Key Findings

A Portrait of Sonoma County is an in-depth look at how residents of Sonoma County are faring in three fundamental areas of life: health, access to knowledge, and living standards. While these metrics do not measure the county's breathtaking vistas, the rich diversity of its population, or the vibrant web of community organizations engaged in making it a better place, they capture outcomes in areas essential to well-being and opportunity. This report examines disparities within the county among neighborhoods and along the lines of race, ethnicity, and gender. It makes the case that population-based approaches, the mainstay of public health, offer great promise for longer, healthier, and more rewarding lives for everyone and that place-based approaches offer a way to address the multiple and often interlocking disadvantages faced by families who are falling behind. Only by building the capabilities of all residents to seize opportunities and live to their full potential will Sonoma County thrive.

The Sonoma County Department of Health Services (DHS) commissioned Measure of America to prepare this report to provide a holistic framework for understanding and addressing complex issues facing its constituency. It will inform the work of the Department's Health Action initiative. Unlike many other health initiatives, Health Action aims to move beyond a narrowly defined focus on sickness and medical care to take into account a wide range of vital determinants of well-being and health, such as economic opportunities; living and working conditions in homes, schools, and workplaces; community inclusion; and levels of stigma and isolation. DHS has sought to engage a broad spectrum of stakeholders and pinpoint root causes of health disparities, all in the service of Health Action's goal: to make Sonoma the healthiest county in California.

The hallmark of this work is the American Human Development Index, a supplement to Gross Domestic Product and other money metrics that tells the story of how ordinary Americans are faring. The American Human Development Index uses official government data in health, education, and income and allows for well-being rankings of states, congressional districts, counties, census tracts, women and men, and racial and ethnic groups. The Index can empower communities with a tool to identify priorities and track progress over time.

Measure of America, a project of the Social Science Research Council, provides easy-to-use yet methodologically sound tools for understanding well-being and opportunity in America and seeks to foster greater awareness of our shared challenges and more support for people-centered policies.

How Does Sonoma County Fare on the American Human Development Index?

The American Human Development Index combines fundamental well-being indicators into a single score expressed as a number between 0 and 10. It is based on the Human Development Index of the United Nations, the global gold standard for measuring the well-being of large population groups. This report is Measure of America's second exploration of well-being within a single county; *A Portrait of Marin* was published in 2012. Both county reports build upon a 2011 study of the state as a whole, *A Portrait of California*.

KEY FINDINGS: AMERICAN HUMAN DEVELOPMENT INDEX

- The most extreme disparities in basic health, education, and earnings outcomes are often found within small geographical areas. Of the county's ninety-nine census tracts, top-ranking East Bennett Valley, with an index value of 8.47, is only five miles away from bottom-ranking Roseland Creek, with an index value of 2.79. The former has a Human Development Index value above that of top-ranked state Connecticut, while the well-being outcomes of the latter are well below those of Mississippi, the lowest-ranked state on the American Human Development Index.

- The ranking of well-being levels by race and ethnicity in Sonoma County follows that of California, with Asian Americans at the top, followed by whites, African Americans, and Latinos. But the gap in human development between the highest- and lowest-ranked racial and ethnic groups is smaller in Sonoma County than it is in California and nationally.

- Sonoma County's females edge out males in human development. They outlive males by just over four years, adult women are slightly more likely to have completed high school and college, and girls' school enrollment is higher than boys'. Yet women's median earnings lag behind men's by $8,628 per year.

KEY FINDINGS: HEALTH

- Sonoma County residents have an average life expectancy of 81.0—two years longer than the national average of 79.0 but just under California's life expectancy of 81.2.

- An entire decade separates the life expectancies in the top and bottom census tracts.

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An entire decade separates the life expectancies in the top and bottom census tracts.

- The top five tracts are Central Bennett Valley (85.7 years), Sea Ranch/Timber Cove and Jenner/Cazadero (both 84.8 years), Annadel/South Oakmont and North Oakmont/Hood Mountain (both 84.3 years), and West Sebastopol/Graton (84.1 years). The bottom five are Bicentennial Park (77.0 years), Sheppard (76.6 years), Burbank Gardens (76.0 years), Downtown Santa Rosa (75.5 years), and Kenwood/Glen Ellen (75.2 years).

- Analysis of Sonoma County's ninety-nine tracts shows a clear positive correlation between life expectancy and education: people in neighborhoods with higher educational attainment and enrollment have longer lives.

- Asian Americans in Sonoma County live the longest compared to other major racial and ethnic groups (86.2 years), followed by Latinos (85.3 years), whites (80.5 years), and African Americans (77.7 years).

KEY FINDINGS: EDUCATION

- Variation in educational outcomes by census tract in Sonoma County is significant and meaningful. The range in the percentage of adult residents with less than a high school diploma is huge, going from a low of 0.4 percent in North Oakmont/Hood Mountain to a high of 46.1 percent in Roseland Creek. The range in school enrollment is likewise vast, from 53.8 percent in Forestville to 100 percent in Central East Windsor.

- In Sonoma County, as in most metro areas and states as well as nationally, educational attainment follows a similar pattern: Asian Americans have the highest score, followed by whites, African Americans, and Latinos. The Education Index is measured by combining the highest degree attained by adults 25 and older and school enrollment of all kids and young adults ages 3 to 24.

- The Census Bureau–defined category "Asian" encompasses U.S.-born citizens who trace their heritage to a wide range of Asian countries, as well as Asian immigrants. The high level of average attainment for this broad group obscures the education struggles of some. While 59.7 percent of Asian Indians in Sonoma County have at least a bachelor's degree, only 17.5 percent of Vietnamese residents do.

KEY FINDINGS: EARNINGS

- Median earnings, the main gauge of material living standards in this report, are $30,214 annually in Sonoma County, which is roughly on par with earnings in California and the country as a whole.

Of the three indicators analyzed in this report—unemployment, child poverty, and housing burden—Sonoma falls near the middle of the pack compared to its peer counties in California.

- Significant disparities in earnings separate census tracts within Sonoma County; annual earnings range from $14,946 in Rohnert Park B/C/R Section, which is below the federal poverty line for a two-person household, to $68,967 in East Bennett Valley, more than double the county median.

- In Sonoma County, whites earn the most money, $36,647 annually, followed by Asian Americans ($32,495), African Americans ($31,213), and Latinos ($21,695). This is found in California as a whole as well, although Asian Americans are the top-earning group in the country overall.

- Men in Sonoma County earn about $8,500 more than women. This wage gap is similar to the gap between men and women at the state level, although it is around $1,000 smaller than at the national level.

- Level of education is the single biggest predictor of earnings for racial and ethnic groups and for census tracts in Sonoma County.

Conclusion—Pledge of Support

Sonoma County is rich in organizations dedicated to improving life for its residents, particularly those who face high barriers to living freely chosen lives of value and opportunity. Working together, these public and private organizations can make a real difference. Thus, this report not only ends with an Agenda for Action—a set of recommendations in health, education, and income that scholarly research and well-documented experience have shown will be essential to boosting Index scores—but also a Pledge of Support from these community actors.

Over sixty organizations and elected officials have committed thus far to using *A Portrait of Sonoma County* to better understand gaps in opportunities and to partner with community organizations and agencies to identify the strengths and assets on which to build a comprehensive and inclusive response to the report. This list will grow as the report is released, understood, and shared across the county, and communities will play a critical role in owning the data and creating solutions moving forward. Those who have signed the Pledge of Support aim to leverage resources, empower communities, share best practices, and strategically focus their efforts in order to creatively contribute to a new and innovative discussion of health equity in Sonoma County. Recognizing that only by working together as equal partners with a shared vision and common agenda, these groups and individuals hope to achieve their long-term goal of making Sonoma County the healthiest county in the state for all residents to work, live, and play.

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