



*Building Brighter  
Futures Together*

## **New Year's Message from the Director**

### **Welcome 2021!**



To borrow from Charles Dickens, 2020 was the best of times and the worst of times. The year started on a high, moving into a new decade with every expectation that the year would be one of stability, continuing economic growth, and improved outlooks for the populations we serve in our human services department. We were optimistic and hopeful that we had seen the last of recessions and the struggles that come with them. We had a new Governor with an expansive plan for investing in local services, and we were finally looking at a county surplus that would bring more stability to department budgets.

By March however, it was clear that we were on a different path and 2020 became our worst nightmare. The Covid-19 virus invaded our tranquility and spread around the world. In May our world was shaken by the senseless killing of George Floyd, followed by more indefensible acts of violence on people of color. The Black Lives Matter movement awakened a dormant outrage in us that will not be silenced. The already horrible year moved into the worst fire season in California history, with hundreds of families losing their homes and businesses. Many of our friends and colleagues in other county social services departments were among those impacted. But the year wasn't done with us, the economic impacts of the virus and necessary lockdowns drove hundreds of small businesses into bankruptcy, thousands of workers to be laid off or furloughed, and schools and child care centers to close.

A shocking 350,000 people have died of this virus in only 9 months. The enormity of the challenges created by the virus, to learn how it spreads, how to combat it, and finding the cure have been met by the best health care professionals in the world, and now we have reliable vaccines being distributed. We all did our part too to slow the spread of the virus and to protect each other – we all masked up, washed our hands frequently, and kept our distance. We changed how we work and how we serve our customers, making sure that we created the capacity to provide our services to the newly unemployed, to families needing child care, and to small businesses struggling to remain open.

We are seeing the beginning of the end of this terrible experience, and as we enter this new year, we still have the same optimism and hope for a better, brighter, and happier year. We will make that happen if we continue to respect the risks that the virus presents – keep our masks on, keep our distance, keep washing our hands and follow CDC and health officials' advice. When offered the vaccine, I will be happy to roll up my sleeve and I hope you will too.

To all of the wonderful and dedicated staff in EHSD who have persevered and met the challenges of this past year with resolve and courage, I thank you and I look forward to a 2021 that meets all of your wishes and hopes.

With gratitude, Kathy Gallagher, EHSD Director