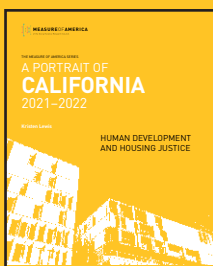
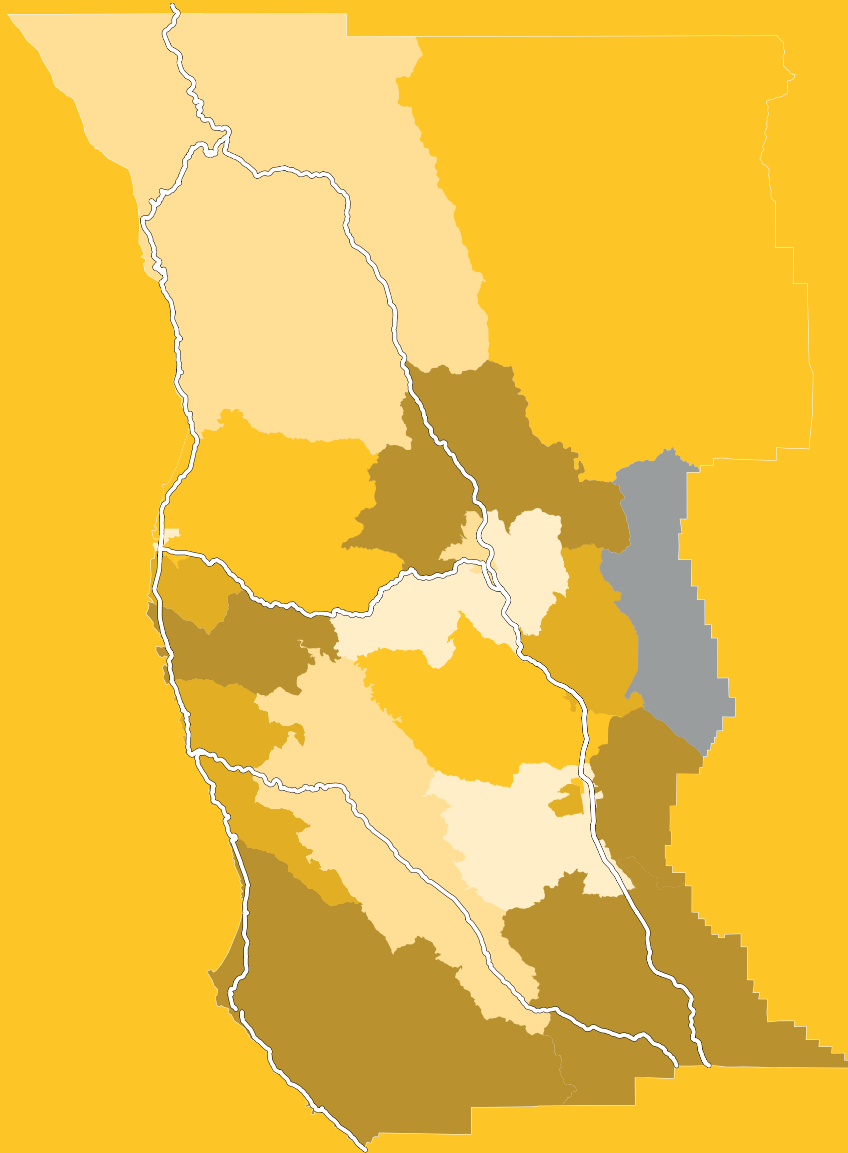


Spotlight on

Mendocino County



REGIONAL REPORT SERIES

A PORTRAIT OF **CALIFORNIA** 2021-2022

HUMAN DEVELOPMENT AND HOUSING JUSTICE



Introduction

This report paints a picture of well-being and access to opportunity in Mendocino County. It was guided by an advisory group of Mendocino County organizations and individuals and is part of a larger project, *A Portrait of California 2021–2022*, that explores well-being in the state as a whole, with a special focus on housing. It is informed by the human development approach and uses the American Human Development Index as a well-being gauge for places and population groups in the county.

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First 5 Del Norte
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thank you!

Kristen

Understanding Human Development

The **American Human Development Index (HDI)** is a composite measure of well-being and access to opportunity made up of health, education, and earnings indicators. The index is expressed on a scale of 0 to 10. Measure of America's HDI calculations provide a snapshot of community well-being, reveal inequalities between groups, allow for tracking change over time, and provide a tool for holding elected officials accountable. Broken down by race and ethnicity, by gender, and by census tract, the index shows how communities across Mendocino County are faring relative to one another and to the state and country as a whole.

The framework that guides this work is the **human development approach**. Human development is an expansive, hopeful concept that values people's dignity and freedom to decide for themselves what to do, how to live, and who to be. Formally defined as the process of improving people's well-being and expanding their opportunities to live freely chosen, flourishing lives, the human development approach puts people at the center of analysis. It is concerned with how political, social, environmental, and economic forces interact to shape the range of choices open to us.

The human development approach rests on a robust conceptual framework: Nobel Prize-winning economist Amartya Sen's seminal work on **capabilities**.¹ Capabilities can be understood as a person's tool kit for living a thriving life. We tend to think of capabilities as an individual's skills and talents. In the human development approach, the word's meaning is far more expansive. Valued capabilities include good health, access to knowledge, sufficient income, physical safety, religious freedom, political participation, love and friendship, dignity and societal respect, equality under the law, social inclusion, access to the natural world, self-expression, agency, the ability to influence decisions that affect one's life, and more.²

Another important idea in the human development framework is the concept of **human security**.³ Human security is concerned with the safety and freedom of people, rather than the integrity and protection of the state. Human development can be understood as the freedom to—to enjoy choices and opportunities and to live a flourishing life. Human security can be understood as freedom *from*—from chronic and sudden threats to our lives, rights, and dignity. The challenges of the last two years—including Covid-19, the sharp economic downturn and fast-rising housing costs that the pandemic spurred, school closures, heatwaves and power outages, and wildfires and wildfire smoke⁴—and the disproportionate effects they have had on different groups, including Latino and Native American people, children, the elderly, and low-income communities, call out for a way to understand what is needed to keep people safe. Disasters like these threaten human life, shake our sense of safety, and wipe out years of progress and lifetimes of hard work in a matter of days or weeks. But preparedness, prevention, and protection can mitigate their effects.

The concept of human development is very broad; it includes all the factors that shape our lives. Because measuring everything in a single index is not possible, the

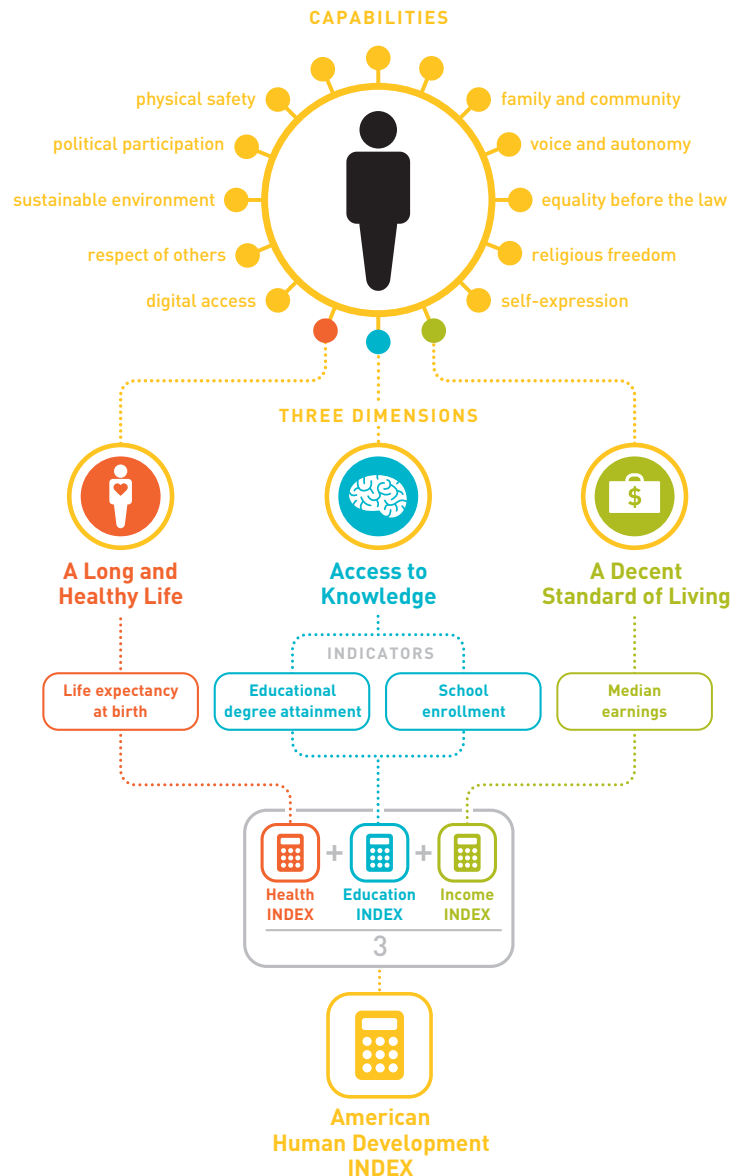
HDI calculations provide a snapshot of community well-being, reveal inequalities between groups, allow for tracking change over time, and provide a tool for holding elected officials accountable.

HDI includes just three dimensions of well-being: a long and healthy life, access to knowledge, and a decent standard of living. People around the world value these areas as core building blocks of a life of freedom and dignity. In addition, good proxy indicators that are collected and tracked in a consistent way across time and place are available for each. These indicators are not perfect, however. For example, one-third of the index is called “access to knowledge,” but the indicators used—school enrollment and degree attainment—measure only *access to formal education*, leaving aside other valuable ways of knowing. A decent standard of living is measured using median personal earnings; this indicator tells us about the wages and salaries of typical Mendocino residents but nothing about their assets and wealth, such as the value of their homes or investments, which are very important ingredients of human security. It is important to keep in mind that the index is just the start of a conversation about well-being, access to opportunity, and inequality. To understand the *why* behind the scores and craft effective policies to address inequality requires additional quantitative data as well as qualitative data—interviews, narratives, life histories, and more.

A Long and Healthy Life is measured using life expectancy at birth, which is calculated using data from the California Department of Public Health, population data from the US Census Bureau, and USALEEP data for census tract-level estimates.

Access to Knowledge is measured using data on school enrollment for children and young people ages 3 to 24 and educational degree attainment for adults 25 and older from the American Community Survey of the US Census Bureau.

A Decent Standard of Living is measured using median personal earnings of all full- and part-time workers ages 16 and older from the American Community Survey of the US Census Bureau.



Human Development in Mendocino County

The HDI score for Mendocino County is 4.53 out of 10, compared to 5.85 for the state as a whole. Residents of Mendocino County have a life expectancy of 78.8 years, about 2.3 years less than the California average. They are less likely to hold high school diplomas and bachelor's degrees than their statewide counterparts and earn about \$11,400 less—\$28,500 compared to \$39,900.

In Mendocino County, as in the state and country, HDI scores vary significantly by gender, by race and ethnicity, and by place. Women have an HDI score of 4.69, whereas men have a score of 4.26. This disparity is due to a nearly six-year difference in life expectancy as well as women's higher levels of school enrollment and degree attainment. Men in Mendocino, however, outearn women; their median personal earnings are more than \$9,000 higher than women's—\$32,800 compared to \$23,500.

In Mendocino County, as in the state and country, HDI scores vary significantly by gender, by race and ethnicity, and by place.

TABLE 2 Human Development Index by Gender and by Race and Ethnicity in Mendocino County

RANK	HDI	LIFE EXPECTANCY AT BIRTH (years)	EDUCATION INDEX (out of 10)	MEDIAN EARNINGS (\$)
California	5.85	81.1	5.45	39,900
Mendocino	4.53	78.8	4.75	28,500
GENDER				
1 Women	4.69	82.4	6.83	23,500
2 Men	4.26	75.5	3.95	32,800
RACE/ETHNICITY				
1 Asian	5.71	84.2	6.48	26,900
2 White	5.37	78.3	6.70	32,200
3 Latino	4.71	86.2	3.76	22,900
4 Native American	3.58	72.9	4.49	28,100
Black			4.26	23,800
GENDER AND RACE/ETHNICITY				
1 White Women	5.57	82.0	7.08	26,400
2 White Men	5.08	74.8	6.30	37,100
3 Latina Women	4.84	89.4	4.20	18,800
4 Latino Men	4.56	83.5	3.35	26,700
5 Native American Men	3.53	70.2	4.40	32,700
6 Native American Women	3.51	75.5	4.59	23,000
Asian Men			6.86	30,000
Asian Women			6.35	26,800
Black Men				
Black Women				

Source: Life expectancy: Measure of America calculations using mortality data from the California Department of Public Health, 2014–2020. Education and Earnings: US Census Bureau.
Note: ACS, 2016–2020.

The racial and ethnic categories used in this report are defined by the White House Office of Management and Budget and used for data collection across US agencies. Of the racial and ethnic groups in Mendocino County for which it is possible to calculate HDI values, Asian residents have the highest score, 5.71, followed by white residents (5.37), Latino residents (4.71), and Native American residents (3.58). The Black population in Mendocino is about 600 people, which is too small to allow for reliable life expectancy calculations, and most of the education and earnings indicators from the American Community Survey used to calculate the American Human Development Index are unreliable, again due to population size. In California as a whole, the Black score is 4.44.

The striking differences by race and ethnicity stem from California's history of genocide, displacement, discrimination, land theft, family separation, and exclusion toward nonwhite Californians, particularly Native American peoples, and the trauma and unequal distribution of resources of all sorts that resulted: political power, public goods like schools, labor market opportunities, land and housing, money in the form of earnings and assets, and more. For more on Native Americans in Mendocino County, see **BOX 4**.

Both Latina and white women have higher HDI scores than their male counterparts. Latina women score 4.84 and Latino men score 4.56. White women, who have the highest index value of the race/gender combinations, score 5.57, compared to white men, who score 5.08. In both groups, women live longer than men—about six years' difference between Latino men and women, and seven for whites—and have better educational outcomes. But white men earn \$10,700 more than white women, and Latino men earn \$7,900 more than Latina women. Native American women, on the other hand, score slightly below Native American men—3.51 and 3.53, respectively. Native American women live five years longer but earn \$9,700 less.

Well-being also varies by place across Mendocino County. This report uses census tracts to present scores by place. Census tracts are areas defined by the Census Bureau; they generally have a population between 1,200 and 8,000 people, with an optimum size of 4,000 people. Mendocino County has twenty-one census tracts, and the populations are sufficiently large to calculate a human development index score for twenty of them. Census tracts are not intuitive—no one knows their census tract number—and can be a bit difficult to see on the maps in this report; please refer to our online map at <https://measureofamerica.org/california2021-22/>, where you can enlarge the view and hover over tracts to see both their number and score.

The range of HDI scores by census tract in Mendocino County runs from a high of 6.74 in Census Tract 117, which includes areas east of Ukiah including Regina Heights, Talmage, Vichy Springs, and the Guidiville Rancheria, to a low of 3.16 in Census Tract 115.02, which includes the northeastern section of Ukiah and Orrs Creek as well as Oak Manor.

The striking differences by race and ethnicity stem from California's history of displacement, discrimination, land theft, family separation, and exclusion toward nonwhite Californians, particularly Native American peoples.

TABLE 3 Human Development Index by Census Tract in Mendocino County

RANK	HDI	LIFE EXPECTANCY AT BIRTH (years)	LESS THAN HIGH SCHOOL (% of adults 25+)	AT LEAST HIGH SCHOOL DIPLOMA (% of adults 25+)	AT LEAST BACHELOR'S DEGREE (% of adults 25+)	SCHOOL ENROLLMENT (% ages 3 to 24)	MEDIAN EARNINGS (\$)
Mendocino County	4.53	78.8	13.3	86.7	24.0	77.2	28,500
1 Census Tract 117	6.74	85.3	4.0	96.0	45.8	84.6	34,600
2 Census Tract 110.04	6.12	84.8	3.8	96.2	44.8	77.0	30,700
3 Census Tract 118	5.72	83.8	22.7	77.3	20.7	85.8	35,200
4 Census Tract 111.02	5.51	84.0	13.7	86.3	31.2	77.3	29,400
5 Census Tract 106.02	5.38	79.1	8.2	91.8	26.9	85.4	33,500
6 Census Tract 114	5.16	81.2	7.2	92.8	34.8	74.4	29,000
7 Census Tract 110.01	5.08*	82.5	2.5	97.5	48.7	96.6	17,300*
8 Census Tract 108.01	4.98	78.5	10.9	89.1	14.8	81.6	35,900
9 Census Tract 110.03	4.91	84.8	9.5	90.5	30.1	62.8	26,600
10 Census Tract 103	4.69	77.1	11.6	88.4	24.2	83.1	31,300
11 Census Tract 104	4.40	78.6	12.5	87.5	28.9	67.7	29,200
12 Census Tract 115.01	4.33*	74.0	18.0	82.0	28.0	84.4	31,800*
13 Census Tract 109	4.32	76.9	19.7	80.3	11.1	81.5	32,300
14 Census Tract 101	4.25	80.5	16.2	83.8	12.9	78.9	25,500
15 Census Tract 112	4.11	78.9	16.6	83.4	26.5	80.3	22,500
16 Census Tract 102	4.09	78.8	17.1	82.9	19.4	82.0	24,000
17 Census Tract 107	3.83	74.9	13.1	86.9	19.1	69.4	31,400
18 Census Tract 106.01	3.59	79.1	13.1	86.9	26.0	54.0	24,100
19 Census Tract 105	3.57	76.1	18.5	81.5	14.7	74.4	26,000
20 Census Tract 116	3.56	74.2	20.2	79.8	15.8	71.3	30,200
21 Census Tract 113	3.56	77.2	14.3	85.7	15.2	74.9	23,700
22 Census Tract 115.02	3.16	74.0	24.7	75.3	4.8	78.4	26,700
Census Tract 108.02		78.3	4.4	95.6	31.3	87.4	

* Indicate estimates that are less reliable.

In the statewide report that accompanies this *Spotlight on Mendocino County, A Portrait of California 2021–2022*, we use a framework called the Five Californias to explore the range of well-being and access to opportunity across the Golden State. The Five Californias, which are created by grouping areas¹⁰ not by geographic region but rather by HDI scores, include the following:

One Percent California consists of neighborhood clusters that score 9.00 or above out of 10 on the HDI. The 900,000 people, 2.3 percent of the state population, living in these mostly Bay Area communities enjoy higher levels of well-being and greater access to opportunity than almost anyone in the country. No Mendocino County communities meet the criteria for One Percent California.

Elite Enclave California is made up of neighborhood clusters that score between 7.00 and 8.99 on the index. It is home to roughly eight million people, or one-fifth of the state's population, living mostly in the Bay Area, Los Angeles, and San Diego. No Mendocino communities fall into this category.

Main Street California comprises neighborhood clusters that score between 5.00 and 6.99. More than eighteen million people, 46 percent of the population, live in this California. Main Street Californians have higher levels of well-being than the average US resident. Nonetheless, California's high cost of living means that some Main

Streeters face levels of economic insecurity similar to that of Struggling California. In Mendocino County, seven communities meet the criteria for this California.

Struggling California is home to neighborhood clusters scoring between 3.00 and 4.99 on the index. They are found chiefly in greater Los Angeles, the Inland Empire, the Central Valley, greater San Diego, and northern California. Struggling California’s residents, who make up roughly 30 percent of the state’s population, have lower levels of well-being than the typical American. The majority of Mendocino communities, fourteen of them, fit into this category.

Disenfranchised California comprises neighborhood clusters that score below 3.00. No Mendocino County communities meet the criteria for this California. Communities in this group can be found in the Inland Empire, the San Joaquin Valley, and Los Angeles County. People living in Disenfranchised California experience many more barriers to opportunity than do those who live elsewhere and have much lower levels of well-being on average—shorter lives, less access to education, and extremely low earnings—than others in the state.

BOX 5 Why Don’t All Groups and Places Have an HDI Score?

You will notice that on some maps, specific areas appear in gray, and that in some tables, values for certain groups or locales are missing or have an asterisk. Gray areas and missing and asterisked values indicate that the data for that place or demographic group are less statistically reliable than data for more populous areas or larger groups.

Ideally, we would be able to provide scores not just for large demographic groups, such as Asian, Latino, Native American, and white Mendocino residents, but also for smaller ones like Black county residents. One barrier to doing so is that the method we use to calculate life expectancy at birth requires a minimum number of deaths in each five-year age category. Even combining several years of California Department of Public Health mortality data did not include deaths in a number of age groups for Black residents, making it impossible to accurately calculate life expectancy for them. Because we don’t have life expectancy

for Black residents, and because some indicators for education and earnings were unreliable due to the small size of this population (about 600 people), we could not calculate an HDI score for them.

We were able to address data challenges around calculating life expectancy for Latino residents by combining the Mendocino County Latino population with the Latino populations in Del Norte County (for which we also wrote a report like this one) and Humboldt County, which lies between the two along the Pacific Coast. We used this combined-county life expectancy alongside Mendocino-specific education and earnings data to calculate the HDI, allowing us to provide a score for Latino residents as well as for Latino men and women.

Another limitation in our ability to provide everyone an HDI score stems from the way in which the data we use for the index are collected. We would like, for example, to calculate scores for

LGBTQ residents, but are unable to do so because the American Community Survey does not provide a way for people to report information about their sexual and gender identities beyond marking the box for male or female. One bright spot: starting in July 2021, the Census has included questions on sexual orientation and gender identity on its Household Pulse Survey. Measure of America has asked the Census to extend these questions to the American Community Survey and its Decennial Census. This would greatly enhance human-centered research.

In short, Measure of America can only calculate scores for groups that are given the chance to self-identify on the American Community Survey and that are sufficiently large as to allow reliable calculations. We understand the frustration and potential harms of not having reliable data on each and every demographic group in the county; individuals and communities can be made invisible in cases like this.



BOX 4 Native American Communities in Mendocino County

Approximately 3,500 Native Americans—and another 3,400 people who list Native American plus another race or ethnicity on census surveys—call Mendocino County home. Mendocino County contains nine federally recognized Indian Reservations.⁵

Health

To calculate life expectancy, we rely on mortality data that state and county coroners' offices collect and classify by race and ethnicity. The coroners code race and ethnicity by marking a check box; as of 2020 in the state of California they do not have the option to code somebody as of two or more races. When a coroner does not know the race or ethnicity of a deceased person, their only options are to check "other" or "unknown." Due to this restrictive classification, we do not have data to calculate the life expectancy for "two or more races." Yet research shows that, since 2010, Native American people have been increasingly self-identifying as "two or more races" in demographic surveys, rather than as "Native American alone."⁶ To keep up with shifts in the way in which people self-report their racial and ethnic identities, changes need to be made in how racial and ethnic data are classified by coroners' offices across the state. Today there is a growing mismatch between the way people see themselves—for instance, as biracial—and the way funeral home employees and coroners classify them at the time of their deaths.

The life expectancy for Native Americans in Mendocino County is 72.9 years—75.5 years for women and 70.2 years for men—the

lowest of the county's major racial and ethnic groups. The Covid-19 pandemic affected tribal communities disproportionately, though local tribes led community mitigation initiatives including public awareness campaigns. For example, the Sherwood Valley Band of Pomo Indians led participatory activities to promote mask use. Each tribal family was invited to tie-dye masks within their family pod, and elders and youth went door to door to raise awareness among Sherwood Valley households. The Consolidated Tribal Health Project, a nonprofit community health clinic governed by a consortium of eight tribes, provides medical, dental, behavioral health, and patient support programs and services. During the pandemic, the Project conducted outreach, distribution of masks, vaccination programs, and more.⁷

Access to Knowledge

The indicators for this category—school enrollment and adult educational attainment—do not capture many important sources of knowledge and ways of knowing that matter to Native American people, such as cultural identity. In addition, local data that focus on Native American youth in Mendocino are hard to come by. One exception: the Pinoleville Pomo Nation and Ukiah Unified School District conducted a needs assessment in 2014 comprising student and parent surveys and interviews with Tribal Elders and other stakeholders in 2014 to identify barriers to academic success and well-being. Respondents identified lack of mentorship, cultural identity, and academic support. The Native

American Youth and Adult (NAYA) Partnership Program was formed as a direct answer to the survey findings. Through the sign-up process, youth identify skills, experiences, and goals they would like a mentor to help them achieve. Youth and adult pairs then meet for twelve sessions to form a circle of youth and adults who are focused on the skills and steps it takes to reach each partnership's goal. Following the twelve sessions, youth work with their mentor for six months to reach their personal goal. Through coordination and financial assistance, the NAYA program supports each young person reaching their goal. After working together for a few months, the young people and their mentors present their progress. The program lasts a total of nine months and is open to all Native American youth, ages 10 to 18, in the Ukiah Valley and surrounding areas.

Living Standards

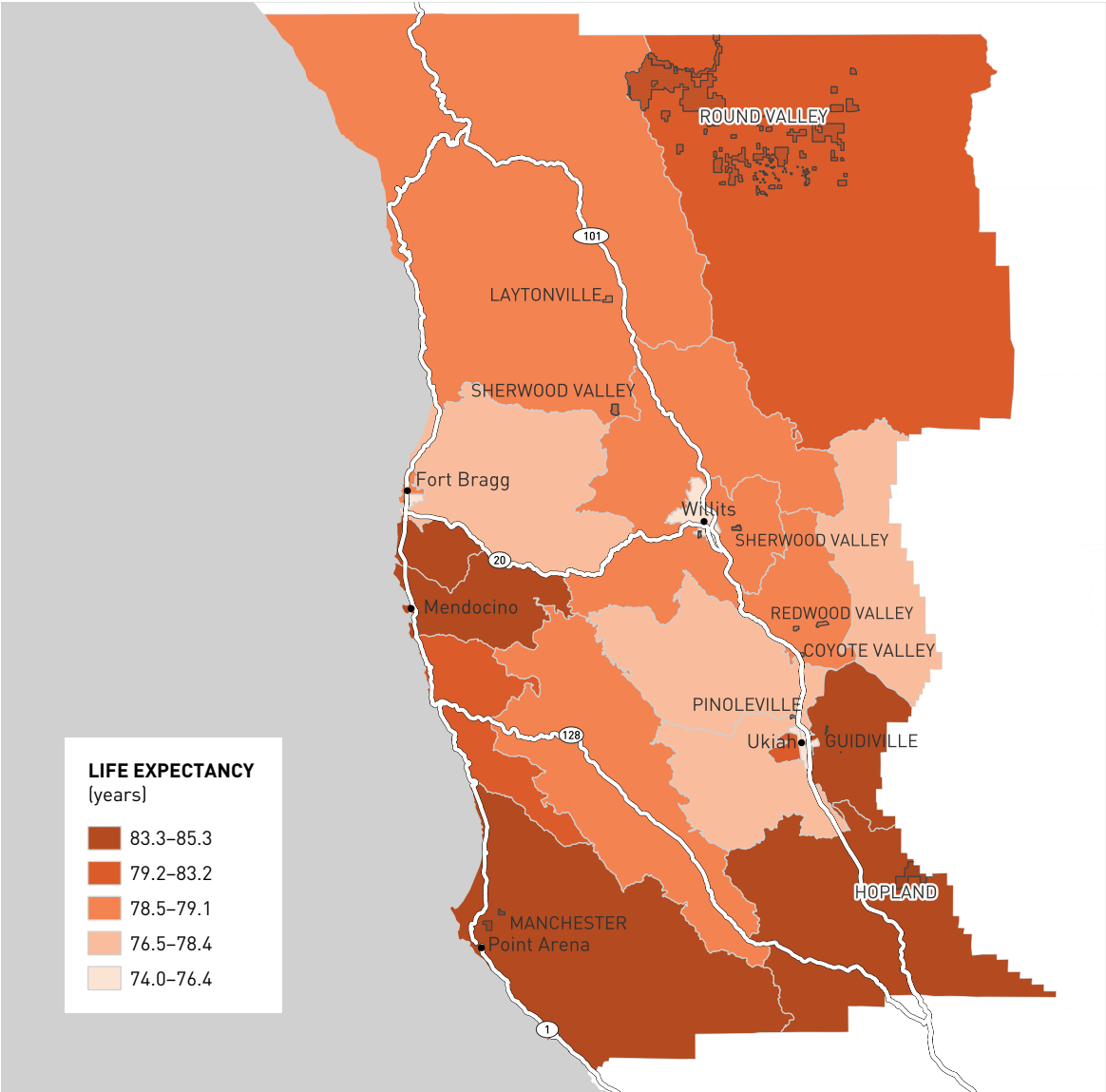
The median personal earnings for Native American residents of Mendocino County is \$28,100, below the statewide median for Native Americans, \$32,400, and on par with the county median, \$28,500.

The California 30x30 plan is a policy to protect 30 percent of California's lands and waters by 2030 and an opportunity to return land and stewardship of natural resources back to Native people.⁸ If coupled with financial assistance and land return, this plan could both restore the environment and provide some economic and cultural sustenance to tribal communities.⁹

Health

Improving human development requires, first and foremost, increasing people’s real opportunities to avoid premature death by disease or injury, to enjoy protection from arbitrary denial of life, to live in a healthy environment, to maintain a healthy lifestyle, to receive quality medical care, and to attain the highest possible standard of physical and mental health. Amid the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic, health and its relationship with income and education, safety and human security, and race and

MAP 6 Life Expectancy



place have come into sharp focus.

In the American Human Development Index, the proxy for a long and healthy life is life expectancy at birth, defined as the number of years that a baby born today can expect to live if current patterns of mortality continue throughout their lifetime. Although living a long life and living a healthy life are not synonymous, those who manage to elude all causes of mortality until their eighties or nineties are generally healthier than the average person, and life expectancy is a widely used summary measure of population health.

Life Expectancy in Mendocino Today

- The average life expectancy for residents of Mendocino County is 78.8 years, 2.3 years shorter than the state average. Life expectancy in Mendocino was 78.0 years in 2008 and 79.3 years in 2012. The drop in life expectancy from 2012 to 2020 is likely attributable to Covid-19; across the United States, life expectancy fell one and a half years from 2019 to 2020.¹¹
- The life expectancy of women in Mendocino is 82.4 years, compared to that of men: 75.5 years. In other words, a baby girl born in Mendocino County today can expect to live 6.9 years longer than a baby boy. This gap is larger than the statewide gap in gender life expectancy (5.2 years).
- Latino residents have the longest life expectancy, 86.2 years, with Latina women having the longest life expectancy of any race/gender combination, 89.4 years.¹² Native American residents have the shortest life expectancy, 72.9 years. Asian residents of Mendocino have a life expectancy of 84.2 years, whereas white residents have a life expectancy of 78.3 years. Due to the small population sizes of the Native Hawaiian and other Pacific Islander and Black populations in Mendocino, life expectancy calculations are not possible for these groups.
- Native American men have the lowest life expectancy of any race/gender combination, 70.2 years. This is a lifespan 19.1 years shorter than the group with the longest life expectancy, Latina women.
- Among census tracts in Mendocino, life expectancy ranges from 74.0 years in Census Tracts 115.01 and 115.02, which together contain much of northern and eastern Ukiah including Las Casas Estates, to 85.3 years in Census Tract 117, which includes areas east of Ukiah including Regina Heights, Talmage, Vichy Springs, and the Guidiville Rancheria.

The average life expectancy for residents of Mendocino County is 78.8 years, 2.3 years shorter than the state average.

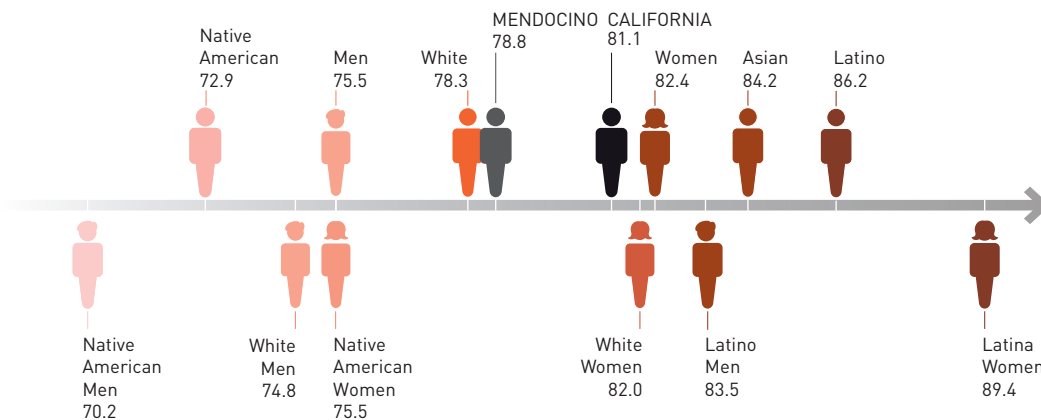
Other Factors Affecting Health

No discussion of life expectancy would be complete without mention of Covid-19’s impact. As of November 2022, Mendocino’s share of the population killed by Covid-19, 157 per 100,000 residents, is below that of California, 252 per 100,000.¹³ Nearly seven in ten (68.4 percent) of all Mendocino residents have completed a primary series of vaccination against Covid-19, compared to 72.3 percent of all Californians.¹⁴

A larger proportion of Mendocino residents, 8.6 percent, die from accidents (including drug overdoses) than in California as a whole, 5.3 percent. Mendocino has the second-highest rate of opioid-related overdose deaths of any county in California, 55.9 per 100,000 residents, more than triple the statewide rate of 16.7 deaths per 100,000 residents.¹⁵ The rate of Mendocino residents who die in land transport accidents (accidents involving pedestrians, bicyclists, motorcycles, cars, trucks, buses, and any other land vehicle) is 21.2 per 100,000 residents, double the California rate of 10.7 per 100,000.¹⁶ The suicide rate in Mendocino is alarmingly high; the 2018–2020 suicide rate in the county was 20.8 per 1,000, about double the state rate.¹⁷

BOX 7 Life Expectancy by Gender and by Race and Ethnicity in Mendocino County

LIFE EXPECTANCY AT BIRTH (YEARS)

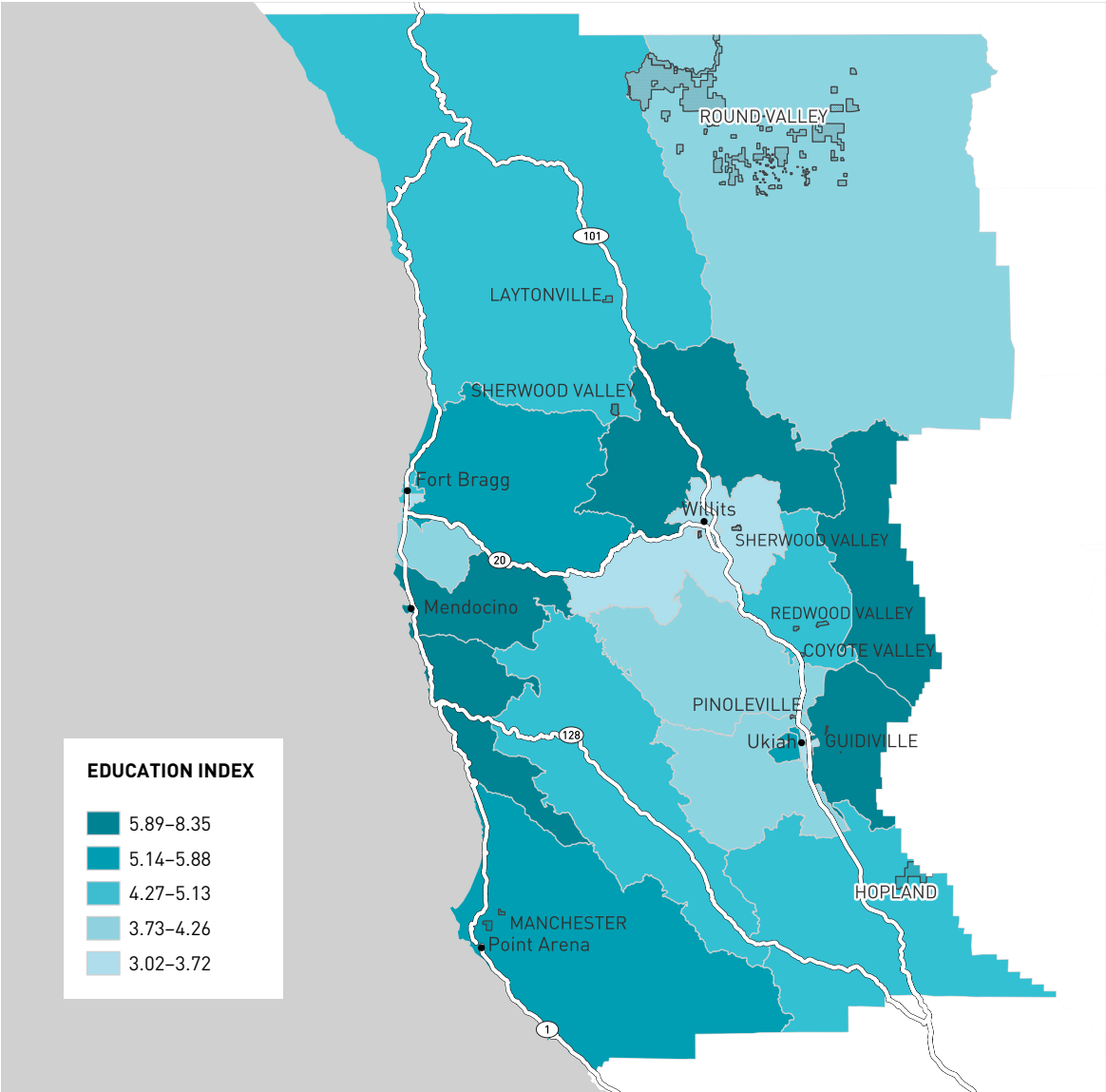


Source: Life expectancy: Measure of America calculations using mortality data from the California Department of Public Health, 2014–2020.
 Note: Data were not reliable for Black or Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander overall, or Asian disaggregated at the gender level. Latino life expectancy is a pooled estimate for Mendocino, Del Norte, and Humboldt counties. For more info, see methodological note.

Education

It is common knowledge that more education typically leads to better jobs and bigger paychecks—a relationship stronger today than ever. Globalization and technological change have made it difficult for people with limited formal education to achieve the economic self-sufficiency, peace of mind, and human security enabled by a living wage across the United States. The ways in which education and knowledge more broadly also make desirable noneconomic outcomes more likely are less well-known. More than just allowing for the

MAP 8 Education Index



acquisition of skills and credentials, education builds confidence, confers status and dignity, and provides access to a wider range of possible futures. More education is associated with better physical and mental health, a longer life, and greater marital stability, tolerance, and ability to adjust to change.

Access to knowledge is measured using data from the American Community Survey of the US Census Bureau on school enrollment for children and young people ages 3 to 24 and educational degree attainment for adults 25 and older. It is important to note that the indicators used to measure access to knowledge—school enrollment and degree attainment—measure only access to formal education. Using indicators of formal education as a stand-in for the broad concept of knowledge is commonplace in social science research and has many advantages (for instance, the data are collected and made available every year). But doing so leaves unmeasured and unacknowledged all other valuable and important ways of knowing that allow communities to survive and flourish and that are sources of strength, resilience, pride, and identity. Access to knowledge includes not just what people learn in school but also what they learn at home and in their communities about how the world works, what is valuable, what it means to be a good person, how to overcome challenges, and how to carry out most of the practical tasks of living, to name just a few.

Access to knowledge is measured using data from the American Community Survey of the US Census Bureau on school enrollment for children and young people ages 3 to 24 and educational degree attainment for adults 25 and older.

TABLE 9 Education Index by Race and Ethnicity in Mendocino County

MENDOCINO	EDUCATION INDEX	HIGHEST DEGREE ATTAINED				SCHOOL ENROLLMENT
		Less than high school	High school diploma	Bachelor's degree	Graduate degree	
White	6.70	6.9%	65.2%	17.1%	10.7%	92.2%
Asian	6.48	7.6	44.7	29.3	18.4	77.5*
Native American	4.49	24.1		68.3	4.7* 2.9*	90.2*
Black	4.26	12.0	68.6		11.9* 7.5*	56.6*
Latino	3.76	36.4		53.3	6.4* 4.0	86.4

Source: US Census Bureau ACS, 2016–2020.
 *Estimates with an asterisk have a higher degree of uncertainty. Due to small population sizes and survey sampling the standard error of the estimate is greater than 20% of the estimate. Data were not reliable for Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander overall.

Educational Outcomes in Mendocino Today

- Compared to California as a whole, adult residents of Mendocino are slightly more likely to have graduated from high school and less likely to have earned bachelor's degrees. While 86.7 percent of adults have at least a high school diploma, 24.0 percent hold at least a bachelor's degree and 9.2 percent hold a graduate degree.
- Compared to boys and young men, girls and young women ages 3 to 24 have notably higher rates of enrollment in Mendocino (79.1 percent of females ages 3 to 24 are enrolled compared to 75.4 percent of males) and enjoy an edge across all educational outcomes.
- Sixty-three percent of Latino adults ages 25 and up in Mendocino graduated high school, compared to nearly 87 percent of adults for the county overall. This is the lowest share of adults with high school diplomas of any racial or ethnic group. This disparity in high school diploma attainment is largely due to the limited opportunities that Latino immigrants had to complete their educations in their home countries. More than nine out of ten young white residents of Mendocino are enrolled in school.
- Whites have the highest share of adults with at least a high school diploma in Mendocino County at 93.1 percent, followed closely by Asians, with 92.4 having completed high school. Eighty-eight percent of Black Mendocino adults are high school graduates, compared with 75.9 percent of Native American adults and 63.6 percent of Latino adults, as mentioned earlier. This gap—between more than nine in ten for one group and more than six in ten for another—is dramatic and larger than the high school credential gap at the statewide level.
- There are dramatic educational gaps between places in Mendocino: 4.8 percent of residents in Census Tract 115.02, which includes the northeast section of Ukiah and Orrs Creek as well as Oak Manor, hold at least a bachelor's degree, whereas 48.7 percent of residents in Census Tract 110.01, a coastal stretch of land that includes Albion and Elk, have at least a bachelor's degree. Similarly dramatic are the gaps between Census Tract 106.01, comprising the areas south, west, and east of Willis and containing part of the Sherwood Valley Band of Pomo Indians, where—albeit with a high margin of error—the Census Bureau estimates that 54.0 percent of young people ages 3 to 24 are enrolled in school, compared to tract 110.01, described just above, where 96.6 percent of young people are enrolled.

Compared to California as a whole, adult residents of Mendocino are slightly more likely to have graduated from high school and less likely to have earned bachelor's degrees.

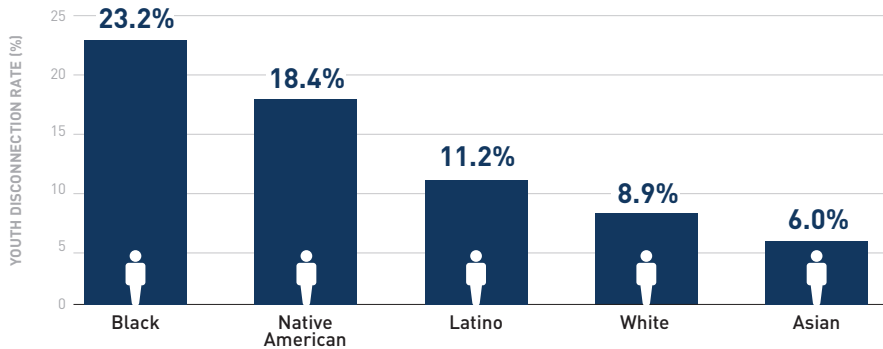
Disconnected Youth

The youth disconnection rate—the share of young people ages 16 to 24 who are not in school or working—is a strong indicator of a community’s collective assets and a telling gauge of its residents’ access to opportunity. Emerging adulthood—the late teens and early twenties—is when people develop many of the capabilities required to live a good life: knowledge and credentials, social skills and networks, a sense of mastery and agency, an understanding of one’s strengths and preferences, and the ability to handle stressful events and regulate one’s emotions, to name just a few. At school and on the job, connected young people set goals and lay the groundwork to realize them. Out-of-school, out-of-work youth also have dreams and aspirations but have far less support to make them a reality.

The youth disconnection rate for Mendocino County for 2015–2020 is 14.3 percent, in the middle of the pack when compared to the rates for other California counties.¹⁸ This translates to **about 1,300 young adults ages 16 to 24 who are out of school and out of work in Mendocino County**. California as a whole has a youth disconnection rate of 12.3 percent; Mendocino’s youth disconnection rate is slightly higher than the statewide rate.

Disconnection is not a spontaneous occurrence; it is years in the making, stemming from deep structural issues, long-standing inequities, and a paucity of educational and employment opportunities available to young people in certain groups and areas. Addressing it successfully will require a diversity of tactics, focusing not only on education and employment but also on poverty, disability, and gender equality.

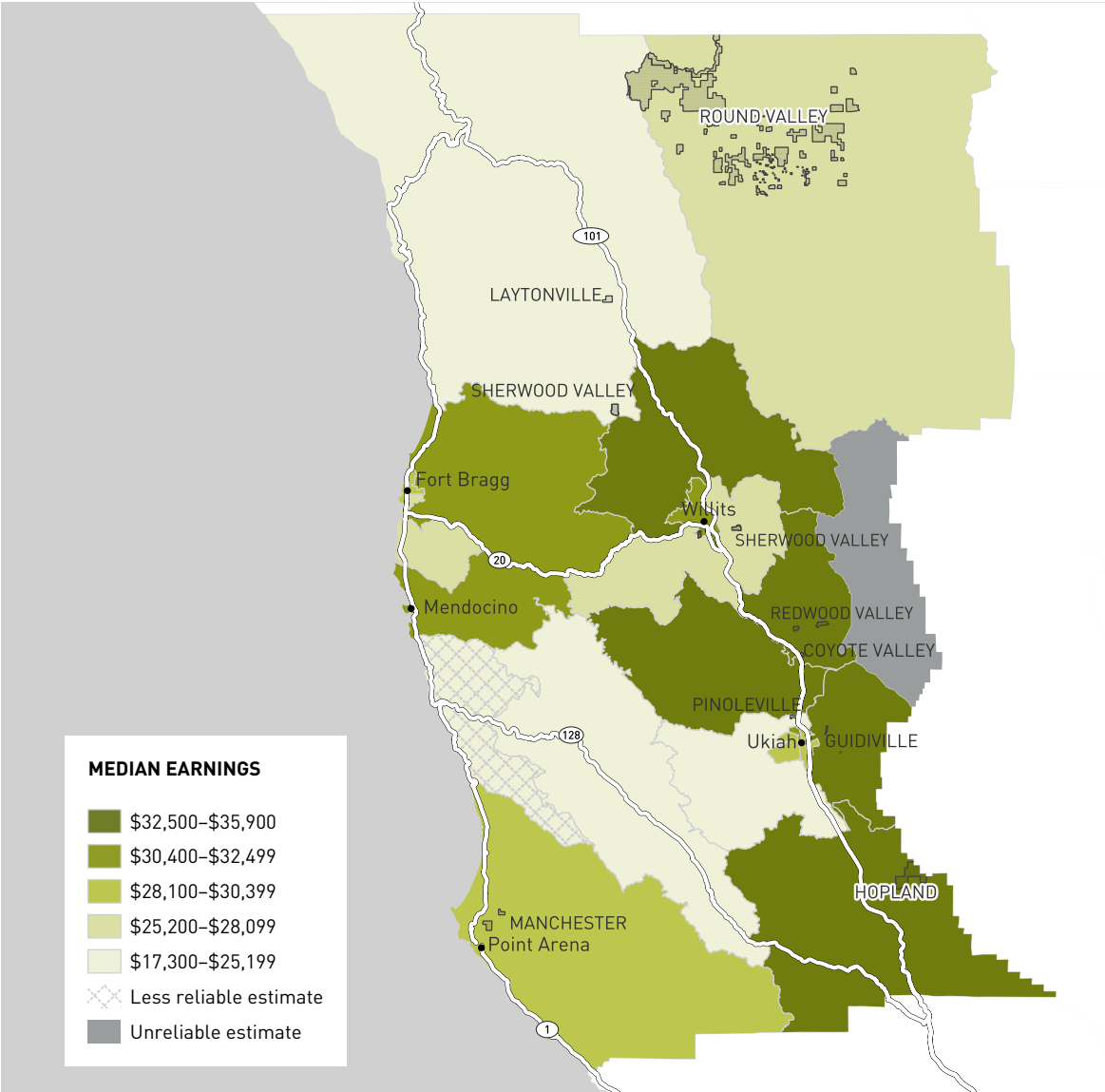
TABLE 10 Youth Disconnection Rates by Race and Ethnicity in California



Earnings

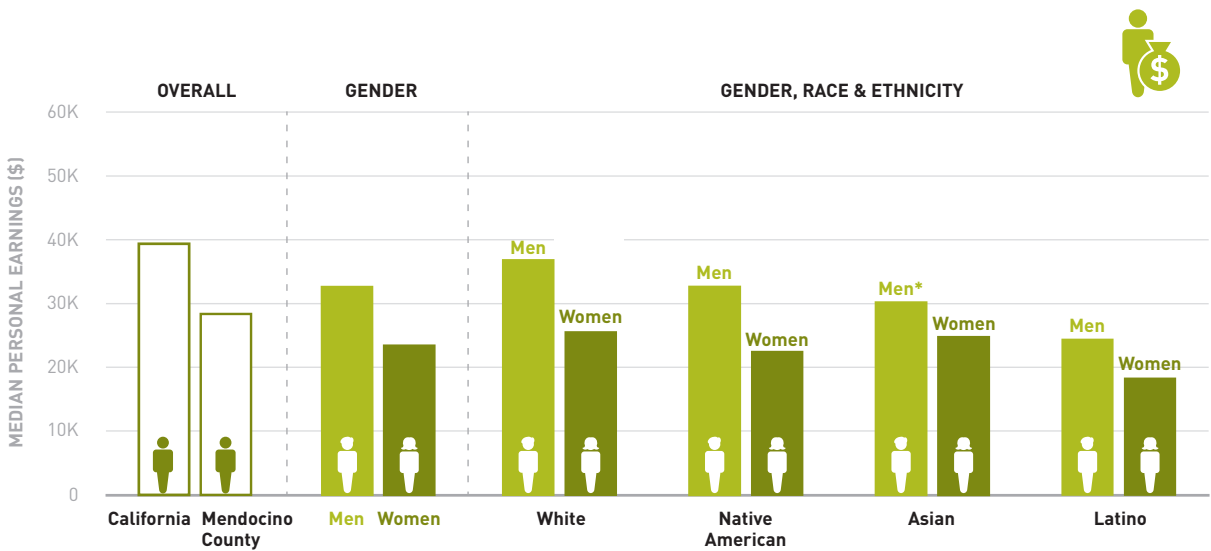
Money alone is a faulty gauge of well-being; that idea is central to the human development approach. A good life is built on much more: physical health, safety and security, love and friendship, freedom to practice one’s faith, equality before the law, being treated with dignity and respect, and having a say in the decisions that affect us, to name just a handful. But while money isn’t everything, adequate financial resources are nonetheless a critical ingredient for a freely chosen, flourishing life. Without money, the range of the possible is vastly curtailed.

MAP 11 Median Earnings



Many different measures can be used to gauge people’s material standard of living. The American Human Development Index uses median personal earnings—the wages and salaries of all full- and part-time workers 16 years of age and older. This measure reflects the resources of the ordinary worker (thus the median, or midpoint, of earnings rather than mean, or average, earnings) and captures the command that both women and men have over economic resources (thus the focus on personal rather than household earnings). Many people ask if wages are adjusted for cost of living; they are not. The cost of living varies far more within California than between the state and other places, and methodologies for adjusting for cost of living do not sufficiently account for local variation.

BOX 12 Median Earnings by Gender and by Race and Ethnicity in Mendocino County



Source: US Census Bureau ACS, 2016–2020.
Note: Estimates with an asterisk have a higher degree of uncertainty. Due to small population sizes and survey sampling the standard error of the estimate is greater than 20% of the estimate. Data were not reliable for Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander overall, or for Black men and women once disaggregated at the gender level.

Living Standards in Mendocino Today

- Median personal earnings in Mendocino are \$28,500, about \$11,400 less than in the state overall.
- Among the racial and ethnic groups in Mendocino with reliable median personal earnings data, white residents earn the most, \$32,300, while Latino residents the least, \$22,900. A difference of \$9,400 separates these two extremes. Native American residents have the second-highest median earnings, \$28,100, followed by Asian residents with \$26,900.
- The gender gap in earnings is persistent across the United States and California. For the state as a whole, women earn 73 cents for every dollar men earn. That pattern holds in Mendocino, where women earn 71 cents for every dollar men earn. This translates into a gap of \$9,300 in annual earnings, as men earn \$32,800 compared to \$23,500 for women.
- Latina women have the lowest earnings of any race/gender combination in Mendocino County, \$18,800. White men in Mendocino make \$37,100, double what Latina women earn.
- The gender gap between white men and white women comes out to \$10,700 in annual earnings; for Native Americans, the gender gap is \$9,700 annually; and for Latinos, the annual gap is \$7,900.
- By census tract, earnings range from \$17,300 in Census Tract 110.01, a coastal stretch of land that includes Albion and Elk (although this estimate has a high margin of error, a large share of retirees on fixed incomes may partially explain low earnings), to \$35,900 in Census Tract 108.01, which includes the town of Redwood Valley as well as the Redwood Valley Little River Band of Pomo Indians and Coyote Valley Band of Pomo Indians.

Median personal earnings in Mendocino are \$28,500, about \$11,400 less than in the state overall.

Other Factors Affecting Earnings

Between 2002 and 2021, the mix of industries that provide jobs in Mendocino has shifted dramatically. Mendocino is one of the ten counties in California that lost jobs over the last twenty years, having shed 5.2 percent of employment, or 2,600 jobs, over that period. Losses in manufacturing and farm employment drove that decrease, with a net loss of 2,800 jobs across those two sectors. Local government also shed thousands of positions—1,700 over this period. These and other decreases were somewhat offset by growth in other sectors. Transportation and warehousing employment has increased 36 percent over this time, and real estate and leasing has grown by 26 percent. In terms of total jobs added, the health care and social assistance industry is the clear leader, growing 40 percent over this period by adding 1,800 new positions.¹⁹

Undocumented immigrants work disproportionately in agriculture, construction, and manufacturing. A 2017 Public Policy Institute of California analysis estimated the count of undocumented immigrants across Mendocino and Lake Counties to be 7,000.²⁰ Undocumented workers are vulnerable to labor exploitation due to their immigration status.

A living wage for a single adult in Mendocino County is approximately \$18.30 an hour, and roughly \$36.90 per hour for a single adult with a child.²¹ Converting the county median salary of \$28,500 to an hourly wage yields \$13.70—far below the living wage for just one person.

BOX 13 The Legalization of Cannabis

The legalization of cannabis, a leading if illicit cash crop in Mendocino and other “Emerald Triangle” counties for decades, held out the promise of a host of human development benefits to county residents. They included new resources from cannabis taxes available to support investments in health, education, infrastructure, and more; a source of potentially well-paid jobs in cultivation, manufacturing, and distribution; greater public safety as well-regulated legal businesses drove out illicit operations and organized crime; a form of restorative justice, with those prosecuted for cannabis-related offenses potentially prioritized in the allocation of permits and licenses; more environmentally sustainable cultivation practices; increased tourism; an avenue for family farms and other small-scale growers to thrive; and new economic dynamism. Today cannabis is the county’s top cash crop, with a value of \$131 million in 2022, and some 600 licensed business cultivate 290 acres.²² Who is reaping the rewards of the cannabis industry? How many of the promises related to equity and the public good were realized? In Mendocino County, the picture is mixed at best.

The chief problem is that alongside permitted grows are illegal operations;

in fact, only 5 percent of cannabis operations in Mendocino County are permitted. Illegal grows operate outside the regulatory framework that protects workers from exploitation, limits environmental harms, and ensures that cannabis is safe to consume. They have flooded the market, causing prices to drop precipitously, all while evading the taxes and regulatory requirements that legitimate cannabis farms must contend with. And illegal growers, many part of organized crime rings, have proved to be dangerous neighbors, invading land, including tribal lands like that of Round Valley Indian Tribes, threatening and harming their workers, and menacing people living near their operations. In July 2022, the overstretched County of Mendocino Marijuana Enforcement Team eradicated nearly 6,000 pounds of processed cannabis and confiscated a large cache of firearms at sites in Covelo, Laytonville, and Willits,²³ and the California Department of Fish and Wildlife found evidence of 59 environmental crimes at the grow sites.²⁴ Yet most illegal grows continue undeterred, with law enforcement facing a nearly impossible task: patrolling a mountainous, heavily forested area twice the size of Delaware with just two dozen officers.

Legitimate growers face a thicket of regulations and taxes that, to date, have ensured that the illegal market remains competitive. Since 2018, California taxes marijuana three separate times as it travels from farm to consumer, and any local taxes are stacked on top of that. This contrasts with the simple and uniform tax framework in Oregon.²⁵ Large growers also compete with small farmers—an explosion in supply has helped drive the collapse of the wholesale price of cannabis to \$300 per pound this harvest from \$1,500 per pound in 2020. Permitting requests are bottlenecked due to overwhelmed regulators, and local regulations were put in place in Mendocino before California established its regulatory framework.²⁶ The black market thrives in these conditions, and legal, small growers pay the price. Economists Robin Goldstein and Daniel Sumner estimate that only about 25 percent of the weed sold and consumed within California is legal.²⁷ Streamlining regulations, simplifying taxation structures, and providing incentives to small farmers will help position legal growers well to thrive in California and prepare for the day when, more likely than not, a national marijuana market is established.

Housing

The events of recent years showed more clearly than ever why housing is a critical human development issue. More than just a place to lay our heads at night, housing is a fulcrum of opportunity. Where we live governs the jobs we can easily access, the quality of the air we breathe, how vulnerable we are to the effects of climate change or pandemics, and much more. Stable, affordable housing—free of hazards such as asthma-inducing fumes, peeling paint, or fraying electrical wires—is particularly important for the youngest Mendocino residents, whose health and safety are compromised by poor housing conditions, whose school outcomes and emotional health are put at risk by the instability of frequent moves, and whose development is threatened when financial insecurity and overcrowding create debilitating stress in the household.

The centrality of housing to well-being means that the housing conditions in Mendocino shape residents' choices and opportunities in numerous ways. Increasing housing costs contribute to the erosion of the region's once relatively affordable cost of living, entrench generational and racial inequities, and limit poor children's access to quality public schools. As climate change makes wildfires more frequent and severe, families living in ecologically vulnerable areas in the wildland-urban interface are at great risk. Funding affordable housing, preserving and acquiring affordable units, and providing rental subsidies and services to vulnerable populations—such as people experiencing homelessness, seniors on fixed incomes, people with disabilities, young people aging out of foster care, people with mental illness, people with very low earnings, and formerly incarcerated people—are necessary to ensure that all Mendocino residents can live with safety, dignity, and stability.

Housing costs in Mendocino have been, and remain, lower relative to other areas in California, with an owner-occupied median home value of \$434,000, below the state median of \$578,000.²⁸ Since 2015, the median value of owner-occupied homes in California has increased over 40 percent. For Mendocino, median home value has increased over 26 percent. This increase in home value has not yet come at the expense of homeownership; residents of Mendocino have higher homeownership rates than California as a whole—60.3 percent of Mendocino residents live in owner-occupied housing, compared to 55.3 percent of all Californians. The share of households in Mendocino that own their homes has increased 4 percent since 2015.

Caveats to this rosy picture abound. Nearly 10 percent of Mendocino's housing stock are mobile homes, about triple the share of California as a whole. For a county not part of a metro area with a robust transportation system, Mendocino has a relatively high share of households without vehicles (cars, trucks, vans) of any county in California: 7 percent. In Mendocino as in other rural areas, cars are necessary for accessing jobs and opportunity.

Increasing housing costs contribute to the erosion of the region's once relatively affordable cost of living, entrench generational and racial inequities, and limit poor children's access to quality public schools.

Mendocino has the ninth-highest share of renters experiencing rent burden—defined as spending more than 30 percent of household income on rent—compared to other California counties, at 58 percent.²⁹ This is slightly above the statewide average of 54 percent of renters who are rent-burdened. Rent burden has been decreasing in Mendocino at a similar rate to California overall; the share of renters in Mendocino who are rent burdened have decreased 4 percent from 2015, compared with a decrease of 5 percent statewide.

Mendocino also fares better than California as a whole in terms of overcrowding: 5.4 percent of households in Mendocino have more than one person per bedroom, compared to 8.2 percent statewide. About 3 percent of households in Mendocino have moved within the last two years, around the statewide share of 4 percent of households having moved within two years.

Broadband connectivity in Mendocino is lower than most counties in California; it has the eleventh-lowest share of households with a wired broadband connection relative to other counties in California. Fifty-eight percent of Mendocino households have a wired broadband connection, compared to 75 percent of all Californians and 70 percent of all Americans.

BOX 14 Homelessness

Homelessness in California is driven by a number of factors, chief among them the state's outsized housing costs and related lack of affordable housing. California overall had the largest increase in homelessness of any state from 2019 to 2020, a 6.8 percent increase, roughly three times the national increase of 2.2 percent.³⁰

In California, 70 percent of homeless residents are unsheltered, compared to 39 percent nationwide, meaning they live outdoors in places like streets or parks. California has the highest rate of unsheltered homelessness in the country in part because the state provides fewer shelter beds and spends less money on resources to support people experiencing homelessness than several other states (see [PAGE 49](#) in *A Portrait of California 2021–2022* for more on homelessness statewide).

Since 2016, the total number of homeless individuals in Mendocino has been decreasing, as indicated by the Point-in-Time counts conducted by the Mendocino County Homeless Services Continuum of Care, from around 1,200 individuals in 2017 to around 300 individuals in 2021. This progress, against countervailing trends in California overall, is remarkable. The 2020 Strategic Plan to Address Homelessness in Mendocino County attributes this to “a result of the Veterans Administration’s commitment to applying Housing First principles to caring for homeless veterans.” Even in the best of times, surveys of the difficult-to-reach homeless population understate the true scope of the situation, which is especially likely to be true against the backdrop of Covid-19. That said, point-in-time

surveys (following standards set by the US Department of Housing and Urban Development) are still the most reliable measure of homelessness and a baseline for tracking progress over time.³¹

Covid-19 exacerbated homelessness nationwide—loss of work, loss of housing, and public health restrictions on shelter capacity all made the problem worse. The good news is that since the pandemic began, more housing programs have developed in Mendocino to help residents experiencing homelessness. State funds from Project Homekey have been channeled to Mendocino, culminating in the April 2021 opening of Live Oak Apartments in Ukiah, which provides 56 units of “bridge and permanent housing for households that are homeless or at-risk of homelessness.”³²

Recommendations

This report was developed by Measure of America in collaboration with a thoughtful, engaged group of advisors and funders, who are listed in the acknowledgments and to whom we are very grateful.

The stark well-being differences by race and ethnicity and by place across Mendocino County are rooted in interlinked social and economic inequalities that together circumscribe the life chances of some while easing the paths of others. Addressing thorny structural issues like gender inequality, income inequality, racism, and residential segregation is a complex challenge but one that is required to make the opportunity that other people and groups in California enjoy a reality—for everyone in Mendocino County. Expanding well-being requires short-term action focused on Covid-19 recovery, medium-term action aimed at building human security, and a long-term commitment to addressing structural inequalities.

Addressing the harmful impacts of Covid-19 is a top short-term priority. To date, some 20,730 people have been sickened with Covid-19—approaching one in four county residents—and 136 people have died. Black, Latino, and Native American people as well as low-income communities were hardest hit (particularly the older people within them); people in these groups are more likely to work in frontline jobs where they could be exposed to Covid-19, more likely to live in intergenerational and sometimes overcrowded homes, and more likely to have underlying health conditions that make the coronavirus more dangerous. As a result, they have disproportionately lost not just their jobs but their lives.

The pandemic made clear that our thin, frayed safety net is inadequate both to chronic threats like unemployment and health inequities and sudden disasters like pandemics, heatwaves, and wildfires. Investing in systems and services that allow people to care for themselves and their families during both normal and challenging times is critical to well-being.

TARGET RESOURCES TO THE MOST VULNERABLE POPULATIONS

The HDI scores by census tract and demographic group presented in this report create a map of pandemic vulnerability and impact; low scores flag areas and groups that were already grappling with threats to their health, access to education, and economic security pre-Covid-19; that were hardest hit during the pandemic; and that face the steepest climb to recovery. **Targeting recovery efforts and dollars toward the census tracts with the lowest HDI scores will prioritize the places and people who need the most assistance in rebuilding their lives. Another priority population is Native American residents, the group with the lowest HDI value in Mendocino County, 3.58.**

Addressing the harmful impacts of Covid-19 is a top short-term priority.

ADDRESS HEALTH DISPARITIES MAGNIFIED BY THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Underlying health conditions like heart disease, hypertension, and diabetes increase the risk of complications and death from Covid-19. Communities of color, who suffer disproportionately from these conditions, have borne the brunt of the pandemic. The American Public Health Association warns that health inequities are likely to worsen in the coming years, including an increase in chronic medical conditions in communities of color. Attentiveness to Covid-19's outsized impact on Black, Native American, and Latino residents; people living in poverty; older Californians; and men will offer critical lessons as the state recovers. The lower life expectancies among Native American men (70.2 years), white men (74.8 years), and Native American women (75.5 years) indicate underlying health conditions that are not receiving the attention and treatment required and that heighten Covid-19 vulnerabilities.

EXPAND ACCESS TO MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

Healthy Mendocino has identified mental health as a countywide priority; two out of three respondents to the 2019 Community Health Assessment reported that mental health issues were among the most important challenges facing the region.³³ Suicide and drug overdoses are two of the most extreme manifestations of mental health struggles; Mendocino has high rates of deaths due to suicide and opioid overdoses. The fear, loss, uncertainty, and isolation Covid-19 engendered among people of all ages, particularly young people, doubtless increased psychological and emotional distress and heightened further the need for behavioral health services. The country and state are experiencing a shortage of mental health care providers, something the county has long suffered; this worsening shortage and challenges related to the geographic isolation of many Mendocino communities require short-term strategies like expanding access to support groups, telepsychiatry, and peer counseling, alongside a long-term strategy for expanding the mental health care labor force and sites for providing services.

Healthy Mendocino has identified mental health as a countywide priority.

INVEST IN THE CARE AND EDUCATION OF THE YOUNGEST MENDOCINO RESIDENTS

High-quality, affordable early-care and education programs as well as support services for families with young children are essential for Mendocino County residents, yet in very short supply; the county has few licensed child-care providers. Though transitional kindergarten has helped alleviate the child-care shortage somewhat and enhanced access to services for preschoolers, there are still far too few spots for babies and toddlers up to age 3. Without reliable childcare, parents cannot work to support their families, and businesses struggle to find workers. In addition, high-quality early care and education can support the healthy development of the region's smallest residents. The social, emotional, and cognitive development of young children, particularly children living in poverty, is

enhanced by high-quality care; key to quality is the educational background of care providers. Quality care can alleviate parents' stress by bringing them into contact with people, services, and organizations that can support them, a protective factor for family violence.

ADDRESS INTIMATE PARTNER AND FAMILIAL VIOLENCE

The rates of violent crime, child maltreatment, and children placed in foster care are all higher in Mendocino County than in the state as a whole, and respondents to the 2019 Community Health Survey identified domestic violence and child abuse as two of the most serious safety issues in the county.³⁴ An analysis commissioned by the Council on Criminal Justice—which reviewed multiple US and international studies on the impacts of Covid-19-related lockdowns on domestic violence—found that domestic violence increased during the pandemic as children were separated from neighbors, teachers, and others who might help them. Moreover, contributing factors to domestic violence like stress, unemployment, and financial hardship intensified.³⁵ These findings suggest that the already high and inadequately met need for victims' services and prevention efforts has grown. Though child maltreatment and domestic violence can and do occur across demographic groups, directing additional resources and providing safe environments like shelters for those groups most at risk—among them, people living in poverty, people who are isolated, families and individuals who have already been exposed to violence, pregnant women, those in households with people who have mental illnesses or drug and alcohol issues, and the elderly—is particularly important.³⁶

SUPPORT THE HEALTH AND WELL-BEING OF YOUNG MOTHERS

The rate of births to teenagers in Mendocino County has been falling steadily; nonetheless, at a rate of 16.8 per 1,000, it is substantially higher than the state rate of 12.3 per 1,000.³⁷ Births to teenagers are associated with poorer outcomes both for young mothers and their babies. Comprehensive sexual health education in middle and high school and access to affordable, long-lasting birth control are important tools for reducing the rate of teenage pregnancy. Supporting young mothers is also critical. Young mothers need support in three ways: first, to experience healthy pregnancies and safe births; second, to envision and realize their own dreams and ambitions; and third, to be the mothers they want to be to their much-loved children. Access to caring, comprehensive, culturally sensitive reproductive health care, which includes prenatal care, protects the health of young women during and after pregnancy. Young mothers disproportionately live in poverty, and the accompanying stress and lack of material resources join forces to hinder healthy child development and erode young mothers' health and well-being. Free or subsidized childcare, some form of basic income, and subsidized housing and transportation for vulnerable families would alleviate poverty's negative impacts and open space for greater joy and well-being. Mental

The rates of violent crime, child maltreatment, and children placed in foster care are all higher in Mendocino County than in the state as a whole, and respondents to the 2019 Community Health Survey identified domestic violence and child abuse as two of the most serious safety issues in the county.

health and parenting supports are likewise vital in helping young families thrive. Young mothers should be supported to continue their education and advance along rewarding career paths, which is possible provided said paths are designed with their schedules and needs at the center.

IMPROVE SERVICE COORDINATION AND NAVIGATION

Vulnerable populations can struggle to locate, access, and coordinate physical, mental, and behavioral health services, income supports, workforce training, housing assistance, and more. Expanding navigation and coordination services can help people identify and access sources of assistance in ways that are more efficient, effective, and people-centered than a siloed, paperwork-heavy, bureaucratic approach. Social services—if they are designed to be human-centered and accessible—can improve well-being, foster independence, and respect people’s dignity.

IMPROVE WAGES AND CLOSE GENDER AND RACIAL WAGE GAPS

California has led the nation in increasing the minimum wage, and doing so was crucial for improving the standard of living of the lowest-paid Californians. But more is needed. This higher minimum wage still does not cover the cost of living in Mendocino County, and many workers are exempt from minimum-wage requirements. In addition, wage gaps by race and ethnicity and by gender imperil the well-being of families across the region. Increasing economic security for low-income workers by raising wages, strengthening equal pay protections, and protecting the right to unionize are important priorities. Universal basic income pilots have shown promise.

INCREASE THE SUPPLY OF HOUSING

In the popular imagination, the California housing crisis is centered in cities, where limited land, sky-high costs, NIMBY-ism, and restrictive regulations conspire to make it near impossible to build affordable housing. Yet rural areas in the state like Mendocino County also face a housing shortage. State funding formulas prioritize urban areas, private developers aren’t able to realize economies of scale because rural populations are small and often spread out, existing infrastructure is frequently inadequate, and rural residents disproportionately live in poverty, making even “affordable” housing unaffordable to many. As a result, affordable housing is increasingly out of reach for Mendocino residents. The current rate of housing construction is far from sufficient to mitigate rising prices or meet demand. Public funding is necessary to expand access to affordable housing, given the obstacles to private development and the higher-than-average rates of poverty in the county.

INVEST IN WEALTH BUILDING AND PERMANENT EXITS OUT OF GENERATIONAL POVERTY

Given the historical context of housing discrimination,³⁸ it is important to target Black, Latino, and Native American people for opportunities to build wealth through homeownership and other means, such as business development and income and savings supports. Policies to provide purchase assistance and homeownership counseling to first-time homebuyers, particularly from low-income neighborhoods, and help community organizations purchase and resell homes to people with moderate incomes could create greater racial equity in the housing market.³⁹ Policies are needed to ensure that residents receive quality, nonpredatory loans to prevent foreclosure and loss of these assets, as was the case during the housing crash in 2008.

TREAT HIGH-SPEED BROADBAND AS A PUBLIC UTILITY AKIN TO ELECTRICITY

Treating high-speed broadband as a twenty-first-century utility akin to electricity rather than an optional luxury is imperative. In the age of coronavirus, the existing gaps in internet access have created an opportunity chasm between the broadband haves and have-nots. Remote learning, working from home, and seeing a doctor virtually—the new normal for many—are only possible with reliable broadband. Even when the threat of Covid-19 ebbs, broadband will remain critical for job searches, school projects, accessing benefits, and myriad other life tasks. For rural areas like Mendocino County, high-speed internet access is also critical in emergencies. Closing the digital divide with infrastructure, affordable services, and skill-building will promote equity and inclusion for everyone. The California 2021 Broadband for All bill, which authorized the investment of \$6 billion in universal statewide broadband access, was a welcome step, and construction on the broadband network began in October 2022.⁴⁰ County government officials and longtime broadband advocates still have an important role to play in ensuring expansion with equity—making sure that everyone in the county benefits from this statewide investment.

Remote learning, working from home, and seeing a doctor virtually—the new normal for many—are only possible with reliable broadband.

Notes

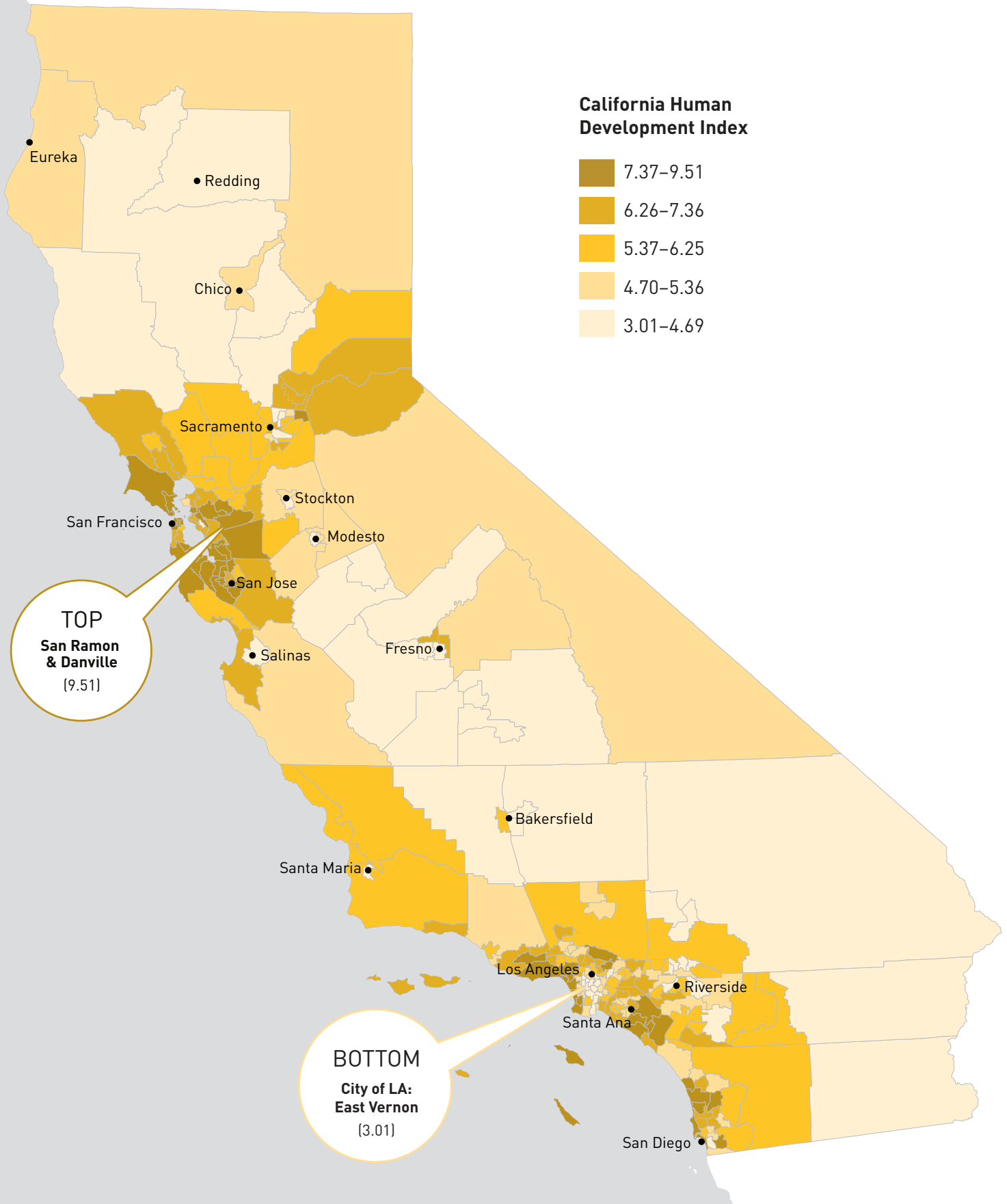
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- ¹⁰ The units of analysis here are Census Bureau-defined Public Use Microdata Areas (PUMAs). The population of PUMAs typically range from 100,000 to 200,000 people.
- ¹¹ "Life Expectancy in the U.S. Declined a Year and Half in 2020."
- ¹² Due to characteristics of the mortality records in Del Norte, the life expectancy calculations for the Latino population are combined across Mendocino, Del Norte, and Humboldt Counties. See the Methodological Note here: <https://measureofamerica.org/california2021-22/>.
- ¹³ New York Times, "California Coronavirus Map and Case Count: Mendocino County."
- ¹⁴ COVID19.CA.GOV, "Vaccination Data."
- ¹⁵ California Department of Public Health, "CA Overdose Dashboard."
- ¹⁶ Measure of America Calculations using CDC WONDER 2015–2019 and California Department of Public Health, "Death Profiles by County: 2014–2020."
- ¹⁷ California Department of Public Health, "Data on Suicide and Self Harm: Suicide Rate by County."
- ¹⁸ Measure of America custom tabulation of US Census Bureau American Community Survey, 2016–2020.
- ¹⁹ Smith, "Shift-Share Analysis of Employment Growth for Mendocino County over 2002–2021."
- ²⁰ Hill and Hayes, *Undocumented Immigrants in California*.
- ²¹ Glasmeier, "Living Wage Calculator."
- ²² Swindell, "Despite Prized Crop, Mendocino County Cannabis Farmers Struggle amid Bureaucracy Snafus, Market Pressures."
- ²³ Ruscitto, "165,000+ Illicit Cannabis Plants Seized in Mendocino County."
- ²⁴ Berrueta, "Mendocino County Officials Report Several Unlawful Cannabis Cultivation Busts."
- ²⁵ Wilson, "The Casualties of California Legalizing Pot."
- ²⁶ Swindell, "Despite Prized Crop, Mendocino County Cannabis Farmers Struggle amid Bureaucracy Snafus, Market Pressures."
- ²⁷ "In California, the World's Largest Legal Weed Market Is Going up in Smoke."
- ²⁸ Measure of America calculations using US Federal Housing Finance Agency All-Transactions House Price Index data for 2021 to adjust US Census Bureau American Community Survey 2016–2020, Table DP04. The underlying Census dataset is meant to represent the value of all households, not just those that were sold recently. Many housing indexes focus on sales instead of valuations.
- ²⁹ The US Department of Housing and Urban Development defines a rent-burdened household as one that spends more than 30 percent of pretax income on rent. This threshold was once set at 25 percent, but Congress altered that limit in 1981 to reduce the amount the federal government spent on housing subsidies. See Pew Charitable Trusts, *American Families Face a Growing Rent Burden*.
- ³⁰ US Department of Housing and Urban Development, "The 2020 Annual Homeless Assessment Report."
- ³¹ *Strategic Plan to Address Homelessness in Mendocino County*, 7.
- ³² Maxwell, "Applications Now Being Accepted for New Project Homekey Apartments in Ukiah."
- ³³ Healthy Mendocino, "Priority Area: Mental Health."
- ³⁴ Healthy Mendocino, "Priority Area: Domestic Abuse."
- ³⁵ Piquero et al., "Domestic Violence during the COVID-19 Pandemic - Evidence from a Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis."
- ³⁶ CDC, "Risk and Protective Factors - Child Abuse and Neglect."
- ³⁷ Chabot et al., *Adolescent Births in California*.
- ³⁸ Recent Urban Institute analysis predicts California will see significant gains in Latino homeownership over the next two decades. Goodman and Zhu, "Increasing Racial and Ethnic Diversity Will Drive Homeownership over the Next Two Decades."
- ³⁹ Roadmap Home 2030 includes several proposals along these lines in recommendations A10, A11, A12, and E7.
- ⁴⁰ California, "State Begins Construction on 10,000-Mile Broadband Network to Bring High-Speed Internet Service to All Californians."

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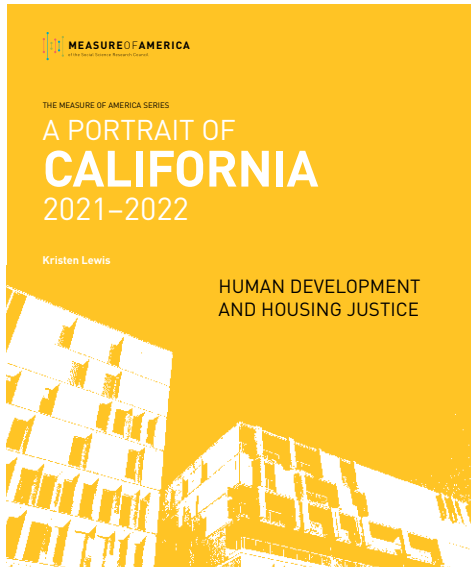
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Within *Spotlight on Mendocino County*, readers will find analysis informed by the Index focused on places (county and census tracts) as well as demographic groups (gender and race and ethnicity).

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

Kristen Lewis is the director of Measure of America and author or coauthor of The Measure of America series of national, state, county, and city reports.

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A Portrait of California 2021–2022 is an exploration of how California residents are faring. It analyzes well-being and access to opportunity using the human development framework and index, presenting American Human Development Index scores for California places and demographic groups, and examines a range of critical issues, including health, education, living standards, housing, homelessness, residential segregation, and inequality.

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