

# A PORTRAIT OF CALIFORNIA 2014–2015

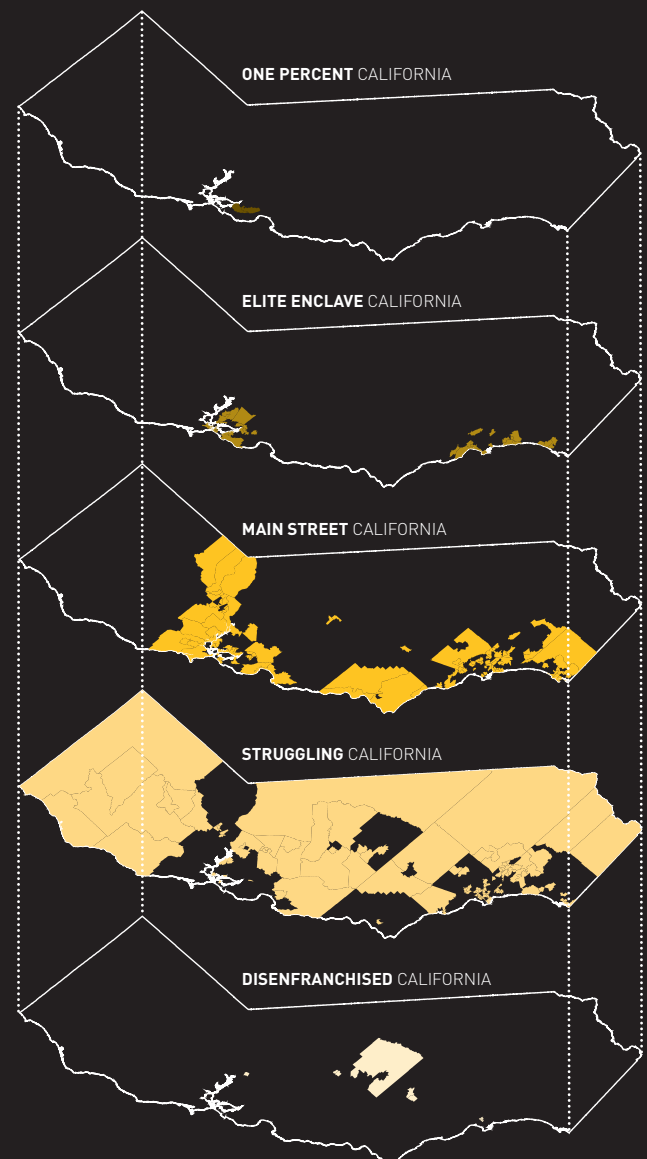
CALIFORNIA HUMAN DEVELOPMENT REPORT

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# Agenda for Action

Action in these areas shows great promise for boosting American Human Development Index scores for all Californians and for narrowing gaps between different groups.



- Lay the groundwork for a long and healthy life.
- Improve the conditions of daily life.
- Reduce economic insecurity.
- Employ Madison Avenue marketing to “sell” an end to domestic violence.
- Insure the undocumented.



- Help build the parenting skills of mothers and fathers living in poverty.
- Improve the quality of childcare with higher standards and higher pay—and make it accessible for all families.
- Make high-quality universal preschool a reality for 3- and 4-year olds.
- Support vulnerable youth in their transition to a productive adulthood.
- Ensure that the new state education funding formula improves the educational outcomes of disadvantaged students.



- Strengthen the safety net to better protect children from the adverse effects of poverty.
- Boost wages for those at the bottom of the income scale.
- Pay farm laborers a fair wage.
- End work-hour insecurity.
- Increase the stock of affordable housing.

# Introduction

“Skills beget skills; motivation begets motivation. . . . The longer society waits to intervene in the life cycle of a disadvantaged child, the more costly it is to remediate disadvantage.”

**JAMES HECKMAN**, *Schools, Skills, and Synapses*, 2008

The routines and realities that shape our daily lives as children define the contours of who we can be and what we can do as adults.

Childhood casts a long shadow. For good and for ill, the characteristics of our parents, the nature and texture of our early relationships, the physical and social environments in which we grow and learn, and the myriad taken-for-granted routines and realities that shape our daily lives as children define the contours of who we can be and what we can do as adults. Evidence is overwhelming that the “accident of birth” patterns lifelong outcomes, sometimes in unexpectedly powerful ways; for example, experiencing poverty as a child makes a person more likely to develop and die prematurely from cardiovascular disease—even if their economic fortunes improve later in life.<sup>172</sup>

Given the strong influence of childhood conditions on life chances, the Five Californias analysis on pages 44–69 paints a troubling picture of how far we are from the American ideal of equal opportunity. Families toward the top of the American Human Development Index have the capabilities to optimize their children’s development. By and large they have the money, knowledge, physical and psychological health, and social capital to have healthy pregnancies and safe, full-term deliveries; to protect their children from hazardous living conditions and crime by buying well-maintained houses in safe neighborhoods; to provide developmentally appropriate experiences in stimulating, interactive home environments and through high-quality childcare and preschool; to cultivate their children’s unique talents by supplementing the school day’s learning with additional enriching experiences; and to help them overcome challenges with tutors, therapies, and tailored interventions.

Families toward the bottom of the American Human Development Index too often find it difficult even to secure their basic needs. They experience higher levels of stress, greater financial insecurity, and more adverse events and tend to have less stable interpersonal relationships as well as more restricted social networks outside their families. They want to encourage their children’s unique gifts, but they simply can’t afford nonessential things such as music lessons or

extracurricular sports. They want to help their children overcome challenges, but they may lack the knowledge to do so themselves, the confidence or skills to advocate for services at school, or the money to hire a specialist. To imagine that a child born in Disenfranchised California has the same real freedoms and opportunities to realize his or her potential as a child born in Elite Enclave or One Percent California is to negate a sobering reality.

**What will it take to make a meaningful difference in the life chances of the more than half of California's children growing up in Struggling California and Disenfranchised California?** Put simply, it will take action. But the actions needed to make a real difference to these families must have an impact on key human development outcomes. We believe our recommendations listed below have the potential to do just that. Two points are worth bearing in mind, however.

**First, preventing a problem is almost always more effective and less expensive, monetarily and in human terms, than responding to a problem.**

Keeping cardiovascular disease from ever developing by eating healthily, exercising, and never taking up smoking is better by any measure than having to submit to surgeries, medications, and lifestyle restrictions following a heart attack. Protecting children from adverse events and toxic stress is better than mitigating in adulthood the poor outcomes they are associated with, such as job difficulties, poor mental health, unintended pregnancy, heart disease, liver disease, obesity, alcoholism, and relationship problems.<sup>173</sup> Investing in the development of children's core social, emotional, and cognitive skills before they arrive on the first day of school is better than investing in the development of those skills in young adults whose educational opportunities have now all but passed them by.

**Second, the best way to help children is to help their parents.** The important adults in a young child's life create that child's world; their well-being, capabilities, opportunities, and freedoms are all-important to his or her life chances. Parents need information about how best to support their children's learning and growth, but they also need affordably priced homes in safe neighborhoods, jobs that pay living wages and offer predictable hours, access to health care, and a respite from the chronic stress that is poverty's constant companion. Thus the recommendations that follow are not only focused on children but also on **what it would take to improve the American Human Development Index scores for those groups lagging behind.** When the lot of parents and communities improve, so, too, will the life chances of their children.

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The main drivers of health disparities are rooted in the circumstances in which different groups of Californians are **born, grow up, work, and age.**

## A Long and Healthy Life

### Lay the groundwork for a long and healthy life.

Ensuring that schools and after-school programs incorporate healthy eating and exercise into their curricula, helping parents model healthy behaviors, regulating junk food advertising, enforcing laws against the sale of cigarettes to children, and supporting public information campaigns whose messages and approach are proven to appeal to children and teens are all actions that will help today's young Californians live long and healthy lives.

### Improve the conditions of daily life.

The main drivers of health disparities are rooted in the circumstances in which different groups of Californians are born, grow up, work, and age. The environments in which we live determine our exposure to certain health risks like pollution or violence and influence the degree to which we practice healthy behaviors like exercise, or risky ones like smoking. Improving the quality of people's daily lives by, for example, enhancing neighborhood amenities or reducing crime is the key to better health and greater longevity. And doing that requires that traditional "health sector" agencies and advocates work together with schools, employers, businesses, and departments of transportation, parks, and public safety, and many others to create health-promoting environments and mitigate health risks.

### Reduce economic insecurity.

Not being able to count on enough work hours to pay the bills, working full-time but not being able to save for a rainy day, much less a child's education—this kind of unrelenting stress is toxic. It leads to physical symptoms from headaches to heart attacks; psychological reactions like anger, anxiety, and depression; and behavioral responses such as overeating, smoking, and interpersonal conflict. It also creates a home environment that can hamper healthy child development and harm health even in adulthood. Addressing economic insecurity is vital to reducing the chronic stress that hastens physical and cognitive decline and ultimately shortens lives.

## Employ Madison Avenue marketing to “sell” an end to domestic violence.

The recent footage of football player Ray Rice knocking his then-fiancée unconscious has brought domestic, or intimate partner, violence into the public conversation again. It’s time to keep it there. Using the sophisticated market research, tailored messaging, and multimedia techniques for which the ad industry is famous, a high-profile marketing campaign could address one area where advocates for domestic violence survivors have made relatively little progress: in public information and awareness. The campaign should sell change in at least two areas. The first is to change behaviors and redefine norms about how communities react—transforming us from silent bystanders to trained “upstanders” who take safe and effective action when we see signs of domestic and sexual violence. The second is to educate the public about the common dynamics and patterns of abuse widely recognized by experts but largely unknown or misunderstood by the general public. Such a campaign could be a game changer for millions of women, men, and children.

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## Insure the undocumented.

Among those still not covered by health insurance in California, 62 percent are Latino, and nearly half of them are undocumented. This population is not eligible for the state programs and subsidies that put health care within reach for other previously uninsured groups. Giving all low-income California residents, regardless of their immigration status, access to both Medi-Cal and an insurance marketplace is a cost-effective way to ensure that all people in the state can take advantage of vaccines and preventive screenings and see a doctor when they are sick.



## Access to Knowledge

### Help build the parenting skills of mothers and fathers living in poverty.

Proven home visiting programs like the Nurse-Family Partnership can help at-risk families ensure a healthy, full-term pregnancy, meet the physical and attachment needs of their infants, employ effective parenting techniques in the challenging toddler years, create a developmentally appropriate home environment, and reduce the stress and isolation that often accompany new parenthood and can compromise parenting behaviors. Parents who are skilled in caregiving can help mitigate the effects of poverty on their children, even if their economic circumstances don't change.

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### Improve the quality of childcare with higher standards and higher pay—and make it accessible for all families.

The quality of childcare in the United States, on the whole, falls badly short. Part of the reason is that most day care providers lack formal training in early childhood development, and the pay in this sector is far too low to keep the most skilled providers on the job or to attract workers with higher levels of education. Boosting pay and improving standards are vital. In addition, safe, reliable, developmentally appropriate childcare is prohibitively expensive for many California families. Reducing the cost of quality childcare through subsidies, tax credits, and other approaches would make it accessible to more California families.

### Make high-quality universal preschool a reality for 3- and 4-year olds.

The evidence is in, and has been for some time: high-quality, center-based preschool, especially for disadvantaged children, helps build the socio-emotional skills required for school and life success and is the most cost-effective investment in formal education a society can make.



## Support vulnerable youth in their transition to a productive adulthood.

In California today, 750,000 people ages 16 to 24 are neither working nor in school. Preventing young people from leaving high school without a degree and finding ways to reengage disconnected teens and young adults are key to addressing this scarring and costly problem. Motivational programs for teens, second chance programs, apprenticeships, and workplace-based educational programs can all get good results with at-risk young people when they have a strong focus on attachment and meaningful relationships, positive personality traits, discipline, and self-control—the same kinds of social, emotional, and interpersonal skills that high-quality early childhood educational programs promote.<sup>174</sup>

## Ensure that the new state education funding formula improves the educational outcomes of disadvantaged students.

Having additional school resources will, in many ways, help all students—for instance, classroom teachers will have less need to spend extra time with a struggling student if a specialist can provide the targeted assistance that child needs. But it is important that administrators ensure that these new funds are used for their intended purpose: addressing the specific needs of children who are low-income, involved in the foster care system, or learning English.

Preventing young people from leaving high school without a degree and finding ways to reengage disconnected teens and young adults are both key to addressing youth disconnection.



Growing up in poverty diminishes child well-being and limits long-term opportunities and life chances.

## A Decent Standard of Living

Strengthen the safety net to better protect children from the adverse effects of poverty.

Growing up in poverty diminishes child well-being and limits long-term opportunities and life chances. Persistent poverty across generations poses particular problems: research has shown that “a family’s exposure to neighborhood poverty across two consecutive generations” significantly reduces child cognitive ability.<sup>175</sup> Nearly one in four children in California live below the official poverty line; given California’s high cost of living, a still-higher share lives in an economically stressed household. Children can’t choose their parents; society has an obligation to ensure that the accident of birth is not a child’s destiny. Other affluent democracies do much more to ease the economic pressure on families with children and to provide universal services that meet children’s essential needs. Making sure that families with children have safe, stable housing and access to quality childcare and early childhood education is not only right, it is also smart; society can either invest in success or pay for failure.

Boost wages for those at the bottom of the income scale.

The minimum wage has lagged way behind inflation for over four decades,<sup>176</sup> while costs for basics like housing, childcare, and health care have risen sharply. Recently, the “Fight for \$15” movement has gained national traction, especially among fast-food workers. In one example of a promising local action, a group of Los Angeles City Council members proposed legislation to boost the city’s minimum wage to \$15.25 an hour by 2019.<sup>177</sup> A range of levers at the federal, state, and local levels can help ensure that those working full-time have economic security and a decent standard of living. Raising the minimum wage, enacting living wage ordinances, protecting rights to collective bargaining, promoting full employment, supporting wage subsidies, and expanding protections for undocumented workers would make a tremendous difference to families in Struggling and Disenfranchised California.

## Pay farm laborers a fair wage.

California's crop workers, nine out of ten of whom are Mexican-born, make vital contributions to the country's access to healthy foods and to the state's economy. They also work long hours in often-difficult conditions and, according to the most recent U.S. Department of Labor Agricultural Workers Survey, typically earn in the range of \$15,000 to \$17,500. A 40 percent increase in wages for the typical seasonal farm worker passed entirely on to the consumer would result in an increase of about \$16 a year for fresh produce, but would boost crop-worker wages, in the case of California, from their current range to a salary of around \$23,000.

## End work-hour insecurity.

Work matters to people's well-being not only because of the money they earn: it also provides structure, dignity, and a sense of control over one's life. On-call hours erode these non-income benefits. California's send-home pay law offers welcome protections to hourly shift workers. But while this law provides more income security, many argue it does not go far enough.<sup>178</sup> A new ordinance took effect in San Francisco in January 2014 that gives particular consideration to the needs of caregivers. Among other provisions, San Francisco's "Family Friendly Workplace Ordinance" gives employees the right to request predictable working arrangements to accommodate caregiving responsibilities that an employer can only refuse for bona fide business reasons. While some business associations are resisting these regulations for their possible impact on efficiency and profits, studies have found that limiting work-hour insecurity can improve morale and productivity and reduce absenteeism.

## Increase the stock of affordable housing.

Stable, affordable housing is fundamental to human development progress, especially for children, whose academic and health outcomes tend to be upended by frequent moves and whose health and safety can be deeply compromised by poor housing conditions. California has long struggled with the high cost of housing—today, six of the ten most expensive metro area rental markets in the country are in California.<sup>179</sup> As a result of the housing bust and subsequent recession, the rental housing market has become prohibitively expensive for many low- and middle-income households. In Struggling and Disenfranchised California, over half of the households spend more than 30 percent of their income on housing—the measure of housing affordability. But despite this situation, attention to housing has not emerged as a high priority in recent times. Priorities include preserving existing affordable housing units, increasing their availability, and ensuring sustainable and long-term funding for affordable housing.

Stable, affordable housing is fundamental to human development progress, especially for children.

# A PORTRAIT OF CALIFORNIA 2014–2015

It's easy to find out how **California's economy** is doing.  
But what if we want to know how **California's people** are doing?

California's economy grew 123 percent over the last three decades—but median household income in the state went up by just 7 percent. While increases in GDP and other money metrics are typically reported as good news, these measures aren't built to say much about what's happening to the quality of life. To learn that, we need a consistent measure that is focused squarely on people's well-being and allows us to track human progress over time, as we do economic progress. *A Portrait of California* features such a measure—the American Human Development Index. The report brings together data, innovative analysis, and a time-tested, internationally acclaimed approach to reveal how different groups of Californians are faring when it comes to the most basic building blocks of a good life: **health**, **education**, and **income**. The Index allows for apples-to-apples well-being comparisons for counties, cities, neighborhood clusters, and racial and ethnic groups.

Did you know . . .

- that there are actually “Five Californias,” characterized by stark differences in the ability of children to realize their potential and live freely chosen, rewarding lives as adults?
- that Californians live longer and earn more than the average American, but that, in parts of Los Angeles, the average life expectancy of a baby born today is on par with that of a baby born today in Libya or Sri Lanka?
- that if every adult in California without a high school degree were to have one, nearly half a million fewer Californians would live in poverty?

*“This fact-based exploration of how children and their communities across California are doing is a must-read for policymakers, business leaders, philanthropists, and anyone who cares about our future.”* Toni G. Atkins, Speaker of the California State Assembly

## ABOUT THE REPORT

Measurement on this scale isn't about simple good news or bad news for the state as a whole—it's about the widely divergent opportunities, freedoms, and life chances of different groups of Californians.

***A Portrait of California*** provides a reliable, fact-based starting point for asking and answering the kinds of questions that shape people-centered policy and investment and help put the American Dream within everyone's reach.

## ABOUT THE AUTHORS

**Kristen Lewis** and **Sarah Burd-Sharps** are co-directors of Measure of America and co-authors of *The Measure of America* series of national, state, and county reports. They both previously worked on human development issues in countries around the world.

## ABOUT THE PROJECT

**Measure of America** is a nonpartisan project of the Social Science Research Council. It creates easy-to-use yet methodologically sound tools for understanding well-being and opportunity in America and stimulates fact-based dialogue about these issues. Through hard copy and online reports, interactive maps, and custom-built dashboards, Measure of America works closely with partners to breathe life into numbers, using data to identify areas of need, pinpoint levers for change, and track progress over time.

## ABOUT THE DESIGN

**Humantific** is an internationally recognized SenseMaking for ChangeMaking firm located in New York and Madrid.



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[www.measureofamerica.org](http://www.measureofamerica.org)