



LOS ANGELES COUNTY

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
July 24, 2025

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From Crisis Response to Systemic Change: L.A. County Wins National Awards for People-First Programs

LOS ANGELES – Four groundbreaking programs, rooted in equity and economic justice, have earned Los Angeles County national recognition from the National Association of Counties (NACo). The Department of Consumer and Business Affairs (DCBA), alongside key County partners and community-based organizations, has been named a 2025 NACo Achievement Award winner for its leadership and collaboration on initiatives tackling some of today's most pressing challenges.

This year's winning programs reflect how County government can drive meaningful change in the face of systemic inequities. "Each of these programs reflect the power of community-centered public investment and cross-sector partnerships to remove systemic barriers and expand opportunity, especially for communities that have been historically underserved," said Rafael Carbajal, Director of the Department of Consumer and Business Affairs.

The recognized programs include:

Empower U (Human Services Category) Domestic violence survivors, especially from BIPOC, immigrant and LGBTQ communities, faced intensified economic hardship during the pandemic. The Empower U Program responded with direct, no-strings-attached financial assistance. The program awarded \$2,500 grants to 1,000 survivors to cover any critical expenses including relocation and medical care, while connecting participants with wraparound services aimed at rebuilding financial independence and long-term stability.

Leaving a Legacy (Community and Economic Development Category) Rewriting the narrative that estate planning is only for the wealthy, *Leaving a Legacy* empowers underserved communities to protect their assets and plan for the future. Led by DCBA's Center for Financial Empowerment, the



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program offers free estate planning services in partnership with Bet Tzedek and St. John's Community Health. By making these often cost-prohibitive tools accessible to all, families of all walks of life, especially in BIPOC communities, can build and preserve intergenerational wealth.

Youth Access to Banking (Youth Financial Empowerment Category) Realizing that foster youth under 18 faced unreasonable barriers to financial independence, Los Angeles County launched an initiative to empower them to open and manage their own bank accounts. Spearheaded by the Auditor-Controller's Ombudsperson for Youth in Short-Term Residential Therapeutic Programs, in partnership with Rize Credit Union, DCFS, and the Treasurer and Tax Collector, the program removed obstacles such as government-issued ID requirements, minimum deposit rules, and the need for adult co-signers. To date, more than 100 youth have opened savings and checking accounts, giving them the opportunity to gain practical money management skills and exercise their right to financial autonomy.

Los Angeles Smoke Shop Project (Public Health and Youth Safety Category) With Delta-8 THC and other emerging cannabinoids flooding local smoke shops, many near youth-sensitive locations, the Substance Abuse Prevention and Control (SAPC) team mobilized a Countywide response. These efforts resulted in local and statewide policy changes, community trainings, and advocacy. Other jurisdictions are now looking to replicate LA's model.

The NACo Achievement Awards recognize innovative county government programs in 18 categories covering a wide spectrum of county responsibilities. Since 1970, the awards have recognized efforts that improve the quality of life for communities across the country.

Since 1975, the County of Los Angeles Department of Consumer and Business Affairs (DCBA) has worked to level the playing field for consumers, tenants, workers, and immigrant communities across LA County. Whether combating fraud, enforcing worker protections, expanding access to justice, or strengthening financial resilience, DCBA serves as a trusted voice and advocate for those who need it most. Learn more at dcba.lacounty.gov or call (800) 593-8222.