



Director's Message

Dear OC Health Care Agency (HCA) Team,

Even though we're entering the final quarter of 2023, not to mention the upcoming holidays and the end of the year, the work we do is hardly slowing down! I am so proud of your efforts and dedication and am pleased to say "well done" to so many in the HCA.

Our Mental Health and Recovery Services (MHRS) team has been working non-stop since September of last year to stand up the CARE Act (Community Assistance, Recovery and Empowerment). The CARE Act is a new framework to get people the support and care they need.

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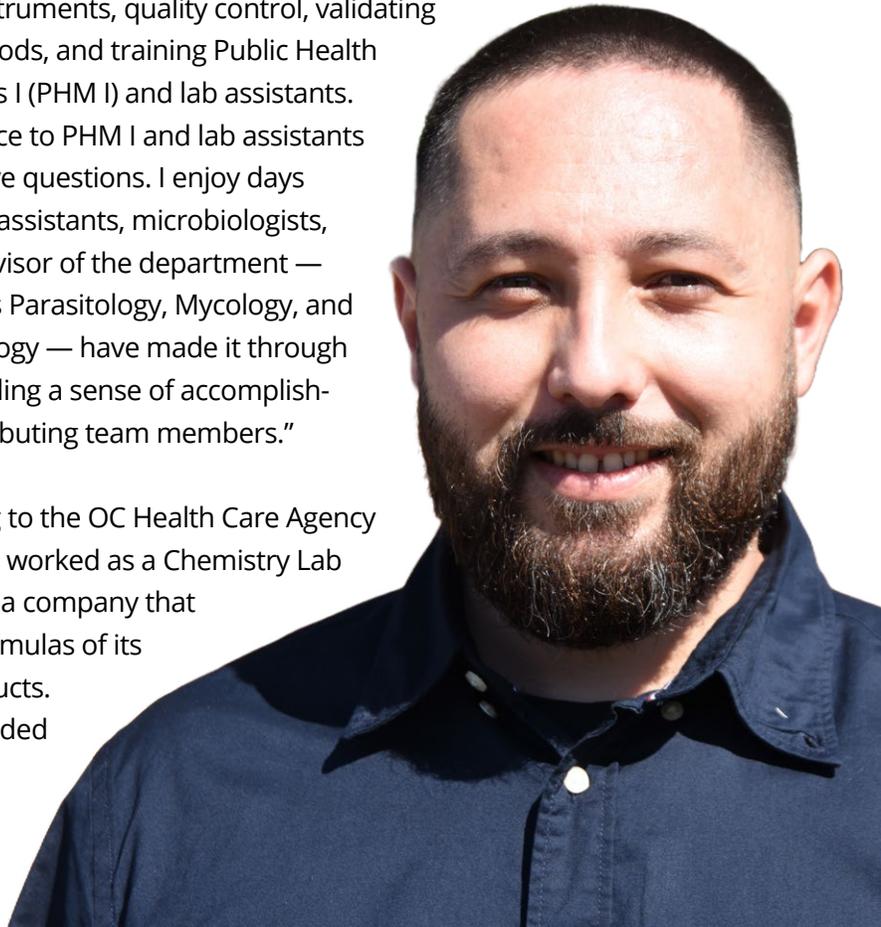
Peer-to-Peer Antonio Bejarano

"I'm proud to know that the work we do in the OC Public Health Laboratory (PHL) is of high value and I enjoy having a job that involves working with infectious diseases," said Peer-to-Peer recipient **Antonio Bejarano**, Public Health Microbiologist II. He explained, "Our work identifies the cause of disease, guides patient care, helps prevent the spread of disease, determines if there are potential outbreaks in the community, gets us closer to eliminating certain diseases, and determines if the water quality throughout Orange County (OC) is safe for public use whether potable or recreational."

Antonio is the technical lead in the Mycobacteriology Department. His role includes troubleshooting difficult cultures or instruments, quality control, validating new test methods, and training Public Health Microbiologists I (PHM I) and lab assistants. "I offer guidance to PHM I and lab assistants when they have questions. I enjoy days where the lab assistants, microbiologists, and the supervisor of the department — which includes Parasitology, Mycology, and Mycobacteriology — have made it through a busy day feeling a sense of accomplishment as contributing team members."

Before coming to the OC Health Care Agency (HCA), Antonio worked as a Chemistry Lab Technician for a company that tested new formulas of its pet treat products. The work included

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Peer-to-Peer

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performing digestion experiments where the pet treats were placed in large flasks, with gastric conditions, to determine how fast the treats would break down. However, Antonio said his desire to work with infectious diseases led him to the HCA and he is grateful for the team here. "I work for a lab that provides the opportunities, resources, and expertise to become a great microbiologist. Since being hired, I have been part of great teams, allowing me to expand my knowledge and build the skills to have a successful career," he said.

When Antonio is not working with infectious diseases, he likes to study data processing and analytics. "I have read and attempted to learn the basics of SQL and the Python coding language but still have much learning to do. Working in the lab has made me realize the large amounts of data that get compiled every day, especially as new instruments, systems, and technologies are built and implemented; therefore, learning some level of data processing and analytics is something I feel would be beneficial."

Director's Message

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The HCA's MHRS team is a leader in the State's efforts to get the CARE Act underway. Our team continues working hard with our partners to make CARE Act serve our constituents in OC.

Our Environmental Health (EH) team has worked at the invitation of city partners in OC to educate operators of compact mobile food facilities on how the food operators can obtain permits and be in compliance with state laws. After a collaboration recently between our EH team and a number of local cities, the EH team received a letter on behalf of the cities that congratulated and thanked the EH team for their efforts in serving the cities.

I would like to congratulate the teams which are nominated for the Steve Ambriz Team Excellence Award (TEA). They are: Children and Youth Services – Clinical Evaluation and Guidance Unit; the Environmental Health Sidewalk Vending Team; the Office of Population Health and Equity; and Older Adult Services. Each is a hard-working and vital part of the HCA and deserving of the Agency's highest team award. You can learn more about each of these teams in this newsletter.

Congratulations to the 17th Street Testing, Treatment and Care Clinics (TTC) for the recognition TTC received from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

(CDC). The CDC recognition is truly an amazing accomplishment and you can read more about the recognition in this newsletter.

Finally, on a health note of importance to us all, the CDC have endorsed recommendations for the new season's COVID mRNA vaccine. The COVID-19 vaccine is more closely matched to the strains of virus circulating now and for those expected though winter according to our federal partners. In addition, the new recommendations also further simplify the vaccination schedule for most individuals. You can learn more about the recommendations by clicking on the HCA Press Release [here](#).

As always, I am grateful to each of you who serve our Agency and wonderful community.



A handwritten signature in white ink that reads "Debra Baetz". The signature is fluid and cursive.

Debra Baetz
Interim Agency Director



Shaping the Care of Seniors in Orange County

Under the leadership of the Orange County (OC) Board of Supervisors (BOS), the OC Health Care Agency (HCA) is working in collaboration with County of Orange (County) Agencies and County partner Advance OC, to carry out the County's [Master Plan for Aging](#). The MPA outlines 5 goals including housing, health reimagined, inclusion and equity, caregiving that works, and affording aging.

As part of the County's effort, Advance OC is asking OC residents aged 55 and older, or caregivers of OC residents who are aged 55 and older, to complete one of the two surveys. The surveys, carried out in conjunction with the County Executive Officer, Social Services Agency, Office on Aging and the HCA, are the first of their kind in OC. The surveys can be found on the main page of the

HCA website by clicking on the carousel that features the [County Master Plan for Aging Needs Assessment](#).

The surveys end on December 30, 2023 and are available in English, Spanish, Vietnamese, Chinese, Korean, Arabic and Farsi. Surveys can be filled out online, or in person at a local senior center and other locations where older adults access services.

HCA staff who are 55 or older or who care for someone age 55 or older are welcome to complete a survey and share this information with your friends, neighbors, and loved ones.

NATIONAL RECOGNITION

for

Fight Against AIDS



Congratulations to OC Health Care Agency (HCA) staff at the 17th Street Testing, Treatment and Care Clinic (TTC)! The TTC has been recognized and awarded by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) under the CDC's "Ending the HIV Epidemic in the U.S. (EHE): Scaling Up HIV Prevention Services in STD Specialty Clinics." The CDC's recognition of the TTC's work speaks for itself said **Dr. Christopher Ried**, Medical Director HIV/STD Services, "You've all worked very hard for us to accomplish this. Give yourself a big pat on the back. I'm proud every day of what we are able to do together in this clinic to change the course of the epidemic in Orange County!"

The TTC was recognized for their impressive Rapid Anti-Retroviral Therapy (ART) program which was initiated in October 2020 to provide ART to priority populations who are newly diagnosed or have fallen out of care within 0-5 days of diagnosis. This need was identified to ensure that patients were able to access their medications immediately, or as soon as possible, to maintain their medical care. The clinic utilizes medical staff, public health investigators, and case managers to re-engage clients into care and other support services.

"Offering RAPID ART and immediate linkage to HIV care within the Clinic has helped put patient's mind at

ease. A lot of time, newly diagnosed patients receive their diagnosis and correlate this with “death or loss of hope,”” said **Karen Chavez**, Social Worker II. “Although they presented with these initial fears during intake, they work with their Provider and or Case Manager to better understand that they can live a normal life like anyone else. Our RAPID ART patients often express that not only the Clinic staff are helpful, but they feel more at ease when they get to work with their medical provider on developing a treatment plan.”

This model is a **no wrong door approach** for all clients newly diagnosed. Staff are trained to be socially, culturally, and linguistically competent with an understanding of the social determinants of health that affect a client’s ability to take their HIV treatment regimen as prescribed. TTC is a trusted and reliable resource in the community because of the genuine care and diligence of the staff. Since the launch of the program, 76% of clients the clinic has reengaged into HIV care have achieved viral suppression.

“All potential clients should be aware that we recognize that just coming into the Clinic for testing can be a lot,” said **T.J. Morales**, Public Health Nurse. T.J., and staff members, are here to work with them from their initial diagnosis, to linking to a Case Management who will help them with various supportive services, to working with their medical provider.

“We understand that patients may be afraid or overwhelmed when they initially are diagnosed, but the

Clinic’s priority is to ensure patients feel comfortable and empowered throughout their treatment and care,” said **Marisol Chavez Canales**, Public Health Nurse. “17th Street TTC Clinic believes in applying a non-judgmental space for all!”

The TTC is one of just 5 public health entities across the country to receive this recognition from the CDC for what the CDC calls “promising practices” in ending the HIV/AIDS epidemic. The TTC’s work is a “Wow” said HCA Interim Director **Debra Baetz**. “Truly an amazing accomplishment. Kudos to all of you. I am truly humbled and proud of the great work you do each and every day,” said Debra.

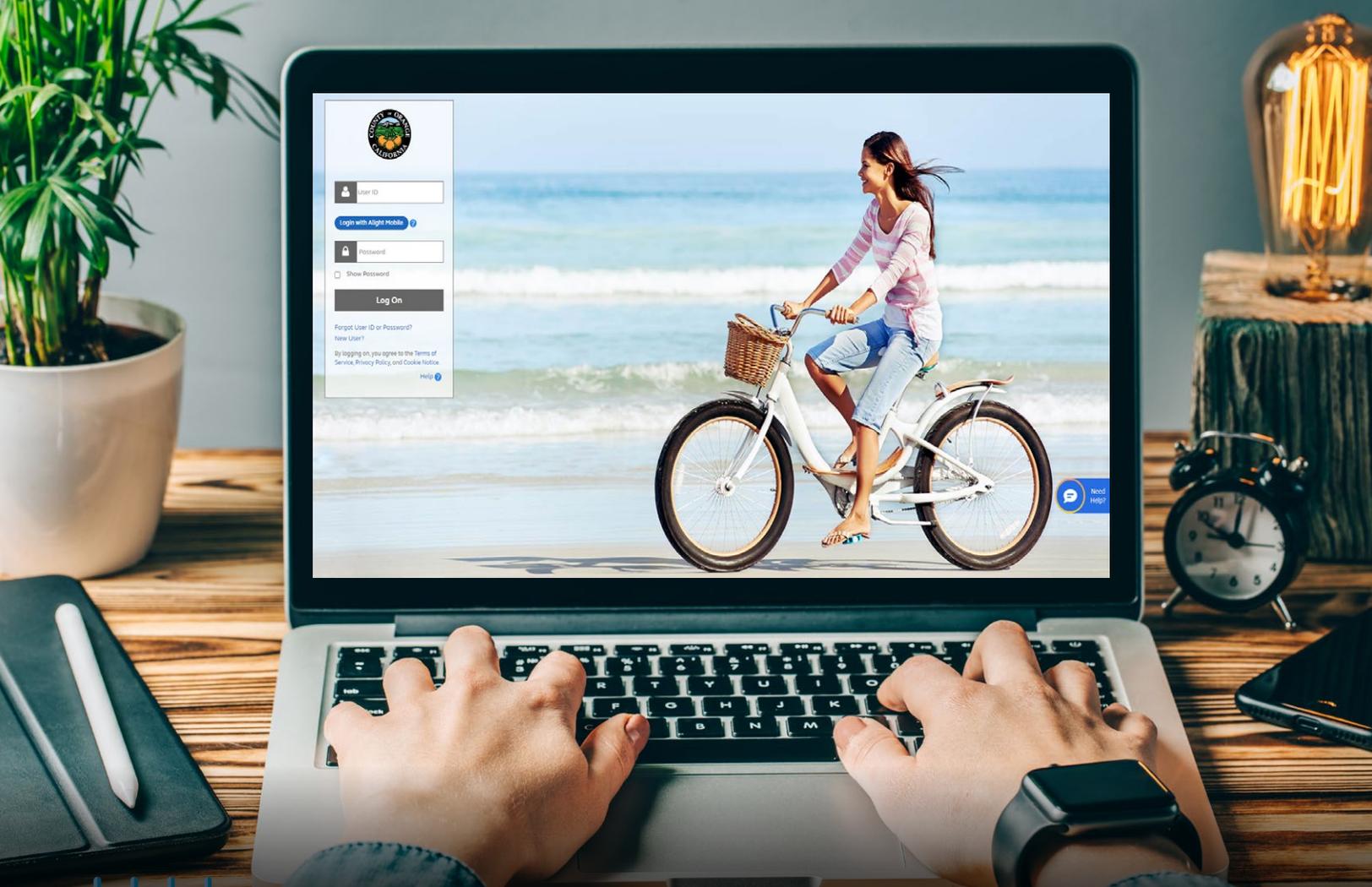
To read the CDC’s recognition of the TTC, click on the link below and scroll down to “Promising Practices.” [Ending the HIV Epidemic in the U.S. \(EHE\): Scaling Up HIV Prevention Services in STD Specialty Clinics \(cdc.gov\)](https://www.cdc.gov/ehe/promising-practices/ending-the-hiv-epidemic-in-the-u-s-scaling-up-hiv-prevention-services-in-std-specialty-clinics)

First Row/Sitting: **Sofia Batshoun, Ha Nguyen, Lisette Hernandez, Dharma Tran, Marisol Chavez-Canales, Grecia Estrada, Marlene Torres, Gabriela Gutierrez.**

Second Row: **Dr. Christopher Ried, Dora Ponce, Dr. Ronald Sherman, Jennifer Ochoa, Yuridia Mejia, Iris Rios-Coreas, Breana Rojo, Milagros Lopez Guevara, Cristina Cortez, Ricardo Delgado, Viviane Lam, Matilde Gonzalez-Flores, Jocelyn Hernandez, Theodore “TJ” Morales, Norma Macias, Octavio Cruz, Natalie Silva.**

Third Row: **Salvador Martinez, Karina Herrera, Susy Karraa, Orlando Watson.**





Mark Your Calendar

Open Enrollment is Soon!

The Annual Open Enrollment begins Wednesday, **October 18** and runs through **Tuesday, November 7, 2023**. You can begin preparing for Open Enrollment on **Wednesday, October 11** at mybenefits.ocgov.com to ensure you and your family have the coverage you need.

To compare health plans, go to the benefits portal and click on the **“Get Ready for Open Enrollment”** banner. You can review Summary of Benefits and Coverages or use online tools to compare health plan options and costs.

You'll also find educational videos that can make understanding your benefits more accessible. Topics include preparing for Open Enrollment, adding a new dependent, and the County of Orange's flexible spending accounts.

If you have questions call the Benefits Service Center at 1-833-476-2347. Calls are answered from 8 a.m. – 6 p.m., Monday-Friday, excluding holidays. You can also use Live Chat by clicking the blue tab that says Need Help? Which is located on the webpage.



ADEPT Red Ribbon Month Creativity Contest

The National Red Ribbon campaign is celebrated during the last week of October each year, to promote awareness and to keep youth drug free. The OC Health Care Agency's (HCA) Alcohol Drug Education & Prevention Team (ADEPT) leads the Agency's Red Ribbon campaign and we wanted to share ADEPT's creativity in how the team promoted this important message through a contest.

The contest was hosted by Hopkinson Elementary, in the Los Alamitos Unified School District. During their lunch break, 4th and 5th grade students were given the prompt, "The Anti-Drug I Am Thankful for Is..." and

asked to draw or describe their "anti-drug."

Over 100 drawings were submitted, and each creation was digitized and made into stickers, which were distributed to students throughout the school. Two stickers were selected as winning designs for their creativity and positive message. The two students were awarded by ADEPT staff at a school assembly with a certificate of achievement for their designs. We are proud to celebrate the National Red Ribbon campaign, our ADEPT team, and congratulate our two young winners for their creativity!

SHARMIE VELASCO



MY WORK MATTERS

Sharmie Velasco is a Comprehensive Care Nurse II, with Correctional Health Services (CHS). She's been with the County of Orange (County) for 4 years after starting as a contract Registered Nurse.

What brought you to the OC Health Care Agency (HCA) and why did you decide to pursue a career in nursing?

"I pursued a career in the health care field because I initially wanted to work with children who are ill. It did not happen the way I envisioned, and my career started in a place where I didn't expect myself to be, because I didn't think I had what it took to be there. I learned to grow into the nurse that I am today because of my training from the Cardiovascular Intensive Care Unit at Hoag Hospital. After working there for a few years, I knew I wanted to do something else with my career. I was encouraged by my mom

to provide service to a governmental facility just like she did. I decided to apply with the County as a contract employee, while working at a private hospital as a full time Registered Nurse. Working in a jail facility is so much different to what people perceive it as. I often got questioned, "Why there?" or "Is it scary?" and "Are you not afraid that you won't learn anything?" I work with some of the most amazing nurses, who advocate and provide care to this underserved population. When a full-time dayshift position opened up, I jumped on the opportunity and applied."

What impact do you have or want to have in your role?

"I want to promote a positive working environment that encourages team building and collaboration amongst staff and management so that better quality of care can be provided to our patients. In addition, I want to provide support to new employees through proper training and sharing the knowledge I have gained during the

past years I've been a nurse. I enjoy teaching, and as a result, I even took a role to teach CPR courses for staff."

Where do you see yourself in the next year to 10 years?

"Returning to school and pursuing a higher degree of education has always been my goal since I became a Registered Nurse. I plan to take advantage of the tuition reimbursement program that the County offers by going back to school for my Master's Degree in Nursing, with an emphasis on becoming a Psychiatric Nurse Practitioner. I hope to continue working for the County for the next 5 and 10 years, giving back to the community and continuing to help those with physical and mental health ailments."

What advice do you have for anyone who is interested in doing what you do?

"Be open minded, humble, and thankful for what you have. Working at the Correctional facilities made me realize how fortunate I am."

What encourages you at work and what do you do to encourage others?

"I enjoy working with my coworkers and appreciate the benefits that the County has to offer. These alone encourage me to come to work."

Any meaningful, funny, challenging, eye-opening experiences on the job that you'd like to share?

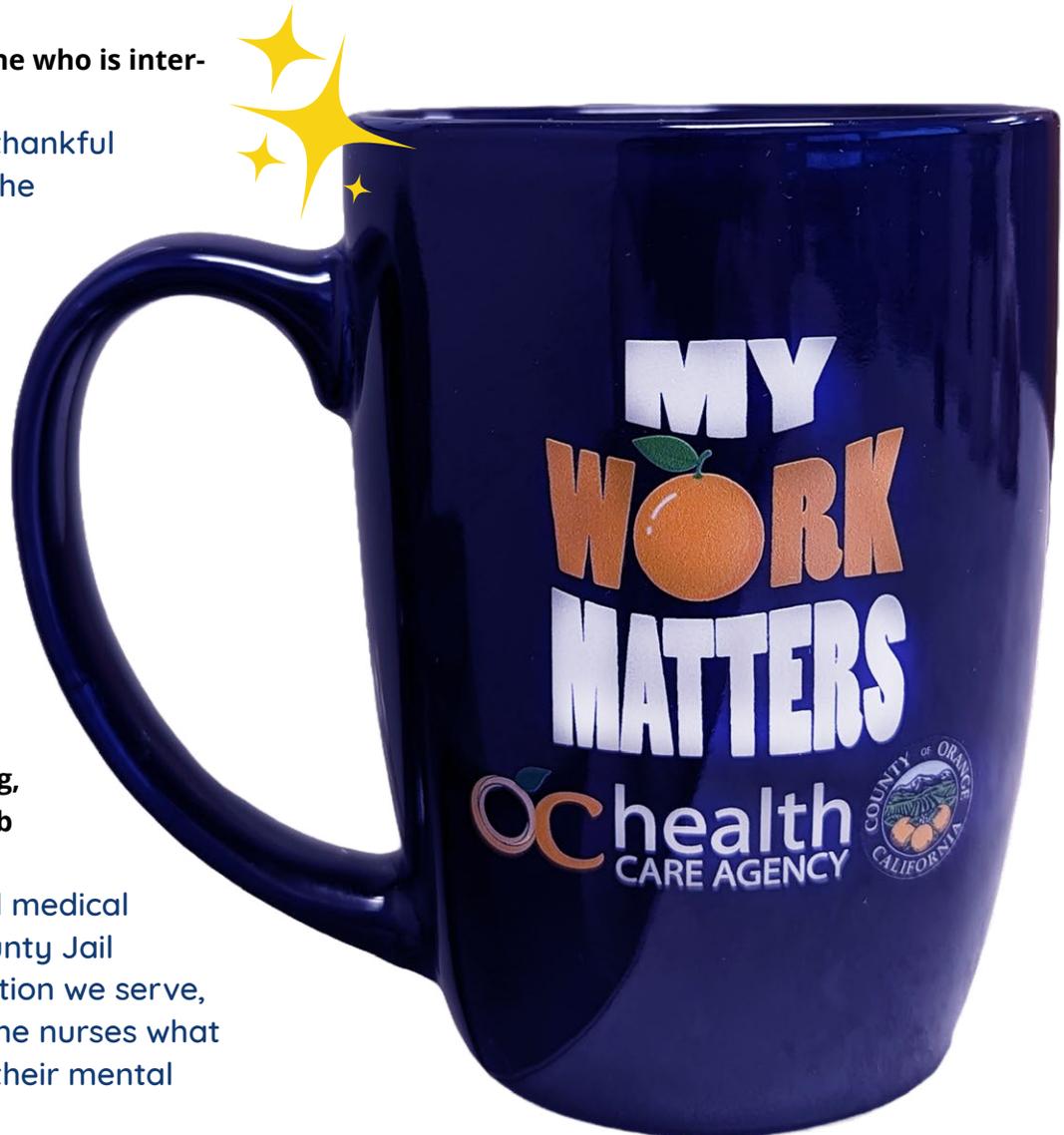
"I work in the mental health and medical departments at the Orange County Jail facilities. Because of the population we serve, I often hear patients report to the nurses what they use to help them manage their mental

health illnesses. After receiving the proper care and treatment, I often see them recover. It is fulfilling when I see my patients improve. I find my job to be meaningful, knowing that I can make a difference in the lives of others."

Anything else you'd like to say or any other point you'd like to make when it comes to why "My Work Matters"?

"Being a patient advocate for inmates in correctional facilities is one of the reasons why My Work Matters."

If you would like to share your thoughts on why "My Work Matters" please click [here](#).





CONGRATULATIONS TO NOMINEES FOR THE 2023

STEVE AMBRIZ

TEAM EXCELLENCE AWARDS



The TEA recognizes the great work of HCA teams and the excellent collaborative efforts that best represent the HCA's values and principles. The award is designed to encourage teams to exemplify qualities of effective communication, accountability, enthusiasm, creativity, and collaboration. The 2023 Team Excellence Award will be presented November 1st. You can learn more about the TEA program on the HCA Intranet [here](#).

Nominations from four OC Health Care Agency (HCA) teams have been received for the 2023 HCA/ Orange County Employees Association (OCEA) Labor & Management Committee's (LMC) Steve Ambriz Team Excellence Award (TEA). The nominees are:

- ★ **Children and Youth Services – Clinical Evaluation and Guidance Unit (CYS CEGU)**
- ★ **Environmental Health (EH) Sidewalk Vending Team**
- ★ **Office of Population Health and Equity (OPHE)**
- ★ **Older Adult Services (OAS)**

The CYS CEGU team, led by **Paola Bautista**, Service Chief II, provides comprehensive mental health services to incarcerated youth (ages 12-25) and their families during their detainment at Orange County Juvenile Hall and camps, based on their individual and unique needs. CYS CEGU provides mental health services, which includes crisis intervention, assessment services, individual therapy, group therapy, family therapy, collateral services, substance use counseling, psychological testing, medication support, intensive case management, discharge planning, and linkage to after-care referrals. It is through their diligent planning and services that they help the incarcerated youth to integrate back to their homes.

The EH team, led by **Christine Lane**, Director, began seeing an increase in sidewalk vendors (e.g., taco stands, tamales, hot dogs) selling food throughout the county. This was concerning, as EH did not know where the food was purchased, stored, or prepared. Additionally, vendors were operating without a health permit—which is required by law—and were also non-compliant with food safety, ware washing and hand-washing requirements. Inspectors developed educational packets and began outreach efforts with vendors, informing them of the applicable laws and what they need to do to achieve compliance. EH ensures that vendors are following food safety regulations and that OC residents can safely enjoy sidewalk vendors' food.

The OPHE team, led by **Hieu Nguyen**, Director, is tasked with supporting the HCA in making health equity and population health a strategic priority. This strategic focus ensures that all efforts and initiatives revolve around reducing health disparities and promoting equitable health outcomes. OPHE's internal infrastructure supports its health equity and population health initiatives with dedicated teams, resources, and processes to drive these efforts. Recognizing the importance of an inclusive environment, the OPHE is also working towards reducing discrimination and oppression within the organization. This commitment ensures that the organization's internal practices align with its equity-focused mission.

The OAS is an outpatient clinic, led by **Hason Vu**, Service Chief II. The OAS team strives to be a leader in delivering quality and culturally responsive care to our older adult community. The OAS is trauma-informed, and client centered, while engaging in reflexive discourses to continuously work on improving service delivery and outcomes. The OAS ensures the HCA stays aware of gender, racial, age, socio-political, cultural, and subcultural differences and their impact on our participants and our community.

The HCA is proud and grateful of the efforts and hard work of these teams, and excited to celebrate their nomination for the TEA. Congratulations to all our nominated HCA teams for this amazing recognition!

SERVICE AWARDS

2023 Third Quarter Employee Service Awards

(July 1 – September 30 Hire Dates)

Congratulations to the following staff for their years of service to the OC Health Care Agency and the County of Orange!

30 YEARS

Florinda Carbajal
Elvira Navarro
Veronica Ramirez
Maria Velazquez

25 YEARS

Domingo Apolonio
Elizabeth Cardoza
Diane Chen
Annabelle Mercado
Nancy Nava
Ha Nguyen
Anong Nhim
Elisa Perez
Tiffany Sampson
Dawn Smith
Helen Topacio
Kandee Tran

20 YEARS

Sylvia Aguas
Anabel Bolanos
Jennifer Brinkley
Alma Davis
Hermelinda Delgado
Richard Hassan
Valentine Kamara
Rene Larios
Joanne Martin
Shane Mills
Yolanda Rienzo

Gabriel Rodriguez
Maria Athena Santos
Maria Sesma
Maria Torres
Nancy Wong

15 YEARS

Jose De Jesus
Martha Galvan
Castolina Haro
Magali Landers
Kimberly Long
Audy Marlissa
Karla Navia
Hannah Ngo
Robert Nguyen
Shawn Noss
Ronilyn Ricaforte
Mary Elizabeth Sobral
Michelle Spitaleri

10 YEARS

Yolanda Hernandez-Obillo
Charles Huffman
Corinne McDonald
Jeannie Meyers
Samuel Monroy
Joseph Montanez
Adrian Morales
Constance Simoni
Christopher Spencer
Rosalia Tapia

5 YEARS

Emily Avila
Angel Cabello
Osvaldo Campos
Jayson Carr
Mark Gabriel
Jennifer Gomez
Robert Gonzales
Willie Greene, Jr.
Ruben Guerrero, Jr.
James Harkins
Maily Ho
Shakia Jackson
Mala Leao
Jennifer Mong
Thuy Nguyen
Vy Nguyen
Jennifer Ochoa
Denacia Okoro
Sarah Orndorff
Riazon Patterson
Kathryn Pfister
Lauren Robinson
Stacy Rusu
Jessie Shin
Neil Spoentgen
Phong Vo
Alexander Vu

ZEST For Health



Why We Should Care About Food Waste?

Food waste is a global issue, leading to economic loss and damaging effects to the environment. According to the [U.S. Department of Agriculture \(USDA\)](#), the average family of four loses nearly \$1,500 worth of food yearly. In addition to wasted money, discarded food ends up in landfills, creating methane, a greenhouse gas that contributes to climate change.

The USDA and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) have taken action by developing the [U.S. 2030 Food Loss and Waste Reduction Goal](#) to reduce food loss and waste by half by 2030. To save money and minimize food waste follow these steps:

PLAN: Take inventory of what you have in stock and list what you need before you go to the grocery store. This will help prevent overbuying.

BE CREATIVE: Find your inner chef and learn to be creative with your leftovers. A video series called [Why Waste?](#), featuring Michelin chef Massimo Bottura and other world-renowned chefs, provides tips on reducing food waste in flavorful and imaginative ways.

STORE: Learning proper storage tips can help foods stay fresher for longer periods of time and prevent spoilage. Many foods such as produce, grains, meats, and leftovers, will last longer in the freezer.

For more helpful tips visit [Reducing Wasted Food at Home](#) by the EPA and [How to Reduce Food Waste at Home](#) by the USDA.

Banana Berry Smoothie

Serves: 2

Ingredients

- 2 ripe bananas
- 1/2 cup of blueberries (frozen or fresh)
- 6 oz. of tofu
- 2 Tbsp of oats
- 2 cups of water (or your choice of milk)

Directions

Drain excess water from tofu. Add all ingredients to a blender and mix until smooth.



VISION

Quality health for all.



MISSION

In partnership with the community, deliver sustainable and responsive services that promote population health and equity.

GOALS

Promote quality, equity, and value.
 Ensure the HCA's sustainability.
 Offer relevant services to the community.



CONNECT WITH US

The **What's Up newsletter** is created and distributed monthly by HCA Communications. We welcome your ideas, input and/or insight into HCA people and programs. To contribute, comment or connect please email us at hacomm@ochca.com or call (714) 834-2178. You can follow us on social media by clicking below.



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