

OPPORTUNITY INDEX 2017



WHERE IS OPPORTUNITY IN AMERICA?



When the Opportunity Index was first released in 2011, the country was in the wake of a recession. Unemployment hovered at 9 percent, just 1 percent down from the peak of the recession in 2007. Youth employment was more than double the national unemployment rate, reaching 18.5 percent in 2011, and there were nearly one million more young people out of school and work than there are today. By many measures, the country has recovered. More people are working, median the household income is rising and violent crime has decreased since 2011. But the recovery depends on where you live and how success is defined. Income inequality has risen steadily, poverty rates have inched up 2.8 percent since the 2011 Index, incarceration rates and health outcomes are having an increasingly negative impact and our community connection is fraying.

The continued mixed results we've seen in the Index year to year and over time serve as a powerful call to action to focus our efforts on specific community challenges that can improve prospects today and for future generations.

We made some changes to the Index this year and engaged two new partners. **Child Trends**, the nation's leading research organization focused exclusively on improving the lives and prospects of children, youth and their families, worked with us to review the Index indicators and dimensions, make recommendations to update the Index and collected and analyzed all indicators for the 2017 Index. We are also thrilled that **PwC US** joined us to add even more depth to the Index. Their team analyzed new and forward-thinking business data that was added on to the Index. While their findings aren't factored into Opportunity Scores, their business-specific indicators improved our ability to assess where opportunity gaps exist and to think about skills and the future of work.

Additionally, there is a new Health dimension. Physical and mental health, economic opportunity and overall well-being are closely intertwined. People who are healthier are more productive and earn higher wages, while increased incomes are associated with greater access to high-quality care, healthy food, physical exercise and mental health care.

The 2017 Index also includes demographics. The number and percentage of residents are noted by race and ethnicity and gender to provide important context for the Index scores.

Fittingly, the Index is a result of collaboration. It takes a team of researchers, thought leaders, storytellers, creatives and technologists to gather the data, analyze it, produce the Index digitally and bring the stories to life. We hope you'll join us all in asking questions like, "In our community, what dimensions of opportunity are strongest and which are weakest?" "Where are we making the greatest progress, and where are we slipping?" "How can we expand opportunity more fairly among our residents?" "What can we learn from the Opportunity Scores of other places that are similar to us?" There's a wealth of information here and this guide is only the beginning. Taking action is up to us.



Monique Rizer
Executive Director
Opportunity Nation

What's your score?

This book should be used as a supplement to opportunityindex.org.

WHAT IS THE OPPORTUNITY INDEX?

What does opportunity look like? This is what the Opportunity Index and the indicators that compose it aim to measure. Since 2011, the Index has provided a snapshot of conditions that can be used to identify and improve access to opportunity—in comprehensive terms—for residents and their communities. The data and [full analysis online](#) show how Opportunity Index scores have changed over time and what access to opportunity looks like today. This Index provides Opportunity Scores for all 50 states plus the District of Columbia and for nearly 2,100 counties, which together represent 97 percent of the U.S. population.

Many factors influence the kinds of opportunity people have, starting with unchangeable characteristics such as gender, race and ethnicity, genetic factors and family background. The quality of parenting, a family's income and individual health as well as the health and safety of neighborhoods, the quality of schools and the inclusiveness of one's community—all of these can respond to improvement efforts at personal, institutional and societal levels. These conditions vary from place to place, as well as over time, and that is why these conditions are the focus of the Opportunity Index.

Because the Opportunity Index is multidimensional, it paints a broad picture of opportunity that goes beyond economics alone. The 2017 Index includes indicators within four dimensions of community well-being:

-  **ECONOMY**
-  **EDUCATION**
-  **HEALTH**
-  **COMMUNITY**

A note about scores and grades: each state has an overall Opportunity Score that summarizes performance across the four Index dimensions of opportunity. To calculate these, a state's four dimension scores are averaged with equal weighting. Final Opportunity Scores are represented as values from 0 to 100; these values are used to rank all 50 states and District of Columbia. To calculate overall county Opportunity Scores, the four dimension scores are averaged again and weighted equally. Counties are also assigned Opportunity Grades that correspond to their scores.

The 2017 Opportunity Index was jointly created by Opportunity Nation and Child Trends. The overview of the data and findings were drafted by Child Trends.

DIMENSIONS AND INDICATORS

ECONOMY

Jobs
Wages
Poverty
Income Inequality
Assets
Affordable Housing
Internet Access



EDUCATION

Preschool Enrollment
High School Graduation
Postsecondary Completion



HEALTH

Birth Weight **NEW!**
Health Insurance **NEW!**
Deaths by Alcohol/Drugs or Suicide **NEW!**



COMMUNITY

Volunteerism
Voter Registration **NEW!**
Disconnected Youth
Community Safety
Health Care
Healthy Food
Incarceration **NEW!**



At the national and state levels, the Opportunity Index is made up of 20 indicators combined to yield a score from 0 to 100 in each of the four dimensions; thus, the four dimensions are equally weighted. Each state and the District of Columbia is then assigned an overall Opportunity Score on a 100-point scale. The county-level Opportunity Index is made up of 17 indicators, because data for three indicators in the Community dimension (volunteerism, voter registration and incarceration) are not available at the county level.

The dimensions and indicators of the Index reflect what constitutes thriving communities: an economy that works for all; learning opportunities that build the skills and knowledge essential for success starting in early childhood and a preventive, wellness-oriented approach to health; and a commitment to embracing and promoting the contributions of all residents while ensuring their health and safety.

2016-2017 TRENDS

National Opportunity



The **overall Opportunity Score** for the nation for 2017 is **52.4** out of 100, an increase of 1.3 points (2.6%) since 2016, driven by improvements in all four dimensions:

4.3% increase in the **Economy dimension**

2.8% increase in the **Education dimension**

2.1% increase in the **Health dimension***

1.1% increase in the **Community dimension**



Among the counties where changes from 2016 to 2017 could be calculated, **opportunity increased in the majority** (77.8 percent).



While opportunity increased for the nation as a whole, some areas are being left behind. At the bottom of the rankings, **18 counties received an F**, 10 more than in 2016. These counties were concentrated mostly in the **South** as well as in **New Mexico**. Moreover, about a third of these counties had 2017 grades of F after receiving a higher grade in 2016.



Opportunity remains segregated by race and ethnicity. Half of the counties with the lowest levels of opportunity are ones where people of color are in the majority. No county that was more than 20 percent American Indian or Alaska Native received an Opportunity Grade higher than a C.

* To compare 2016 to 2017 as well as to check the strength of the new Index composition, Child Trends recalculated the 2016 Opportunity Index using the structure of the 2017 Index.

Correlations



For states, **high incarceration rates are a close second to youth disconnection** as the two indicators most associated with lower opportunity. This is the first time in the Index's history that incarceration was included as an indicator.



For counties, the percentage of the population with an **associate degree or higher is most associated with opportunity** (followed by the percentage of disconnected youth and median household income). This suggests that economic opportunity (or the lack thereof) has an **intergenerational component** where the education and employment struggles of young people often mirror those of their parents and neighbors.

2011-2017 TRENDS

Youth Who Are Disconnected

4.9
MILLION

For the **FIRST TIME** in the Index's history **the rate of disconnected youth dropped below five million nationally**. These are young adults ages 16–24 who are not in school and not working, but are available and looking for work.

The proportion of youth who are disconnected from employment or education **declined in most states** (37).

Other



In the wake of the nation's recovery from the housing finance crisis of the 2000's, **housing affordability improved** in every state except Louisiana. The **rate of poverty is also rising**, and the trend continues toward **greater inequality of income**.



The nation's rate of **violent crime dropped** in nearly half of states, but rose in 10 states.

Education



Adult educational attainment has gone up in every state. This is measured by the percentage of adults who have an associate degree or higher.



Enrollment in preschool has declined in the majority of states (27) and improved in fewer than a third (16).

Learn more about the analysis of the 2017 Opportunity Index,
find your state's Opportunity Score and your county's
Opportunity Grade online at:

opportunityindex.org

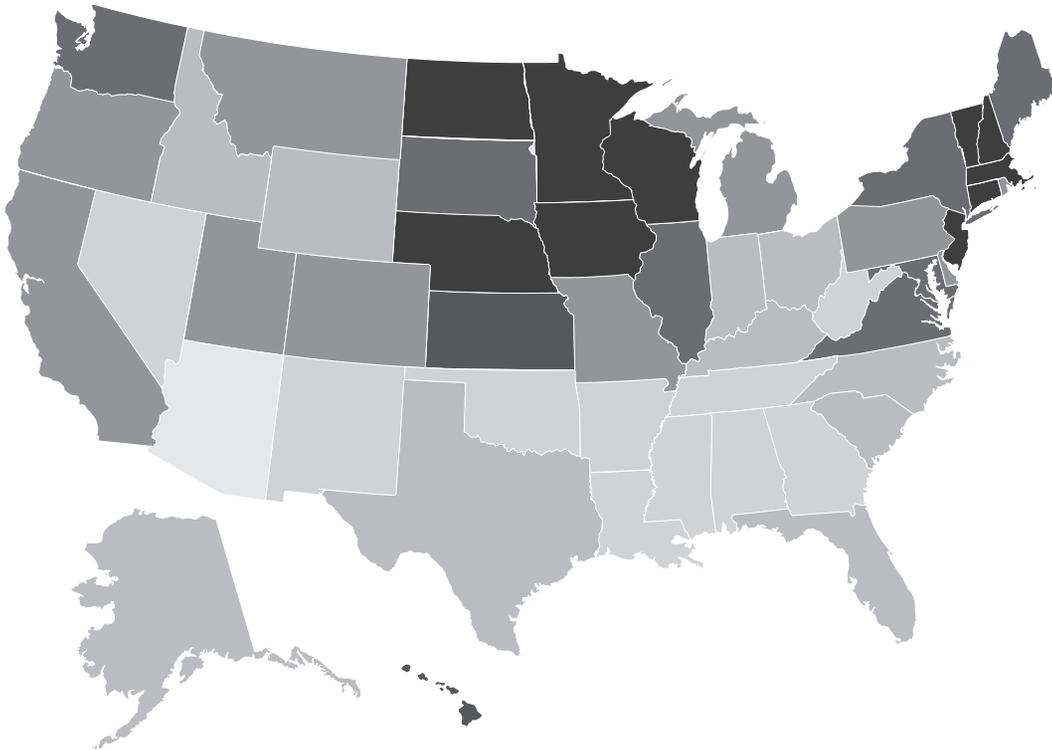
STATE RANKINGS

OVERALL U.S.
OPPORTUNITY SCORE:

52.4

27 STATES and the
DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
scored ABOVE the national
Opportunity Score

From 2016 to 2017,
opportunity INCREASED
in 43 STATES and the
DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA,
while it DECREASED
in 7 STATES



COUNTIES SNAPSHOT There were **383 counties** (about one in five) that had **increases of at least 5 percent** in their Opportunity Grades from 2016 to 2017. **Just 54 counties** (about 3 percent of all counties) had a **decrease of 5 percent or more** in their Opportunity Grades from 2016 to 2017. **More than two-thirds of these counties were in the South**, and **the great majority of them had populations of fewer than 100,000 people**.

Note: State scores have been rounded to one decimal place. As a result values may appear tied, but the rankings reflect the original, not the rounded values. There are no ties in the original values.

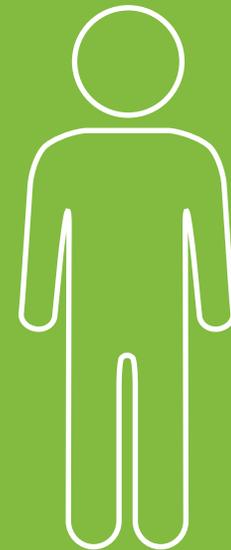
Learn more about your state ranking and find your county's Opportunity Grade online at opportunityindex.org.

1. Vermont	63.3	27. Pennsylvania	52.9
2. Minnesota	61.8	28. Delaware	52.8
3. Iowa	61.1	29. Missouri	52.4
4. Massachusetts	60.5	30. Michigan	52.2
5. North Dakota	60.4	31. Indiana	51.6
6. Nebraska	60.0	32. Idaho	50.8
7. New Hampshire	59.7	33. North Carolina	50.7
8. Connecticut	58.7	34. Alaska	50.7
9. New Jersey	58.7	35. Ohio	50.7
10. Wisconsin	58.1	36. Wyoming	49.2
11. Washington	57.9	37. South Carolina	48.8
12. Maine	57.9	38. Texas	48.7
13. Maryland	57.5	39. Kentucky	48.2
14. Kansas	56.8	40. Florida	48.1
15. District of Columbia	56.8	41. Tennessee	48.1
16. Virginia	56.6	42. Arizona	47.1
17. New York	56.4	43. Arkansas	47.1
18. South Dakota	56.4	44. Georgia	46.9
19. Hawaii	56.3	45. Alabama	46.4
20. Illinois	56.1	46. Oklahoma	46.4
21. Oregon	55.4	47. West Virginia	44.8
22. Utah	55.1	48. Nevada	44.0
23. California	55.0	49. Mississippi	42.9
24. Rhode Island	54.5	50. Louisiana	42.4
25. Colorado	54.1	51. New Mexico	40.9
26. Montana	53.3		

ECONOMY



Jobs | Wages | Poverty | Income Inequality | Assets | Affordable Housing | Internet Access



Why poverty and income inequality matter to Ivan...

Ivan's access to opportunity is limited because he lives in a county (Monongalia County, WV) with a lower Opportunity Grade (C+), mainly due to rates of income inequality and poverty. When these rates aren't positive, Ivan and his family have less of a chance of paying for postsecondary education and beyond and may struggle with purchasing necessities like health insurance, healthy foods and transportation. Even when affordable housing, unemployment and youth disconnection rates are solid, counties like Ivan's can still present a challenge if the Economy dimension indicators are keeping a county's overall grade down.

ECONOMY

Jobs | Wages | Poverty | Income Inequality | Assets | Affordable Housing | Internet Access

Opportunity increased in the Economy dimension by 4.3 percent in 2017. North Dakota was the highest-performing state, with a score of 65.2. The state with the lowest score was New Mexico, at 42.3. Most counties made progress in this dimension.

Thanks to PwC US, the 2017 Opportunity Index provides business-specific data to features further insight into how opportunity interacts with the evolving U.S. economy. Want to learn more about the future of work in your community? Visit opportunityindex.org.



3 COUNTIES IN COLORADO
have the
LOWEST
UNEMPLOYMENT RATES
in the nation



ROBERTS COUNTY, TX (population 918) had the **HIGHEST SCORE** in the Economy dimension, largely influenced by its **VERY LOW POVERTY RATE** (1.5 percent, which is 1/10 the national average) and a relatively **HIGH RATE OF AFFORDABLE HOUSING**



ACCESS TO BANKING SERVICES
has **DETERIORATED**
in **NEARLY EVERY STATE**
and improved in none



The **UNEMPLOYMENT RATE IMPROVED**
in **49 STATES** and the **DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA**



Only **ALASKA'S UNEMPLOYMENT RATE REMAINED UNCHANGED** from 2016-2017, due in part to a **steep drop in oil prices** and by related declines over this time in their industries related to **extraction of natural resources**

Why is economy important?

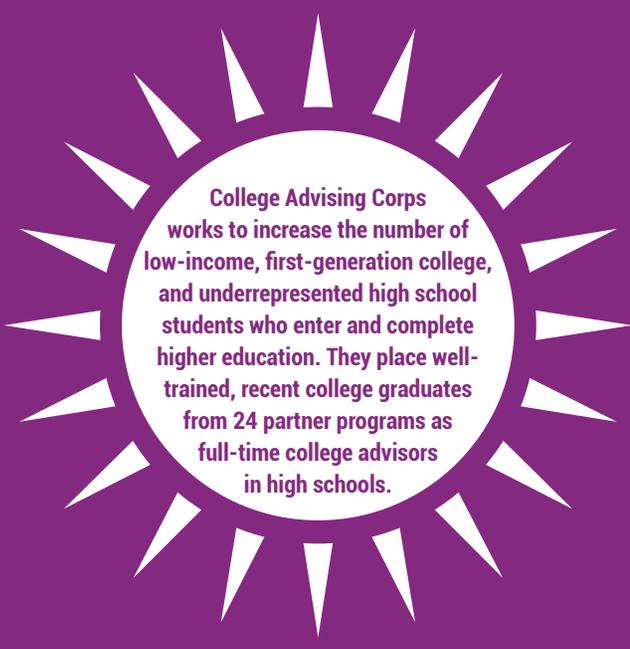
A robust economy supports a high-skills and high-wage labor force. Opportunities to accumulate assets and access financial credit are important features of an economy that works for all residents and offers improved prospects for future generations. In general, economies with large disparities in income, wealth or access to good jobs are associated with greater problems—such as poorer overall health and well-being, weaker economic growth, violence and greater dependence on public assistance.

Improvements in the Economy dimension have been widespread nationwide, bolstered by declining rate of disconnected youth, lower rates of violent crime and improvements in access to broadband internet services, among other indicators, though geographic disparities persist for all of these. However, the Economy indicators also show widening disparities in economic well-being.

EDUCATION



Preschool Enrollment | High School Graduation | Postsecondary Completion

A large sunburst graphic with a central circle containing text and many triangular rays extending outwards.

College Advising Corps works to increase the number of low-income, first-generation college, and underrepresented high school students who enter and complete higher education. They place well-trained, recent college graduates from 24 partner programs as full-time college advisors in high schools.



Why the Education dimension matters in Jessi's life...

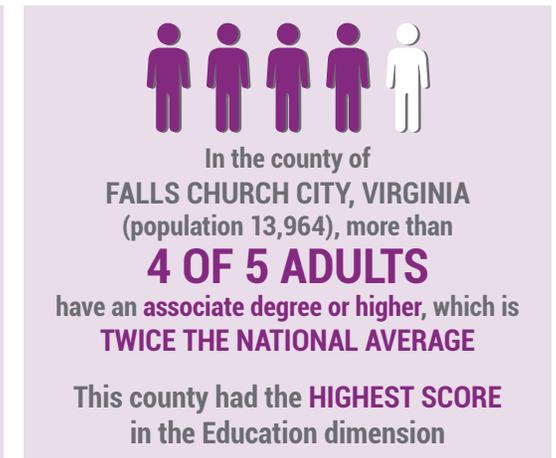
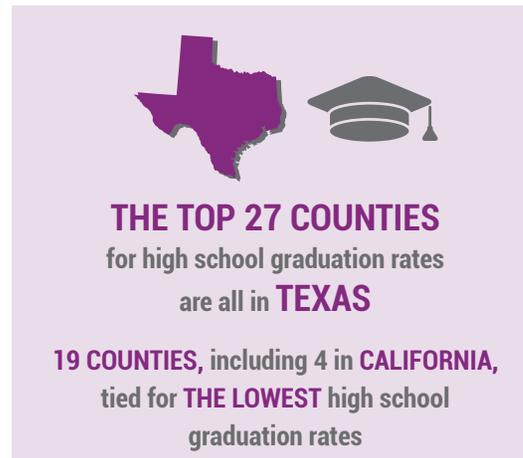
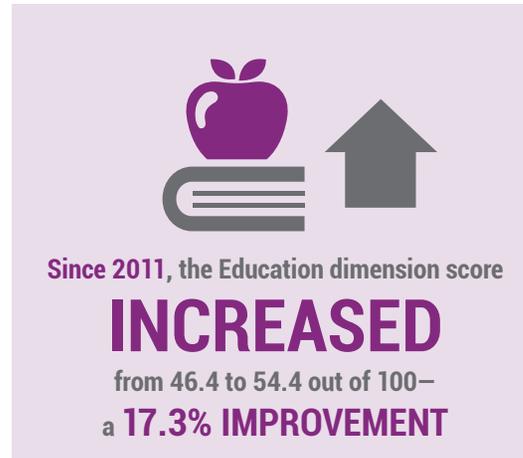
Jessi and Alex were born in counties with similar population sizes and high school graduation rates but that's where the similarities end. Jessi's county (Indian River County, FL, Opportunity Grade C) has higher youth disconnection rates, less access to health care and higher rates of deaths by drugs and suicide. If Jessi doesn't graduate from high school on time or at all, Jessi's county holds considerable barriers that put the future in question.

EDUCATION

Preschool Enrollment | High School Graduation | Postsecondary Completion

Opportunity increased since 2016 in the Education dimension by 2.8 percent. Since 2011, the Education dimension score increased from 46.4 to 54.4—a 17.3 percent improvement. New Jersey had the highest score, at 65.5; Nevada, at 38.6, was the lowest performer. The number of counties losing ground on the Education indicators (1,379) almost matched those making progress (1,446).

Encouragingly, adult educational attainment, measured by the percentage of adults with an associate degree or higher, has increased in every state since 2011. However, preschool enrollment has declined in the majority of states (27) and improved in fewer than one-third (16).



Why is education important?

Educational attainment, and the skills that accompany it, are associated with greater lifetime earnings and better health and life-satisfaction. The benefits of education begin in early childhood, when participation in a good, quality childcare or preschool program gives young children a head start on the kinds of social, emotional and learning skills they will need in school and beyond. Indicators included in this dimension remain unchanged from previous years.

At both state and county levels, communities where teens and young adults are most likely to neither work or attend school tend to be those where adult educational attainment is relatively low. This suggests that economic opportunity (or the lack thereof) has an intergenerational component, and that the education and employment struggles of young people often mirror those of their parents and neighbors.

HEALTH



NEW! Birth Weight | **NEW!** Health Insurance | **NEW!** Deaths by Alcohol/Drugs or Suicide



Why the Health dimension matters to Charles....

Why does it matter if Charles has a greater possibility of becoming disconnected from school or work, a greater chance of being involved in a violent crime, less of a chance to access health insurance AND a greater likelihood to die from alcohol/drugs or suicide? It means his pathway to opportunity is a lot harder. We can see this reflected in his county's Opportunity Grade (Atlantic County, NJ, Opportunity Grade C). Since health outcomes are having an increasingly negative impact on our communities, it's important that Charles has opportunities for physical activity, access to social networks and health care and overall well-being.

HEALTH

NEW! Birth Weight | **NEW!** Health Insurance | **NEW!** Deaths by Alcohol/Drugs or Suicide

Opportunity increased in the Health dimension by 2.1 percent since 2016 with most states seeing a positive trend in scores. Minnesota, at 71.2, had the highest score in this dimension while West Virginia had the lowest at 36.7. Forty-five percent of counties saw improvements in this dimension. Nearly every state improved in health insurance coverage.



95% OF PEOPLE UNDER THE AGE OF 65 have health insurance in **LINCOLN COUNTY, SOUTH DAKOTA** (population 52,826)

LINCOLN COUNTY was the **TOP COUNTY** in the Health dimension and received an **A** for overall opportunity



In **MCDOWELL COUNTY, WEST VIRGINIA**, drug/alcohol-related poisoning or suicide kills residents at nearly **4.5X** the national rate



Rates of deaths from drug/alcohol poisoning or suicide **ROSE** in **43 STATES** and the **DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA**



The rate of **low birth weight** **ROSE** IN **26 STATES** and the **DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA**



Nearly every state saw **IMPROVEMENTS** in rates of health insurance*

* Includes those who are under age 65 and covered by health insurance



The **ONLY STATES** THAT IMPROVED in the drug/alcohol-related poisoning or suicide indicator were **ARIZONA, ILLINOIS, INDIANA** and **NORTH DAKOTA**

Why is health important?

Neighborhood quality, household income, racial discrimination, education and other social supports can greatly influence health by affecting people's opportunities for physical activity, their social networks, access to care and overall well-being.

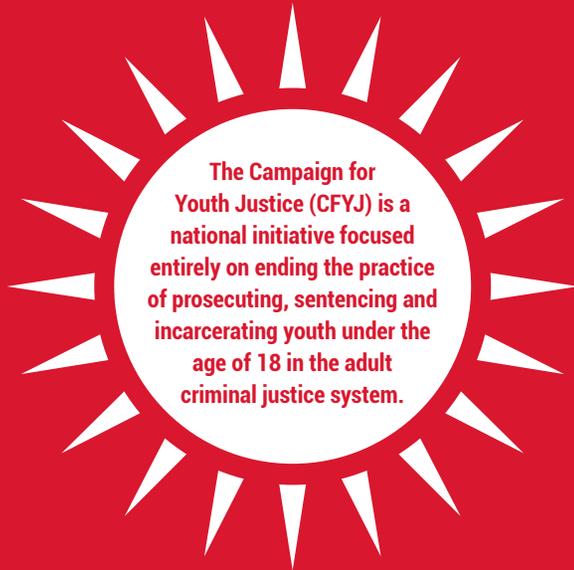
Physical and mental health, economic opportunity and overall well-being are closely intertwined and influences flow in both directions. People who are healthier are more productive and earn higher wages. Similarly, increased incomes are associated with greater access to high-quality care, healthy food, physical exercise and mental health care. According to an analysis of more than 50 studies, social conditions contribute to nearly one-third of mortality in the United States and account for an even greater share of illness and injury.

The new Health dimension includes a critical early marker of developmental risk: low birth weight. Also included is an indicator of health insurance coverage, which is linked both with access to care and better health outcomes. Finally, deaths due to drug or alcohol poisoning or suicide are included. These "deaths of despair" may reflect a combination of personal and social ills: untreated substance use and mental health disorders, including depression and anxiety linked to job loss, discrimination or other wrenching circumstances.

COMMUNITY



Volunteerism | **NEW!** Voter Registration | Disconnected Youth | Community Safety | Health Care | Healthy Food | **NEW!** Incarceration



Why Community matters to Jaimie...

The county Jaimie lives in (Williams County, ND, Grade C+) and the county Sam lives in (Norfolk County, MA, Grade A) have similar Economy scores, fairly close Health scores, the same median income and same unemployment rates, but a big gap in Education and Community scores. What does that mean for Jaimie when opportunity shifts dramatically away from her? She has a higher chance of becoming a young adult disconnected from school and work and of being involved in, or a victim of, a violent crime. Community matters because even when there are many job opportunities, Jaimie needs to have a clear pathway to those jobs—and physical and mental safety is critical to the opportunity equation.

COMMUNITY

Volunteerism | **NEW!** Voter Registration | Disconnected Youth |
Community Safety | Health Care | Healthy Food | **NEW!** Incarceration

Opportunity increased in this dimension by 1.1 percent since 2016, with most counties seeing progress. For states, Vermont had the highest score of 66.9, while Oklahoma had the lowest score of 38.1.

The proportion of youth disconnected from employment and education declined in most states and, for the first time in the Index's history, dropped below five million to 4.9 million youth nationally.



Voter registration rates
DECLINED
IN 32 STATES
and the
DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA



Incarceration rates
DECLINED
in
33 STATES



The rate of **PRIMARY CARE PHYSICIANS** for 38 states was essentially **UNCHANGED** while it **DECLINED** in **FOUR STATES** and the **DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA**



BOYD COUNTY, NEBRASKA had the **HIGHEST SCORE** in the Community dimension. Boyd County's rate of **YOUTH DISCONNECTION** is **EXCEPTIONALLY LOW**, at 2.6%, and its rate of **VIOLENT CRIME** is just **ONE-EIGHTH** of the national rate



Access to healthy food **DECLINED** in **33 STATES** and **IMPROVED** in **15**

Why is community important?

Thriving communities provide the infrastructure that supports the health, education, work life, recreation and civic participation of its residents, welcoming the assets that those of diverse ages, race and ethnicities and cultural backgrounds bring and taking care not to adopt practices that exclude anyone's contributions.

The Community dimension focuses on several distinct aspects of a vibrant community: access to primary health care and healthy foods; participation in community life and governance; safety; the impact of incarceration on families and the community; and a measure of disconnection that focuses on youth who need to build human capital through employment or postsecondary education.

For states, high incarceration rates are a close second to youth disconnection as the indicators most associated with lower opportunity.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Opportunity Champion



Opportunity Advocate



Opportunity Allies



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Monster.com | PACE | PwC US | United Way Worldwide | YouthBuild USA | Youth Villages**

Thank you to Measure of America, a project of the Social Science Research Council, for their work with Opportunity Nation in developing the original concept for the Opportunity Index.

LEARN MORE

Why do counties have Opportunity Grades and states have Opportunity Scores?

What dimensions of opportunity are strongest and which are weakest in my community?

What else can I find out about my county or state's opportunity?

Where are we making the greatest progress, and where are we slipping?

How can we expand opportunity more fairly in our community?

What can we learn from the Opportunity Scores of other places that are similar to us?

Learn more about the analysis of the 2017 Opportunity Index, find your state's Opportunity Score and your county's Opportunity Grade online at

opportunityindex.org

The 2017 Opportunity Index was jointly created by Opportunity Nation and Child Trends. The overviews of the data and findings were drafted by Child Trends. PwC US contributed business-related indicators to the Economic dimension.



Opportunity Nation is a bipartisan, national campaign comprised of more than 350 cross-sector organizations working together to expand economic mobility and close the opportunity gap in America. Our mission is to restore the promise of the American Dream by ensuring that all Americans—regardless of where they were born—have the opportunity to succeed.

Opportunity Nation:

- Measures access to opportunity via our Opportunity Index, which measures economic, educational and civic factors that foster economic mobility at both the county and state levels;
- Advances bipartisan legislation by promoting common-sense, bipartisan approaches to increase access to education, tackle the skills gap and expand opportunity for young adults;
- Convenes cross-sector groups through our Coalition, National Opportunity Summits, the Opportunity Index briefings and other events across the country that lead to innovative collaborations and partnerships.

We believe that expanding economic mobility is the defining issue of our time. Closing the opportunity gap will take innovative, bipartisan, cross-sector solutions grounded in data and collaboration. For more information, visit www.opportunitynation.org.

About Child Trends

Child Trends is the nation's leading research organization focused exclusively on improving the lives and prospects of children, youth and their families. For 36 years, decision makers have relied on our rigorous research, unbiased analyses and clear communications to improve public policies and interventions that serve children and families. We have more than 120 staff in three offices and multiple locations around the country, including our headquarters in Bethesda, MD. childtrends.org



About PwC US

At PwC US, our purpose is to build trust in society and solve important problems. We're a network of firms in 157 countries with more than 223,000 people who are committed to delivering quality in assurance, advisory, and tax services. Find out more and tell us what matters to you by visiting us at www.pwc.com/us.



For more information, and to learn how much opportunity is in YOUR community, please visit www.opportunityindex.org. Join the conversation on social media with [#OppIndex](https://twitter.com/OppIndex).



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