

California Health Disadvantage Index

Health Disadvantaged Communities

Many communities face significant and persistent health inequities due to historical marginalization and lack of resources and opportunities to support good health. The social, economic, physical, and services environments in which people live, work, learn and play - known as the social determinants of health - are the key drivers of population and health inequities. To improve health and reduce health inequities, we need to target health-promoting investments to disadvantaged communities.



How do we identify "disadvantaged communities?"

Identifying disadvantaged communities is a complex issue, and there are many approaches and methodologies. The choice of any particular approach may differ depending on the particular type of targeted investment under consideration.

- CalEnviroScreen (CES) was developed by the Office of Environmental Health Hazard Assessment/CalEPA with the specific goal of targeting environmental enforcement and clean-up investments in communities with increased cumulative exposures to toxic substances.
- Food assistance programs use a different measure of disadvantage, generally based on household income alone.
- Prop 1 Water Bonds use income to define disadvantaged and severely disadvantaged communities for water quality infrastructure improvements.

The need for a "Health Disadvantage Index"

Many communities of color and low-income communities suffer multiple forms of disadvantage, but the overlap among different forms of disadvantage is not always complete. Several years ago, local health officials noticed that communities experiencing poor health outcomes and shortened life spans in their jurisdictions were not identified by CES. Further examination suggested that the reason was because the CES method heavily weights toxics exposures, and places less emphasis on other social determinants of health such as income and education.

This prompted the Public Health Alliance of Southern California - working with partners from other local health departments around the state - to develop a "Health Disadvantage Index". The HDI uses evidence-based approach to focus on the range of social, economic, and environmental factors that are associated with poor health outcomes, and to weight each of these factor's contribution to health outcomes. HDI offers one more approach to identify disadvantaged communities, in this case based on health disadvantage.

Because the California Health Disadvantage Index measures the social factors that affect health, not the health outcomes themselves, policy makers and local agencies can use the index to identify actionable policies that would improve health in their community, such as improving housing affordability and quality, or educational attainment.

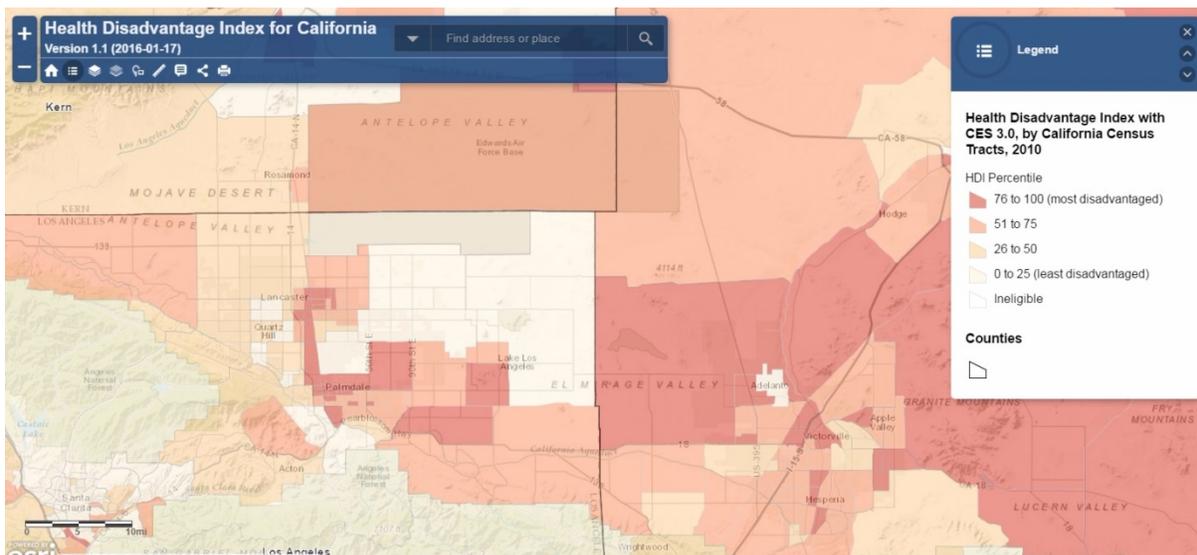
Health Disadvantage Index Composition

The first iteration of the Health Disadvantage Index includes six domains, grouping together 27 underlying indicators of health.

ECONOMIC RESOURCES	SOCIAL RESOURCES	EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES	HEALTH/ HEALTHCARE	ENVIRONMENTAL HAZARDS	COMPLETE NEIGHBORHOODS
50	15	10	10	10	5
Poverty	Linguistic Isolation	Residents whose age makes them eligible for, but not enrolled in:	Population disabled	Pedestrian Injuries	Supermarket Access
Crowding	Renter Occupied	Preschool	Low Birth Weight	PM 2.5 Concentration	Park Access
Housing Cost	Voting	High School	Years of Life Lost	Traffic Density	Retail Density
Unemployment Rate	Single Parent Households		Asthma ER Visits		Tree Canopy
No Auto Access	High school educational attainment				
Median Income					
Uninsured					
No Kitchen					

The Alliance has contracted with Virginia Commonwealth University Center on Society and Health to create an updated and re-organized HDI v. 2.0 index. As of April 2017, this update process is underway with the guidance of a steering committee comprised of local and state health department experts.

Health Disadvantage Index Online Map



The Health Disadvantage Index data is available for download and through an interactive online map at <http://www.PHSoCal.org>.

More Information

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