

TEAM PROGRAM

Telecommunications Education and Assistance in Multiple Languages

Program Year: June 2022–May 2023

This California Public Utilities Commission (CPUC) staff report summarizes the services provided by the Telecommunications Education and Assistance in Multiple Languages (TEAM) program, for the program year June 2022–May 2023, and highlights areas of interest for CPUC, other policymakers and interested parties.



**California Public
Utilities Commission**

TEAM PROGRAM ANNUAL REPORT

Program Year: JUNE 2022–MAY 2023

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Executive Summary

In June 2008, the CPUC launched the Telecommunications Education and Assistance in Multiple Languages (TEAM) program, to support limited English proficient (LEP) clients state-wide to manage their telecommunications services. The Commission established an annual budget of \$1.6 million for TEAM.

This report summarizes TEAM services provided and related insights from the most recent program year (PY), June 2022 - May 2023. Program delivery is contracted to Self-Help for the Elderly, a non-profit organization based in San Francisco, supported by Milestone Consulting. The program has three service components: individual case assistance, education, and outreach.

Most individual case assistance cases are provided by community-based organizations (CBO) staff working in their offices, advocating with utilities on behalf of their clients in response to disputes or needs assistance (e.g., support applying for bill reduction programs such as Lifeline). Education classes are provided either on CBO premises or in nearby facilities. Outreach is mainly conducted via promotions at community events or through media outlets.

Summary of Annual Activity

Similar to last year, delivery of individual case assistance services continues to rebound from the sharp declines at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic. This has been driven by CBO offices reopening their doors to the public so that they could reinstate in-person services, a vital aspect of the program model.

Case Assistance services increased by **4 percent** on the previous PY, from **4,058** to **4,204** total services. This growth was underpinned by strong growth in support for enrolling clients in internet services (**1,267 to 2,020 services**), and Lifeline services (**69 to 326**), the majority of which were recertifications. Though a smaller group of services, fraud support also increased by over half this year, from **73 to 113** services.

The most common single service that TEAM CBOs provided was enrolling or renewing clients in reduced cost internet through the FCC's Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP). This service resulted in **1,900** ACP applications (**45 percent** of total services), which also represented the vast majority of CBOs' internet services. The next most important set of services was helping clients open new accounts or change existing accounts, which comprised **22 percent** of all services.

CBOs select educational topics based on their assessment of the needs and interests of their respective communities. Education class attendance increased by just over **a quarter** this PY. Most of the CBOs opened up full-time to in-person services this year, which helped increase delivery. The three most attended topics were Understanding Your Phone Bill (**18 percent**), California Lifeline (**17 percent**), and Late Fees, Disconnections and Deposits (**10 percent**).

Community outreach activities also increased markedly. In particular, consumers targeted by community event outreach increased **three-fold** over the last PY. Those targeted by social and traditional media outreach edged up by **3 percent** and **4 percent** respectively.

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Client Demographics¹

Recipients of TEAM case assistance had the following characteristics:

- They were overwhelmingly low-income. Approximately **88 percent** of clients reported annual income **under \$25,000**.
- They spanned all age groups though tended to be over 60 years old. **72 percent** were **over 60 years old**, with **28 percent** between the ages of **21 and 59**.
- Case assistance was conducted in **26** languages. The two largest language groups served were Cantonese (**38 percent**) and Spanish (**19 percent**).

¹ Based on data pulled from the program database on all clients receiving case services in the 2022 – 23 PY.

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1. Introduction

In Order Instituting Rulemaking (OIR) R.07-01-021, the California Public Utilities Commission (CPUC) issued Decision (D.)07-07-042 that ordered Commission staff to “design a program that integrates community-based organizations (CBOs) in the Commission’s outreach, education, and complaint resolution processes, including a mechanism for compensating CBOs for their efforts while ensuring financial accountability and prudent use of public funds.”²

Subsequently, the TEAM Program was authorized by CPUC Resolution CSID-002 (the Resolution) to support limited English proficient (LEP) clients to resolve issues with their telecommunications services. Program services are provided through a state-wide network of community-based organizations (CBOs). Although TEAM is focused on LEP clients, the Resolution also specifies that English-speaking clients may be provided services.³

In June 2008, the Telecommunications Education and Assistance in Multiple Languages (TEAM) program was launched to support LEP clients state-wide to help them manage their telecommunications services. The Commission established an annual budget of \$1.6 million for the TEAM program.

This report summarizes the services provided and related insights from the most recent program year (PY), June 2022 - May 2023. The program has three service components: individual case assistance, education, and outreach.

The CPUC contracts with Self-Help for the Elderly (SHE) to implement the TEAM program and oversees a state-wide network of 24 Community Based Organizations (CBOs) to provide program services to LEP clients. Under this contract, TEAM CBOs also provides services for the Community Help and Assistance for Natural Gas and Electricity Services (CHANGES) program. CHANGES provides similar services to TEAM but focuses on supporting LEP customers with their energy services.

² D.07-07-043, ordering paragraph 13, pg. 133:

https://view.officeapps.live.com/op/view.aspx?src=https%3A%2F%2Fdocs.cpuc.ca.gov%2FPublishedDocs%2FWORD_PDF%2FFINAL_D ECISION%2F70869.DOC&wdOrigin=BROWSELINK

³ Additional information on TEAM and the CPUC Decisions underpinning it can be found on page 9 at: <https://www.cpuc.ca.gov/about-cpuc/divisions/news-and-public-information-office/client-affairs-branch/team-and-changes-programs>.

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2. Overview of CHANGES CBOs

The TEAM program is operated by a single state-wide coalition of 24 community-based organizations (CBOs) that work on various issues impacting LEP communities.⁴ They are overseen and trained by SHE, the prime contractor, and Milestone Consulting LLC, which supports SHE with CBO operations, particularly strategy, implementation and training. The CBOs are geographically concentrated in four different regions across the state as shown in Table 1 and Figure 1 below.

Table 1: Number of CBOs in Each Region	
Region	Number of CBOs
Bay Area/Northern California	8
Central Valley	4
Greater Los Angeles	10
San Diego County	2

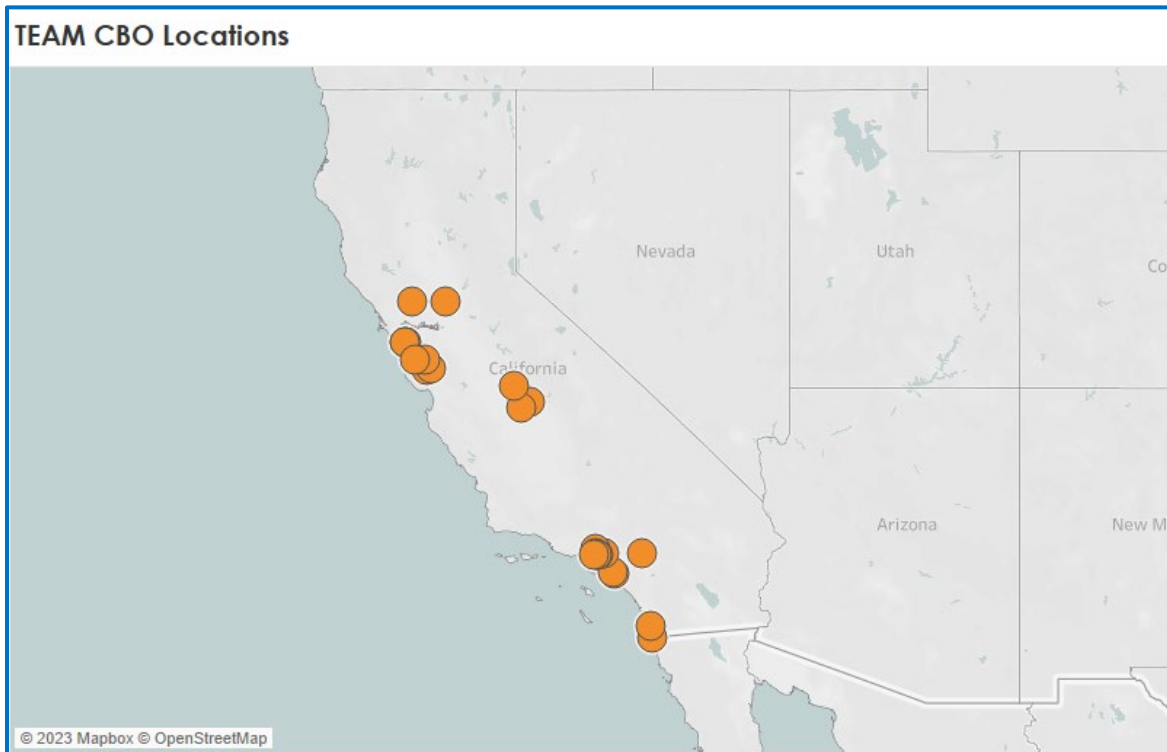


Figure 1: Map of TEAM Program CBOs

⁴ A full list of CBOs in the coalition can be accessed at: <https://www.cpuc.ca.gov/about-cpuc/divisions/news-and-public-information-office/client-affairs-branch/team-and-changes-programs>

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3. Individual Case Assistance

Types of Services Provided

There are two types of case assistance - dispute resolution or needs assistance. Disputes arise from a client’s belief that a utility has acted incorrectly concerning their service or account. Needs assistance comprise requests for help from a utility on services or bills, but there is no error reported.

Of the 4,204 total case services provided this PY, needs assistance represented 3,362 (**80 percent**) services, and complaint resolution represented 842 (**20 percent**) services. Clients often receive multiple services per case tailored to their range of needs. For instance, if a CBO represents a client in a bill dispute, they may identify additional services to support the client, e.g., resolving the bill dispute or helping them enroll in a financial assistance program such as LifeLine.

Overall, there were a total of 3,557 client cases in 26 different languages. Of these clients’ cases, clients received a total of 4,204 services, for an average of 1.2 service issues per case.

As shown in Table 2, the program provides a wide range of case services. The most common program service enables clients to access the Internet. In particular, CBOs were very active in helping clients sign up for the Federal Communications Commission’s (FCC) Emergency Broadband Benefit and the Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP).⁵ These were by far the largest single service (1,882) offered. The next most in-demand set of services supported clients with making changes to their accounts and opening new accounts; followed by support with billing issues; Lifeline; service/repair issues; and fraudulent practices.

Overall Category	Sub-Category	Number of Service Issues	Percent of all Service Issues
Assist with Changes to Account / Set up new account	Assist with Changes to Account	632	15%
	Set Up New Account	289	7%
	Sub Total	921	22%
Billing/Fee Issues	High Bill	339	8%
	Overbilling/Wrong rate	68	2%
	Promotion related	41	1%
	Other bill/fee related	5	<1%
	Subtotal	453	11%
Service/Quality/Repair issues	Repairs/Installation	143	3%
	WirePro (Insurance)	29	<1%
	Poor Coverage/Dropped Calls	60	1%

⁵ [The Emergency Broadband Benefit](#) helped families and households struggling to afford internet service during the COVID-19 pandemic, connecting eligible households to jobs, critical healthcare services, virtual classrooms, and more. On December 31, 2021, the Affordable Connectivity Program, a new long-term \$14 billion program replaced the Emergency Benefit Program.

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	Other	0	0
	Subtotal	232	6%
Notified Company of COVID-19 Financial Hardship		33	<1%
Fraud/Misleading practices	Cramming	69	2%
	Misrepresentation	41	1%
	Slamming	0	0
	Other	3	<1%
	Subtotal	113	3%
LifeLine	Applications	85	2%
	Recertifications	237	6%
	Enrollment/Billing problem	4	<1%
	Subtotal	326	8%
Internet	FCC Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP)	1,882	45%
	FCC Emergency Broadband Program	26	<1%
	Add internet service/plan	112	3%
	Subtotal	2,020	48%
Complaints About Unhelpful Customer Service		60	1%
Other		17	<1%
Wrongful Disconnection		6	<1%
Pay-as-You-Go/Prepaid Phone/Calling Cards		23	<1%
TOTAL		4,204	100%

As shown in Table 3, compared to the last PY, total case services have increased by **4 percent**, underpinned by strong growth in support for Internet services and Lifeline recertifications, which restarted after the COVID-19 moratoriums ended. Fraud cases are a smaller group but also increased by over half.

Table 3: Total Case Assistance Services Provided in PYs 2021-22 and 2022-23

Overall Category	Sub-Category	2021 – 22 Services	2022– 23 Services	YOY Number Change	YOY Percent Change
Internet access related	FCC’s Affordable Connectivity Program	1068	1,882	814	76%
	Add internet service/plan	198	26	(172)	(87%)
	Hot Spot Device Loans Program	1	112	111	-
	Subtotal	1267	2,020	753	59%
Assist with Changes to Account/Set up new account	Assist with Changes to Account	821	632	(189)	(23%)
	Set Up New Account	484	289	(195)	(40%)
	CTAP	5	0	(5)	(100%)

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	Sub Total	1,310	921	(389)	(30%)
Billing/Fee Issues	High bill	532	339	(193)	(36%)
	Overbilling/ Wrong Rate	147	68	(79)	(54%)
	Promotion Related	52	41	(11)	(21%)
	Other bill/fee related	12	5	(7)	(58%)
	Subtotal	743	453	(290)	(39%)
LifeLine	LifeLine Recertifications	26	237	211	812%
	LifeLine Enrollments	66	85	19	29%
	LifeLine Enrollment/Billing Problem	3	4	1	33%
	Subtotal	69	326	257	372%
Service/Quality/ Repair issues	Repairs/Installation	101	143	42	42%
	WirePro (Insurance)	127	29	(98)	(77%)
	Poor Coverage /Dropped Calls	73	60	(13)	(18%)
	Other Service/Quality/ Repair Issues	23	0	(23)	(100%)
	Subtotal	324	232	(92)	(28%)
Fraud/ Misleading practices	Cramming	43	69	26	60%
	Misrepresentation	18	41	23	128%
	Slamming	7	0	(7)	(100%)
	Other Fraud/Misleading Practices	5	3	(2)	(40%)
	Subtotal	73	113	40	55%
Complaints About Unhelpful Customer Service		23	60	37	161%
Notified Company of COVID-19 Financial Hardship		171	33	(138)	(81%)
Pay-as-You-Go/Prepaid Phone/Calling Cards		5	23	18	360%
Wrongful Disconnection		12	6	(6)	(50%)
Other		61	17	(44)	(72%)
TOTAL		4,058	4,204	146	4%

Complaints about pay-as-you-go or prepaid phone plans continue to increase among TEAM consumers. However, according to the CBOs, this does not necessarily translate to increased TEAM services. This is because prepaid services do not generally generate the type of documentation (such as a regularly mailed monthly bill) needed to support a case that a CBO can pursue. Therefore, the program data may understate the issue.

In terms of falling demand, the largest drops were in making changes to clients' accounts, opening new accounts, and helping with service/repair issues, in that order. Disconnections also stayed very low.

However, some CBOs suggested that the low number of cases addressing disconnections is affected by a

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shift a shift in consumer behavior i.e., consumers have switched to prepaid phone plans where services are purchased in advance. Documentation in connection with these services is limited meaning dispute cases are hard to follow up on.

Languages in Which Services are Provided

Case assistance was conducted in 26 languages. By far the two largest language groups were Cantonese (**38 percent**) and Spanish (**19 percent**) speakers. The next largest groups were Vietnamese (**11 percent**) and Armenian (**5 percent**).

Table 4 below illustrates the array of languages served, as well as the Year-On-Year (YOY) change in clients served by language. The top four attendee language groups remained relatively constant when compared to the previous PY. There were particularly large numerical increases in Cantonese, Vietnamese, and Korean speakers served this year. Though countering this increase was a fall, particularly in Spanish, Native American English, and Farsi speakers.

Table 4: Comparison of Languages Used for Case Assistance Compared to the Previous Year				
Language	2021 – 22 Program Year	2022 – 23 Program Year	YOY Change	YOY Percent Change
Cantonese	1,003	1,366	363	36%
Spanish	820	672	(148)	(18%)
English – Native Americans	327	88	(239)	(73%)
Vietnamese	239	381	142	59%
Armenian	149	185	36	24%
Dari	149	105	(44)	(30%)
Mandarin	139	167	28	20%
Korean	122	239	117	96%
English	105	192	87	83%
Farsi	104	6	(98)	(94%)
Cambodian	76	11	(65)	(86%)
Japanese	38	72	34	89%
Tagalog	37	9	(28)	(76%)
Arabic	34	7	(27)	(79%)
Portuguese	24	26	2	8%
Lao	18	0	(18)	(100%)
American Sign Language	14	0	(14)	(100%)
Pashto	9	13	4	44%
Hmong	4	0	(4)	(100%)
Albanian	2	0	(2)	(100%)
Brazilian Portuguese	2	0	(2)	(100%)
Cebuano	0	2	2	-
French	2	0	(2)	(100%)
German	2	0	(2)	(100%)
Persian	2	0	(2)	(100%)
Somali	2	1	(1)	(50%)

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Swahili	2	1	(1)	(50%)
Burmese	1	0	(1)	(50%)
Eritrean	0	1	1	-
Fanti	1	0	(1)	(50%)
Hindi	1	2	1	100%
Khmer	1	0	(1)	(50%)
Mien	0	1	1	-
Kurdish	1	0	(1)	(50%)
Ukrainian	0	6	6	-
Urdu	1	0	(1)	(50%)
Russian	0	1	1	-
Samoan	0	2	2	-
Visayan	0	1	1	-
Total	3,431	3,557	126	4%

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4. Education

Education Workshop Topics

CBOs provide client education on 14 different topics⁶ in workshops that typically span 45 – 60 minutes. CBOs select educational topics based on their assessment of the needs and interests of their respective communities.

Overall, workshop attendance in 2022/2023 was 38,385 clients, **26 percent** more than the prior PY. Most of the CBOs reopened to full time to in-person services this year, which helped increase delivery. CBOs pivoted effectively to start offering online education during the pandemic. However, this format is not as effective or accessible as in-person presentations for the target populations. Compared to the general population, this demographic tends to be lower income and older, besides being LEP.

As shown in Figure 2 below, the three most presented topics were Understanding Your Phone Bill (**18 percent**), California Lifeline (**17 percent**), and Late Fees, Disconnections and Deposits (**10 percent**). CBOs believed that their communities needed the most help in these areas.

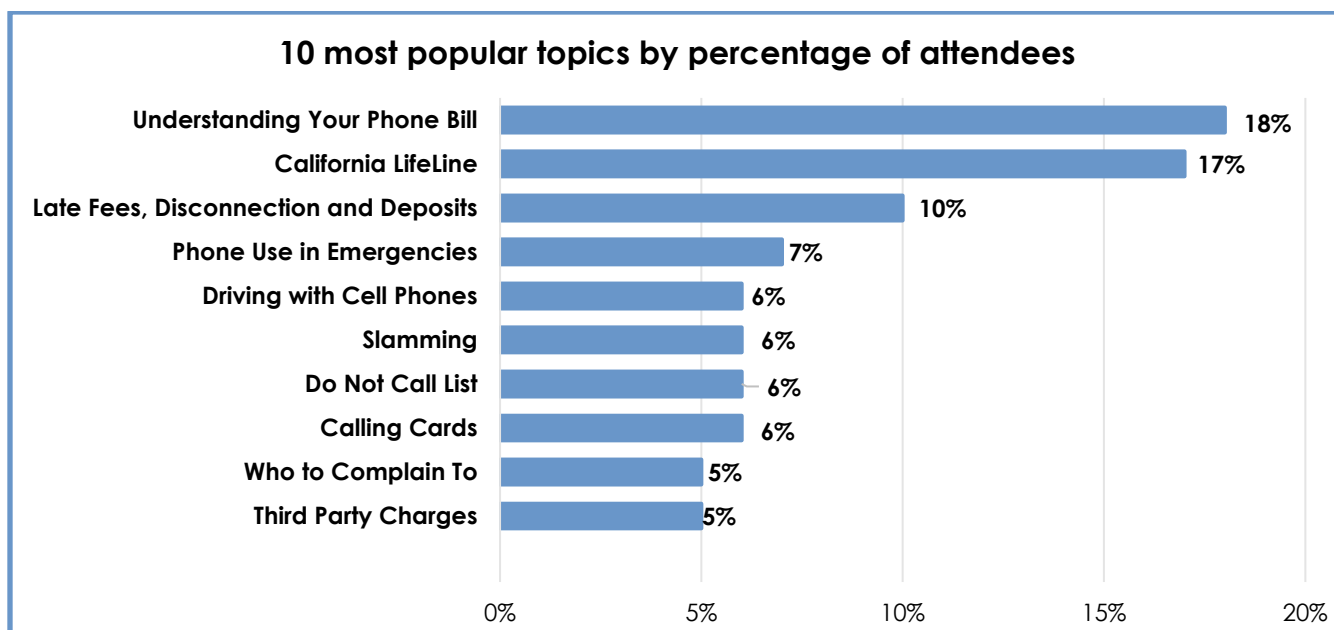


Figure 2: Distribution of Education Attendees by Workshop Topic

⁶ Samples of client education materials for each topic can be found at <https://www.cpuc.ca.gov/about-cpuc/divisions/news-and-public-information-office/consumer-affairs-branch/team-and-changes-programs> or on www.calphoneinfo.com

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As shown in Table 5, attendance for most topics increased significantly compared to the last PY and in line with the overall trend. Notably, the largest increase was for the Prepaid Phone Cards topic. As noted in the case assistance section, support for this issue increased only slightly, though CBOs are reporting more concerns around this area. As noted earlier, limitations on documenting prepaid charges also limit the ability of CBOs to follow up on client complaints. Nonetheless, this large level of interest in attending education sessions underscores that this is a serious area of concern for LEP consumers.

There were decreases for a small number of topics. The topics of Late Fees, Disconnections, Deposits; and Collections Agencies; saw the most significant decreases. This appears to indicate that CBOs are receiving fewer complaints about companies penalizing consumers who are having trouble making their payments.

Topic	2021-22 PY	2022–23 PY	YOY Change	YOY Percent Change
Understanding Your Phone Bill	5,538	6,821	1,283	23%
California LifeLine	5,224	6,531	1,307	25%
Late Fees, Disconnection, Deposits	4,588	3,896	(692)	(15%)
Phone Use in Emergencies	1,540	2,711	1,171	76%
Do Not Call List	1,760	2,416	656	37%
Slamming	1,899	2,396	497	26%
Cell Phones and Driving	2,047	2,227	180	9%
Who to Complain to	1,380	2,206	826	60%
Prepaid Phone Cards	528	2,153	1,625	308%
Third Party Charges	887	1,861	974	110%
Guide to Selecting Phone Service	988	1,760	772	78%
Take Charge of Your Phone Service	1,602	1,411	(191)	(12%)
Tips for Buying Cell Phone Service	1,007	1,156	149	15%
Collections	1,596	840	(756)	(47%)
TOTAL	30,584	38,385	7,801	26%

Languages in Which Education is Provided

Figure 3 shows the most common languages spoken by education workshop attendees. The most spoken language by a large margin was Spanish (**36 percent**). The next most spoken languages are Korean (**20 percent**), Vietnamese (**19 percent**), Cantonese (**18 percent**) and Native American English (**16 percent**). The latter is mostly driven by the hard work of the Suscol Tribal CBO based in Napa County

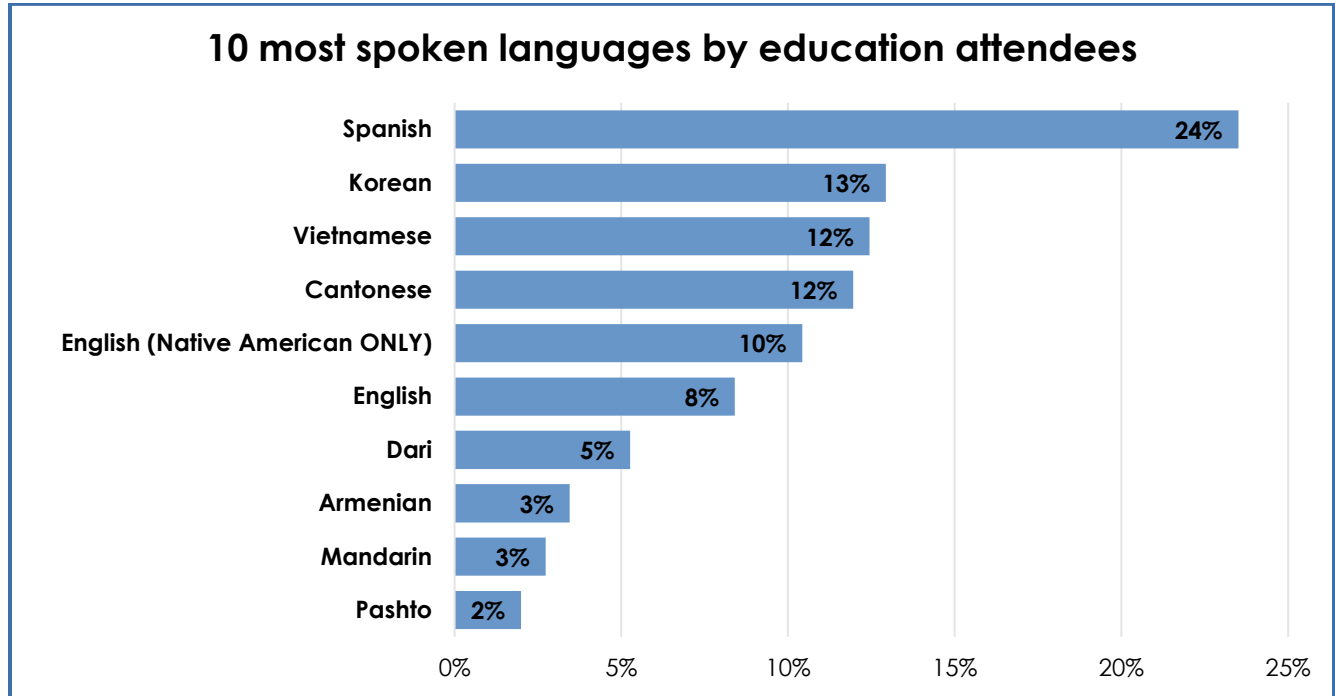


Figure 3: Distribution of Clients Educated by Language

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5. Outreach

Sources of Client Referrals

Table 6 below shows that over **80 percent** of all referrals occurred via three methods – **43 percent** through family or friends, **24 percent** by participation in another program at the CHANGES CBO, or **14 percent** through attendance at a CBO education workshop. Historically, the largest source of referrals has come from friends and families. These three referral methods show the importance of CBOs having close ties with the LEP communities being targeted by the TEAM program.

Table 6: Sources of Client referrals	
Referred by Friend or Family	43%
Previous/existing client at CBO	24%
TEAM Consumer Education Workshop	14%
Outreach - Community Event	8%
Outreach - media	7%
Not Indicated	2%
Special Outreach Project	1%
Referred by Another CBO	1%
Total	100%

Outreach Methods

In 2022-2023 PY, CBOs conducted program outreach through community events, media placements (in-language ethnic television, radio, and print outlets), social media postings, and community presentations. The two main methods of reaching consumers are community events and media outreach, with social media increasing slightly over the last 3 years.

As shown in Table 7 below, the total number of customers reached by community events and media outreach both increased this PY. Media outreach reached slightly more consumers this year, but community event outreach effectively tripled.

Table 7: Comparison of Outreach Activities with the Previous Program Year				
* Potential Number of Customers Reached				
Outreach Component:	2021-22 PY	2022–23 PY	YOY Change	YOY Percent Change
No. of Community Presentations	60	13	(47)	(78%)
No. of Social-Media (postings)	225	232	7	3%
Media Placements*	1,255,362	1,302,050	46,688	4%
Community Events*	41,393	125,172	83,779	202%

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6. Conclusion

Similar to last year, delivery of individual case assistance services continues to rebound from the sharp declines at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic. This has been driven by CBO offices reopening their doors to the public so that they could reinstate in-person services, a vital aspect of the program model.

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