated by the very farmworkers who produce the region’s agricultural bounty.4

The resurgence of comparisons to historically impoverished communities in the Appalachian Mountain region in the eastern United States suggests that broad, cross-sectoral interventions are needed to improve current conditions. Most alarming, however, is data showing that investments in efforts likely to generate improvements in health outcomes continue to lag behind healthier regions in California. According to an October 2013 report from the Central Valley Health Policy Institute, “Despite having some of the state’s highest levels of poverty and poor health outcomes, the San Joaquin Valley also receives less public health funding from state and federal sources than other California counties with similar populations.”5

Recognizing the confluence of regional challenges, opportunities and changing health policy, the Center for Health Program Management (the Center) recently expanded its base of operations deeper into the San Joaquin Valley with the opening of an office in Merced. Subsequently, Sierra Health Foundation, founder of the Center, and The California Endowment committed initial resources to launch the San Joaquin Valley Health Fund.

The San Joaquin Valley Health Fund

The San Joaquin Valley Health Fund aims to make the San Joaquin Valley a healthier place to live, work and prosper, by strengthening the capacity of communities and organizations in the Valley to advance program, policy and systems change efforts to promote community health. In consultation with funding partners and San Joaquin Valley leaders, the Fund focuses on addressing health disparities and factors that impact health, such as education, employment, housing, open space, neighborhood safety and other drivers of health outcomes, through capacity building, policy development and community engagement. In support of this, Sierra Health Foundation and The California Endowment have committed a combined $1 million to seed the San Joaquin Valley Health Fund, which is managed by the Center for Health Program Management.

This initial $1 million will be used to support small grants to nonprofit organizations and public agencies in the San Joaquin Valley to improve health and well-being in their communities. In addition, further highlighting its commitment to the San Joaquin Valley, in November 2013 the Center opened an office in Merced, California. With the opening of this new office, the Center now serves as a central meeting place for many of the Valley’s nonprofit organizations and public agencies. This increased presence has also enabled the Center to expand efforts like the Minority-Led Organization Capacity Building Program and Health Leadership Program in the San Joaquin Valley.

While an important beginning, this represents only a small portion of what is needed to realize the aspirations articulated by both public and private sector San Joaquin Valley leaders.
who are committed to making their communities healthier, more equitable places to live, play and do business.

Moving forward, San Joaquin Valley Health Fund partners will be supported by input and guidance from key stakeholders in the San Joaquin Valley to help inform the Fund’s priorities.

The Center will expand its learning and collaborative engagement process through focus groups, interviews and convenings to provide San Joaquin Valley residents with opportunities to describe their aspirations for the Valley and the resources they feel are needed to advance them. Moreover, through this process the Fund’s partners will be able to learn, reflect on and fund strategies to address some of the challenges that have impeded greater progress in the past, while building consensus moving forward.

The Center will supplement the above process by matching the San Joaquin Valley’s vision with strategy, leadership development, entrepreneurship and network building ideas, drawn from the most promising private, public and social sector organizations and practices in the country.

Why the San Joaquin Valley and Why Now?

2010 Census data shows that the San Joaquin Valley is home to just over three million people, and it is growing at a rate double that of the state average. It is estimated that by 2030 the population will have grown to nearly six million.

Note: For the purposes of the San Joaquin Valley Health Fund, the San Joaquin Valley includes Fresno, Kings, Madera, Mariposa, Merced, San Joaquin, Stanislaus and Tulare counties. Traditionally, references to the San Joaquin Valley include Fresno, Kern, Kings, Madera, Merced, San Joaquin, Stanislaus and Tulare counties. This second definition puts the population closer to four million people.6
Home to a growing Latino majority population, the Valley is also home to more than 70 other ethnicities and 105 languages, making it by many accounts the most diverse region in California. The San Joaquin Valley's future is particularly important because almost a third of the population is under the age of 18 (compared to 25% in the state overall), making it much younger than the rest of the state.

Despite California’s well-deserved reputation as the home of technological innovation, many communities in the San Joaquin Valley are just striving to attain the basic elements of a safe and healthy environment that residents of coastal regions have long ago acquired. More than 300,000 residents live in the 525 low-income unincorporated communities in the Valley. These communities, also referred to as disadvantaged unincorporated communities, range from urban pockets that are excluded from cities to more remote, densely settled rural communities. Within these communities, 64% of the households are low income and 65% of the residents are people of color. At the same time, the Valley’s urban areas also experience the kinds of challenges faced in large metropolitan areas throughout the country.

Given the region’s fast-growing population, as well as the important role it plays in the state’s larger economy, conditions in the San Joaquin Valley should be of great concern to all Californians. Sheer population growth aside, it is the Valley’s unique, large-scale agriculture-based ecosystem that has created a particular social and economic pattern characterized by relatively low educational attainment and high poverty.

Where some see only hardship and inequity, the leaders we have met see hope and opportunity. We have decided to join them as they promote a new culture of health, built upon strong commitments to equity and inclusion. The goal is simple and straightforward, yet admittedly complicated to achieve: Make the San Joaquin Valley a healthier place to live, work and prosper.

The Challenge: Poor Health in California’s San Joaquin Valley

A powerful and growing body of evidence in the public health field suggests that individual and community health status is heavily influenced by the social and environmental conditions in which people live, learn, work and play. The science supporting this perspective is considered so credible that a commonly used catch phrase has emerged: “How long you live may be more related to your zip code than your genetics.” Unfortunately, the environment in many San Joaquin Valley towns and cities is not as good as it ought to be. For example:

- The counties of the San Joaquin Valley have per capita incomes below the per capita income of Mississippi, which at $32,000 is the lowest among the 50 states.
- In the American Lung Association’s 2014 rankings, three of the five cities with the worst air pollution in the United States are in the San Joaquin Valley.
- Almost all of the census tracts with the highest environmental hazards and greatest vulnerability to those hazards in California are found in the San Joaquin Valley.
• Three of the 10 Metropolitan Statistical Areas in the U.S. with the lowest average years of schooling are in the San Joaquin Valley. Overall, 30% of the adult population in the Valley does not have a high school diploma.\(^4\)

• The San Joaquin Valley includes the two counties in California with the highest rates of linguistically isolated households, in which no person 14 years or older speaks English fluently – 14% in Merced County and 13% in Tulare County.\(^5\)

• More than 30% of the population lives in unincorporated areas with little infrastructure to support clean drinking water and other services.\(^6\)

• The residents of some small San Joaquin Valley towns and unincorporated communities do not have safe drinking water and go to the local gas station to fill up containers with filtered water. In many areas, families spend 10% or more of their income on safe drinking water.\(^7\)

• Children in the San Joaquin Valley often lack safe places to play because of a lack of sidewalks, packs of stray dogs and other dangers.\(^8\) Recently, visitors to a small community in the valley were told about the need for a school playground to be searched for weapons each morning because gang members had been hiding weapons where the children play.\(^9\)

• Food insecurity is widespread in the San Joaquin Valley. More than 20% of the populations in seven of the eight counties cannot afford enough food or high enough quality food to maintain a healthy life. In Mariposa County, 15% of the population is food insecure.\(^10\)

• The San Joaquin Valley has 48 primary care doctors and 80 specialists per 100,000 residents, well below the minimum of 60 primary care doctors and 85 specialists recommended by the Council on Graduate Medical Education. In contrast, the Bay Area has 86 primary care doctors and 175 specialists per 100,000.\(^11\)

As a consequence of these conditions, health disparities experienced by Valley residents can be dangerous, or even fatal. Illness and poor health caused from unsafe drinking water, lack of access to healthy foods, and poor air quality are exacerbated by environmental conditions, such as high rates of traffic accidents due to poorly maintained roads, poor sanitation service, few or no recreation facilities for youth, and dilapidated schools. In addition, the high number of unincorporated areas and vast swaths of agricultural land separating communities makes the development of social capital to address these issues a huge challenge.
The Opportunity: Help Communities Help Themselves

It’s easy to get lost in the various problems and issues facing the population of the San Joaquin Valley. When looked at as a whole, it can seem overwhelming. However, good news does exist. There is a groundswell of energy emerging in the region, which is being propelled by new leaders with great vision and commitment. These individuals are poised to harness the Valley’s longstanding ingenuity and resilience to bring about new opportunities and positive change, both social and economic.

With positive momentum building in the San Joaquin Valley, the Center for Health Program Management and its growing list of partners believe that it is of critical importance to invest in the Valley, which is why we have launched the San Joaquin Valley Health Fund. This co-investment vehicle will help deploy capital into the region, to strengthen and connect leaders in education, public services, community development and business. Such a strategy will build on the Valley’s assets and be developed in partnership with residents, while drawing on cross-sectoral resources and national, state and local talent.

Currently, the Center is actively looking to partner with additional public and private institutions interested in making financial investments to increase the overall resources and funding available in support of the San Joaquin Valley. By combining resources and working with local leaders and residents, together we can create positive, lasting change.

About the Center for Health Program Management, manager of the San Joaquin Valley Health Fund

With offices in Sacramento and Merced, California, the Center for Health Program Management was founded by Sierra Health Foundation to pursue the promise of health equity in communities across our state, with a special focus on the San Joaquin Valley. Operating as an independent 501(c)(3) nonprofit, the Center brings people, ideas and infrastructure together to create a collective impact that reduces health disparities and improves community health for the underserved. The Center’s vision is for all people in California to live healthy lives. Visit www.shfcenter.org for more information.
End Notes

19 San Joaquin Valley Funders Tour. April 23, 2014.

The San Joaquin Valley Health Fund is a program managed by the Center for Health Program Management. Initial funding provided by Sierra Health Foundation and The California Endowment.