

From: [First 5 San Diego](#)
To: [Hays, Karen](#); [Javier, Lenette](#)
Subject: [External] First 5 Commission Feedback/Question Received
Date: Wednesday, March 19, 2025 8:36:44 AM

03/19/2025

First 5 San Diego Commission

Funding Reductions FY2025-2030

I am a Chief Dental Officer of a San Diego-based health center that provides dental care to 0-5 year old children under OHI. I would like to relay continued support for this very important initiative. Oral Health is imperative to the overall health of all people, but particularly our youngest and arguably the most vulnerable of our community. Prevention and early detection of dental disease, as well as education on the importance of oral health is paramount in creating early healthy habits and healthier outcomes for children. Though CA has experienced wonderfully inclusive MediCal expansion, there are continued and imminent threats to coverage for people in our community; potentially even children, making this program as important now as it has ever been. Additionally, there is real fear in our community related to seeking important healthcare, including dental care because of initiatives at the federal level under the current administration. OHI provides valuable coverage as the payor of last resort where children would otherwise not be able to receive necessary dental care/oral health, care coordination, and outreach and/or education.

Rebecca Cornille

From: [First 5 San Diego](#)
To: [Hays, Karen](#); [Javier, Lenette](#)
Subject: [External] First 5 Commission Feedback/Question Received
Date: Wednesday, March 19, 2025 1:53:19 PM

03/19/2025

First 5 San Diego Commission

The parenting advisory services offered through Rady's have been a complete game-changer for our relationship with our child. Following the provided advice and recommendations has enabled us to have a stronger relationship, and really allowed our child to flourish in both sensory regulation and interactions with his peers.

This service has been a turning point in the raising of our children, and we are better prepared to be great parents in the future. No other 'parent help' services or guides have had this big of an impact, this fast. Losing this service would be a tragedy for the parents and children of San Diego.

Andrew Hawk

From: [First 5 San Diego](#)
To: [Hays, Karen](#); [Javier, Lenette](#)
Subject: [External] First 5 Commission Feedback/Question Received
Date: Tuesday, March 18, 2025 12:23:18 PM

03/18/2025

First 5 San Diego Commission

Submitted on behalf of a caregiver that wished to remain anonymous: "My experience with first 5 has been the best. I am beyond grateful for the HDS program and everything that it has done for our family. HDS has helped us significantly in understanding our children and trying to navigate their development! I would definitely recommend it to lots of families for multiple reasons. One being that they truly care for the families that they are helping."

Holly Arnold

From: First 5 San Diego <notifications@first5sandiego.org>
Sent: Monday, March 17, 2025 4:50 PM
Subject: [External] First 5 Commission Feedback/Question Received

03/17/2025

First 5 San Diego Commission

Public Comment in Support of KidSTART Center

Dear Members of the First 5 San Diego Commission,
I appreciate each of you taking the time to review the two letters attached from Dr. Lauren Gist and Dr. Hilary Bowers.

Thank you,
Natalie Elms
Manager, KidSTART Center
Rady Children's Hospital San Diego

Natalie Elms

<https://first5sandiego.org/index.php?gf-download=2025%2F03%2FDB-Peds-KidSTART-Letter-17-March-2025.pdf&form-id=5&field-id=14&hash=51faa2a45b9eedfb54cae2dd6560202bc399262ddd135c465768544f8d7ef505>

<https://first5sandiego.org/index.php?gf-download=2025%2F03%2FCPCMG-KidSTART-Letter-17-March-2025.pdf&form-id=5&field-id=19&hash=5207bbab851d500c828542264b4eaaaac14c5ef1d9090aceac7e9dc395743165>



March 17, 2025

First 5 San Diego Commission
9655 Granite Ridge Drive #120
San Diego, California 92123

Dear Members of the First 5 San Diego Commission,

I am writing to you as a developmental-behavioral pediatrician deeply committed to improving the lives of children with complex developmental and behavioral health needs. I wish to express my strong support for KidSTART Center, a vital program that provides comprehensive services to this vulnerable population. It is crucial that we retain funding for this program to ensure its continued success and impact.

The children served by KidStart Center often face a multitude of challenges that can severely hinder their development and well-being. Many of these children have experienced high rates of adverse childhood experiences (ACEs), which can lead to significant emotional and behavioral difficulties. These ACEs not only affect the children, but also their caregivers, creating a cycle of intergenerational trauma that can be difficult to break. The stress and trauma associated with these experiences can lead to increased mental health challenges, making it even more difficult for families to navigate the system of care in San Diego.

Additionally, a significant portion of the children we see have had prenatal exposure to substances and alcohol. We know that alcohol exposure in utero has clear negative impacts on the brain and we are learning even more about the negative impacts of fentanyl exposure, which is an increasing problem. This exposure can result in a range of developmental disorders and behavioral problems, further complicating their care. Most notably, to me, is that these children have clear challenges but don't always fit in a clear diagnostic "box" when they are young. The specialized interventions and support, which KidSTART Center is uniquely equipped to provide, allow us to have trained professionals observing through treating to help clarify diagnosis and guide further treatment options. This would not be able to occur without a holistic program like KidSTART. By offering tailored services that address the specific needs of these children and their families, KidStart Center plays an essential role in promoting the health and development of this vulnerable population.

The system of care in San Diego can be overwhelming and fragmented, making it difficult for caregivers to access the appropriate resources and services. Each family at KidSTART Center is assigned a social worker to guide families through the complexities of the healthcare landscape, educational support, and provide caregiver support to both understand and advocate for the needs of their child. This high level of care coordination is absolutely vital to our program and support children and families. Without this program, many families would struggle to find the help they

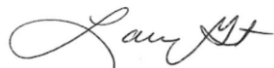
need, particularly at young ages when their brains are still developing. For many children served by KidSTART Center, it is possible it would be several years in the school system before they could access supports and by then it may be too late.

I follow many of our KidSTART patients for their developmental needs and medication management once they age out of the program. Many of the children continue to have significant developmental and behavioral challenges but fortunately have been connected to school services and mental health therapy from a much younger age than likely would have occurred without the support of KidSTART.

In conclusion, I urge you to advocate for the continued funding of the KidStart Center. This program is not just a resource; it is a lifeline for families in our community facing unimaginable challenges. By supporting KidStart Center, we can ensure that we provide these very young children and their caregivers with the comprehensive care and support they desperately need.

Thank you for your attention to this critical matter. Together, we can make a significant difference in the lives of children and families in San Diego.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Lauren Gist".

Lauren Gist, MD MPH
(HS) Associate Clinical Professor of Pediatrics
Associate Fellowship Director, UCSD Developmental-Behavioral Pediatrics
Medical Director, Rady Children's Down Syndrome Center
Developmental-Behavioral Pediatrician, Rady Children's KidSTART Program and Turner Syndrome Clinic



March 17, 2025

First 5 San Diego Commission
9655 Granite Ridge Drive #120
San Diego, California 92123

Dear Members of the First 5 San Diego Commission,

I am writing this letter on behalf of Children's Primary Care Medical Group (CPCMG), a dedicated group of primary care physicians, nurse practitioners and physician assistants committed to enhancing the health and well-being of children in our community. We would like to express our strong support for KidSTART Center, a program that provides vital, comprehensive services for young children with complex developmental and behavioral health needs. KidSTART Center is serving the most vulnerable children in San Diego County as evidenced by the following data:

50% of children having active involvement with the Office of Child Safety and up to 80% with previous involvement

50% of children having experienced prenatal alcohol and/or substance exposure

23% of families experiencing housing insecurity

As healthcare professionals, we have witnessed firsthand the hardships faced by children with complex developmental and behavioral health challenges and the profound impact these have on their families. These obstacles may include, and are not limited to, the risk of children being misdiagnosed, navigating a complex system of care, challenges understanding and advocating for their child's needs, difficulty navigating barriers to accessing services including transportation, housing and food insecurity. KidStart Center offers an invaluable resource by providing a holistic approach to care, addressing not just the medical needs of these children, but also their emotional, social, and educational requirements.

The comprehensive services offered by KidSTART Center include diagnostic assessment with a psychologist, Developmental Behavioral Pediatric services, screening for Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD), speech-language pathology, occupational therapy and behavior therapy. In addition, each family is assigned a social worker to support coordinating and guiding the family through services. These services ensure that children receive coordinated care tailored to their unique needs, leading to improved health outcomes and enhance quality of life.

We believe that supporting KidSTART Center aligns with our shared goal of supporting the well-being of the youngest and most vulnerable children in San Diego County. We urge the Commission to continue its support for this program and to consider additional resources that would expand the reach of this effective program.

Thank you for your attention to this important matter and your ongoing commitment to the health and wellbeing of our community's children. We look forward to your continued support of KidSTART Center.

Sincerely,



Hilary Bowers, MD

Hilary M. Bowers, MD, FAAP

Physician

Director of Behavioral and Mental Health Services

Children's Primary Care Medical Group

15725 Pomerado Road

Suite #203

Poway, CA 92064

From: First 5 San Diego <notifications@first5sandiego.org>
Sent: Monday, March 17, 2025 2:10 PM
Subject: [External] First 5 Commission Feedback/Question Received

03/17/2025

First 5 San Diego Commission

March 25

Dear Commission:

As a pediatric nurse practitioner and a parent of two boys who are high functioning on the Autism Spectrum Disorder, I sincerely hope you consider the impact of any reduction of services to children with developmental delays. To a child with development (fine, gross, social/emotional) delays, early services (PT, OT, speech and behavioral interventions) are critical to provide during the first few years of life. I can professionally and personally attest to the life-changing impact services can make on children. It can literally make the difference between a child who learns to function appropriately in a classroom before they attend so they can learn and going through life behind from the very beginning. Please avoid any cuts to these programs. In a perfect world, all children who need them would receive them and we are far away from covering even most children adequately.

Please contact me if you have any further questions.

Warmest Regards,

Tammy

--

Tamara Troyer Denlinger, Doctor of Nursing Practice, C-PNP, C-FNP



Tamara Denlinger

From: First 5 San Diego <notifications@first5sandiego.org>
Sent: Monday, March 17, 2025 2:10 PM
Subject: [External] First 5 Commission Feedback/Question Received

03/17/2025

First 5 San Diego Commission

This message is for the First 5 San Diego Commission. I want to extend my heartfelt thank you to the Commission for funding the work of the San Diego County Office of Education (SDCOE) and the San Diego Quality Preschool Initiative (QPI). The research of Dr. Junlei Li, Senior Lecturer in Early Childhood Education at Harvard University, demonstrates that the number one indicator of child care quality is child care educator well-being. SDCOE and QPI have recognized, empowered, and provided stipends to thousands of childcare educators. This directly increases the quality of child care throughout San Diego County, thereby improving the socio-economic and health-related outcomes for San Diego children and families. Thank you for investing in San Diego's future and choosing to invest in the dedicated, diverse, and caring childcare educators who serve our youngest and most vulnerable children. I urge you to continue smart investments through SDCOE and QPI that increase the quality of childcare programs throughout San Diego County. Investing in quality child care is a prevention strategy with multi-generational impact that yields a substantial return on investment. Access to and participation in quality childcare help children develop the foundational skills necessary for success in school, significantly decreasing the number of students needing special education placement and decreasing student grade repetition. Access to and participation in quality childcare is also a crucial economic development strategy for San Diego County, enabling workforce participation, boosting productivity, and fostering long-term economic growth. Thank you for your leadership in what should be increased investment in childcare and families as a cost-effective strategy for inclusive, short-term, and long-term economic growth and sustainability.

Sarina Lynn

From: First 5 San Diego <notifications@first5sandiego.org>
Sent: Monday, March 17, 2025 2:10 PM
Subject: [External] First 5 Commission Feedback/Question Received

03/14/2025

First 5 San Diego Commission

Hi, I am a community pediatrician at Neighborhood Health in Escondido, California. We are in the North Inland region for First 5 services. I wanted to express my unwavering support for all the benefits of this program. We serve a predominantly poor and indigent population with many barriers to health and childhood adverse experiences, almost all with Medi-Cal insurance or uninsured. I can recall numerous patients of my own who have benefitted enormously from participating in our local program's services. We regularly have babies with plagiocephaly (misshapen heads from lack of tummy time or stiff neck) and delay motor skills, and early intervention is key to preventing the need for a head-shaping molding helmet. The rate of developmental delays in children is around 20-30%, and we routinely refer for speech delay in children who are not meeting even the backstop parameters, such as at least putting 2 words together by 2 years, or 3 word phrases by 3 years, or kids who still have unintelligible speech by 4 years. These kids benefit so much from the evaluation and speech services offered – especially since the children with milder-moderate delays who are not picked up by official early intervention services (0-3, Regional Center), fall through the cracks, and have to wait until 3 years for a school district evaluation – and qualifying at the school depends so much on the resources available in that district. And for the little ones, waiting until they can be seen after age 3 is not appropriate – the early brains of kids are primed and wired to interventions precisely at this time. This applies to the kids with sensory and behavior issues, and the parenting support is invaluable in not only positive outcomes, but preventing future depression, abuse, and stress on the family as a unit due to neurodiverse kids as a population. And the case management benefits help our families who already have so many barriers such as parents who don't speak English to navigate the healthcare and school systems, and have regularly provided assistance in helping our speech delayed kids eventually qualify at the district when appropriate. The community building of relationships with other agencies generates trust and First 5 Healthy Development Services with Palomar Health is absolutely trusted by local preschools, DSEP (foster kids), and physicians alike. While there is no manual for helping to raise healthy children, First 5 is certainly a much needed tool in our area to help us raise healthy and loving families. I hope you will consider this in funding decisions and continue to direct support to First 5.

Byron Chow

From: First 5 San Diego <notifications@first5sandiego.org>
Sent: Monday, March 17, 2025 2:10 PM
Subject: [External] First 5 Commission Feedback/Question Received

03/14/2025

First 5 San Diego Commission

For March 25 meeting

Hi, I am a community pediatrician at Neighborhood Health in Escondido, California. We are in the North Inland region for First 5 services. I wanted to express my unwavering support for all the benefits of this program. We serve a predominantly poor and indigent population with many barriers to health and childhood adverse experiences, almost all with Medi-Cal insurance or uninsured. I can recall numerous patients of my own who have benefitted enormously from participating in our local program's services. We regularly have babies with plagiocephaly (misshapen heads from lack of tummy time or stiff neck) and delay motor skills, and early intervention is key to preventing the need for a head-shaping molding helmet. The rate of developmental delays in children is around 20-30%, and we routinely refer for speech delay in children who are not meeting even the backstop parameters, such as at least putting 2 words together by 2 years, or 3 word phrases by 3 years, or kids who still have unintelligible speech by 4 years. These kids benefit so much from the evaluation and speech services offered – especially since the children with milder-moderate delays who are not picked up by official early intervention services (0-3, Regional Center), fall through the cracks, and have to wait until 3 years for a school district evaluation – and qualifying at the school depends so much on the resources available in that district. And for the little ones, waiting until they can be seen after age 3 is not appropriate – the early brains of kids are primed and wired to interventions precisely at this time. This applies to the kids with sensory and behavior issues, and the parenting support is invaluable in not only positive outcomes, but preventing future depression, abuse, and stress on the family as a unit due to neurodiverse kids as a population. And the case management benefits help our families who already have so many barriers such as parents who don't speak English to navigate the healthcare and school systems, and have regularly provided assistance in helping our speech delayed kids eventually qualify at the district when appropriate. The community building of relationships with other agencies generates trust and First 5 Healthy Development Services with Palomar Health is absolutely trusted by local preschools, DSEP (foster kids), and physicians alike. While there is no manual for helping to raise healthy children, First 5 is certainly a much needed tool in our area to help us raise healthy and loving families. I hope you will consider this in funding decisions and continue to direct support to First 5.

Sincerely,
Dr Byron Chow MD

Byron Chow

From: First 5 San Diego <notifications@first5sandiego.org>
Sent: Monday, March 17, 2025 2:10 PM
Subject: [External] First 5 Commission Feedback/Question Received

03/14/2025

First 5 San Diego Commission

Please see attached analogy regarding the impact of HDS on the community. This analogy aims to describe what "needy" means in relation to the work we do.

Holly Arnold

<https://first5sandiego.org/index.php?gf-download=2025%2F03%2FHealthy-Development-Services-A-Lagoon-Story.pdf&form-id=5&field-id=14&hash=cbce9f4f694fb18f889aa88ed736b6c8e2f71081abbfa3a1e85206ea8c9ed773>

Healthy Development Services

San Diego's Community Lagoon: An Analogy

Written by: Holly Arnold and Jen Goins



A LAGOON IS A NATURAL SAFETY NET FROM A LARGE, EMPTY BODY OF WATER TO A DEVELOPED AND RESOURCED AREA

Important Facts About Lagoons:

They provide **habitats** for many animals and plants | They offer **valuable natural resources** to people living and working in those areas | Coastal lagoons are seasonally **productive ecosystems** | Play an important role in **mitigating the consequences** of coastal flooding

HDS provides a protective lagoon for children and families that don't have a place in other "habitats"

In the "large bodies of water" surrounding the "lagoon", you can find higher-income families and/or families with no developmental concerns. These families have the means to access the resources available to them on the "land" or they are not in need. They are able to pay the fees associated, have position and power to advocate for themselves, and have resources readily available.

In the "land" outside the "lagoon", low-income families and/or families with moderate-to-severe developmental needs have access to services like home visiting programs, subsidized childcare, free health care, insurance, CAES, and the School District.

Families who are not in either of these situations are truly those in highest needs and need the safety of the HDS "lagoon".



HDS provides a resource to children and families who live in the "lagoon"

- **Care Coordination** to support families navigate the often-difficult process of getting to the "land" where higher level services reside
- **Bridging** support for families while they are in the process of accessing higher level services and navigating getting to the right place
- **Resource** for community programs, schools, and healthcare providers to supplement the support they provide to their families and act as a partner



HDS plays a role in mitigating the consequences of system "flooding"

When children receive services through HDS prior to entering school, they may not need to access special education or insurance-based services, which are highly impacted. This leaves room for children with more moderate-to-severe needs to benefit from these higher levels of care.



Preventative education with families at HDS leads to confident and healthy caregiving, as evidenced by program outcomes which shows an increase in supportive behaviors such as spending time together, reading together, etc. We know based on evidenced-based research that children with these protective factors in place will have more protection from ACEs as they grow up.

Families who understand these protective factors based on their time with HDS may have more resources to lean on in times of need, reducing need for access to higher-level supports (social service programs, school services).

Without the HDS Lagoon as a safety net, we will be moving the needle away from serving the neediest and leaving a vulnerable population with no resources

From: First 5 San Diego <notifications@first5sandiego.org>
Sent: Monday, March 17, 2025 2:10 PM
Subject: [External] First 5 Commission Feedback/Question Received

03/14/2025

First 5 San Diego Commission

The program was excellent and has really provided me insight on the development of my child. The resources have allowed me to better help my child improve in areas such as social, motor, and communication skills. I would highly recommend it to other parents.

Grace Bernardo

From: First 5 San Diego <notifications@first5sandiego.org>

Sent: Monday, March 17, 2025 2:10 PM

Subject: [External] First 5 Commission Feedback/Question Received

03/13/2025

First 5 San Diego Commission

I think this program is absolutely essential to any child's development. Not all parents have what it takes to properly evaluate and help their children grow and succeed. This gives everyone an opportunity to learn developmental skills from a professional. I think this program should be continued and fully supported at all costs.

Jacques Pieterse

From: First 5 San Diego <notifications@first5sandiego.org>
Sent: Monday, March 17, 2025 2:10 PM
Subject: [External] First 5 Commission Feedback/Question Received

03/13/2025

First 5 San Diego Commission

Hello, My name is Victoria Baay, the Pre-K through 12 principal at Borrego Springs Unified School District. We are a small rural district at least an hour and a half from most towns with services. I took over as a PreK-12 Principal 4 years ago and did not know much about our preschool program. Through the support of my coach, I have received invaluable guidance, patience, and expertise that has been crucial in my growth as a leader of our preschool program. Without her assistance, the group meetings, and information SDQPI gives out I am not sure if we would have been able to clear our ECE FPM and maintain a great program. Our program was recently rated, and we received a 5— an achievement that I attribute not only to our dedicated staff who have benefited from SDQPI's training and the goals set on our QIP, but also to the guidance of our coach. I fully support the continued work of SDQPI as their work prepares programs and staff to help children to become strong, curious, empathetic, and eager learners, ready to succeed in the educational system. For my program and myself personally, SDPI as it has been instrumental in the growth and success of our preschool program, and in turn, the future success of our students.

Victoria Baay

From: First 5 San Diego <notifications@first5sandiego.org>
Sent: Monday, March 17, 2025 2:10 PM
Subject: [External] First 5 Commission Feedback/Question Received

03/13/2025

First 5 San Diego Commission

Dear Commissioners,

Please accept this e-comment supporting the Learn Well Initiative with the San Diego Office of Education, San Diego Quality Preschool Initiative (SDQPI). Beginning in 2006, when SDCOE received these funds, the Early Childhood Education (ECE) community urgently needed social and emotional support services for young children, parents, and professionals in the ECE workforce. As an administrator in the field, I can attest to the positive difference it has made to those working in ECE settings with children. When I saw classrooms in the early 2000s, much of the workforce and parents used outdated strategies to help children self-regulate (time-outs, threats, squawking at children, exclusion, etc.). Unbeknownst to many of them, there were other research-based techniques and strategies. Then came the First 5 California and San Diego! I now see professionals who feel valued and supported through training, coaching, and monetary stipends through SDCOE SDQPI. Parents, children, and ECE professionals have a whole new set of skills to help our youngest and most vulnerable children under 5 years old who need behavioral and mental health support! Please continue the funding and not take away almost 20 years of passionate effort and work. Revisit the SDCOE SDQPI data recently shared with the commission to remind you that this funding positively impacts our communities!

Susan Villareal

From: First 5 San Diego <notifications@first5sandiego.org>
Sent: Monday, March 17, 2025 2:10 PM
Subject: [External] First 5 Commission Feedback/Question Received

03/11/2025

First 5 San Diego Finance Committee

Hello,

I wanted to take a moment to express our deep gratitude for the partnership we have with First 5 and the critical role that the Healthy Development Services play in our pediatric office and within our community.

The early years of a child's life are absolutely vital for their long-term health and well-being. Through First 5's support, we've been able to provide essential services for our patients under the age of 5, helping them reach developmental milestones and address health concerns that could otherwise go unnoticed or untreated. The resources and programs made available to us through First 5 have not only benefited individual children but have contributed significantly to the health of the entire community.

We've seen firsthand how these services empower families to navigate the often complex healthcare system, ensuring that even the most vulnerable children receive the care and attention they need. Without these resources, we fear that many children would miss out on early intervention that could have lifelong implications on their health, development, and educational outcomes.

We hope that the importance of early childhood health services continues to be recognized and prioritized. Reducing funding for these services would have a direct impact on our ability to support families and children in need, leading to long-term consequences that could be difficult to reverse. We are incredibly grateful for the opportunity to work alongside First 5 and advocate for the well-being of children in our community.

Gratefully,

Marlene Xochical, Child Development Specialist at TrueCare Pediatrics

Marlene Xochical