

Leticia Ayala



ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH COALITION

2024 FINALIST

Leticia Ayala is a longtime San Diego environmental health leader rarely in the spotlight, but one whose impact has been felt in innumerable ways. For the past 25 years, Ayala has coordinated the Environmental Health Coalition (EHC) policy development and advocacy, community outreach, direct services, and education around lead poisoning prevention. She tirelessly works to protect the children most vulnerable to the hazards of lead exposure – a population overwhelmingly low income, Hispanic, and disproportionately exposed to risk factors like lead-based paint in dilapidated housing stock. Through her outreach and advocacy efforts, she has protected thousands of San Diego children from the irreversible impacts of lead poisoning.

Central to her work at EHC, Ayala trains and deploys community organizers to reach vulnerable communities through door-to-door outreach as well as in schools and through local health providers – conducting healthy home assessments, coordinating blood testing, and connecting families to resources for remediation. Beyond outreach and direct services, Ayala advocates and collaborates with local authorities to prioritize lead hazard control in the homes and workplaces of vulnerable families. She has collaborated with decision-making bodies to advance multiple policies protecting children’s health, such as California’s law to ban lead in candy and mandate testing.

Ayala innately understands and embraces the power of lifting marginalized voices as a pathway to change. Throughout decades of developing and facilitating trainings she has activated more than 3,000 community leaders to organize, advocate, and build power in the fight for environmental justice in San Diego County.

