

THE MARINE MAMMAL CARE CENTER

2024 Impact Report





The Marine Mammal Care Center Los Angeles is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization and a leader in the field of marine mammal health and conservation. We are the only organization authorized by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) to respond to marine mammals in distress year-round along the entire Los Angeles County coastline from Malibu to Long Beach, Catalina Island, and at sea. Our experts respond to more marine mammals per mile of coastline than any other organization in the United States.



The contents of this report reflect the life-saving impact you made possible in 2024. As you read the inspiring patient stories and enjoy the incredible images capturing our experts in action, you can feel proud of all you've accomplished.

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Our Mission

Inspiring ocean conservation through marine mammal rescue and rehabilitation, education, and research.

Our Vision

A healthy ecosystem where people and marine life thrive together.

Our Goals

- Advance the field of marine mammal health and rehabilitation.
- Strengthen the conservation and protection of marine mammals.
- Inspire and equip people to take actions that protect marine mammals and the ocean.
- Enhance organizational health, culture and effectiveness.



Looking to the Future:

Reflections from MMCC

In a world that feels increasingly unpredictable, one thing remains constant: our ocean needs us. As this report goes to print, we have just endured the longest, most toxic and deadliest algal bloom we've ever experienced.

As we look back on the issues our marine mammal patients faced in 2024 and those we've already seen in 2025, one of our concerns for the future is how to ensure that our rapidly changing ocean environment does not threaten the survival of these species.

While the latest stranding emergency has passed, the challenges facing marine mammals are far from over. To ensure that every sick and injured marine mammal can be rescued and cared for, we will be focused on:

- Expanding our hospital facility to meet the number of patients needing care.
- Increasing our rescue and response capacity with trained personnel and equipment.
- Securing research funding to better understand these threats and prepare for future emergencies.

Every marine mammal we rescue, every seal we rehabilitate, and every sea lion we return to the wild is a reminder that compassion and action still make a difference. The challenges are big, but so is our collective impact.

Sincerely,



John Warner | CEO, Marine Mammal Care Center

Our Board



Liz Kendrick, Board Chair



Fredrick Felman, Treasurer



Liz Shindler Johnson,
Secretary



Donna Dutcher,
Governance Chair



Dr. Tammy Da Costa Gomez,
Audit Committee Chair



Irene Gilgoff



Lisa Jordan



Jon Poelma



Elaine Wah

Join us — **volunteer, donate, speak up** — because protecting our ocean isn't just important during a crisis; it's a promise to future generations.

The Southern California Coast:

An Ecosystem Like No Other

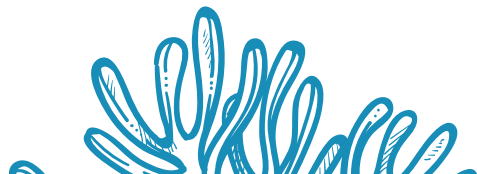
California borders the vast Pacific Ocean, which accounts for nearly half of the world's ocean area and supports a significant portion of the planet's biodiversity.

Just offshore, the California Current serves as a vital feeding ground for billions of fish, mammals and birds. These consistently cool waters contribute to the state's mild and welcoming coastal climate.

The Channel Islands National Marine Sanctuary, situated off the coast of Southern California, is renowned for its remarkable biodiversity and stunning kelp forests. These underwater ecosystems are teeming with vibrant marine life.

Twenty-seven different species of whales and dolphins visit or inhabit the Channel Islands, including the world's largest congregation of blue whales, as well as fin, humpback, and gray whales. Common dolphins, orcas, and Risso's dolphins are also frequent visitors.

Five species of pinnipeds, including California sea lions, elephant seals and harbor seals, rely on the sanctuary for feeding and breeding. In fact, more than 80 percent of all California sea lions are born on the Channel Islands in June of every year. Additionally, 60 species of seabirds, such as the rare Scripps's murrelet and California brown pelican, nest, feed and migrate here.



Los Angeles County:

Where Conservation and Commerce Meet

Los Angeles County has more marine mammal rescues per mile of coastline than anywhere else in the country but also the least remaining critical shoreline habitat in all of California.

Characterized by rock formations and beaches where people and buildings aren't prevalent, critical shoreline habitats are essential for marine mammals, allowing them to rest, wait out storms, give birth, nurse pups, or recover when sick or injured.

Without these places, sick marine mammals have no choice but to come ashore on beaches that are heavily populated by people. This creates public safety and public health issues that are unique to Los Angeles County.

The county's coastline provides recreational and environmental amenities that generate over \$4 billion in international tourism to the Los Angeles area annually. Los Angeles County is also home to the busiest port complex in the United States; close to 45 percent of all oceanic freight entering the country comes ashore through the twin ports at Los Angeles and Long Beach. Together, these ports contribute more than 1 million jobs to a vibrant economy.

Conservation and commerce can and need to coexist. Marine Mammal Care Center is committed to working with our partners in Los Angeles County to make it the model for how marine wildlife can thrive in an urban ocean environment.

Rescue and Response

The Marine Mammal Care Center rescues and responds to marine mammals along the entire coast of Los Angeles County, including Catalina Island. Recent trends indicate that strandings will continue to increase with cyclical spikes occurring more frequently. Causes of strandings include malnutrition, infectious disease, entanglements, and toxins from harmful algal blooms, among other threats.

Since launching the rescue and response program in 2023, the team has continued to grow and build on its

success. Over the course of the year, our rescue hotline received more than 3,500 calls about animals in distress. Our response team participated in more than 40 special rescue operations in response to entangled marine mammals and built out a cache of specialized response gear.

As part of NOAA's Large Whale Entanglement Response Network, the team also participated in more than 60 hours of training, including multiple on-water trainings that prepared them for a successful response in early 2025.



The Center's experts responded to more than 680 animals, including marine mammals, sea turtles and sea birds.



LA County beachgoers care about the health of our native marine wildlife. When sick marine mammals are struggling on crowded beaches, the Marine Mammal Care Center delivers the kind of educational interface and quick, humane action that the community can be proud of.

As responders, we provide expert service, which may include delivering sick animals to veterinary care. In turn, people who call our hotline at 1-800-39-WHALE gain a deeper understanding of our wildlife and play an active part in maintaining our unique ocean community.

— Adam Fox, *Senior Marine Mammal Responder*



NOAA PERMIT #24359

Responding to a Fin Whale on the Beach

Second only to blue whales in size, fin whales are part of the rich, diverse ecosystem of Southern California and are listed as an endangered species worldwide. That's why it was so surprising—and concerning—for our responders to find one stranded alive on the beach in Torrance.

The 51-foot juvenile male was in poor body condition, indicating it was sick and weak, when our team arrived on the scene, and it passed away a few hours later. No apparent or obvious wounds or trauma were evident on areas of the whale that could be visually inspected.

The death of a large whale like this is incredibly sad, but you can take solace in knowing that this animal will help us learn more about the threats fin whales face off our coast and how we can better support their recovery. That's why it's vital for our team to not just respond to distressed animals but also be present on the beach to speak with concerned members of the public.

The Center's team of experts also worked with stranding network partners to perform a necropsy, or animal autopsy, that included sample and data collection to help identify a clear cause of death. By sharing those findings with other researchers and policymakers, we can help champion the protection of this endangered species.



Rehabilitation

The Marine Mammal Care Center rehabilitates sick and injured marine mammals at our hospital until they can be released back to the wild. Our experts develop treatment protocols and best practices to deliver outstanding care to animals in need.

Over the course of 2024, the Marine Mammal Care Center cared for 349 marine mammal patients, including California sea lions, elephant seals, harbor seals and northern fur seals ranging in age from pups to adults.

The Center's experts also helped stabilize a young Guadalupe fur seal until it could be transferred to a specialized facility with saltwater pools. This threatened species is rarely seen along the coast as it spends most of its life in deeper waters.

The Marine Mammal Care Center has treated more than 10,500 patients since its founding in 1992.

In 2024, the Center's animal care experts took on a major project to shift patient records from paper files to a digital database. By the start of 2025, the transition was complete, with each new patient added to the database during intake, greatly enhancing patient care, staff collaboration, and long-term data tracking.





“

You see these animals come in sick and skinny, and my favorite part of the job is when you get them to actually eat fish. Because once they start doing it on their own, I know that they are going to be OK. They're going to make it through this process, and they're going to be released.

— Korrina Guerrero, *Wildlife Rehabilitation Associate*

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Targeted by Gunshot: *California sea lion Burton*

Subadult California sea lion Burton was rescued from a Jet Ski platform at Burton Chace Park. He arrived at our hospital thin and lethargic with multiple injuries, including shark bites on his hind flipper and a fractured jaw. X-rays revealed that a pellet along the lower jaw had caused the fractures.

Burton's jaw was initially unstable but improved over time, and he gradually began swallowing larger pieces of fish. His wounds and fractures eventually healed, and he was able to successfully catch fish and vocalize normally. During his three months in care, he became known for playing "babysitter" with the young pups onsite.

After about three months in care, Burton was released back to the wild. Six weeks later, during a routine patrol of Marina del Rey, our responders spotted Burton healthy and thriving among a group of healthy male sea lions.

You may find it difficult to hear that Burton was one of 10 sea lion patients with known gunshot injuries in 2024. Five of them were pups or yearlings; three were previous patients. Sadly, Burton was the only one that survived. Despite this heavy news, you can feel proud knowing compassionate people like you made Burton's success story possible.



Research

As a partner in NOAA's Stranding Network, the Marine Mammal Care Center helps grow scientific understanding of the animal populations we treat by tracking the occurrence of disease and human-related stranding events. Our experts collaborate with scientists from around the country to conduct non-invasive research that helps us learn more about marine mammals and their ocean environment.

In 2024, the Center's veterinary experts advanced and shared research ranging from the development of diagnostic tools and treatment strategies to population health assessments.

Dr. Michelle Rivard traveled to Sable Island, Nova Scotia, in Canada to participate in research on gray seal field sedation, population ecology, physiology, diet, movement, behavior and overall health. Located in the Atlantic Ocean, Sable Island is home to the largest gray seal colony in the world and one of the longest studied marine mammal populations.

Dr. Rivard provided veterinary support to this unique project, which was led by multiple collaborators, while also transferring a knowledge base to the West Coast that we can apply to our local seals and sea lions.



As part of a collaborative project between researchers in the U.S. and Mexico, Dr. Mattison Peters (*pictured right*) provided veterinary support anesthetizing mom-pup pairs of Guadalupe fur seals on Guadalupe Island. The data acquired through this work contributes to our understanding of the ecology and health of this endangered species.

In 2024, Board Member Dr. Tammy Da Costa Gomez and her colleagues, including Dr. Lauren Palmer, presented at an international research conference.

Dr. Da Costa Gomez's presentation focused on the specialized techniques she has developed to repair damaged tissue in sea lions (*pictured below*) with gillnet entanglements that cut deeply into the neck.





When we put our heads together, we can do more for these animals than we think we can. We have options to save more of these animals with severe gill net injuries – to give them a chance when we thought we might not be able to.

— Dr. Tammy Da Costa Gomez, DVM, Board of Directors



Defying the Odds:

Six California Sea Lion Pups

You may remember hundreds of California sea lions were sickened by a toxic algae bloom during pupping season in 2023. During that time, 10 of our patients gave birth and six of those pups defied the odds and grew strong enough to be released off a boat near the Channel Islands.

Each pup was fitted with a satellite transmitter as part of a research study aimed at understanding whether pups born in rehabilitation and exposed to domoic acid in utero can thrive after being released to the wild.

All six pups pinged the satellite for more than 40 days. Sadly, on the 41st day, one of the six pups was found dead due to malnourishment after traveling from Monterey almost all the way to Eureka in just five days.

The remaining five pups' satellite tags continued to transmit much longer. What does this all tell us? We can't yet be sure, but we are continuing to analyze the data and compare it against other peer-reviewed studies of other similar-aged animals.

We look forward to publishing and sharing this research to help inform the future care and rehabilitation of many sea lion pups to come.



Education and Community Engagement

The Marine Mammal Care Center's education programs provide learning opportunities for K-12 students, community organizations, conservation partners and the public.

We aim to create experiences that motivate, inspire and equip people to take concrete actions to protect the ocean and marine mammals. That's why the Center launched a collaboration with the LA County Department of Beaches and Harbors to create the MMCC Hub at Burton Chace Park in Marina Del Rey.

Over the course of the year, nearly 4,000 conservation pledges were made by community members in response to calls to action like "sharing the shore" and "reducing climate impact by going meatless one day a week."

More than 2,000 Los Angeles Unified School District students participated in the Center's STEM-aligned field trip program. And an additional 5,800 students engaged in marine mammal conservation-focused learning during onsite visits.



In 2024, more than 21,600 people visited the Marine Mammal Care Center and interacted with docents while learning about ocean conservation and marine mammal rehabilitation.



The ocean is telling us it's not well, it's not healthy, and we have to take big steps to solve these problems. That's why conservation education is such a big part of our mission.

— Dave Bader, *Chief Operations and Education Officer*



The Hub at Burton Chace Park

Located at a site well-known for its resident sea lions that often haul out on the nearby docks, The Hub at Burton Chace Park provides a perfect opportunity to engage with the public on topics like ocean and marine mammal conservation.

One of the key goals of this new program, created in partnership with LA County Department of Beaches and Harbors, is to connect with people in a space where they can observe these incredible animals in their natural habitat, sparking meaningful conversations about the importance of protecting marine life.

Additionally, visitors to The Hub will be able to participate in a community science data collection project. Working with the Center's volunteers, they'll help count the number of sea lions seen in the area, as well as other data points like the number of tagged animals and animals with any visible entanglements or scarring. This effort helps teach people about the scientific process while gathering useful information about local marine life.



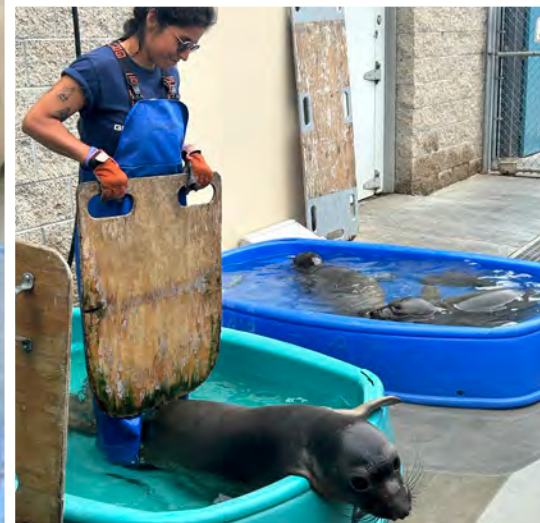
Teaching Hospital

The Marine Mammal Care Center serves as a vital training ground providing hands-on practical experience for students who will go on to become future leaders in the field of marine mammal health and medicine.

Teaching Hospital participants commit anywhere from four to 10 weeks learning and working alongside our experienced team of veterinary and animal husbandry professionals.

About 100 veterinary students have completed the Center's Formal Veterinary Student Internship since 2008, spending a minimum of 160 hours over the course of four weeks in the program.

Teaching Hospital participants in 2024 included six veterinary students who gained required and valuable clinical experience and 9 animal care interns who each spent 300 hours supporting the rehabilitation of admitted patients.





My work is inspired by the curiosity and desire to continually learn more from our marine mammal patients.

Marine mammals are excellent sentinels for ocean health, and I feel incredibly lucky to have the privilege to care for and learn from these amazing animals.

I feel so fortunate to be part of a brilliant community of animal care staff, responders, veterinarians, biologists and volunteers who display such impressive expertise and compassion for marine mammals.

— Dr. Michelle Rivard
Director of Animal Health & Conservation



Leaving a Legacy of Learning

2024 was a year for big changes in our team as Dr. Lauren Palmer, the Center's Hospital Director and lead veterinarian for nearly two decades, stepped down from her role. As head of the Center's Teaching Hospital, Dr. Palmer was a strong believer in the importance of educating future veterinarians and animal care experts.

Earlier in the year, prior to Dr. Palmer's departure, Dr. Mattison Peters joined our team of experts, and she now serves as Veterinarian & Response Operations Director. Dr. Peters joined us from San Francisco, where she worked as a Veterinary Research Associate at The Marine Mammal Center, focusing on research related to antimicrobial resistance, infectious disease, and clinical medicine.

Later in the year, the Center's community was thrilled to welcome Dr. Michelle Rivard as Director of Animal Health & Conservation. Dr. Rivard joined us from Seattle, where she worked as a marine wildlife veterinarian at SR3. Prior to transitioning to a career focused on marine wildlife, she spent several years in the U.S. Army Veterinary Corps, where she provided veterinary care for military working dogs as well as service members' pets.

Both Dr. Rivard and Dr. Peters are committed to continuing Dr. Palmer's Teaching Hospital legacy of inspiring the next generation of leaders in the field of marine mammal health and medicine.



DR. MATTISON PETERS



DR. LAUREN PALMER



DR. MICHELLE RIVARD

Our Volunteer Community

Volunteers play important roles in all aspects of the Marine Mammal Care Center's life-saving work, from caring for animals to educating visitors to supporting release events.

Over the course of the year, more than 300 volunteers contributed a total of 32,000 hours of service toward the Center's mission, a workforce value of \$1.15 million.

More than a third of those service hours were completed by volunteers who have been working with the Center for more than a year or bring professional expertise to their volunteer role.

The Center continued to build on the success of the Pinniped Patrol program launched during the 2023 domoic acid crisis. Over the course of 2024, Pinniped Patrol volunteers spent more than 740 hours deployed to beaches and harbors throughout LA to engage the public and respond to stranded marine mammals until Center staff were able to arrive.





“

I’ve always loved the ocean, loved animals and loved working with energetic people, and it all comes together here. I can’t wait to come in every week and help out any way I can.

— Charles Foster, *Facilities Maintenance and Animal Care Volunteer*

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Sick and Contagious:

California Sea Lion Caspar

Subadult California sea lion Caspar was found looking sick and lethargic on Hermosa Beach. During Caspar's intake exam, our veterinary team determined that he was positive for leptospirosis, a life-threatening bacterial infection that affects the kidneys and can lead to a cascade of health problems.

Leptospirosis is contagious, so animals like Caspar are often kept isolated from more vulnerable patients. This disease can also be transmitted to humans, dogs and many other species, so our animal care volunteers and staff wear protective clothing to prevent transmission.

After about a week in care, Caspar still had little interest in eating and the skin on his flippers began to blister and bleed. He was observed holding his back flippers and moaning throughout the day.

Finally, after about three weeks at our hospital, Caspar was eating more regularly and had gained about 20 pounds. A month later, Caspar's flipper wounds had healed, his leptospirosis treatment was complete, and he returned to the wild with a second chance at life.



Future Challenges

As we think about the future of marine mammal health and conservation, one of the biggest challenges we face is the increasing threat of human-caused impacts on these animals.

From entanglement in fishing gear to ingesting plastic trash to, shockingly, gunshots, marine mammals face a multitude of ailments due to human negligence or even direct violence.

In 2024, we rescued 10 sea lions with known gunshot injuries, half of them under two years old, and only one survived.

Other threats are more complex in nature, like those due to our changing climate: Warm waters contribute to larger and more frequent toxic algal blooms; increased storms lead to beach erosion that encroaches on vital resting areas; shifts in ocean temperatures affect food availability.

Humans and marine mammals are sharing the same coastal habitat here in Southern California, which can create its own conflicts in busy marinas and on crowded docks. And with more and more marine mammals in need of rescue each year, one of our biggest challenges is simply having enough space in our hospital to care for them.



With your steadfast support, our continued focus will be on finding solutions to these challenges.

Threatened by Toxins and

Trash: *California Sea Lion Bubbles*

When California sea lion Bubbles was rescued from Topaz Jetty in Redondo Beach, she was notably thin and lethargic. She was also exhibiting signs that she had been exposed to a toxin called domoic acid. But two days after her rescue, we learned that toxic fish wasn't the scariest thing Bubbles had eaten.

After refusing to eat for those two days, Bubbles vomited a sock and a balloon, along with some food remnants. It was quite a surprising sight but sadly, not that uncommon. California sea lions are curious creatures, and ocean trash items like balloons can be mistaken for food or something to play with but may end up being deadly once ingested.

Marine mammals aren't the only ones impacted when balloon releases end up as ocean trash. Sea turtles are particularly vulnerable to the hazards of balloons because they can mistake them for jellyfish, one of their primary food sources. Balloons are also the deadliest type of plastic that seabirds ingest and are 32 times more likely to kill them compared to hard plastics.

After about a month in care receiving treatment for domoic acid toxicosis and gaining a healthy amount of weight, Bubbles was released with a second chance at life.



Financials

The Marine Mammal Care Center is honored to be a trusted organization.

Guidestar Platinum Seal of Transparency

This recognition shows a nonprofit's commitment to transparency, allowing potential donors and funders to make educated decisions. The Platinum Seal is the highest possible rating on Guidestar.

Great Nonprofits Top-Rated Nonprofit

These ratings come from donors, volunteers and others who have experienced the nonprofit's impact firsthand.

Charity Navigator Four Star Charity

This recognition comes from third-party accreditation that validates our organization's operational excellence. Four Star Charity is the highest possible rating on Charity Navigator.

1% for the Planet

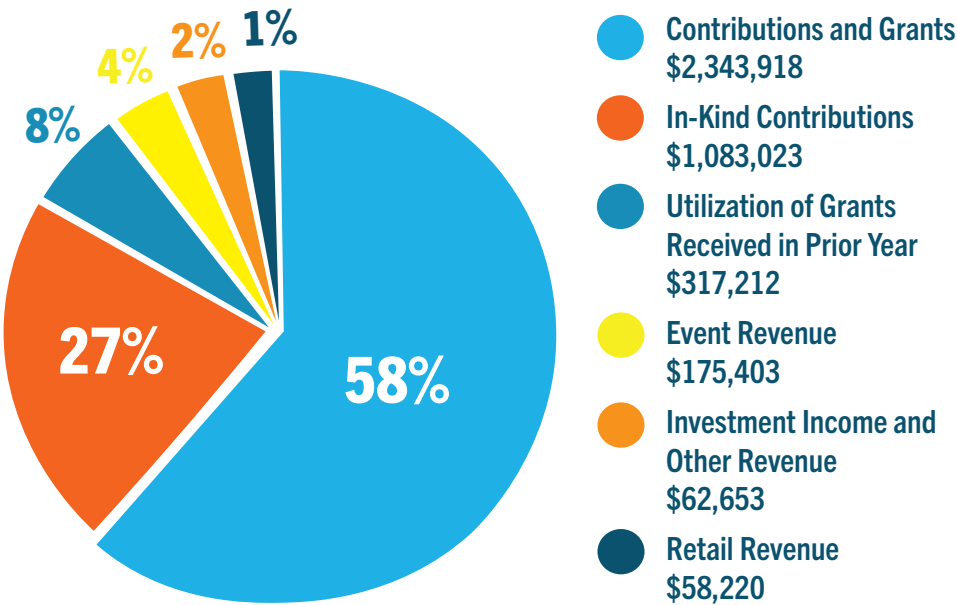
The Marine Mammal Care Center is a vetted Environmental Partner in a global network with thousands of businesses and environmental organizations working together to support people and the planet.



Financials for FY2024

The Marine Mammal Care Center’s life-saving work is made possible through the support of generous people like you.

Support & Revenue

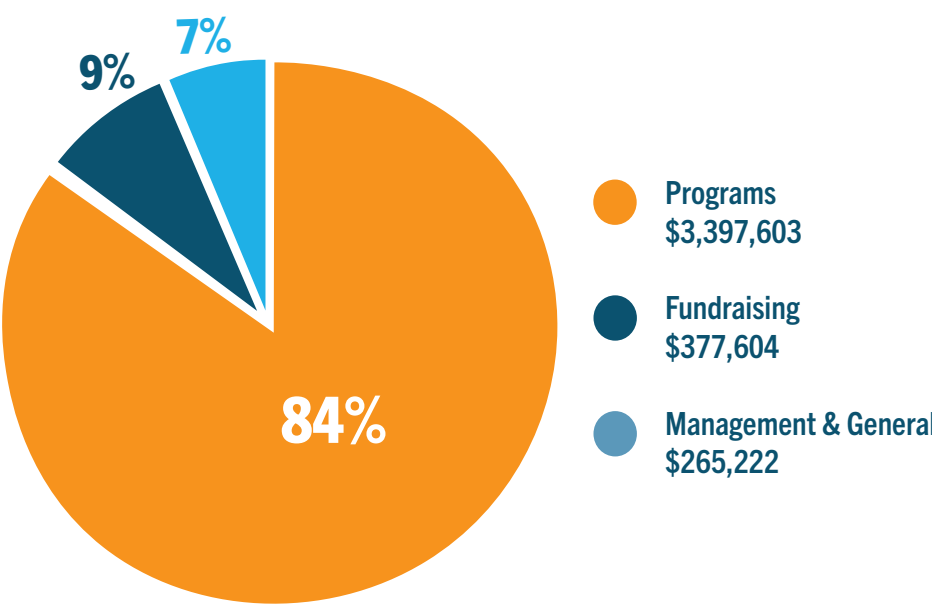


Total Support and Revenue: \$4,040,429

Net Impact: \$0

Audited financials for 2024 are available at MarineMammalCare.org/financials

Expenses



Total Expenses: \$4,040,429

Take Action and Make an Impact

Your everyday actions can have an impact on the health of our ocean and marine mammals. **From what you do with your waste to making your voice heard and voting, your choices matter.**



Use your voice and vote with the environment in mind.

Discuss the importance of conservation with friends, neighbors and local leadership, and research candidates' stances on the topic before heading to the polls.



Eat more plants by going meatless at least one day a week.

A hamburger patty made of ground beef has a carbon footprint that's eight to 10 times higher than one made with chicken and around 20 times higher than a vegetarian version.



Reduce, reuse, THEN recycle. Reducing what you buy and making sure you reuse what you already have goes a long way in helping our environment. Recycling is an important last step.

“Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it's the only thing that ever has.”

— Margaret Mead



Photo Credits:

Djeneba Aduayom, Dave Bader, Adam Fox, Kate Johns, Greg Kulon, Nik Traitler, Jules Leon, and MMCC Staff & Volunteers

