



HELP A MOTHER OUT'S DIAPER PROGRAMS: EVALUATION BRIEF

Alameda & San Francisco Counties

Prepared by Public Profit for Help a Mother Out | December 2021



About this Brief

Help a Mother Out (“HAMO”) works to improve baby and family well-being by increasing families’ access to diapers. This brief describes the importance of diapers to families’ well-being and success, HAMO’s role in reducing diaper need, and how the HAMO diaper programs strengthen partner organizations’ abilities to serve families.

We also include recommendations for policymakers and diaper access advocates based on our findings. HAMO’s diaper programs serve families throughout the greater Bay Area region; this brief focuses on HAMO’s diaper programs in San Francisco and Alameda Counties.

The full evaluation reports on which this brief is based on can be requested from the HAMO team at info@helpamotherout.org.



Diapers are critical to families' health and economic security.

All infants and toddlers need diapers — and lots of them. Infants need up to twelve diapers a day and toddlers need about eight a day.¹ It costs approximately \$18 a week to diaper one child, and \$1,872 per year to diaper two children.² This cost places a huge burden on many families living in the United States.

The high cost of diapers creates “diaper need.” The National Diaper Bank Network defines diaper need as “the lack of a sufficient supply of diapers to keep an infant or child clean, dry, and healthy.”¹ More than a third of families in the United States experience diaper need.^{1,2,3} When families do not have enough diapers, they are forced to make difficult decisions, choosing between diapers and other necessities.⁴



Help a Mother Out's diaper programs are innovative enhancements to existing family supports.

Help a Mother Out (“HAMO”) works to improve baby and family well-being by increasing access to diapers for families. HAMO distributes diapers to families through a network of social service partners. HAMO distributes diapers primarily through two programs in the San Francisco Bay Area: HAMO's San Francisco Diaper Bank and HAMO's Bay Area Diaper Bank.

SAN FRANCISCO DIAPER BANK

In 2015, the City and County of San Francisco partnered with HAMO to launch the San Francisco Diaper Bank to distribute diapers through the City's network of Family Resource Centers and city and county agencies.⁵ HAMO's partnership with the San Francisco Human Services Agency (SFHSA), a central resource for public assistance in San Francisco, builds on existing infrastructure to support children and families. San Francisco families receiving CalWORKs or CalFresh benefits, two income support programs available to lower income Californians, are eligible to receive a free monthly supply of diapers up to age three.⁶ The San Francisco Diaper Bank is the only publicly funded diaper program in the U.S. that is layered into existing public services.

BAY AREA DIAPER BANK

Established in 2009, HAMO's Bay Area Diaper Bank distributes diapers to families through a network of partner organizations. Partner organizations integrate diaper distribution into their current programming for families, which includes classes, support groups, home visits, food pantries, and other services. HAMO's Bay Area Diaper Bank serves families throughout the greater Bay Area region; this evaluation focused on the Alameda County component.

“I feel like it is in the organization's DNA that we're always trying to see our clients as our customers... The experience is more like, 'here's a gift to you. This is not a handout. This is a gift for you and your child.'”

LISA TRUONG, FOUNDER AND
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF HAMO



HAMO distributed more than 12 million diapers in fiscal year 2020-21.

From July 2020 through June 2021, HAMO distributed more than 12 million diapers to partner organizations in Alameda, Contra Costa, Solano, San Francisco, San Mateo, Santa Clara, Marin, Sonoma, and Santa Cruz counties. This evaluation focused specifically on HAMO's San Francisco Diaper Bank and the Bay Area Diaper Bank in Alameda County.

SAN FRANCISCO DIAPER BANK

HAMO provided more than 2.6 million diapers to San Francisco Diaper Bank partner organizations from July 2020 through June 2021. During that year, the San Francisco Diaper Bank served over 1,360 families and 1,463 children, accounting for more than 31% of eligible families who receive CalWORKs or CalFresh. Families who accessed the San Francisco Diaper Bank lived in lower-income communities and most commonly spoke English, Spanish, or Cantonese. The vast majority of these families identified as people of color.

BAY AREA DIAPER BANK: ALAMEDA COUNTY PROGRAMS

From July 2020 through June 2021, HAMO provided over 4.3 million diapers to partner organizations who serve families with children in Alameda County. These diapers reached an estimated number of 2,000 children each month.⁷ Families who accessed diapers lived in lower-income communities. Most clients served by HAMO's partner organizations identified as people of color, which is similar to Alameda County's overall population of lower-income residents.⁸

"[Our partnership with SFHSA] helps us respond to the needs of the community in real time. We really believe that diapers need to be part of the safety net. What better way to do that than to tack it on to an existing program?"

LISA TRUONG, FOUNDER AND EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF HAMO



Bay Area families benefit from HAMO's diaper programs.

When families participated in HAMO's diaper programs, they experienced improved economic stability, less stress, increased parenting self-efficacy, better child health, and stronger community connections.

- Improved economic stability:** The diaper programs allow families to shift their focus from buying diapers to purchasing other essential items, such as groceries, rent, and clothing. The diaper programs also help families reach longer-term economic stability. About 29% of caregivers said that receiving diapers from HAMO allows them to go to or look for work, take their child to daycare, and/or go to school.
- Reduced stress:** HAMO's commitment to providing a steady, full month's supply of diapers reduces caregivers' stress. This reliability allows families to plan, rather than face the uncertainty of whether they will need to save money for diapers.
- Increased parenting self-efficacy.** The financial and stress relief enables caregivers to focus on and provide for their child. Being able to meet their child's immediate needs instills confidence in their parenting abilities.
- Improved child health:** Caregivers said that having enough diapers helps their children to be more comfortable, sleep better, have less diaper rash, and cry less.
- Stronger community connections:** Families connect with others when they visit community organizations to pick up diapers, when program staff drop off diapers, or when they attend programs that also give out diapers. Partner organizations have used the diaper program as a strategy to help alleviate poverty and build resilience in their local communities. When numerous families have access to the tools they need, entire communities can thrive.

"I am able to feel less stress and therefore be [happier] and enjoy every minute with my child. We feel less stress about having enough money for all of my child's needs."

ALAMEDA COUNTY DIAPER PROGRAM CLIENT

"It gives us security and confidence as parents."

SAN FRANCISCO DIAPER BANK CLIENT ^a

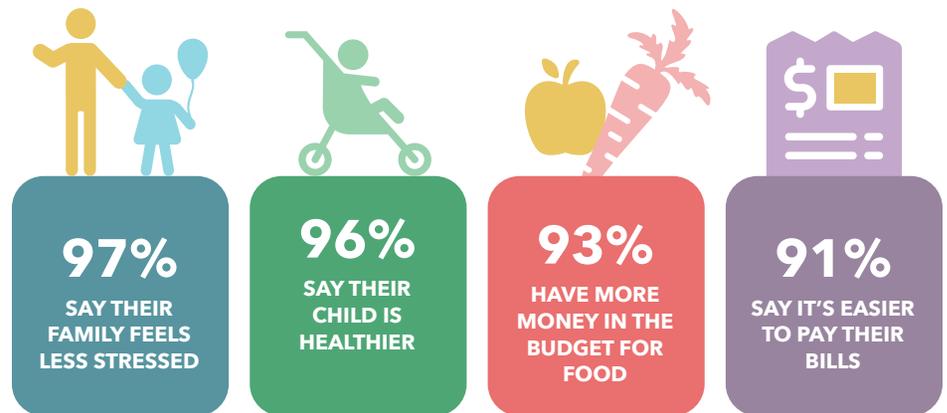
^a Comment was originally written as: "Nos brindan más seguridad y confianza a los padres."



90%

OF CLIENTS SAID THAT BECAUSE OF THE DIAPER PROGRAM, THEY GET CONNECTED TO OTHER RESOURCES.

Figure 1. Families are healthier and happier after receiving diapers from HAMO.



Source: Alameda and San Francisco HAMO Client Survey (Feb-March 2021), n=537.

"It has helped with my second child, he has [experienced] much fewer diaper rashes and fussiness because we didn't feel like we had to conserve as much as we did for our first born."

ALAMEDA COUNTY DIAPER PROGRAM CLIENT



HAMO's diaper programs enhance partner organizations' abilities to serve families.

In addition to helping partner organizations fulfill a concrete need for families, HAMO's diaper programs help partner organizations with outreach, retention, and relationship-building.

The diaper programs are a tool for partner organizations to build trust and deepen their relationships with families.

The diaper programs provide opportunities for partner staff to establish trust and build rapport with clients since they see each other regularly for diaper pickups.

"The families feel very supported, and we have been able to create a deeper and more impactful relationship. The families know that we are there for them."

LOTUS BLOOM, SAN ANTONIO FAMILY RESOURCE CENTER STAFF MEMBER

The diaper programs serve as an "entry point" for families to gain access to other services and programs. HAMO's partner organizations provide a variety of resources and services for families. In some cases, clients would come to pick up diapers, and stay to take advantage of other services, such as parenting and child development resources, mental health services, and housing support.

Providing free diapers allows partner organizations to increase client engagement and retention in their programs. Partner staff said that clients were more likely to attend programs and meet with staff members if they knew they could also pick up diapers. Additionally, once basic needs are met, families are more able to focus on other aspects of family well-being.

"A strength of this [diaper] program is the fact that people were coming just for diapers, but because of that, Compass has been able to say, 'Hey, this is what else we're offering with diapers.' It's been a gateway to show what other services that we can integrate. We're just not about diapers, but we have all these other services too."

COMPASS FAMILY SERVICES STAFF MEMBER



Figure 2. Partner staff members are better able to serve their clients because of HAMO's diaper programs.

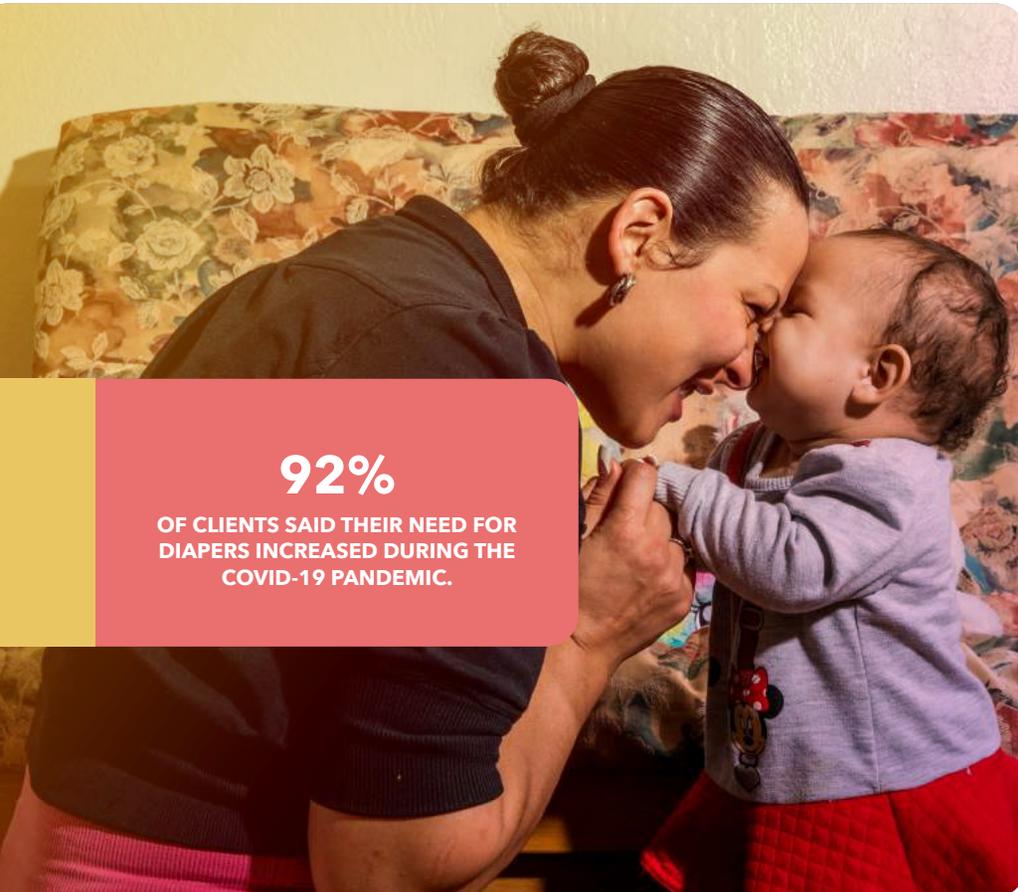


Source: Alameda and San Francisco HAMO Partner Survey (March-April 2021), n=105.

HAMO's model supports families in unforeseen events, like the COVID-19 pandemic.

The COVID-19 pandemic caused many families and caregivers to experience financial hardships, making it hard to diaper their children. The pandemic added a deeper layer to the barriers that families were already facing before the pandemic. HAMO and partner organizations were able to respond immediately to the Bay Area community's diaper need during the pandemic because of the existing diaper distribution systems.

In San Francisco, HAMO's integration into the public assistance system allowed HAMO to quickly identify and serve families in need of diapers. Additionally, flexible state funding allowed HAMO, with its partners, to expand free diaper distributions to the broader community of San Francisco, including families who did not receive CalWORKs and CalFresh benefits.



92%

OF CLIENTS SAID THEIR NEED FOR DIAPERS INCREASED DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC.

"[SFHSA] already had data to identify clientele. We already had the systems in place to get the diapers out there. There wasn't a scramble to figure out how sites were going to get diapers or anything like that. SFHSA already had a streamlined process for getting us the data of the people that qualified. It was pretty much an immediate response."

KAI FORSLEY, SENIOR PROGRAM MANAGER AT HAMO

In Alameda County, HAMO and partners were also ready to meet the increased demand for diapers during the pandemic. Partner organizations collaborated with other local community organizations to get diapers distributed to clients through home deliveries, drive-through pickups, and food pantries. With many families experiencing isolation due to the pandemic, partner staff used diaper distribution as an opportunity to check-in and connect with their clients.

"Diapers were the main anchor when we started contacting families again [after closures from COVID-19]. 'I just wanted to reach out to let you know, we are back on staff, and we are offering diapers again.' Families were so grateful. They could share a little bit of what they've been through. I feel like that was the bridge to be able to reconnect with families. It's literally one of the anchors of my work. It's been a huge impact on myself and families."

**LOTUS BLOOM, ROOM TO BLOOM AT CASTLEMONT
STAFF MEMBER**

HAMO and partners' work during the COVID-19 pandemic demonstrates how the established diaper distribution infrastructure will continue to be an asset during future regional emergencies.



Recommendations for Policymakers

CREATE SUSTAINABLE FUNDING SOURCES TO SUPPORT FAMILIES EXPERIENCING DIAPER NEED.

Diapers are critical to families' health and economic security. Public benefits, such as Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and Women, Infants, and Children (WIC), do not cover or provide diapers, and virtually no federal child safety-net programs allocate benefits specifically for buying diapers.¹ Tremendous progress has been made to address diaper need in California, yet diaper need persists for too many families.

The San Francisco Diaper Bank shows that public funding can be used to add diapers as a complement to the existing safety net. San Francisco Human Services Agency (SFHSA) creatively used a blend of county and federal Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) funds to start the San Francisco Diaper Bank. This innovation shows that county offices can use federal public benefits funds to meet concrete local needs. Until a national solution is established, San Francisco offers an example of how local governments can creatively fill this gap.

INTEGRATE DIAPER PROGRAMS INTO THE EXISTING FAMILY SUPPORT INFRASTRUCTURE.

HAMO's diaper programs demonstrate that the existing family support infrastructure is well-designed to incorporate diapers:

- **Leverage public assistance infrastructure to distribute diapers efficiently and effectively to families.** Public assistance programs, such as CalWORKs and CalFresh, already have the infrastructure to identify families in need of diapers and facilitate families' connections to diapers.
- **Partner with community-based organizations to meet families in their neighborhoods.** Community-based organizations, such as Family Resource Centers, Human Services Agencies, and Public Health Departments, already have relationships with families and the infrastructure to distribute diapers. Partner organizations can enhance their current programming for families by adding diapers.
- **Allow partners flexibility with how they distribute diapers.** Partner organizations know their community best. HAMO allowed partner organizations in Alameda County to be creative and adaptable with their distribution efforts. Some distributed diapers during home visits, some used diapers as an incentive to attend support groups, and others distributed diapers through a food pantry.
- **Remember that providing diapers through public benefits does not include everyone in need of diapers.** Notably, families without immigration documentation are ineligible for certain public benefits. Some families that may be eligible to access public benefits might be reticent to participate out of fear of jeopardizing their path to citizenship. Additionally, there are lower-income families who do not meet the income or work requirements for public benefits, but still experience diaper need. A truly comprehensive diaper program will extend beyond public benefits.





Recommendations for Policymakers Cont'd

PROVIDE FLEXIBLE FUNDING TO COMMUNITY-BASED DIAPER BANKS.

Local diaper banks know how to best serve their community based on its needs and resources. Some communities might already have a strong diaper bank that can expand, and others might be best served by adding diaper distribution services to a food bank or a community center. The flexible funding HAMO received from the state allowed HAMO to engage with organizations in a variety of ways, meeting each organizations' unique needs. The flexible state funding was particularly important during the COVID-19 pandemic.

"This program has helped me see my clients during the pandemic. I deliver diapers to their homes and can see them from a safe distance outside. It also helps clients to stay connected when they may otherwise drift away from the program."

ALAMEDA COUNTY PUBLIC HEALTH STAFF MEMBER

USE DIAPERS AS A TOOL TO BUILD RELATIONSHIPS, CONNECT FAMILIES TO ADDITIONAL RESOURCES, AND STRENGTHEN THE COMMUNITY.

HAMO's diaper programs demonstrate that diapers can be used as a tool to support individual families and strengthen the community:

- **Diapers build and deepen relationships between families and the family support system.** The diaper program provides opportunities for partner staff to establish trust and build rapport with clients when they see each other regularly for diaper pickups.
- **Diapers support longer-term economic stability by enabling caregivers to work and go to school.** Nearly all childcare providers require families to provide disposable diapers.
- **Diapers create a ripple effect of access to other services.** Diaper programs can be an "entry point" for clients to gain access to other services and programs. Partner organizations use the diapers as an outreach tool to introduce families to their other services, including public benefits.
- **Diapers help families meet basic needs, and in turn, strengthen the health and well-being of families and communities.** Diapers are an important basic need. Once families' basic needs are met, they can focus on goals like education, career development, and community engagement.



Recommendations for Diaper Banks

CENTER THE PRIORITIES OF FAMILIES.

Diaper banks should consider the requests from parents and caregivers to honor their dignity and maximize the effectiveness of the diaper bank:

- **Provide a full, reliable supply of diapers.** Families frequently mentioned the importance of being able to count on a full supply of diapers each month. This was a significant help financially, and it eliminated the need for families to worry about how, where, and when they would get the additional diapers needed.
- **Provide a range of diaper pickup locations and hours.** The San Francisco Diaper Bank found that clients needed a wide range of diaper pickup locations and hours. It helped to have a strong network of local government agencies and Family Resource Centers.
- **Treat participants as customers.** Families' experiences picking up the diapers is an important aspect of the diaper program. HAMO made changes based on families' feedback, including adding pickup sites, creating a high-quality private label diaper, and packaging diapers so they are easier to carry.
- **Track inventory carefully so partners can always provide the diaper sizes clients need.** Many partners have limited storage space and rely on receiving frequent diaper deliveries. Diaper programs need strong communication and inventory management systems to ensure they are supplying partner organizations with enough diapers in the sizes clients need.

ADAPT THE MODEL TO THE COMMUNITY.

It is critical for each community to tailor this model to their own needs. The specific diaper program operations will look different based on scale, population density, available funding, and the existing community infrastructure. While the San Francisco Bay area is unique, like all communities are, the basic principles will apply everywhere: link the diaper bank to existing programs where families already go for support.



Acknowledgements

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Help a Mother Out (“HAMO”)

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San Francisco Family Resource Centers & City Agency Distribution Partners

Bayview Hunters Point YMCA

Compass Connecting Point:
A Family Resource Center

Mission Workforce Development Center

OMI Family Resource Center

San Francisco Housing Authority

San Francisco Human Services Agency
at 1235 Mission Service Center

San Francisco Human Services Agency
at 170 Otis Street

Visitation Valley Strong Families

First 5 Alameda County

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Neighborhoods Ready for School Grantees

Lincoln Mandela Family Resource Center

Lotus Bloom - Room to Bloom at Castlemont

Lotus Bloom - San Antonio Family
Resource Center

Union City Family Center

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(MPCA)

California Food Banks

Central California Food Bank

Los Angeles Regional Food Bank

Orange County Food Bank

San Diego Food Bank

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We also would like to acknowledge HAMO's diaper program clients for their contributions to this evaluation.

Thank you for reading!

The full evaluation reports on which this brief is based on can be requested from the HAMO team at info@helpamotherout.org.

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1 The National Diaper Bank Network (NDBN). (n.d.). The Need. Retrieved from <https://nationaldiaperbanknetwork.org/diaperneed/>

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5 Wallace, L. R., Weir, A. M., & Smith, M. V. (2017). Policy impact of research findings on the association of diaper need and mental health. *Women's Health Issues*, 27, S14-S21.

6 San Francisco Human Services Agency. (n.d.). Free diapers for CalFresh and CalWORKS households. Retrieved from <https://www.sfhsa.org/free-diapers-calfresh-and-calworks-households>

7 Number of children served per month is estimated based on the number of diapers distributed each month and the number of diapers allotted per child. For example, each family typically picks up 180 diapers per month so if a site distributes 18,000 diapers, we estimate that 100 children were served (18,000/180=100).

8 Alameda County- Oakland Community Action Partnership. (2019). Alameda County- Oakland Community Action Partnership 2019 Update. Retrieved from http://www.acgov.org/board/bos_calendar/documents/DocsAgendaReg_7_22_19/PUBLIC%20ASSISTANCE/Regular%20Calendar/Oakland_Community_Action_Partnership_7_22_19.pdf

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<http://helpamotherout.org>



<http://www.first5alameda.org>



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SAN FRANCISCO
HUMAN SERVICES AGENCY

<https://www.sfhsa.org>

