



# VENTURA COUNTY Foster Health Link



## Goals

The Ventura County **Foster Health Link** web site and mobile application released in July 2015 are designed to engage foster parents and relatives more fully in supporting the health needs of foster children by giving these caregivers easy, secure, electronic access to health information about the children in their care.

Foster parents and relative caregivers play critical roles in helping Ventura County's 1,000 foster children thrive until they can reunite with their biological parents. These caregivers bring foster children to doctor's visits and dental appointments, pick up prescriptions, and stay up at night to console sick children. They are often the first to recognize when a foster child needs extra help or may be experiencing a health issue, but they may be the last to get access to important health documents.

With critical roles to play on foster children's care teams, foster parents need current and accurate health information about the children in their care.

## Benefits

Prior to **Foster Health Link**, Ventura County child welfare social workers delivered binders to caregivers containing paper copies of health information.

It took time for updated health information to reach the binders, and more time for the binders to reach caregivers' homes. Information was regularly out of date, leaving caregivers with questions about important issues such as immunization schedules and allergies. While every attempt was made to share important information with caregivers when foster children were placed in their care, delays were inevitable and caregivers could not participate fully in supporting the children's needs.

Now, with **Foster Health Link**, caregivers can securely access updated health information about foster children 24/7 from a computer or mobile device. Ventura County child welfare social workers can view the same information as caregivers, facilitating better sharing and planning among the care team to support foster children's needs.

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## Records

**Foster Health Link** pulls health and education information from the state-administered Child Welfare Services Case Management System for all foster children regarding: immunizations; allergies; medical conditions; medications; well child physical and dental exams; Medi-Cal insurance; school, grade level and special education plans; and more.

Additionally, **Foster Health Link** pulls e-records from the Ventura County Health Care Agency's patient portal for all foster children through age 11 who have received care within the Ventura County Medical Center system of hospital, clinic and specialty services. This information includes real-time summaries of doctor visits, lab results, medical conditions, immunizations, medications and more.

Further, **Foster Health Link** offers caregivers quick links to the online Network of Care resource library, which contains thousands of user-friendly articles, medical definitions, and other information designed to help caregivers better understand the health needs of foster children. The Network of Care also makes it simple for caregivers to search for, map and contact local service providers such as therapists and counselors.

*To view a Foster Health Link video, visit [www.FosterVCkids.org/fhl](http://www.FosterVCkids.org/fhl).*

## Continuity

Ventura County child welfare services attempts to reunify foster children with their biological parents as soon as the families are strong enough to care for their children safely. When children need to stay in foster care for longer periods of time, the goal is to place the

children with relatives or foster families who can provide care with as few disruptive moves and changes to the children's lives as possible.

However, when foster children experience moves to different foster homes over the course of months or years, it becomes critically important to ensure that the children's health histories remain intact with each transition.

**Foster Health Link** "turns on" access to health information for caregivers when they begin to care for foster children, and then "turns off" access when the children leave the foster home.

*The foster children's electronic health records follow them during their stay in foster care, ensuring that each new caregiver gets access to the most updated information such as immunization status and allergies.*

## Security

The **Foster Health Link** web site and mobile application are hosted on a secure, Verisign-encrypted server – the same type of security used in online banking.

**Foster Health Link** ensures that foster children's information is accessible only to the caregivers who are approved by Ventura County child welfare services to provide care to the children at a given time. Approved caregivers receive an email link from Ventura County child welfare services that enables them to log in to **Foster Health Link** using a unique username and password.

*Caregivers and child welfare social workers who access Foster Health Link receive training regarding Ventura County's high standards for protecting foster children's confidential information.*

## Partnership

Ventura County was approached about piloting an e-health records system for foster children by The Children's Partnership, a national, nonprofit child advocacy organization that focuses particular attention ensuring that all children have the health care they need.

In alignment with technical agendas established by the California Department of Social Services and the California Department of Health Care Services, the following public and private organizations partnered to develop **Foster Health Link**: Ventura County Human Services Agency; Ventura County Health Care Agency; Ventura County Information Technology Services; The Children's Partnership; Verizon Foundation; Sierra Health Care Foundation; Trilogy Integrated Resources; and Cerner Corporation.

The Verizon Foundation and the Sierra Health Care Foundation provided generous financial support that supplemented County funding, making **Foster Health Link** possible.

Importantly, foster parents and transitional-age foster youth participated in focus groups to provide input into the design and content of **Foster Health Link**. Following a year-long planning and technical development phase, foster parents provided additional feedback as they tested the site prior to its release.

*Ventura County encourages foster parents to participate in upcoming surveys regarding their experiences with Foster Health Link, which will help determine future enhancements.*

## Future

As **Foster Health Link** is released to caregivers in July 2015, system data and survey information will be collected to ensure the site meets caregivers' needs.

*With Foster Health Link, it is anticipated that caregivers will: save time in collecting foster children's health information; better understand the needs of the children in their care; schedule medical and dental exams more timely; and participate more fully on children's care teams as important health decisions are made.*

Undoubtedly, after using **Foster Health Link**, caregivers will request access to additional information in order to fulfill their roles more effectively. The architecture of **Foster Health Link** allows for additional information—such as school records—to be included in future phases. Further, **Foster Health Link** can accommodate a portal that gives transitional-age foster youth access their own information, empowering them to play a larger role in managing their health and well-being.

Ventura County continues to seek grants and private funding to enhance **Foster Health Link**, and stands ready to offer **Foster Health Link** as a state-wide model for engaging foster parents in the provision of quality care.

## More Information

Ventura County foster parents and relative caregivers are encouraged to visit [www.FosterVCKids.org/fhl](http://www.FosterVCKids.org/fhl) or contact the Children & Family Services Recruitment, Development & Support team at (805) 654-3220.

Human services agencies, foundations, and media outlets are encouraged to visit [www.FosterVCKids.org/fhl](http://www.FosterVCKids.org/fhl) or contact the Ventura County Human Services Agency at (805) 477-5340.

