Policy Brief

PANEL 1: DATA PARTNERSHIPS TO STRENGTHEN FAMILIES

Speakers:

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"Paving the Road to Safety for Our Children: A Prevention Plan for LA County"

In June 2017, LA County released a plan—*Paving the Road to Safety for Our Children: A Prevention Plan for Los Angeles County*—that engages the community in prevention efforts to strengthen families and reduce the need for intervention from child protective services. The plan builds on existing efforts including Prevention and Aftercare Networks (P&A) and links these to two essential supports for families with young children that are not generally considered part of the public child welfare system, home visiting and Early Childhood Education (ECE). The County Department of Public Health took the lead on expanding home visiting programs and the Policy Roundtable for Child Care and Development has been working to expand access to ECE.

Countywide Prevention Plan Components

Network the Networks

- Developed a set of recommendations for weaving together relevant prevention networks across the county to strengthen the support "web" available to families

Expand P&A Capacity

- Released an RFP that doubles the original contract amount and adds performance measures in the new contracts
- $28 million in new funding was added to the 10 current P&A agencies over two years

Create Universal Home Visiting

- $30 million in new funding was added to 17 home-visiting agencies over the next two years
- $22 million in new State funding is expanding home visiting for TANF recipients over the next two years

Improve Access to ECE

- Conducting a first-ever comprehensive financial analysis of the early care and education system in Los Angeles County
- Findings will help spearhead an effort to coordinate and streamline the system

Monitor Community Well-being

- Released *A Portrait of Los Angeles County* report that measures the health, educational attainment, and economic stability of all 88 cities in the County

Develop Prevention Measures

- Developed a draft set of prevention measures using data already collected by County departments that will be published on the County's Open Data Portal

Improving Access to Early Childhood Education Programs

The LA County Office of Child Protection and Policy Roundtable for Child Care and Development, with the ECE Prevention Work Group leadership, has engaged in a comprehensive fiscal analysis, running from October 2018 to June 2019. This county level analysis will address:

- What funding currently supports early care and education services in Los Angeles County?

- How are these funds are being used and are they are being fully spent?

- What opportunities exist to better coordinate, streamline, and maximize existing funds?

Using Data to Expand Home Visitation

In July 2018, the LA County Department of Public Health released a home visitation expansion plan titled *Strengthening Home Visiting in Los Angeles: A Comprehensive Plan to Improve Child, Family, and Community Well-Being*. Home visiting models are in-home supportive services that aim to improve parent and child outcomes, particularly among at-risk populations. Home visiting is a primary and secondary prevention tool that has been rigorously tested and shown to improve outcomes for children, parents, and family systems. Children with parents participating in these programs have improved health and are less likely to be maltreated. Parents have improved educational and economic abilities and are less likely to experience intimate partner violence. This plan is helping to chart a course toward universal and targeted home visiting, where home visiting is offered to every mother giving birth countywide, and families at highest risk of adverse outcomes are prioritized for more intensive services.

To assist with implementation, the Children's Data Network (CDN) conducted a landscape analysis of all evidence-based home visiting programs currently operating in LA County. The resulting report, *Newborn Home Visiting Programs: In Los Angeles County: A Primer*, presents each program's goals, intensity, funding streams, and catchment areas (visualized as a map). In addition, the CDN estimated the number of slots needed for a universal system in LA County by examining birth records. The CDN also leveraged prior work with linked birth and child protection records to risk-stratify recent births. Using these linked data, researchers examined potential cut-points for tiered services, estimated the number of slots needed per tier, created maps of potential 'demand' for each tier, and generated baseline data that could be used for evaluation purposes.

California Strong Start Index

This work led to discussion about the possibility of using birth records to help communities more efficiently and equitably allocate resources. Due, in large part, to a dearth of recent, publicly available data on young children and families, counties and service providers have to conduct costly community needs assessments, use survey-based county estimates for neighborhood-level program planning, extrapolate historical data about adults into actionable information about current families with newborns, and base many decisions on a community's poverty level. The California Strong Start Index was designed to address this need.
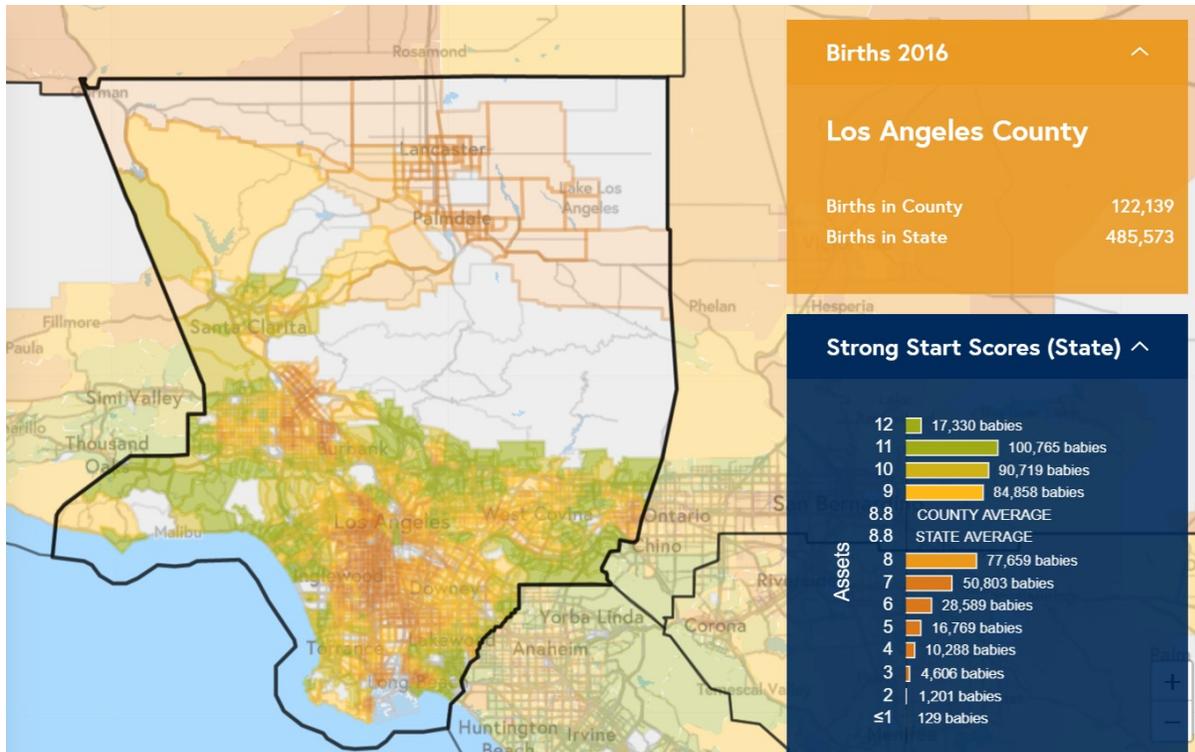
Information universally registered at birth can be used to document assets available to each California newborn. The California Strong Start Index uses indicators that already exist for children and families to summarize, in a standardized way, the conditions into which children are born. It comprises a total of 12 variables that fall into four domains. A birth asset score is calculated by simply counting the number of assets present (0-12). Of course, assets and conditions at birth are not destiny. But thoughtful supports and services may be required to ensure that children with fewer assets find themselves on equal footing with their peers in California. Monitoring the distribution of assets among newborns in different communities can help target investments to support equity and maximize available resources.

California Strong Start Index Indicators

Family

- Legal parentage established at birth

- Born to non-teen parents

- Born to parents with at least a HS degree

Health

- Healthy birthweight

- Absence of congenital anomalies, abnormalities, or complications at birth

- Absence of transmissible (mother-to-child) infections

Service

- Access to and receipt of timely prenatal care

- Receipt of nutritional services (WIC) if eligible

- Hospital with high percentage of births with timely prenatal care

Financial

- Ability to afford and access healthcare

- Born to a parent with a college degree

- Born to parents with employment history

These asset indicators are universally measured at birth with strong validity and set the stage for the emergence of protective factors and healthy development throughout the life course. The Strong Start Index adds unique insight into the conditions into which children are born in California and its scores are related to at least two important indicators of child health and well-being (i.e., child protection involvement and death).

The Strong Start Index allows us to characterize the number of assets children have at birth, including how California communities vary in the distribution of children at different asset levels.

Specifically, the Strong Start Index:

- Facilitates the identification of communities in which children have fewer assets at birth and where additional services and supports may be important to promote equity; and

- Characterizes how asset levels of children in different communities have changed over time, highlighting where disparities persist.

And it has the potential to:

- Guide a more strategic stewardship of public dollars, with increased accountability;

- Act as a standardized and cost-effective anchor for community needs assessments; and

- Promote the adoption of a common language across communities, commissions, and other stakeholder groups for conceptualizing and discussing early childhood investments.

Please visit www.strongstartindex.org to explore the data, and to learn more about how communities are using it to facilitate equitable investment.