



# TEAM Program

*Community Help and Awareness of Natural Gas  
and Electricity Service*

## ANNUAL REPORT

Program Year: July 1, 2024 – June 30, 2025

Submitted by  
International Institute of Los Angeles



International Institute  
of Los Angeles

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## 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.”<sup>1</sup> In June 2008 the Telecommunications Education and Assistance in Multiple Languages (TEAM) program began to support limited English proficient (LEP) clients statewide 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), July 2024-June 2025. This report also includes data on activities completed in June 2024, which was not included in the Annual Report for the previous program year. That data is included in Y-T-D totals for the 2023-24 PY.

- *Year-to-Date (YTD) totals are for the 2024-25 Program Year only and do not include June 2024.*
- *In Year-Over-Year Comparisons (YOY), June 2024 is included in data with the 2023-24 program year. Totals will differ from those included in the previous 2023-24 Annual Report.*

## Summary of Activity

During the 2024 – 25 program year, TEAM CBO provided telecommunications and internet assistance via three major program components: Program Outreach, mainly through Community Events such as health fairs, resource events, and ethnic holiday celebrations; Consumer Education to inform consumers on a variety of topics impacting their communications needs; and Case Assistance to resolve consumer complaints or assisting with consumers’ needs with their phones, internet, telecom accounts, and bills.

CBOs provided **2,169** consumers with case resolution, conducted consumer education sessions with **26,543** individuals. Outreach was conducted, reaching nearly 1 million people through in-language media placements.

## Operational Overview

Program delivery is contracted to International Institute of Los Angeles (IILA), a non-profit organization based in Los Angeles. with operation support by Milestone Consulting LLC. As the lead contractor, IILA manages a statewide network of 24 multilingual community-based organizations (CBOs).

TEAM CBOs are trained to advocate for LEP communities through the program's three service components: individual case assistance, education, and outreach. Most case assistance requests arise from a client's disputes or needs related to utility services, such as help applying for payment assistance or bill reduction programs, or managing their accounts. Consumer Education classes are provided in group settings or one-to-one with consumers. Outreach is mainly conducted via promotions at community events or through media outlets.

### About TEAM CBOs

TEAM CBOs work as a single collaborative to provide program assistance throughout California, in geographic areas with high rates of LEP residents. Most CBOs have been providing TEAM services for over a decade, and even those most recently added have assigned staff that worked in the program in other organizations. The lengthy experience and knowledge of the CBOs in program delivery services and telecommunications issues has solidified a committed and knowledgeable team of consumer advocates able to navigate the often complicated and constantly changing landscape of telephone and internet.



CBOs receive ongoing training and support in the form of an annual 4-day training and meeting in which they can interact, share new techniques and insight, learn fresh delivery methods, and renew goals, commitments and knowledge. Regular all-CBO remote training and meeting sessions are held regularly to conduct updates and discuss newly emerging issues. CBOs also receive individual training and monitoring visits at least twice each program year, and all newly hired CBO staff receive in-person program training before beginning to provide services.

All CBOs are linguistically capable, culturally competent and are selected because their organizations focus activities on immigrant communities. Collectively, CBOs have the capacity to provide TEAM services in 78 different languages.

In June 2025, CBOs discussed overall program operations, issues impacting service delivery, and how changes in assistance programs have impacted their ability to assist clients. CBOs described the rapidly changing telecommunications landscape and new ways to address emerging barriers to service provision.

*“In our communities, many people recognize us as telephone/internet trouble solvers.*

*Without any outreach people contact us when they have question regarding telecommunication issues*

*-Yasue, Los Angeles TEAM CBO*

*“Sometimes, when the internet is clearly slow and the bill has gone up, clients quickly see that they’re not getting a good deal.*

*These are the best opportunities to negotiate with providers and ask for deals and discounts. We need to take advantage of the barriers to best serve our clients”*

*-Sophy, Stockton TEAM CBO*

*“Unfortunately, many clients struggling with telephone and internet services will place a higher priority on energy issues. Clients will bluntly state that they can go without phone and internet services, when also facing challenges with their electricity and gas bills.*

*Several of the phone companies only offer discounts and promotions to new customers and have few incentives for long-term clients. Some of the discounts require clients to have public assistance for eligibility, and are only available in specific regions.*

*Case Managers have noticed, time and time again, that clients will always prioritize CHANGES over TEAM when faced with disconnection or other challenges.”*

*-Lisette and Laura, Los Angeles TEAM CBO*

## Our CBOs

<b>Afghan Coalition</b> 39155 Liberty Street 460 Fremont, CA 94538	Rona Popal 510-579-5767 rona@afghancoalition.org	
<b>Alliance for African Assistance</b> 5952 El Cajon Blvd San Diego, CA 92115	Walter Lam 619- 286-9052 wl@alliance-for-africa.org	
<b>Armenian Relief Society</b> 517 W. Glenoaks Blvd. Glendale, CA 91202	Melanie Vartabedian 818-241-7533 regionalsocialservices@arswestusa.org	
<b>Asian Pacific Self Development and Residential Association</b> 3830 Alvarado Ave. Suite C Stockton, CA 95204	Sovanna Koeurt 209-513-7618 ksovanna@apsaraonline.org	
<b>Asian Youth Center</b> 100 Clary Ave, San Gabriel, CA 91776	Michelle Freridge 626-646-4855 Exec@aycla.org	
<b>Asian-American Resource Center</b> 1133 South "E" Street San Bernardino, CA 92408	Rasmey Sam Cell: 909-855-3101 Office: 909-383-0164 rasmey.sam@gmail.com	
<b>Asian Community Center Senior Services</b> 7334 Park City Drive Sacramento, CA 95831	Connie Rusynyk 916-503-2077 crusynyk@accsv.org	

<b>Casa Familiar</b> 268 E Park Ave San Ysidro, CA 92173	Elizabeth Cuestas 619-428-1115 x202 <a href="mailto:lisac@casafamiliar.org">lisac@casafamiliar.org</a>	
<b>Centro La Familia</b> 302 Fresno St, Ste 102 Fresno, CA 93706	Margarita A. Rocha Office: 559-237-2961 ext. 102 Cell: 559-960-0147 <a href="mailto:mrocha@centrolafamilia.org">mrocha@centrolafamilia.org</a>	
<b>Chinatown Service Center</b> 767 N. Hill Street Los Angeles, CA 90012	Peter Ng (213) 808-1701 <a href="mailto:png@cscla.org">png@cscla.org</a>	
<b>Chinese Newcomers Service Center</b> 777 Stockton St. #104 San Francisco, CA 94108	George Chan <a href="mailto:georgechan@chinesenewcomers.org">georgechan@chinesenewcomers.org</a> 415-421-2111 ext 686	
<b>Compass of Madera</b> 1007 Papaya Street Madera, CA 93638	Andrea Herrera Mata 559-330-1718 <a href="mailto:andrea@compassofmadera.org">andrea@compassofmadera.org</a>	
<b>Delhi Center</b> 505 East Central Avenue Santa Ana, CA 92707	Christine Sanchez 714-481-9601 <a href="mailto:christine.sanchez@delhicenter.org">christine.sanchez@delhicenter.org</a>	
<b>El Concilio of San Mateo County</b> 3180 Middlefield Rd Redwood City, CA 94063	Ana Avendano 650-402-7995 <a href="mailto:ana@el-concilio.org">ana@el-concilio.org</a>	
<b>The Fresno Center</b> 4879 E. Kings Canyon Rd. Fresno, CA, 93727	Pao Yang 559-255-8395 <a href="mailto:pao.yang@fresnocenter.org">pao.yang@fresnocenter.org</a>	
<b>International Institute of Los Angeles</b> 3845 Selig Pl Los Angeles, CA 90031	Cambria Tortorelli (323) 426-2762 <a href="mailto:ctortorelli@iilosangeles.org">ctortorelli@iilosangeles.org</a>	

<b>Korean American Community Services</b> 136 Burton Ave San Jose, CA 95112	Eunice Chun 408-920-9733 eunice@kacssv.org	
<b>Koreatown Youth and Community Center</b> 3727 West 6th St. Suite 300 Los Angeles, CA 90020	John Ho Song 213-365-7400 ext. 5231 jsong@kycccla.org	
<b>Little Tokyo Service Center</b> 231 E. Third St. Suite G-106 Los Angeles, CA 90013	Takao Suzuki 213-473-1649 tsuzuki@LTSC.org	
<b>Madera Coalition for Community Justice</b> 219 S D Street Madera, CA 93638	Linette Lomeli (559) 661-1879 ext. 106 linettel@maderaccj.org	
<b>Pilipino Workers Center of Southern California</b> 153 Glendale Blvd Los Angeles, California 2455 Cushing Rd San Diego, 92106	Aquilina Soriano-Versoza aqui@pwcsc.org	
<b>Portuguese Community Center</b> 1115 East Santa Clara St San Jose, CA 95116	Elsa Oliveria 408-293-0877 Elsa@portuguesecenter.org	
<b>Southeast Asian Community Center</b> 875 O'Farrell Street San Francisco, CA, 94109	Diana Vuong 415-885-2743 dv94606@yahoo.com	
<b>Southland Integrated Services</b> 9862 Chapman Ave. Garden Grove, CA 92841	Tricia Nguyen 714-620-7007 tnguyen@southlandintegrated.org	
<b>Suscol Intertribal Council</b> P.O. Box 5386 Napa, CA 94558	Charlie Toledo 707-256-3561 suscol@suscol.net	

## About TEAM Clients

Recipients of TEAM case assistance had the following characteristics:

- They were overwhelmingly low income. Approximately **82 percent** of clients reported annual income under \$25,000.
- They spanned all age groups. **54 percent** were over 60 years old, with **45 percent** between the ages of 21 and 59.
- Case assistance was conducted in **23** languages. The two largest language groups were Spanish (**32 percent**) and Cantonese (**15 percent**).

In June 2025, CBOs surveyed 206 clients services about their experiences with managing telephone and internet services in their homes. Responses found the following:

- **Nearly all** respondents indicated that they have difficulty paying their entire balance every month, or struggle with high bills:

*“The biggest challenge I face with phone services is having to keep up with my payments because sometimes I don’t have enough money.”*

Rottana, consumer in Stockton

*“It’s getting harder to keep up with the cost. We rely on my phone for daily communication and internet access, especially for our daughter’s school needs, so we can’t go without it. But the rising prices make it difficult to manage within our budget.”*

Ngo, consumer in Westminster

- Consumers expressed frustrations with the free phones received from LifeLine providers, indicating that the low quality phones “break” or become non-functional after a few weeks of use. Others felt their service coverage was poor and internet connectivity difficult on the free phones.

*“One of the biggest challenges I face with my low income phone service is that the internet connection does not work properly. It’s often slow or unreliable, which makes it difficult to stay connected, access important information, or complete tasks that require a stable connection.”*

Ahmad, consumer in El Cajon

## INDIVIDUAL CASE ASSISTANCE

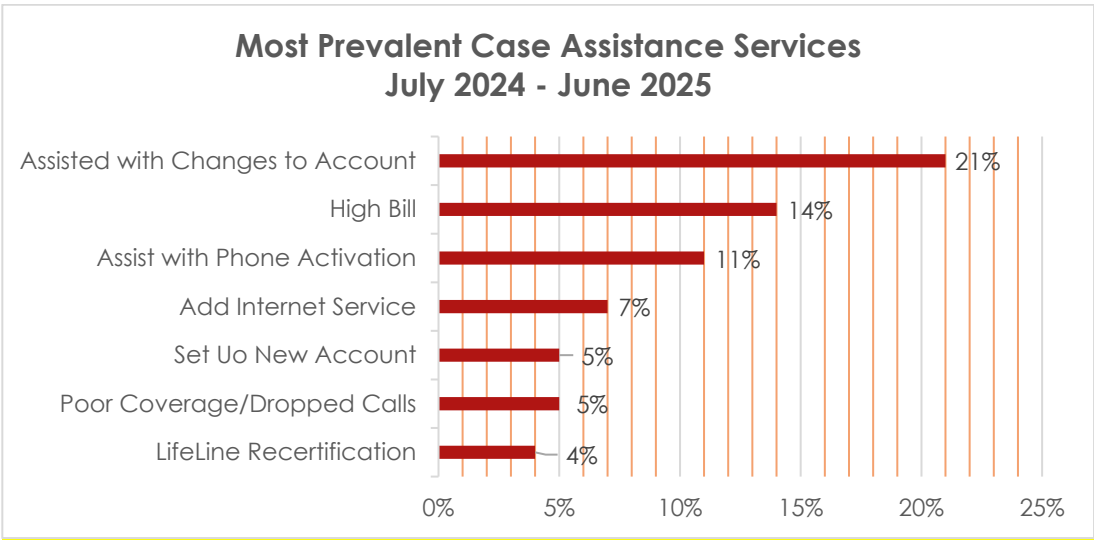
Case assistance includes two types of cases – dispute resolution and needs assistance. Disputes result from a client’s belief that a company has acted incorrectly concerning their account or service, and needs assistance is provided to clients who request help with utility services, bills, or contracts, but do not feel that the IOU has acted in error.

Of the 2,999 case services provided in the PY, needs assistance represented 1,889 (63 percent) services and complaint resolution *represented* 1,110 (37 percent) services. Clients often receive multiple services per case tailored to their range of needs. For instance, if a CBO represents a client on a bill dispute, they may identify additional services to support the client, e.g., resolving the bill dispute, and by helping them enroll in a financial assistance program such as LifeLine.

Overall, there were a total of 2,168 client cases in 21 different languages. Of these cases, clients received a total of 2,999 services, for an average of 1.4 service issues per case.

As shown in the illustrations below, there are several different types of case services that are provided to individual clients. The most common types of service provided to clients were assisting with changes to accounts, including new calling plans and bundled services, and handling high bill amounts.

Pay-as-you-go or pre-paid phone plans continue to increase among TEAM consumers, presenting their own challenges to resolving billing and service issues. However, this does not necessarily translate to an increase in TEAM services, because pre-paid services do not generally generate the type of documentation needed to support a case that can be pursued by a CBO such as bills or call records. New processes for addressing issues with pre-paid services are being tested and results will be included in upcoming reports.



## COMPARISON WITH PREVIOUS PY

The table below compares the main categories of case assistance services to the previous PY. **Columns A and B** illustrate each case assistance category as a share of all services for the relative PY. **Column C** evaluates the YOY distributional change, and **column D** compares the proportional share of each category between two consecutive PYs.

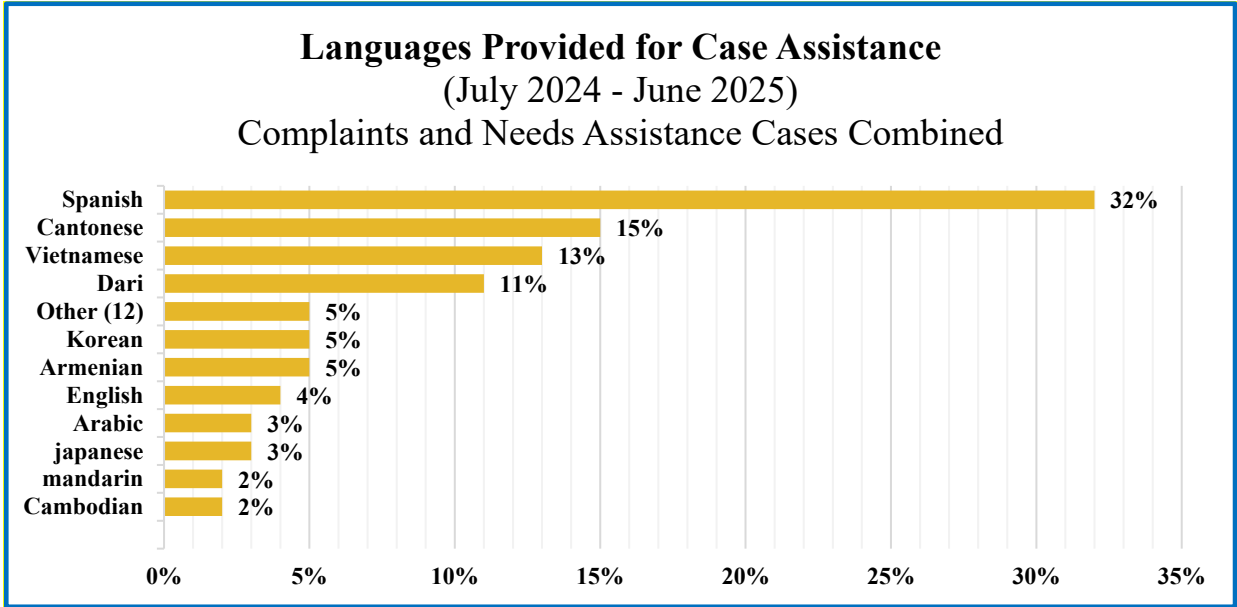
Changes in YOY reflect the impact of the cancellation of federal Broadband discount programs that were prevalent in previous years, as well as the continuing migration of consumers to pre-paid month-to-month phone services.

Comparison of Case Assistance for the 2023/24 and 2024/25 PYs <i>Complaint and Needs Assistance Cases Combined</i>				
Main Category	(A)	(B)	(C)	(D)
	2023-24 PY (July '23- June '24)	2024-2054 PY (July '24- June '25)	YOY Change	Difference in Category Share (%)
	Services Provided (% of All Services)	Services Provided (% of All Services)		
Add new Internet Service/Plan	185	209	24	13%
Assisted with Changes to Account	626	622	(4)	<1%
Assisted Client with Paying Bill	94	122	28	30%
Assist with Phone Activation	283	344	61	22%
Automated Voice/IVR	2	2	0	0
California LifeLine Problem	2	34	32	1,600%
California LifeLine Enrollment	145	107	(38)	(26%)
California LifeLine Recertification	185	124	(61)	(33%)
Case Not Resolvable	0	1	1	100%
Changed Bill Language	0	60	60	100%
COVID-19 Hardship	10	0	(10)	(100%)
Class Action Claims	0	3	3	100%
Cramming	257	61	(196)	(76%)
Contract Language	6	12	6	100%
CTAP Application	6	0	(6)	(100%)

Do Not Call List	0	58	58	100%
Expired Promotion	21	103	82	390%
Faulty Equipment	28	37	9	32%
FCC Affordability Connect Program	1,127	2	(1,125)	(99.8%)
FCC Affordability Connect Program – Tribal	0	1	1	100%
FCC Emergency Broadband Benefit	6	0	(6)	(100%)
High Bill	448	418	(30)	(7%)
Maintenance Agreement	0	1	1	100%
Misleading Ads	4	7	3	75%
Misrepresentation	8	14	6	75%
Overbilling	96	75	(21)	(22%)
Pay Phones	3	9	6	200%
Pre-paid/Pay-As-You-Go	1	2	1	100%
Pre-paid Calling Card	1	0	(1)	(100%)
Poor Coverage/Dropped Calls	99	150	51	(52%)
Promotion/Award Not Honored	41	8	(33)	(80%)
Repairs/Installation	73	68	(5)	(7%)
Rude Customer Service	56	79	23	41%
Slamming	6	2	(4)	(67%)
Set up New Account	207	137	(70)	(34%)
Termination Fee	7	3	(4)	(57%)
Third Party Charges	10	0	(10)	(100%)
Wildfire Related Issue	3	55	52	1,733%
WirePro	44	3	(41)	(93%)
Wrong Rate	8	24	16	200%
Wrongful Disconnection	0	4	4	100%
Undisclosed Fee	1	6	5	500%
<b>OVERALL NUMBER OF CASE ASSISTANCE SERVICES PROVIDED</b>	<b>4,103</b>	<b>2,999</b>	<b>(1,104)</b>	<b>27%</b>

LANGUAGES PROVIDED FOR CASE ASSISTANCE

The chart below outlines the most spoken languages by case assistance clients. In total, clients spoke **23** different languages, reflecting the program’s broad linguistic reach. Many of the clients were either Spanish (**32%**) or Cantonese (**15%**) speakers. These were followed by Vietnamese (**13%**), Dari (**11%**), and Korean (**5%**). This linguistic diversity underscores the importance of culturally and linguistically responsive services in addressing the needs of California’s LEP communities and the TEAM program.



The table below illustrates the array of languages served as well as the YOY change in languages used for Case Assistance. The top four language groups remained relatively constant and although Cantonese dropped by 68%, it was still the second most used language for case assistance.

Comparison of Languages Used for Case Assistance Compared to the Previous Year				
Language	2023 – 24 Program Year	2024 – 25 Program Year	YOY Change	YOY Percent Change
Spanish	482	692	210	44%
Cantonese	1,190	336	(854)	(72%)
Vietnamese	364	270	(94)	(26%)
Dari	280	254	(26)	(9%)
Korean	213	112	(101)	(47%)
Armenian	152	114	(38)	(25%)

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English	104	72	(32)	(31%)
Arabic	47	71	24	51%
Japanese	95	52	(43)	(45%)
Mandarin	84	44	(40)	(48%)
Cambodian	1	50	49	50%
Albanian	1	0	(1)	(100%)
Amharic	0	1	1	100%
Burmese	0	1	1	100%
English – Native Americans	329	0	(329)	(100%)
Eritrean	2	0	(2)	(100%)
Farsi	5	1	(4)	(80%)
French	4	0	(4)	(100%)
Hindi	3	1	(2)	(67%)
Hmong	4	5	1	25%
Lao	1	0	(1)	(100%)
Mien	0	1	1	100%
Pashto	25	36	11	44%
Portuguese	31	23	(8)	(26%)
Romanian	1	0	(1)	(100%)
Samoan	2	0	(2)	(100%)
Somali	0	4	4	(100%)
Swahili	2	6	4	67%
Tagalog	0	2	2	100%
Tigrinia	1	0	(1)	(100%)
Toisanese	0	20	20	100%
Ukranian	1	0	(1)	(100%)
Urdu	3	0	(3)	(100%)
<b>Total</b>	<b>3,427</b>	<b>2,168</b>	<b>(1,259)</b>	<b>(37%)</b>

## Consumer Education

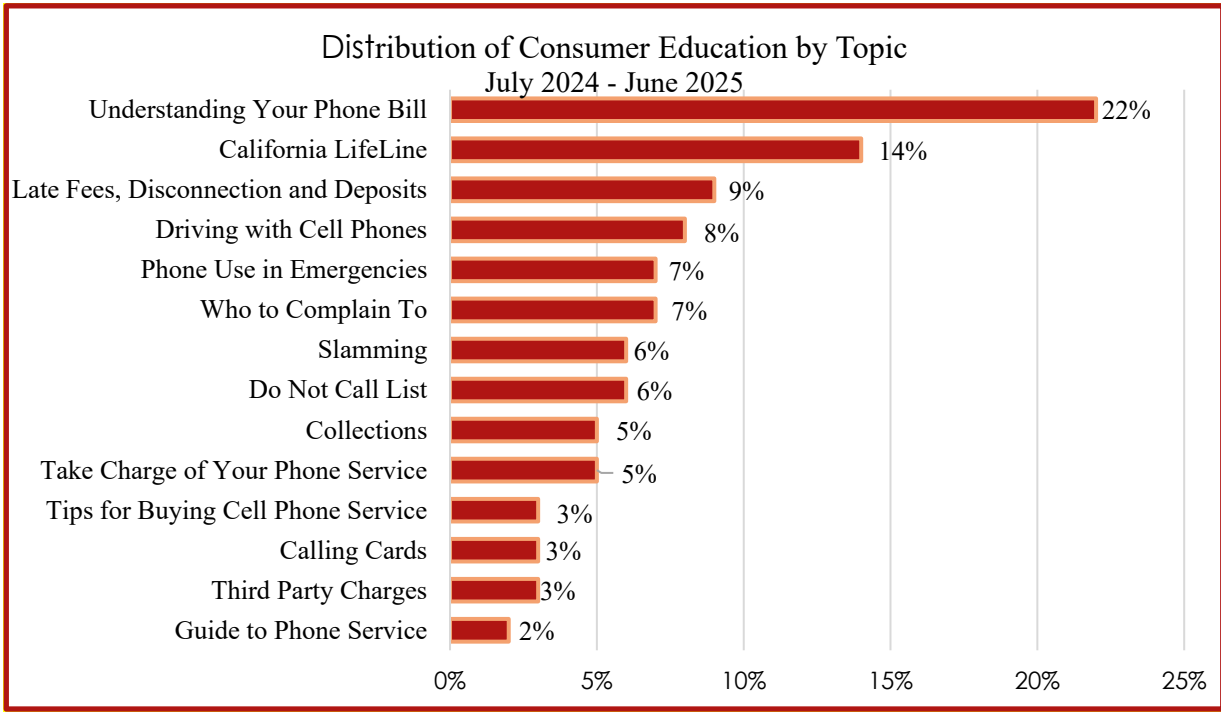
### EDUCATION WORKSHOP TOPICS

CBOs provided client education on 14 different topics in workshops that typically spanned 45 – 60 minutes in length. CBOs typically choose educational topics based on their assessment of needs and interests of their respective communities.

Overall, TEAM educated 26,543 consumers in 2024/2025, which was 6% more clients than the 25,085 educated in the prior PY.

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](http://www.calphoneinfo.com)

As shown below, the two most presented topics were Understanding Your Phone Bill (22 percent), California Lifeline (14 percent), and Late Fees, Disconnections and Deposits (9 percent); followed by Driving with Cell Phones (8 percent) and Phone Use in Emergencies (7 percent).

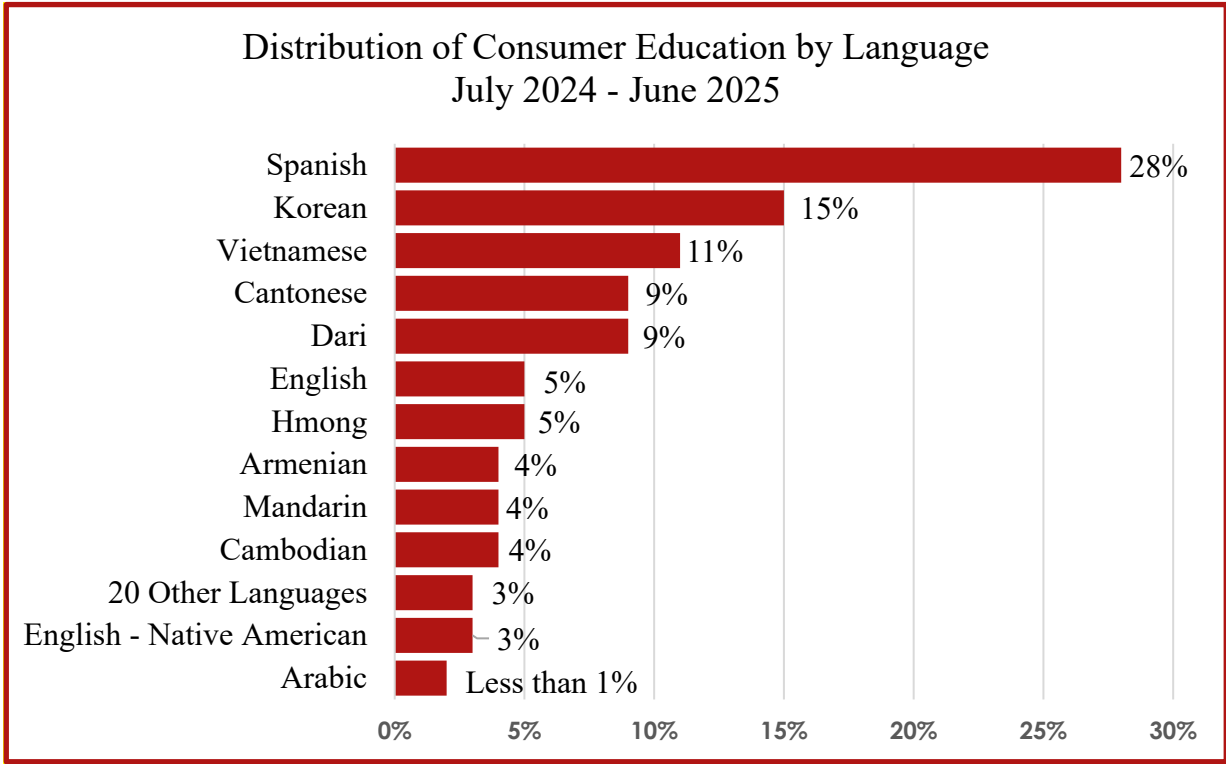


As illustrated on the following chart, Consumer Education decreased 33 percent over the last PY.

Comparison of Education Attendees by Topic to the Previous Year				
Topic	2023-24 PY	2024-25 PY	YOY Change	YOY Percent Change
Late Fees, Disconnection, Deposits	2,390	2,357	(33)	(1%)
Take Charge of Your Phone Service	1,721	1,326	(395)	(23%)
Prepaid Phone Cards	1,957	722	(1,235)	(63%)
Understanding Your Phone Bill	6,306	5,784	(522)	(8%)
Phone Use in Emergencies	2,193	1,748	(445)	(20%)
Slamming	2,818	1,624	(1,194)	(42%)
California LifeLine	5,977	3,765	(2,212)	(37%)
Tips for Buying Cell Phone Service	1,833	753	(1,080)	(59%)
Collections	1,720	1,312	(408)	(24%)
Who to Complain to	3,140	1,963	(1,177)	(37%)
Guide to Phone Service	1,281	615	(666)	(52%)
Third Party Charges	1,923	790	(1,133)	(59%)
Cell Phones and Driving	4,221	2,226	(1,995)	(47%)
Do Not Call List	2,269	1,558	(711)	(31%)
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>39,749</b>	<b>26,543</b>	<b>(13,206)</b>	<b>(33%)</b>

**LANGUAGES IN WHICH EDUCATION IS PROVIDED**

The highest number of workshop attendees spoke Spanish (28 percent) followed by Korean (15 percent).



## Outreach

### SOURCES OF CLIENT REFERRALS

Over 77 percent of all referrals occurred via three methods – 37 percent by participation in another program at the TEAM CBO, 20 percent through family or friends, or 18 percent through attendance at a CBO education workshop. Historically, the largest sources of referrals have come from friends and families, and existing clients who know and trust the TEAM CBO. These three referral methods show the importance of CBOs having close ties with the LEP communities being targeted by the TEAM program.

Referral Sources for TEAM Case Assistance Clients July 2024 – June 2025	
Previous/existing client at CBO	37%
Referred by Friend or Family	20%
TEAM Consumer Education Workshop	18%
Outreach - Community Event	11%
Outreach – Media	6%
Special Outreach Project	5%
Referred by Another CBO	2%
Not Indicated	1%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>100%</b>

### OUTREACH ACTIVITIES COMPLETED

During the 2024 -25 PY, TEAM CBOs conducted the following Outreach activities:

Community Events	138,918 potential consumers reached
Media Placements	936,847 potential consumers reached
Social media	130 posts
Community Presentations	5 meeting presentations



## Success Stories

**1. Portuguese Organization for Social Services and Opportunities** Our client Maria is an immigrant from the island of Faial in the Azores Islands. She is nearing 90 years old which isn't something she likes to admit openly. She lives about 3 miles from POSSO in San Jose and is currently in cancer treatment which makes her uncomfortable using public transportation. Maria has no relatives in the United States and relies on POSSO to assist with various tasks including transportation and translation at doctor's appointments, analyzing her bills, applying her for programs, and even delivering food. She currently has care providers that attend to her and speak her primary language of Portuguese.

Maria lives in limited-income apartment complex and survives off of her SSI check. She has been a familiar face at POSSO for over 30 years. She comes in with her care providers and is familiar with our TEAM program - as we assist with obtaining calling cards to call Portugal, double check her AT&T bills, assist with getting the best deal on her internet, and also help with her California Lifeline Renewals. She recently took our IPAD class for seniors so that internet access is a great priority.

Our client was scammed by a person posing as providing a "gift" to everyone in the apartment complex. She was asked if she had Medi-Cal and if she liked using her phone to communicate with family and friends. The woman gained Maria's confidence and was invited in. The woman promised her a free cell phone - which sounded wonderful! Maria has a pay-as-you-go phone that was on it's last leg, so getting a brand new smartphone as a gift sounded amazing. Unfortunately, this phone turned out being a California Lifeline Phone.

When she received her AT&T bill Maria was shocked to see her home bill was at \$60 when previously it was in the \$14 range. She called POSSO and asked to be seen as soon as possible because she knew something was wrong. She brought in her bill, her new free phone, and the woman's information who signed her up for this gift. We immediately logged into her California Lifeline account and saw that she no longer had the benefit assigned to her home phone.

I reached out to Assurance to see what could be done. They claimed they were able to cancel the Lifeline cell phone and AT&T said they would send over a pink envelope. It never arrived. I called again and finally she received TWO on August 12. She immediately had her care provider stop by with her so I could apply online. Two days later she was approved. She is super frustrated that she went 2 months without her discount because her money can only stretch so much. This took three phone calls to AT&T, Assurance Wireless, and filing a complaint with the CPUC. Maria ended up with a letter from both the CPUC and AT&T apologizing for the delay. Maria is back to having her Lifeline benefit on her home phone. She is worried that someone might knock on her door or get her information one day and end up signing her up for a program that might put her in a financial hole.

## **2. Alliance for African Assistance**

Recently, a client, arrived in the United States and approached the Alliance for African Assistance seeking help to apply for public benefits. I assisted the client in filling out the application.

As part of the process, I asked for his contact information. He explained that he did not have a SIM card or internet access and was unable to purchase one due to having spent all his savings on his travel ticket to the U.S.

Understanding the urgency of completing the phone interview required for the application, I reassured him and provided a free SIM card that included both calling and internet access for one month at no cost to him.

With this support in place, I successfully submitted his application. The following day, he was able to complete the interview and was approved to receive public benefits. He continues to use the SIM card, which has been instrumental in helping him stay connected during this important transition period.

## **3. Chinatown Service Center Los Angeles**

Mr. Quan is a Chinese and Korean senior who lives alone in a small apartment in Koreatown. He is hard of hearing, speaks only Mandarin and Korean, and relies solely on his meagre SSA and SSI income. At his age, having reliable home Wi-Fi is essential—not just for staying in touch with family, but also for accessing Chinese and Korean-language news and entertainment that help him feel connected. He also mentioned that his family and friends are more willing to visit when he has Wi-Fi available for them to use.

When his internet service suddenly stopped working, Mr. Quan tried calling AT&T but struggled to navigate the English-language phone system and explain the issue. Frustrated, he turned to the Chinatown Service Center (CSC), a long-time trusted resource for him. As someone who has attended CSC’s educational workshops in the past, Mr. Quan knew that CSC, as a TEAM organization, was a place that could advocate on his behalf when he doesn’t know how to do it himself.

Our case manager called AT&T with him and helped schedule a technician visit. Mr. Quan waited at home the entire day, but no one came. When we followed up, AT&T admitted that the appointment had been mishandled due to an internal error. The appointment request never went through, and thus a technician was not sent to Mr. Quan’s home.

We rescheduled the repair for Mr. Quan and confirmed the new appointment. The technician eventually came and restored service—but flagged the issue as “internal wiring

damage,” which meant AT&T would charge Mr. Quan a \$99.99 repair fee.

Given his very limited income, this unexpected cost would have been a serious burden. Our case manager called AT&T again, explained Mr. Quan’s circumstances, and advocated for the charge to be waived, especially considering their earlier missed appointment. After further discussion with a supervisor, AT&T agreed to “discount” the full \$99.99 charge. Mr. Quan’s internet service was restored at no cost to him. He was relieved and grateful, telling us, “Thank you for helping me when I didn’t know how to ask for help.”

#### **4. Asian Community Center, Sacramento**

Dr. Foster is a long-time client of ours from another ACC program. He is a retired dentist in his 90s who lives alone and does not drive, which often necessitates in-person home visits. A few years ago, I helped Dr. Foster apply for a Lifeline cellphone through TruConnect. Recently, he reached out to me—via his property manager—because the phone was no longer working, and he was unable to resolve the issue on his own.

Due to his mobility and technological limitations, I scheduled a home visit to assist him. We attempted to call TruConnect customer service, but the representative refused to speak with me directly, as they needed to verify Dr. Foster’s identity first. Unfortunately, Dr. Foster struggled to comprehend the verification questions, and it took more than 30 minutes of coaching and repeating information before he was finally able to authenticate himself.

Once the verification process was complete, TruConnect informed us that the defective phone would need to be mailed back for inspection before a replacement could be issued. They also stated that shipping costs would not be covered. Dr. Foster, despite his limited income, understood the process and agreed to send the phone in. The following day, I took him to a UPS location to ship the device and later called TruConnect again to confirm that the phone had been sent.

Over the course of several weeks, I made four separate home visits to follow up on the issue. Each time we called TruConnect, we encountered long wait times, inconsistent information, and had to repeatedly provide the tracking number to multiple representatives. At one point, we were told there was no record of the shipment on his account. After being placed on hold for over 30 minutes, a representative was finally able to locate the returned phone and initiate the replacement order. We were told that Dr. Foster would receive a new device within 7 to 10 business days.

This entire process was both time-consuming and emotionally draining for Dr. Foster, who is already coping with mental health challenges and expressed significant anxiety about being without a working phone. For a senior living alone, especially one in his 90s, reliable communication is not just a convenience—it’s a lifeline. The lack of streamlined support and

accommodations from the service provider made this experience particularly frustrating and stressful for both the client and myself. We made it work at the end and Dr. Foster was very appreciative of my assistance.

## 5. Little Tokyo Service Center CDC, Los Angeles

Ms. Michi, a low-income Japanese monolingual senior, had lived alone in the United States for many years. She had never married and had no children, and all her remaining family lived in Japan. Determined to visit her loved ones, she carefully saved every penny over the years.

In April 2023, Ms. Michi finally had enough savings to purchase airline tickets for a long-awaited trip to Japan. Before traveling, she signed up for a no-contract T-Mobile plan, specifically because it was the only wireless carrier that would work in Japan without requiring an eSIM or incurring extra charges.

Upon returning from Japan in late April, she called T-Mobile to pay her outstanding balance of \$103.00 and requested to cancel her account. However, she was informed that account cancellations could only be done in person at a T-Mobile store. She went to the store, where T-Mobile provided a phone interpreter through a three-way call.

Unfortunately, Ms. Michi could not cancel the account that day because she did not have her Social Security number with her. She returned to the store another day and was told her account had been canceled. By that time, her phone was already inactive, so she assumed the cancellation had gone through.

However, in **June 2023**, Ms. Michi received a shocking letter from T-Mobile stating that an unpaid bill of **\$165.89** had been sent to a collection agency. She had not received any prior bills or notices and was devastated by the sudden collection notice. In a panic, she turned to a friend for help. That friend introduced her to **LTSC**, where she was connected with a **TEAM** representative.

The TEAM representative immediately contacted T-Mobile to request copies of the missing May and June bills. Unfortunately, they were unable to access Ms. Michi's account because she had never set up an account passcode. In order to create or reset it, she would need to visit a T-Mobile store in person with a valid ID — a difficult task for an elderly, limited-English-speaking senior.

Understanding the challenges, the TEAM representative escorted Ms. Michi to the store. There, they discovered that her account had **not** been properly canceled. T-Mobile had marked the account inactive due to missed payments, but formal cancellation needed to be done by phone — a step that had never been completed.

In **September 2023**, the TEAM representative and Ms. Michi contacted T-Mobile's collections department, but they were told no information could be shared because the account had already been sent to a third-party collection agency. They decided to send a written dispute to the agency.

In **October 2023**, Ms. Michi received a letter from the collection agency stating that she was still responsible for the charges. Unwilling to accept that outcome, they filed an appeal and submitted a complaint to the **California Public Utilities Commission's Consumer Affairs Branch (CAB)**.

Following the complaint, both Ms. Michi and the TEAM representative received a phone call from a member of T-Mobile's executive team. The representative listened to the situation, and Ms. Michi explained her limited income and confusion over the billing process.

In the end, T-Mobile offered a compromise: Ms. Michi would only need to pay for the service she actually used — from her return from Japan until her first visit to the store.

After nearly six months of stress, confusion, and back-and-forth communication, Ms. Michi finally reached a resolution. She was relieved and grateful to have the issue resolved — and especially thankful f

or the support of TEAM and LTSC in helping her navigate a complex system in a language she did not understand.

## **Casa Familiar, San Diego**

The story of Ms. Serrano, a resident of San Ysidro, highlights the barriers faced when living on a fixed income. Her story depicts the life of those who must stretch every dollar to cover the cost of basic necessities in the expensive San Diego County. Additionally, it reflects the importance of advocacy and outreach for services and programs that enhance the quality of life for community members like Ms. Serrano.

Ms. Serrano is a long-time recipient of services at Casa Familiar. We have mainly assisted her with translation of her mail and medical insurance. She discovered the TEAM program at one of our education presentations, which led her to schedule an appointment with us to review her phone bill. Upon reviewing her bill, we noticed the amount being charged was high as she only had a landline. To her, having a landline was sufficient because she does not need features like text messaging or social media.

Her bill included unnecessary charges of \$34 per month for messaging and long-distance service. She had never made use of these services and had no need for them as she did not know how to use them. When she did try to use the long-distance feature, she received an error message stating that she did not have the correct plan to make those calls. When we spoke to

customer service, they gave some pushbacks to remove both of those services but ultimately, our team member, Nadia, was able to reduce the bill from \$122.00 a month to \$47.36.

She mentioned that a couple of years ago, she was benefiting from the services provided by California Lifeline where she was paying a lower amount. However, one day, a sales representative enrolled her in the free government cell phone program without informing her of the negative impacts it would have on her. One being her home phone line to which the bill increased. She was left to navigate correcting the problem on her own. She wanted to stop enrollment with the cell phone and for it to be transferred back to her landline. She did not understand the process to make this correction and was aware that there was a language barrier. Meanwhile, she accumulated debt, which she eventually paid off, but still caused financial stress. She then found the support she needed at Casa Familiar, which was a relief for her.

Her story has a profound impact on the community. In follow-up meetings, she often shares her testimony, encouraging other community members to take advantage of the services offered by Casa Familiar. Nadia's expertise in navigating communication with sales representatives from companies has facilitated the aid community members like Ms. Serrano are in need of.

Today, her financial situation is more stable, partly thanks to the support she received. Her story serves as a powerful reminder of the importance of community support and advocacy. Reflecting on her journey, we see the significance of helping those in need who are navigating complex systems to improve their quality of life. Ms. Serrano's resilience and the assistance she received left a lasting impact that inspires others to seek help and support within their communities.

## Conclusion

During the 2024-25 PY, services declined in comparison to the previous PY, mainly as a result of funding shortages. CBO compensation for various program deliverables were increased for the first time since the inception of the non-pilot phase of the program in 2015. Other deliverables were added to CBOs' scopes of work, making less dollars available for core services.

With a few exceptions, most Outreach activities were halted in October 2024 to make funds available for much needed case assistance, and a stop to Consumer Education was implemented in November 2024.

The reduction in services provided should not be misconstrued as a reduction in need. Higher utility rates and recent difficulties with traditional assistance programs made the need more prevalent, as CBO found it increasingly challenging to find adequate assistance to meet their clients' needs.