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## ENVIRONMENTAL SCAN: OVERVIEW

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Over the next three years, the partnership between the Clinton Foundation, The San Diego Foundation, and the County of San Diego aims to facilitate community collaboration, create systemic change, and improve the health and wellbeing of children and families who interact with San Diego County's child welfare and juvenile justice systems. The partnership will build a coalition of San Diego agencies – including those in the public, private, and non-profit sectors – that will develop a Blueprint for Action with specific action items that will improve the health outcomes of these children and families.

A preliminary analysis of the welfare landscape indicates that the presence of risk factors such as stress, mental health issues, substance abuse, unemployment, poverty, and a lack of affordable housing options can lead to abuse and neglect in a home, thereby making intervention, removal, and placement necessary. However, a report of abuse or neglect offers an early opportunity to provide parents with social support resources that can prevent removal and avoid trauma that can affect children throughout their lives. Strategies that focus on prevention and that are successful in reconciling the needs of the child's wellbeing with the goal of family reunification can serve as a foundation for systemic change and improved outcomes.

A complicating factor in San Diego County is the historic disproportional exposure to the child welfare system among the region's African-American and Native American communities, which has resulted in lingering feelings of distrust between County agencies and families from these communities. Research suggests that this problem may be exacerbated by the prevalence of the risk factors discussed above, but other components of this distrust stem from a perceived institutional bias among child protective workers and mandated reporters and a lack of social service resources available in African-American and Native American neighborhoods.

Changing legal, policy, and political landscapes, as well as budget constraints, pose new challenges to effective management of child welfare services. Mandates stemming from Public Safety/Child Welfare Services Realignment, Extended Foster Care, and Continuum of Care Reform have added new pressure on staff and budgets. In this context, a fiscally-conservative approach to social services programming requires substantial realignment to continue implementing evidence-based practices that serve families most effectively.

Collaboration between the County's family-serving agencies and their community partners is hindered by a lack of capacity, engrained organizational culture, and procedural and contractual hurdles. Because child protective issues are multi-factorial and require an integrated system of seamless coordination, the impact to children and families can be especially severe when system disconnects are not appropriately addressed. One of the major goals of this coalition will be to bridge these gaps so that resources are maximized for the benefit of children and families.

