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*California's First-Ever Index of Children's
Health and Well-Being Reveals Decade of Improvement*

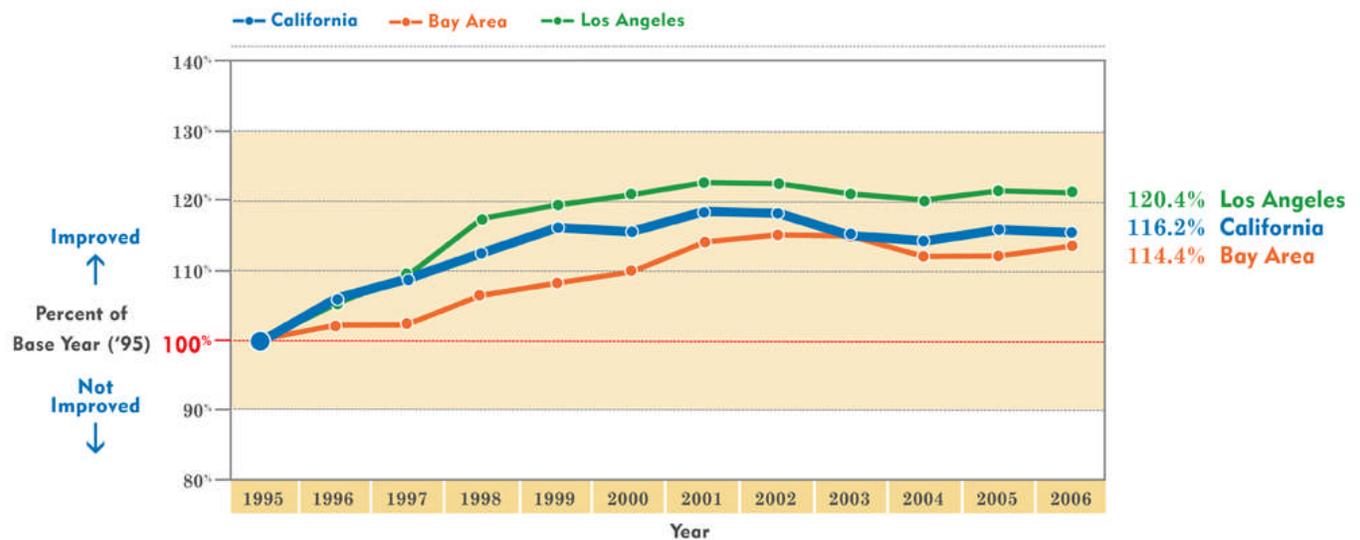
Will Recession Undermine Gains for Kids?

PALO ALTO, CA, December 16, 2009 – A newly created index measuring the overall health and well-being of California's children and youth shows a consistent pattern of improvement over the last decade, but researchers warn that the present economic recession could undermine and possibly even reverse those gains.

Released today by the Lucile Packard Foundation for Children's Health, the composite of 16 key indicators of children's well-being tracks data from 1995 to 2006 to assess how California children have fared over time. In addition to statewide data, the Index also analyzes data for the state's two most populous regions, Los Angeles County and the six-county San Francisco Bay Area (Alameda, Contra Costa, Marin, San Francisco, San Mateo and Santa Clara counties). During that period, the overall measure of child health and well-being of California's children improved by 16 percent. Los Angeles youth fared even better, with a 20 percent improvement, while the Bay Area saw a 14 percent increase. Those gains, however, would have been even higher except for deep losses in the area of family economics.

Index of Child and Youth Well-Being

California, the Bay Area and Los Angeles County



IMPORTANT NOTE: This index measures the *rate of improvement* in children’s health and well-being from 1995 to 2006 for each of these regions. The regions did not start at the same level in 1995. That is, these results do not imply that child and youth well-being in the Bay Area was worse than California or Los Angeles County in 2006 but rather that the latter two regions made greater gains in child well-being as compared to their 1995 rates.

“This index gives California a solid benchmark to gauge progress in advancing the health of children,” said David Alexander, MD, the foundation’s president and CEO. “We have made slow, steady progress, but present economic conditions now threaten these gains.”

Estimates from this study suggest that in 2010 more than one in four children in California will be living below the poverty line.

“Given these economic challenges, we must be especially careful that we do no harm to children,” Alexander said. “It’s imperative that we preserve the hard-won gains we have made and continue to invest in their health and well-being.”

The foundation commissioned Duke University sociologist Dr. Kenneth Land to create “The California Index of Child and Youth Well-Being.” Land based the California Index on the national model he developed for the Foundation for Child Development and

has released annually since 2004. Like the Dow Jones or Consumer Price Index (CPI), the California Index provides a summary measure to compare trends over time.

Land analyzed five key areas, or domains, to paint a picture of the health of California's children: educational attainment, emotional well-being, family economics, health and safety/behavioral concerns. Collectively, those domains show a 16 percent improvement in children's well-being over a decade. Each individual domain also showed marked improvement, except for one -- family economics. Spurred on by increasing rates of children living in poverty and decreasing rates of affordable housing, family economics dropped by 21 percent statewide. That drop was mirrored in Los Angeles County, with a 20 percent decrease. However, the Bay Area saw a far more modest 9 percent slip in family economic well-being.

“Given that the family economics domain already was falling in 2006, we have to ask what the long-term effects of the more recent ‘Great Recession’ will be on California's kids,” Land says. “Although it's impossible to determine just how much poverty will affect the overall California index, poverty rates are likely to weigh down what, at least until 2006, were general improvements in child well-being.”

Land projected that the percentage of California's children living in poverty could jump from the 2007 level of 17 percent to a high of 27 percent in 2010. And while his projections call for that figure to fall to 24 percent by 2012, the impact on children's health will likely be lasting, as the percent of children in poverty still will be higher than before the downturn.

Disparities remain

The index also breaks down trends in four ethnic groups, finding nearly identical gains in overall well-being from 1995 to 2006: African Americans (13 percent), Asians (15 percent), Latinos (12 percent) and Caucasians (12 percent). But Land cautions that significant disparities still exist, with African American and, to a lesser degree, Latino children faring poorly compared to Caucasian and Asian children.

To develop the index, Land reviewed more than 250 child- and youth-related indicators available through the foundation's www.kidsdata.org Web site. The site, which tracks indicators over time, recently expanded to offer wide-ranging data on children for all cities, school districts and counties in California, nearly 1,600 regions in total.

A Web summary of the index report and accompanying charts can be downloaded from the site at www.kidsdata.org/index/.

Land is the John Franklin Crowell Professor of Sociology and Demography at Duke University. He is well known for his scholarship and research on mathematical and statistical models in sociology, demography, criminology and social indicators/quality-of-life studies. He is the co-author or co-editor of five books, more than 100 research articles and numerous book chapters.

The Lucile Packard Foundation for Children's Health is a public charity whose vision is that all children in the communities it serves are able to reach their maximum health potential. For more information on the foundation, see www.lpfch.org.

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EDITORS NOTE: A media site with a report summary, charts, supporting materials and the full report can be accessed at <http://www.kidsdata.org/index>