

TEAM PROGRAM

Telecommunications Education and Assistance in Multiple Languages

Program Year: June 2023–May 2024

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 2023–May 2024, and highlights areas of interest for CPUC, other policymakers and interested parties.



**California Public
Utilities Commission**

TEAM PROGRAM ANNUAL REPORT

Program Year: JUNE 2023–MAY 2024

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Executive Summary

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

This report summarizes TEAM services provided and related insights for the June 2023 - May 2024 Program Year (PY) and includes Year-over-Year (YOY) data for a comprehensive trend analysis. Program delivery is contracted to Self-Help for the Elderly (SHE), a California non-profit organization based in San Francisco, supported by Milestone Consulting and a statewide collaborative of 24 multilingual community-based organizations (CBOs).

CBOs are culturally trained to advocate for minority communities through the program's three service components: individual case assistance, education, and outreach. Most individual case assistance cases arise from client disputes or support being needed in areas such as applying for bill reduction programs. CBOs also hold education classes on their premises or at nearby facilities. Outreach is mainly conducted via promotions at community events or through media outlets.

In the 2023-2024 PY:

- Social media postings increased by **31%**
- Community event outreach expanded, reaching **23%** more consumers than the PY prior.

Client Demographics¹

Recipients of TEAM case assistance had the following characteristics:

- Most of the clients were **low-income** with approximately **82%** of clients reporting an annual income **under \$25,000**.
- All age groups were represented – **64%** were **over 60 years old**, **36%** were **between the ages of 21 and 59**, and **less than 1%** were **below the age of 21**.
- Case assistance was conducted in **27** languages. The two largest language groups served were Cantonese (**34%**) and Spanish (**14%**).

¹ Based on data pulled from the TEAM program database of all clients receiving case services in the 2023 – 2024 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.) 07-07-043, directing 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

To fulfill this directive, the CPUC authorized the Telecommunications Education and Assistance in Multiple Languages (TEAM) program through Resolution CSID-002. Program services are provided through a statewide network of CBOs. Although TEAM primarily focuses on LEP clients, the Resolution also allows services to be provided to English-speaking clients.³

In June 2008, the TEAM program was launched with an annual budget of \$1.6 million, offering support through three core service components: individual case assistance, education, and outreach.

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

This report summarizes the services provided and key insights from the most recent PY, June 2023 - May 2024.

² D.07-07-043, ordering paragraph 13, pg. 136:

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

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

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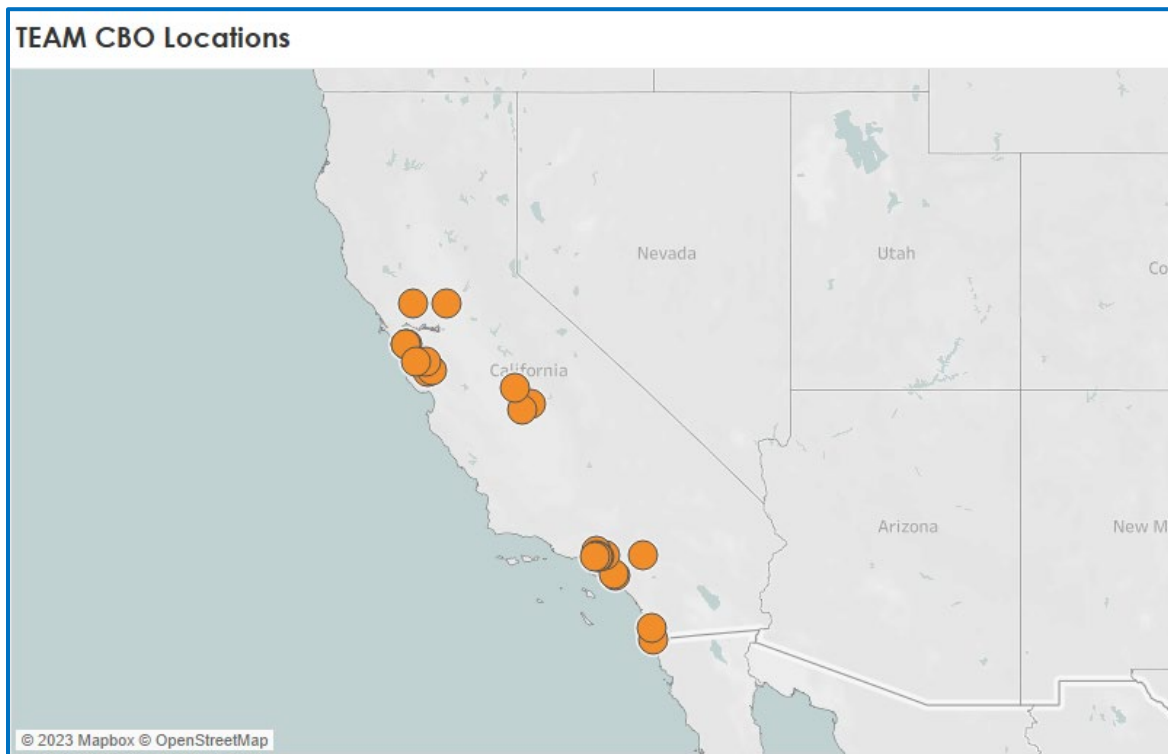
2. Overview of TEAM CBOs

The TEAM program operates through a statewide coalition of 24 community-based organizations (CBOs) that work on various issues impacting LEP communities.⁴ These CBOs 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 distributed across 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/consumer-affairs-branch/team-and-changes-programs>.

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3. Individual Case Assistance

Types of Services Provided

CBOs provide two types of case assistance: dispute resolution and needs assistance. Dispute resolution addresses client concerns that a utility has acted incorrectly regarding their service or account. On the other hand, needs assistance cases involve requests for help with utility services or bills without disputing utility actions.

In the 2023-2024 PY, CBOs handled **3,448** client cases in **27** languages. Clients often receive multiple services per case, tailored to their specific needs. 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 public purpose program such as LifeLine. As a result, the TEAM program completed **4,118** case services, with an average of **1.2** service issues per case. Overall, **4,118** cases were completed in the 2023-24 Program Year, of which **72%** were needs assistance, and **28%** were dispute resolution cases.

As shown in **Table 2**, consumers received services related to internet access, home phones, and other telecommunications solutions. The most common service type was internet access, with CBOs playing a key role in helping clients sign up for the Federal Communications Commission's (FCC) Emergency Broadband Benefit (EBB) and Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP). These two programs accounted for a total of **1,266 (31%)** services.⁵ Other highly requested services included Changes to Account, High Bill, Cramming, Phone Activation, Set Up New Account, LifeLine or other plan type issues.

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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Table 2: Types of Case Assistance Provided in the 2023-2024 Program Year

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	604	15%
	Assist with Phone Activation	259	6%
	Set Up New Account	199	5%
	California Telephone Access Program (CTAP)	6	<1%
	Subtotal	1,068	26%
Billing/Fee Issues	Assist with Paying Bill	82	2%
	High Bill	435	11%
	Overbilling/Wrong Rate	104	3%
	Promotion Related	57	1%
	Other Bill/Fee Related	8	<1%
	Subtotal	686	17%
Service/Quality/Repair Issues	Repairs/Installation	101	2%
	WirePro (Insurance)	44	1%
	Poor Coverage/Dropped Calls	98	2%
	Other	0	0%
	Subtotal	243	6%
Fraud/Misleading Practices	Cramming	261	6%
	Misrepresentation	12	<1%
	Slamming	6	<1%
	Other	0	0%
	Subtotal	279	7%
LifeLine	Applications	146	4%
	Recertifications	181	4%
	Enrollment/Billing problem	2	<1%
	Subtotal	329	8%
Internet	FCC Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP)	1,258	31%
	FCC Emergency Broadband Program	8	<1%
	Add Internet Service/Plan	154	4%
	Subtotal	1,420	34%
Complaints About Unhelpful Customer Service		54	1%
Notified Company of COVID-19 Financial Hardship		9	<1%
Pay-as-You-Go/Prepaid Phone/Calling Cards		6	<1%
Wrongful Disconnection		4	<1%
Other		20	<1%
TOTAL		4,118	100%

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Table 3 compares case assistance services between the 2023-2024 and 2022-2023 program years. Compared to the last PY, total case services have decreased by **2%**, mostly due to a drop in internet related cases, Unhelpful Customer Service, COVID-19 Financial Hardships, Pay-as-You-Go/Prepaid Phone/Calling Cards, and Wrongful Disconnection categories. While case assistance experienced post-COVID recovery growth in the previous Program Years, the slight decrease in total case services for Program Year 2023-24 demonstrates a leveling in case services.

The considerable reduction in Internet assistance by **33%**, particularly ACP, is mainly due to the lack of ACP funding. Effective February 8, 2024, the FCC stopped accepting ACP enrollments. Consumers who enrolled before February 8 continued to receive ACP discounts until the ACP funds ran out. As a result, CBOs sought alternative avenues, including applying for Internet Service Provider (ISP) low-cost broadband plans, to help consumers lower their Internet bill. The growth in Add Internet Service/Plan services rose by **38%**.

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Table 3: Total Case Assistance Services Provided in the 2022-23 and 2023-24 PYs

Overall Category	Sub-Category	2022 – 2023 Services	2023– 2024 Services	YOY Number Change	YOY Percent Change
Internet Access Related	FCC's Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP)	1,882	1,258	(624)	(33%)
	FCC Emergency Broadband Benefit Program (EBB)	26	8	(18)	(69%)
	Add Internet Service/Plan	112	154	42	38%
	Subtotal	2,020	1,420	(600)	(30%)
Assist with Changes to Account/Set Up New Account	Assist with Changes to Account	632	604	(28)	(4%)
	Assist with Phone Activation	0	259	259	-
	Set Up New Account	289	199	(90)	(31%)
	CTAP	0	6	6	-
	Subtotal	921	1,068	147	16%
Billing/Fee Issues	Assist with Paying Bill	0	82	82	-
	High Bill	339	435	96	28%
	Overbilling/Wrong Rate	68	104	36	53%
	Promotion Related	41	57	16	39%
	Other Bill/Fee Related	5	8	3	60%
	Subtotal	453	686	233	51%
LifeLine	LifeLine Applications	85	146	61	72%
	LifeLine Recertifications	237	181	(56)	(24%)
	LifeLine Enrollment/Billing Problem	4	2	(2)	(50%)
	Subtotal	326	329	3	<1%
Service/Quality/Repair Issues	Repairs/Installation	143	101	(42)	(29%)
	WirePro (Insurance)	29	44	15	52%
	Poor Coverage/Dropped Calls	60	98	38	63%
	Other Service/Quality/Repair Issues	0	0	0	-
	Subtotal	232	243	11	5%
Fraud/Misleading Practices	Cramming	69	261	192	278%
	Misrepresentation	41	12	(29)	(71%)
	Slamming	0	6	6	-
	Other Fraud/Misleading Practices	3	0	(3)	(100%)
	Subtotal	113	279	166	147%
Complaints About Unhelpful Customer Service		60	54	(6)	(10%)
Notified Company of COVID-19 Financial Hardship		33	9	(24)	(73%)
Pay-as-You-Go/Prepaid Phone/Calling Cards		23	6	(17)	(72%)
Wrongful Disconnection		6	4	(2)	(33%)
Other		17	28	3	18%
TOTAL		4,204	4,118	(86)	(2%)

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There has been a notable decline in pay-as-you-go/prepaid plans. However, this does not necessarily translate to increased TEAM services. Prepaid services generally do not 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.

Wrongful disconnections continued to remain at a low level. However, some CBOs suggested that this could be due to a shift in consumer behavior. For example, some consumers have switched to prepaid phone plans where services are purchased in advance. However, since these prepaid plans provide limited documentation, following up on dispute cases are challenging.

In contrast, billing/fee issues and fraud/misleading practices cases have risen sharply. Billing/fee issues rose by over **50%**, while fraud/misleading practices surged by **147%**. The spike in fraud/misleading issues is mainly driven by Suscol Intertribal Council CBO's efforts in disputing unauthorized charges on phone bills. Additionally, account creation and assistance rose by **16%**. The rise in such cases is related to Alliance for African Assistance—a CBO dedicated to uplifting refugees and immigrants—and their resettlement work through obtaining SIM cards and phone numbers for newly arrived refugees. At smaller magnitudes, service/quality/repair issues (**5%**) and LifeLine (**<1%**) remained consistent with a slight upward trend.

Languages in Which Services Were Provided

Case assistance was provided in **27** languages. Notably, Cantonese (**34%**) and Spanish (**14%**) were the most prominent language groups served, followed by Vietnamese (**11%**) and English – Native Americans (**10%**).

Table 4 below illustrates the various language services CBOs provide services in, and the YOY change in the number of clients served. The top 10 languages remained the same as the previous PY. However, there were changes in their individual rankings. A majority of the top 10 languages experienced a decrease, except for Vietnamese, Dari, English-Native American, and Japanese. In particular, the number of Dari and English – Native American speaking participants more than tripled. Languages that are less widely spoken tend to fluctuate more. A key example is the positive shift in Arabic-speaking clientele, rising from 7 cases to **47** cases in one year.

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Table 4: Comparison of Languages Used for Case Assistance with the Previous Program Year

Language	2022 – 2023 Program Year	2023 – 2024 Program Year	YOY Change	YOY Percent Change
Cantonese	1,366	1,188	(178)	(13%)
Spanish	672	483	(189)	(28%)
Vietnamese	381	386	5	1%
Korean	239	233	(6)	(3%)
English	192	103	(89)	(46%)
Armenian	185	152	(33)	(18%)
Mandarin	167	89	(78)	(47%)
Dari	105	257	152	145%
English – Native Americans	88	329	241	274%
Japanese	72	95	23	32%
Portuguese	26	31	5	19%
Pashto	13	24	11	85%
Cambodian	11	1	(10)	(91%)
Tagalog	9	0	(9)	(100%)
Arabic	7	47	40	571%
Farsi	6	5	(1)	(17%)
Ukrainian	6	1	(5)	(83%)
Hindi	2	3	1	50%
Samoan	2	2	0	0%
Cebuano	2	0	(2)	(100%)
Somali	1	0	(1)	(100%)
Swahili	1	2	1	100%
Eritrean	1	2	1	100%
Mien	1	0	(1)	(100%)
Russian	1	0	(1)	(100%)
Visayan	1	0	(1)	(100%)
French	0	4	4	-
Hmong	0	4	4	-
Urdu	0	3	3	-
Albanian	0	1	1	-
Lao	0	1	1	-
Romanian	0	1	0	-
Tigrinya	0	1	0	-
Total	3,557	3,448	(109)	(3%)

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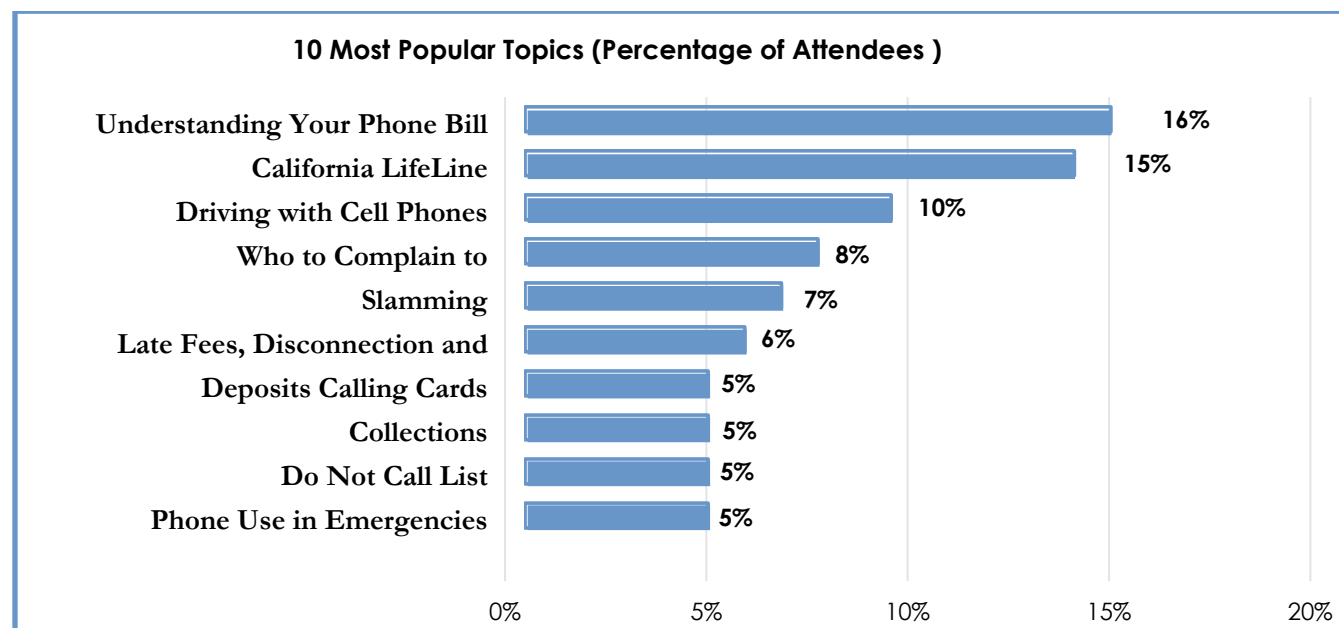
4. Education

Education Workshop Topics

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

Overall, **39,484** individuals attended educational workshops for the 2023-2024 PY, a modest increase of **3%** from 38,385 clients in the prior PY. Most sessions were conducted in person, although some CBOs engage with clients virtually depending on the interests of their communities. As shown in **Figure 2**, Understanding Your Phone Bill (**16%**), California Lifeline (**15%**), and Driving with Cell Phones (**10%**) were the most attended topics.

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 <http://calphoneinfo.cpuc.ca.gov/>.

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In **Table 5**, CBOs hosted fewer attendees for many of the traditionally most attended topics, including Understanding Your Phone Bill (**6,332** attendees); California LifeLine (**5,966**); and Late Fees, Disconnection, Deposits (**1,470**). CBOs, instead, redirected their educational efforts on Collections (**134%** increase); Cell Phones and Driving (**84%**); Tips for Buying Cell Phone Service (**67%**); and Who to Complain to (**43%**). Based on the data for the Collections topic, the sharp rise in Collections-related topics suggest that clients are increasingly concerned about or are at risk of bill collections.

Meanwhile, the Prepaid Phone Cards topic has declined in attendance. This correlates with the drop in number of Case Assistance cases related to Pay-as-You-Go/Prepaid Phone/Calling Cards noted in **Table 3** above. As mentioned earlier, limitations on documenting prepaid charges also limit the ability of CBOs to follow up on client complaints. Nonetheless, the ongoing interest in Prepaid Phone Cards workshops underscores that this is a significant area of concern for LEP consumers.

Table 5: Total Education Attendance by Topic in 2022-2023 and 2023-2024 PYs

Topic	2022–2023 PY	2023–2024 PY	YOY Change	YOY Percent Change
Understanding Your Phone Bill	6,821	6,332	(489)	(7%)
California LifeLine	6,531	5,966	(565)	(9%)
Late Fees, Disconnection, Deposits	3,896	2,426	(1470)	(38%)
Phone Use in Emergencies	2,711	2,115	(596)	(22%)
Do Not Call List	2,416	2,074	(342)	(14%)
Slamming	2,396	2,801	405	17%
Cell Phones and Driving	2,227	4,104	1,877	84%
Who to Complain to	2,206	3,163	957	43%
Prepaid Phone Cards	2,153	1,852	(301)	(14%)
Third Party Charges	1,861	1,774	(87)	(5%)
Guide to Selecting Phone Service	1,760	1,346	(414)	(24%)
Take Charge of Your Phone Service	1,411	1,634	223	16%
Tips for Buying Cell Phone Service	1,156	1,929	773	67%
Collections	840	1,968	1,128	134%
Total	38,385	39,484	1,099	3%

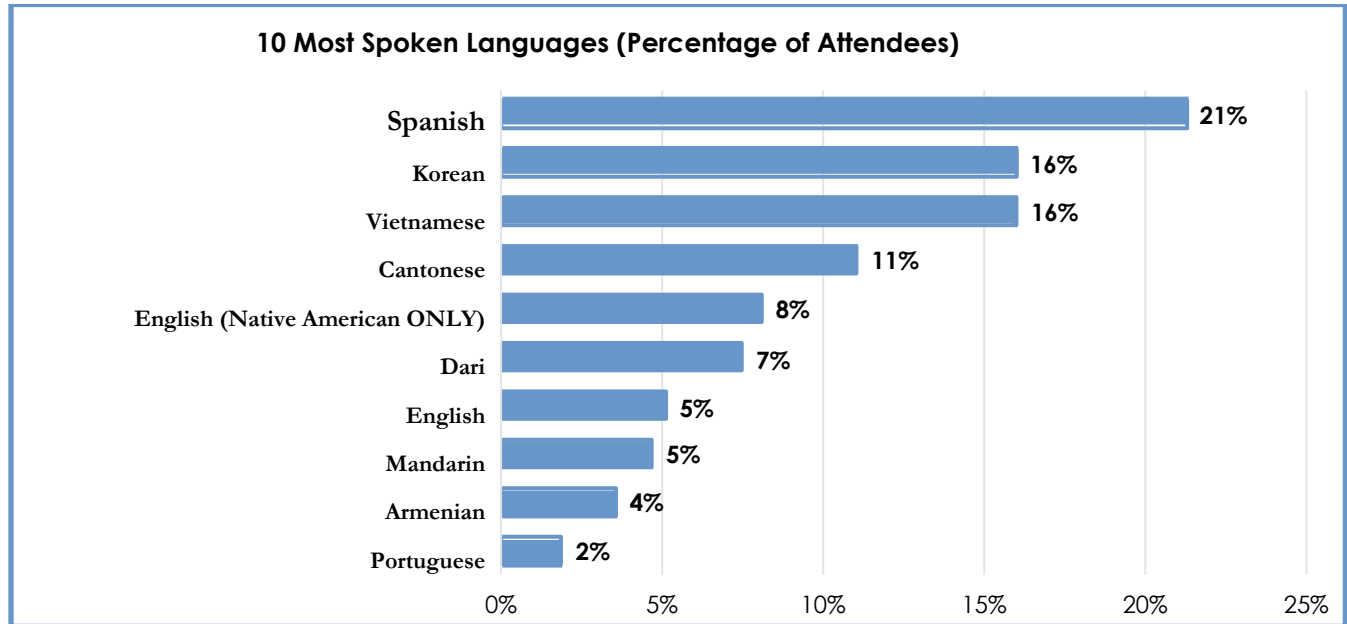
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Languages in Which Education Was Provided

Figure 3 demonstrates the predominantly spoken languages of education workshop attendees. Spanish was the most common language by a large margin (**21%**). The next most spoken languages were Korean (**16%**), Vietnamese (**16%**), Cantonese (**11%**), and English (Native American) (**8%**).

Figure 3: Distribution of Clients Educated by Language



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5. Outreach

Sources of Client Referrals

As shown in **Table 6** and consistent with past trends, over **86%** of client referrals originated either from family or friends (**32%**), previous or current involvement with CBO (**31%**), and attendance at a TEAM education workshop (**23%**). Compared to the previous PY, the Referred by Family or Friend source category decreased by **11%**, while Previous/Existing Client at CBO, and TEAM Consumer Education Workshops referrals increased **7%** and **9%** respectively.

Table 6: Sources of Client Referrals

Source	Percent of Total
Referred by Family or Friend	32%
Previous/Existing Client at CBO	31%
TEAM Consumer Education Workshop	23%
Outreach - Community Event	5%
Outreach - Media	4%
Not Indicated	2%
Special Outreach Project	2%
Referred by Another CBO	1%
Total	100%

Outreach Methods

CBOs conduct program outreach through community events, media placements (in-language ethnic television, radio, and print outlets), social media postings, and community presentations. As shown in **Table 7**, outreach via media placements and community presentations was conducted less frequently than the previous PY. Media placements fell by **58%** and community presentations by **23%**. Additionally, **8%** fewer social media postings were published. Nonetheless, CBOs reached more consumers at community events (**24%**) and through special outreach projects (**57%**).

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Table 7: Comparison of Outreach Activities with the Previous Program Year

Outreach Component	2022–2023 PY	2023–2024 PY	YOY Change	YOY Percent Change
No. of Community Presentations	13	10	(3)	(23%)
No. of Social Media (Postings)	232	214	(18)	(8%)
Media Placements*	1,302,050	543,384	(758,666)	(58%)
Community Events*	125,172	155,664	30,499	24%
Special Outreach Project*	4,406	6,908	2,502	57%

* Potential Number of Customers Reached

6. Conclusion

Delivery of individual case assistance services has fully recovered and was relatively consistent compared to the previous PY. Compared to the previous PY, case assistance services decreased by **2%** from **4,204** to **4,118** total services. Internet services experienced the largest downturn, with **600** fewer cases than the year before (**-30%** decrease). On the other hand, issues regarding fraud/misleading (**147%**), billing/fee (**51%**), and account assistance and creation (**16%**) saw increases. Service/quality/repair issues (**5%**) and LifeLine (**<1%**) remained consistent with a slight upward trend.

Among case assistance services mentioned above, the ACP accounted for **31%** of total case services, making it the largest category of case services. Consumers typically arrive at TEAM CBOs for bill reduction assistance, and consequently, CBOs assist clients with enrolling and renewing ACP applications. CBOs assisted with **1,266** EBB/ACP-related cases, a significant decrease from past PY due to limited ACP funding. To reconcile the upsurge in monthly Internet bills without ACP credit, CBOs sought alternative avenues, including applying for Internet Service Provider (ISP) low-cost broadband plans, resulting in a **38%** increase in Add Internet Service/Plan services.

CBOs are trained to deliver telecommunication education in 14 topics; however, it is at their discretion on which topics to facilitate based on their assessment of the needs and interests of their respective communities. Attendance at education workshops experienced a **3%** jump for this PY. Understanding Your Phone Bill (**16%**), California Lifeline (**15%**), and Driving with Cell Phones (**10%**) had the highest attendance records of all the workshop topics. Over half of the attendees were Spanish (**21%**), Korean (**16%**), and Vietnamese (**16%**) speakers.

Community outreach activities fluctuated across different channels in contrast to the previous PY. Consumers reached by Media Placements (**-58%**), Community Presentations (**-23%**), and Social Media (**-8%**) have declined however, Community Events (**24%**) and Special Outreach Projects (**57%**) saw increases, reflecting greater post-COVID-19 community engagement by most non-profit organizations.

To conclude, the data from the 2023-24 program year demonstrates that the TEAM Program is effectively offering vital outreach, education, and case assistance services to consumers with Limited English Proficiency in the Communication Services Sector. These services play a crucial role in helping vulnerable consumers maintain connections with their families, employers, and essential support networks, while also

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keeping them informed about safety and other consumer protection measures. While we have seen a slight decline in the number of clients served, there has been modest growth in participant numbers in two out of the three service components of the TEAM program, i.e., an increase in the community outreach events and in education workshops attendance.

TEAM positively impacts Limited English Proficient consumers, some who may feel uneasy about contacting service providers directly. However, TEAM CBO staff, trained in language and cultural competencies, effectively address these concerns and advocate for solutions that meet the needs of Limited English Proficient consumers.