How does this tool relate to state policy?
The state of California is increasingly recognizing that the health of our residents—and the associated societal costs such as education, economic health, and health care—are shaped dramatically by “non-health” policies. Although access to quality health care is important, the health of Californians is deeply influenced by state policies, funding sources, and programs affecting educational opportunities, income, housing affordability and supply, transportation systems, the environment and parks, social services, and other community conditions.

As state agencies and departments administer programs to increase these health-promoting community resources, many are asking big questions, such as: Which of these diverse policy issues should state government prioritize to improve health outcomes? And where should resources and efforts be targeted to maximize impact and reduce inequities? Until now, convenient tools have been lacking to assess the current status of factors that shape healthy communities, and to gauge their relative contributions to health.

The California Healthy Places Index (HPI) can help address some of these questions. This new tool was created by the Public Health Alliance of Southern California, for use by local, regional, and state government to explore local factors that predict life expectancy. HPI was developed based on input from state and local government policy and health equity experts, and provides overall scores as well as detailed data on specific policy action areas that shape health (see figure 1 above). The HPI website offers other resources that government officials and those in other sectors may find useful, including an interactive online map, graphs, data tables, and a policy guide with practical solutions for improving community conditions.
The California Healthy Places Index (HPI)

How can this tool be used by state government?

1. For instance, the State of California established the Health in All Policies Task Force (made up of representatives from mostly non-health-focused state agencies) by executive order in 2010 to identify priority programs, policies, and strategies to improve the health of Californians while advancing State sustainability goals.

Officials throughout state government—including agency leadership, legislators, and their staff—can use this information in conjunction with resident experiences to prioritize investments, resources, and programming in communities where health needs are greatest; lift up communities that have been burdened by previous policies; and help ensure that all Californians have what we need to be healthy. For instance, a state program could use the HPI to identify geographic areas that need a particular kind of investment (like parks, housing, or transportation facilities) or that have been cumulatively disadvantaged by past policies and funding.

Examples of current use

The Governor’s Office of Planning and Research has cited the HPI as a resource in its guidance for healthy general plans (the Planning for Healthy Communities Chapter of the 2017 General Plan Guidelines), and the California Strategic Growth Council, which coordinates efforts by state agencies and partners to promote sustainability and economic prosperity, has cited the HPI as a tool in its Transformative Climate Communities Program. Caltrans has also included the HPI as an optional tool for applicants to define eligible disadvantaged communities under its Sustainable Transportation Planning Grant program. The California Department of Public Health advises peer agencies and departments to use the HPI to identify and prioritize resources in the multitude of policies and programs across the state that influence health equity and population health outcomes.

The Healthy Places Index was created in partnership with Virginia Commonwealth University’s Center on Society and Health. Learn more about the tool and access the above resources at HealthyPlacesIndex.org.

Mapping Tool

HPI Score

Move into Action

Identify hotspots where health needs are greatest

Compare conditions with other areas of California and dig deeper to understand community conditions and needs

Policy guide to improve community conditions

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