



The 2017 Opportunity Index

Introduction

What does opportunity look like—state by state and county by county— across our nation? This is what the Opportunity Index and its component indicators aim to measure. Since 2011, the Index has provided a snapshot of conditions that state and local leaders and community-based organizations can use to identify and address opportunity—in comprehensive terms—for their residents.

The Opportunity Index is a composite measure of opportunity in the United States, covering four distinct dimensions of opportunity: Economy, Education, Health and Community. This Analysis Report shares the latest calculation of Index scores for all 50 states, plus the District of Columbia, ranking them 1 to 51, with 1 being the highest scoring state. This report also provides analysis for more than 2,000 counties, which constitute 97 percent of the U.S. population. Finally we examine how Opportunity Index scores have changed over time, accounting for the ways in which calculation details have necessarily evolved.

The Index was first launched in 2011 and has since been updated annually. This year, Opportunity Nation and Child Trends introduced some significant changes to its composition (summarized below), which means that strict comparisons with earlier Index values are inadvisable, though there are also many continuities. However, to provide a degree of comparison, we calculated scores for both 2016 and 2017 using the new methodology.

The updates this year include the addition of a fourth dimension of opportunity focusing on health. The Opportunity Index now includes voter registration rates and incarceration rates under the Community dimension. We also included demographic data beyond population, including race and ethnicity and gender. A detailed *Technical Supplement* focusing on the Index methodology and indicator changes can be found on the Opportunity Index website.



Additionally, through collaboration with PwC US, the 2017 Opportunity Index has been supplemented with business-specific data to provide further insight into how opportunity interacts with the evolving U.S. economy. More information on these data can be found in the 2017 Opportunity Index *Briefing Book* and online. This Analysis Report summarizes the results of the updated 2017 Opportunity Index, and examines changes in Opportunity Scores since 2016.¹ Where there is continuity in indicators, the report also explores changes in scores since 2011.

Findings and Trends

The nation's 2017 Opportunity Score, the Index's combined measure of opportunity, stands at 52.4 out of 100. This represents an increase of 1.3 points (2.6 percent) in overall opportunity since 2016, driven by improvements in all four dimensions.² Most notably, there was a substantial increase (4.3 percent) in the Economy dimension, along with a 2.8 percent increase in the Education dimension, a 2.1 percent increase in the Health dimension and a 1.2 percent increase in the Community dimension.

Since the Opportunity Index first launched in 2011, Vermont has been the state with the highest overall Opportunity Score. In 2017, this pattern continued; Vermont accrued 63.3 points out of 100. The state with the lowest Opportunity Score was New Mexico, at 40.9—maintaining that position for the third consecutive year. From 2016 to 2017, opportunity increased for 43 states and the District of Columbia, while it went down for seven states.

Among the counties for which changes from 2016 to 2017 could be calculated, opportunity increased in the majority (77.8 percent). For counties, overall opportunity is measured in letter grades that are assigned based on their performance on the Opportunity Index indicators. In 2017, 15 counties received an Opportunity Grade of A, compared with six in 2016. However, the number of counties receiving an F also increased, from eight to 18.³

¹ We retroactively gathered indicators for the updated Index for 2016 to allow comparisons between Opportunity Scores from 2016 to 2017. Because of substantial differences in the structures of the original and updated Opportunity Index, we strongly caution against making comparisons between 2017 results and those obtained under the older methodology used for 2011–2016.

² All comparisons between 2017 and 2016 scores refer to changes in the standardized scores.

³ Because of varying availability of data, rankings for 2017 are based on data for 2,057 counties and 2016 rankings are based on 1,409 counties. Thus, the percentage of counties receiving a grade of A in 2017 and 2016 was 0.7 percent and 0.4 percent, respectively. The percentage of counties receiving a grade of F in 2017 and 2016 was 0.8 percent and 0.6 percent, respectively.

How is Opportunity Measured in the Opportunity Index?

The opportunity to improve one's prospects or the prospects of the next generation is at the core of the American Dream. It stands to reason that we would want to know what progress we are making and where we still have work to do to expand opportunity for everyone in the nation—regardless of where they were born.

Many factors influence the types of opportunity that people may experience, starting with essentially unchangeable characteristics like gender, race and ethnicity, genetic factors and family background. However, opportunity can also depend on the relationships, roles and conditions people experience in their families, schools and communities, as well as the wider cultural context. Many of these latter examples *are* susceptible to change. For instance, personal, institutional and societal efforts can help improve important factors of opportunity, such as parenting quality, family income and health, neighborhood safety, school quality and the inclusiveness of one's community. These conditions vary from place to place and over time, which 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 just economics. The 2017 Index includes indicators in four dimensions of well-being:

- Economy
- Education
- Health
- Community

Accompanying the 2017 Index we also include, for the first time, basic demographic information at each geographic level. Specifically, we note the number and percentage of residents by race and ethnicity and gender. These measures are not part of the Index scores, but are intended to provide important context for the data.

Economy Dimension: Why It's Important

A robust economy supports a high-skills/high-wage labor force. 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,⁴ weaker economic growth,⁵ violence and greater dependence on public assistance. Opportunities to accumulate assets and access financial credit are also important features of an economy that works for all residents and offers improved prospects for future generations. Although the specific indicators assessing this dimension remain mostly unchanged from previous years, we substituted “subscription to broadband internet service” for the earlier “high-speed internet service,” due to a change in our data source for this indicator.

The indicators included in the Economy dimension of the Opportunity Index are:

- Jobs
- Wages
- Poverty
- Income inequality
- Access to banking services
- Affordable housing
- Broadband internet subscription

Education Dimension: Why It’s Important

An important indicator of human capital is the extent to which a population is educated. Educational attainment, and its related skills, are associated with greater lifetime earnings and better health and life satisfaction.⁶ 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 social, emotional and learning skills they will need in school and beyond. Indicators included under this dimension remain unchanged from previous years.

The indicators included in the Education dimension of the Opportunity Index are as follows:

- Preschool enrollment
- High school graduation
- Postsecondary education

⁴ Kahn, R. S., Wise, P. H., Kennedy, B. P., & Kawachi, I. (2000). “State income inequality, household income and maternal mental and physical health: Cross-sectional national survey.” *BMJ*, 321, 1311–1315.

⁵ Standard & Poor’s Rating Services. (2014). *How increasing income inequality is dampening U.S. economic growth, and possible ways to change the tide*. Retrieved from http://www.ncsl.org/Portals/1/Documents/forum/Forum_2014/Income_Inequality.pdf.

⁶ Child Trends DataBank. (2016). *Educational attainment*. Bethesda, MD: Child Trends. Retrieved from https://www.childtrends.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/06_Educational_Attainment.pdf.

Health Dimension: Why It's Important

Health is a multifaceted concept. The new Health dimension includes a critical early marker of developmental risk: low birth weight.⁷ Also included is an indicator of health insurance coverage, which is linked both with access to care and better health outcomes.⁸ Finally, we report on deaths due to drug or alcohol poisoning or suicide. These “deaths of despair” may reflect a combination of personal and social ills:⁹ untreated substance abuse and mental health disorders, including depression and anxiety linked to job loss, discrimination or other wrenching circumstances.¹⁰ Physical and mental health, economic opportunity and overall well-being are closely intertwined. Many researchers have concluded that influences flow in both directions; for example, 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.¹¹

The “conditions in which people are born, grow, live, work and age” are known as the “social determinants” of health.¹² For example, 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. 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.¹³

⁷ Child Trends DataBank. (2016). *Low and very low birthweight infants*. Bethesda, MD: Child Trends. Retrieved from https://www.childtrends.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/57_Low_Birth_Weight.pdf.

⁸ Child Trends DataBank. (2016). *Health care coverage*. (2016). Bethesda, MD: Child Trends. Retrieved from https://www.childtrends.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/26_Health_Care_Coverage-1.pdf.

⁹ Case, A. & Deaton, A. (2017). *Mortality and morbidity in the 21st century*. Washington, DC: Brookings Institution.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Woolf, S. V., Aron, L., Dubay, L., Simon, S. M., Zimmerman, E., & Luk, K. X. (2015). *How are income and wealth linked to health and longevity?* Richmond, VA: Center on Society and Health. Retrieved from <http://societyhealth.vcu.edu/media/society-health/pdf/IHIBrief1.pdf>.

¹² Marmot, M., Friel, S., Bell, R., Houweling, T. A. J., & Taylor, S. (2008). “Closing the gap in a generation: Health equity through action on the social determinants of health.” *The Lancet*, 372(9650), 1661–1669.

¹³ Galea, S., Tracy, M., Hoggatt, K. J., DiMaggio, C., & Karpati, A. (2011). “Estimated deaths attributable to social factors in the United States.” *American Journal of Public Health*, 101(8), 1456–1465.

The indicators included in the Health dimension of the Opportunity Index are as follows:

- Low birth weight
- Health insurance coverage
- Deaths related to alcohol/drug use or suicide

Community Dimension: Why It's Important

Thriving communities provide infrastructure that supports the health, education, work life, recreation and civic participation of their residents. These communities welcome the assets of residents of diverse ages, races and ethnicities and cultural backgrounds, and take care not to adopt practices that exclude anyone's contributions.¹⁴

This dimension has been reworked to focus 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.

The indicators included in the Community dimension of the Opportunity Index are:

- Volunteering
- Voter registration
- Youth disconnection
- Violent crime
- Access to primary health care
- Access to healthy food
- Incarceration

Methodologies

The Opportunity Index uses official statistics from a number of government sources, including the U.S. Census Bureau, the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics and the CDC's National Vital Statistics System, as well as data compiled by

¹⁴ Parilla, J. (2017). *Opportunity for growth: How reducing barriers to economic inclusion can benefit workers, firms, and local economies*. Brookings Institution, Metropolitan Policy Program. Retrieved from https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/metro_20170927_opportunity-for-growth-iedl-report-parilla-final.pdf

reputable nonprofit organizations. (See the *Technical Supplement* for complete sources for every indicator.)

At the national and state levels, the Opportunity Index is made up of 20 indicators combined to yield a score from 1 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 only 17 indicators because data for three indicators in the Community dimension (volunteering, primary care physicians and incarceration) are not available at the county level. Counties are awarded "Opportunity Grades" (A+ to F) for their overall performance rather than Opportunity Scores for ease of interpretation, and because opportunity at the county level is measured by a slightly different set of indicators. (See the *Technical Supplement* for full details on construction of the Index.)



The Opportunity Index: Dimensions and Indicators

Opportunity Index Indicators		
DIMENSION	INDICATOR	DESCRIPTION
Economy	JOB	Unemployment rate (percentage of the population ages 16 and older who are unemployed and seeking work)
	WAGES	Median household income (in 2010 dollars)
	POVERTY	Percentage of the population below the federal poverty level (the amount of pretax cash income considered adequate for an individual or family to meet basic needs)
	INCOME INEQUALITY	80/20 ratio (ratio of household income at the 80th percentile to that at the 20th percentile)
	ACCESS TO BANKING SERVICES	Number of banking institutions (commercial banks, savings institutions and credit unions) per 10,000 residents
	AFFORDABLE HOUSING	Percentage of households spending less than 30 percent of their income on housing-related costs
	BROADBAND INTERNET SUBSCRIPTION	Percentage of households with subscriptions to broadband internet service
Education	PRESCHOOL ENROLLMENT	Percentage of 3- and 4-year-olds attending preschool
	HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION	On-time high school graduation rate (percentage of freshmen who graduate in four years)
	POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION	Percentage of adults 25 and older with an associate degree or higher

Health	LOW BIRTH WEIGHT	Percentage of infants born weighing less than 5.5 pounds
	HEALTH INSURANCE COVERAGE	Percentage of the population under age 65 without health insurance coverage
	DEATHS RELATED TO ALCOHOL/DRUG USE OR SUICIDE	Deaths attributed to alcohol or drug poisoning (including recreational and prescription drugs), or suicide (age-adjusted rate per 100,000 population)
Community	VOLUNTEERING	Percentage of adults (ages 18 and older) who reported volunteering during the previous year [national and state-level only]
	VOTER REGISTRATION	Percentage of the population ages 18 and older who are registered to vote [national and state-level only]
	YOUTH DISCONNECTION	Percentage of youth ages 16–24 not in school and not working
	VIOLENT CRIME	Incidents of violent crime reported to law enforcement agencies (per 100,000 population)
	ACCESS TO PRIMARY HEALTH CARE	Number of primary care physicians (per 100,000 population)
	ACCESS TO HEALTHY FOOD	Number of grocery stores and produce vendors (per 10,000 population)
	INCARCERATION	Number of people incarcerated in jail or prison (per 100,000 population ages 18 and older) [national and state-level only]

The Nation's Opportunity Score

The overall 2017 Opportunity Score for the United States is 52.4 on a 100-point scale, representing an increase of 1.3 points (2.6 percent) from the overall score in 2016. As noted, because of the significant changes in the composition of the 2017 Index, we caution readers against comparing this year's Opportunity Score with scores for years before 2016.¹⁵

Education is the only dimension for which indicators remained unchanged for the 2017 update. Indicators for the Economy dimension have varied only slightly in recent years, while the Health and Community dimensions were substantially redefined this year.

This year's data show that opportunity increased in all four dimensions since 2016, with the greatest improvement (4.3 percent) in the Economy dimension. Gains in Education, Health and Community were smaller, at 2.8, 2.1 and 1.2 percent, respectively. Since 2011, the Education dimension increased from 46.4 to 54.4 out of 100—a 17.3 percent improvement.

State Opportunity Scores

Twenty-three states score below the U.S. average of 52.4, while 27 states and the District of Columbia score above the average.¹⁶

Vermont ranks highest on the 2017 Opportunity Index, with a score of 63.3 out of 100. Scoring lowest in 2017 is New Mexico, at 40.9. New England states performed well overall on this year's Index, with four ranking in the top 10. The bottom five spots were occupied by states in the South (Mississippi and Louisiana), West (New Mexico and Nevada) and Appalachia (West Virginia).

North Dakota was the highest-performing state in the Economy dimension, with a score of 65.2 out of 100. The state with the lowest Economy score was New Mexico, at 42.3.

New Jersey had the highest score for the Education dimension, at 65.5 out of 100; Nevada, at 38.6, was the lowest performer.

¹⁵ The Opportunity Index was also calculated in its updated format for 2016 to allow for examination of progress from the previous Index year.

¹⁶ We advise readers that small differences in Index scores between one state and another are not likely to indicate substantively meaningful differences. We recommend examining all available information (dimension-level scores and specific indicators), as well as using additional contextual information from other sources, to gain a more nuanced understanding.

Minnesota, at 71.2, had the highest score in the Health dimension, while West Virginia had the lowest, at 36.7.

Finally, in the Community dimension, Vermont performed best with a score of 66.6. The state with the lowest score here was Oklahoma, at 38.2.

The complete state rankings, including overall opportunity and dimension scores, are presented below.

2017 Opportunity Index, State Rankings

Rank	State	Overall Opportunity Score	Economy	Education	Health	Community
	United States	52.4	52.9	54.4	55.5	46.8
1	Vermont (VT)	63.3	59.6	59.3	67.6	66.6
2	Minnesota (MN)	61.8	61.1	54.5	71.2	60.2
3	Iowa (IA)	61.1	61.7	57.6	69.3	55.9
4	Massachusetts (MA)	60.5	56.9	64.7	62.8	57.5
5	North Dakota (ND)	60.4	65.2	51.8	67.4	57.4
6	Nebraska (NE)	60.0	62.4	54.8	66.7	56.3
7	New Hampshire (NH)	59.7	64.6	62.3	53.3	58.8
8	Connecticut (CT)	58.7	57.7	64.7	58.3	54.2
9	New Jersey (NJ)	58.7	56.1	66.5	58.7	53.5
10	Wisconsin (WI)	58.1	59.9	55.2	63.2	54.1
11	Washington (WA)	57.9	58.6	53.1	65.9	54.1
12	Maine (ME)	57.9	57.4	52.1	57.2	64.6
13	Maryland (MD)	57.5	60.4	61.1	56.3	52.4
14	Kansas (KS)	56.8	59.9	54.3	62.2	50.8
15	District of Columbia (DC)	56.8	48.7	61.3	55.4	61.7

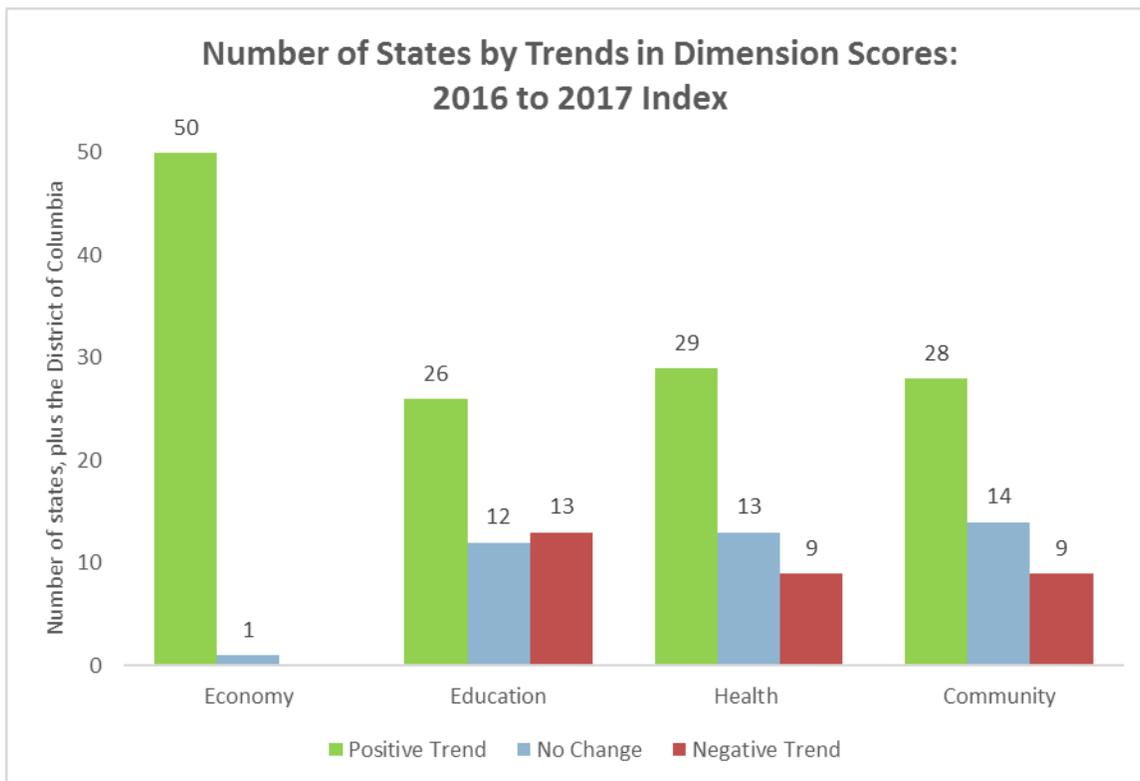
16	Virginia (VA)	56.6	58.5	58.3	59.4	50.1
17	New York (NY)	56.4	48.9	56.0	63.6	57.3
18	South Dakota (SD)	56.4	61.6	48.6	64.1	51.4
19	Hawaii (HI)	56.3	59.7	53.7	63.1	48.7
20	Illinois (IL)	56.1	54.6	59.1	60.1	50.4
21	Oregon (OR)	55.4	54.4	47.6	65.8	53.8
22	Utah (UT)	55.1	63.0	54.4	51.2	51.9
23	California (CA)	55.0	49.9	58.0	66.1	46.1
24	Rhode Island (RI)	54.5	52.1	54.4	55.9	55.6
25	Colorado (CO)	54.1	60.9	54.7	49.9	50.7
26	Montana (MT)	53.3	55.6	53.0	52.6	52.0
27	Pennsylvania (PA)	52.9	54.9	53.9	52.9	49.9
28	Delaware (DE)	52.8	58.3	55.4	51.3	46.1
29	Missouri (MO)	52.4	54.8	55.7	51.4	47.5
30	Michigan (MI)	52.2	53.2	50.9	54.9	49.8
31	Indiana (IN)	51.6	56.6	50.9	53.0	45.8
32	Idaho (ID)	50.8	55.9	42.7	57.4	47.2
33	North Carolina (NC)	50.7	50.6	54.1	49.2	49.1
34	Alaska (AK)	50.7	58.9	43.5	50.3	50.0
35	Ohio (OH)	50.7	54.2	49.9	49.1	49.5
36	Wyoming (WY)	49.2	61.0	48.1	42.2	45.6
37	South Carolina (SC)	48.8	50.5	51.9	47.0	45.7
38	Texas (TX)	48.7	51.3	55.0	50.2	38.2
39	Kentucky (KY)	48.2	49.2	51.7	46.8	45.0
40	Tennessee (TN)	48.1	51.4	51.3	45.5	44.2

41	Florida (FL)	48.1	50.8	50.9	48.5	42.2
42	Arizona (AZ)	47.1	50.4	45.3	53.9	39.0
43	Arkansas (AR)	47.1	49.2	50.5	49.2	39.6
44	Georgia (GA)	46.9	49.5	51.8	46.5	39.8
45	Alabama (AL)	46.4	47.5	54.3	43.4	40.5
46	Oklahoma (OK)	46.4	52.2	49.0	46.0	38.2
47	West Virginia (WV)	44.8	50.0	46.3	36.7	46.2
48	Nevada (NV)	44.0	52.1	38.6	46.0	39.2
49	Mississippi (MS)	42.9	42.5	50.2	38.7	40.1
50	Louisiana (LA)	42.4	44.2	48.4	38.7	38.2
51	New Mexico (NM)	40.9	42.3	41.3	40.1	39.8

Note: State scores have been rounded to one decimal place. While values may appear tied, the rankings reflect the original (not rounded) values. There are no ties in the original values.

Number of States by Changes in Opportunity Index Scores 2016 to 2017¹⁷ by Dimension

	Positive Trend	No Change	Negative Trend
OPPORTUNITY INDEX	38	11	2
Economy	50	1	0
Education	26	12	13
Health	29	13	9
Community	28	14	9



¹⁷ Throughout this document, the terms “positive trend” and “negative trend” refer to any improvement or decline, respectively, of 1 percent or greater. Variations within 1 percent of zero are considered “no change.”

Individual Indicators in the Opportunity Index

Thirteen states and the District of Columbia were the highest-performing on at least one indicator in 2017, while 12 states and the District of Columbia were the lowest-performing on at least one. The District of Columbia, depending on the indicator, was both top-ranked (four indicators across Education and Community) and bottom-ranked (three indicators in Economy, Education and Community). Mississippi was the lowest-performing state for five different indicators across the Economy, Health and Community dimensions.

For the new indicators in the 2017 Index, progress was mixed from 2016 to 2017. On the positive side, nearly every state improved in broadband internet subscription rates and health insurance coverage; in 33 states, incarceration rates declined. The rate of primary care physicians in 38 states remained essentially unchanged, while it declined in four states and the District of Columbia. On the negative side, low birth weight rates rose in 26 states and the District of Columbia, and voter registration rates fared worse still—declining in 32 states and the District of Columbia. Most alarmingly, rates of deaths from drug/alcohol poisoning or suicide—so-called “deaths of despair”—rose in 43 states and the District of Columbia. The only states with improvement on this new Health indicator were Arizona, Illinois, Indiana and North Dakota.

Notably, the District of Columbia is a place of disturbing contrasts in access to opportunity. The District’s employed adults have, on average, very high levels of education and excellent access to health care. Median household income in the District is second-highest in the nation, after only Maryland. The public school system makes pre-kindergarten available to all residents without charge, contributing to the highest rate of preschool enrollment. For the first time in four years, the District of Columbia’s rate of youth disconnection is below the national average. And compared to states with similar overall opportunity, its incarceration rate is relatively low.¹⁸ However, the District also faces numerous challenges—for example, it has the worst income inequality in the nation, high rates of violent crime and low rates of on-time high school graduation.

¹⁸ There are two correctional facilities within the District of Columbia: the Central Detention Facility and the Correctional Treatment Facility. In the District, offenders with felony sentences are transferred to the Federal Bureau of Prisons system, which has detention facilities throughout the nation but none in the District.

The table below summarizes the top- and bottom-ranked states for each 2017 indicator, as well as the single state showing the greatest improvement (as measured by the percent change in scores) since 2011 (where applicable) and since 2016.

Top, Bottom and Most-Improved States by Opportunity Index Indicator				
INDICATOR	TOP STATE	BOTTOM STATE	MOST IMPROVED SINCE 2016	MOST IMPROVED SINCE 2011
OPPORTUNITY INDEX	VT	NM	GA	a
Economy	ND	NM	OR	a
Unemployment rate (percentage of the population ages 16 and older who are unemployed and seeking work)	CO	AK	WY	NV
Median household income (2010 dollars)	MD	MS	TN	ND
Percentage of the population below the federal poverty level (the amount of pretax cash income considered adequate for an individual or family to meet basic needs)	NH	MS	TN	TX
80/20 ratio (ratio of household income at the 80th percentile to that at the 20th percentile)	UT	DC	MA	DC
Number of banking institutions (commercial banks, savings institutions and credit unions) per 10,000 residents	ND	NV	ME	RI
Percentage of households spending less than 30 percent of their income on housing-related costs	ND	CA	RI	NV

Percentage of households with subscriptions to broadband internet service	NH	MS	WV	a
Education	NJ	NV	GA	NV
Percentage of 3- and 4-year-olds attending preschool	DC	ID	NH	NV
On-time high school graduation rate (percentage of freshmen who graduate in four years)	NJ	DC	DC	a
Percentage of adults ages 25 and older with an associate degree or higher	DC	WV	VT	DC
Health	MN	WV	NM	a
Percentage of infants born weighing less than 5.5 pounds	AK	MS	WY	a
Percentage of the population under age 65 without health insurance coverage	MA	TX	FL	a
Deaths attributed to alcohol or drug poisoning, or suicide (age-adjusted rate per 100,000 population)	NE	WV	VT	a
Community	VT	OK	UT	a
Percentage of adults ages 18 and older who reported volunteer activity during the previous year	UT	FL	LA	a
Percentage of the population ages 18 and older who are registered to vote	ME	HI	UT	a
Percentage of youth ages 16–24 not in school and not working	NH	NM	TN	ND

Incidents of violent crime reported to law enforcement agencies (per 100,000 population)	VT	DC	FL	SC
Number of primary care physicians (per 100,000 population)	DC	MS	SD	a
Number of grocery stores and produce vendors (per 10,000 population)	NY	UT	ID	NY
Number of people incarcerated in jail or prison (per 100,000 population ages 18 and older)	DC	LA	AL	a

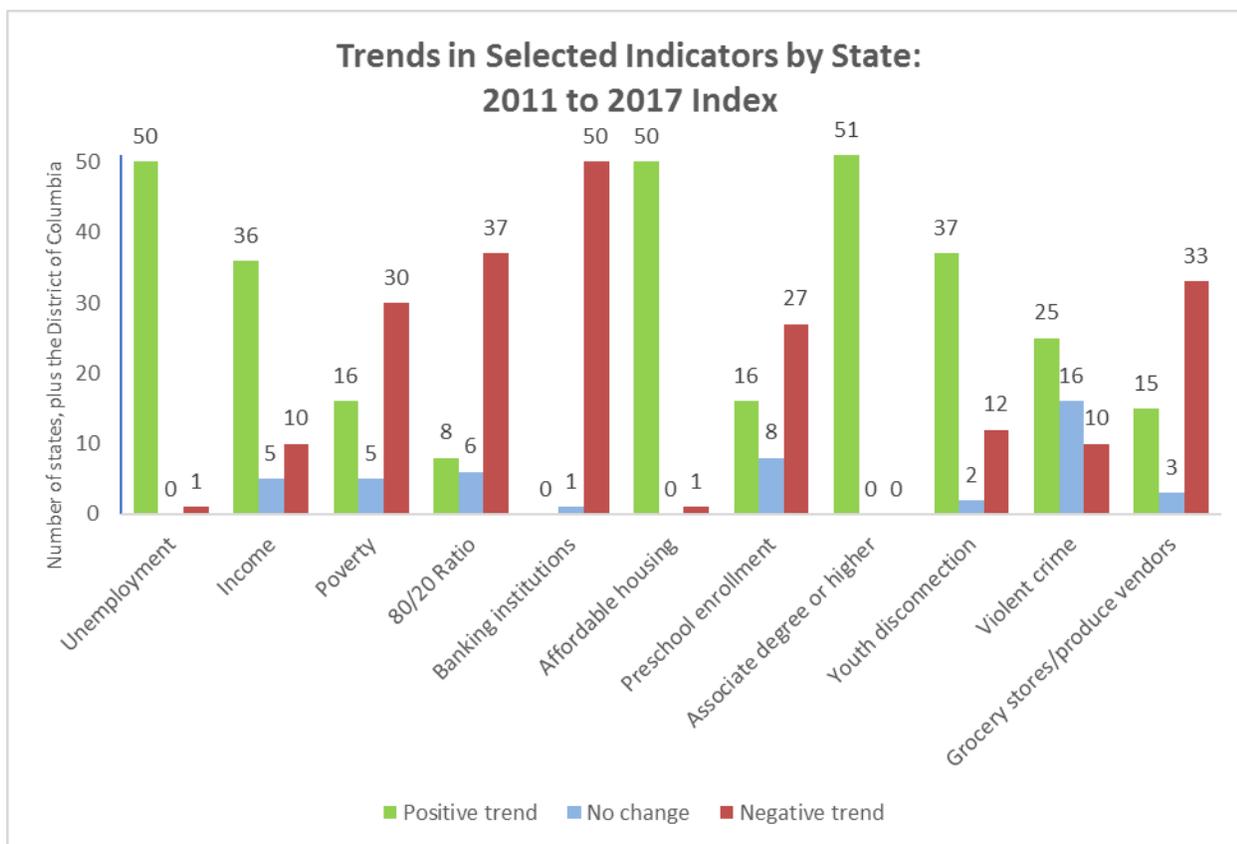
^a Due to updates to the Opportunity Index and its indicators, comparisons cannot be made from 2011–2017.

The next chart shows trends on selected indicators for states and the District of Columbia since the 2011 Opportunity Index, where substantial improvements have been made on several economic indicators. The unemployment rate improved in 49 states and the District of Columbia (only Alaska’s rate remained unchanged over this period, due in part to a steep drop in oil prices and related declines over this time in natural resource extraction industries). In the wake of the nation’s recovery from the housing finance crisis of the 2000s, housing affordability improved in every state except Louisiana. However, while median household incomes rose in most states, so too did the poverty rate—income inequality continues to rise.¹⁹ As measured by the income ratio of the wealthiest quintile (20 percent) of households to that of the poorest quintile, most states (37) have greater inequality in 2017 than in 2011. Finally, access to banking services has deteriorated in nearly every state and improved in none.

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

¹⁹ Sommeiller, E., Price, M., & Wazeter, E. (2016). *Income inequality in the U.S. by state, metropolitan area and county*. Economic Policy Institute. Retrieved from <http://www.epi.org/files/pdf/107100.pdf>.

The proportion of youth disconnected from employment and education declined in most states (37) and, for the first time in the Index’s history, dropped below five million youth nationally. The nation’s violent crime rate dropped by nearly half, but did rise in 10 states. According to our measure, access to healthy food decreased in nearly two-thirds of states (33) while improving in 15.



County Opportunity Grades and Changes Since 2016

Counties represent a much wider diversity of outcomes than states, and examining opportunity at a county level often gives a more accurate picture of the local circumstances experienced by residents. We calculated 2017 Opportunity Grades for 2,057 U.S. counties or county equivalents, accounting for 97 percent of the nation’s population.²⁰ In 2017, 15 counties received an Opportunity Grade of A and 32 received an A- (none received an A+). Eighteen counties (less than 1 percent) received an F.

²⁰ Because the 2017 Opportunity Index includes more indicators, more data points may be missing for each county. As a result, more counties have been excluded from the Index due to missing data than in previous years.

From 2016 to 2017, Opportunity Grades improved in 531 counties, worsened in 127 and stayed the same in 732.²¹

Just 54 counties (about 3 percent of the total) had declines 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 a significant majority had populations of fewer than 100,000 people. There were 383 counties (about one-fifth) that saw increases of at least 5 percent in their Opportunity Grades. Counties in southern states made up almost half of those with this increase, while counties in the West and Northeast each accounted for slightly less than one-fifth.

County-level changes for various dimensions show more mixed progress from 2016 to 2017 than at the state level. Most counties made progress in the Economy and Community dimensions. However, only 48.3 and 45.0 percent saw improvements in Education and Health, respectively, and the number of counties losing ground on the Education indicators (1,379) almost matched those making progress (1,446). Overall, more than half of all counties made progress on nine of the 17 county-level indicators:

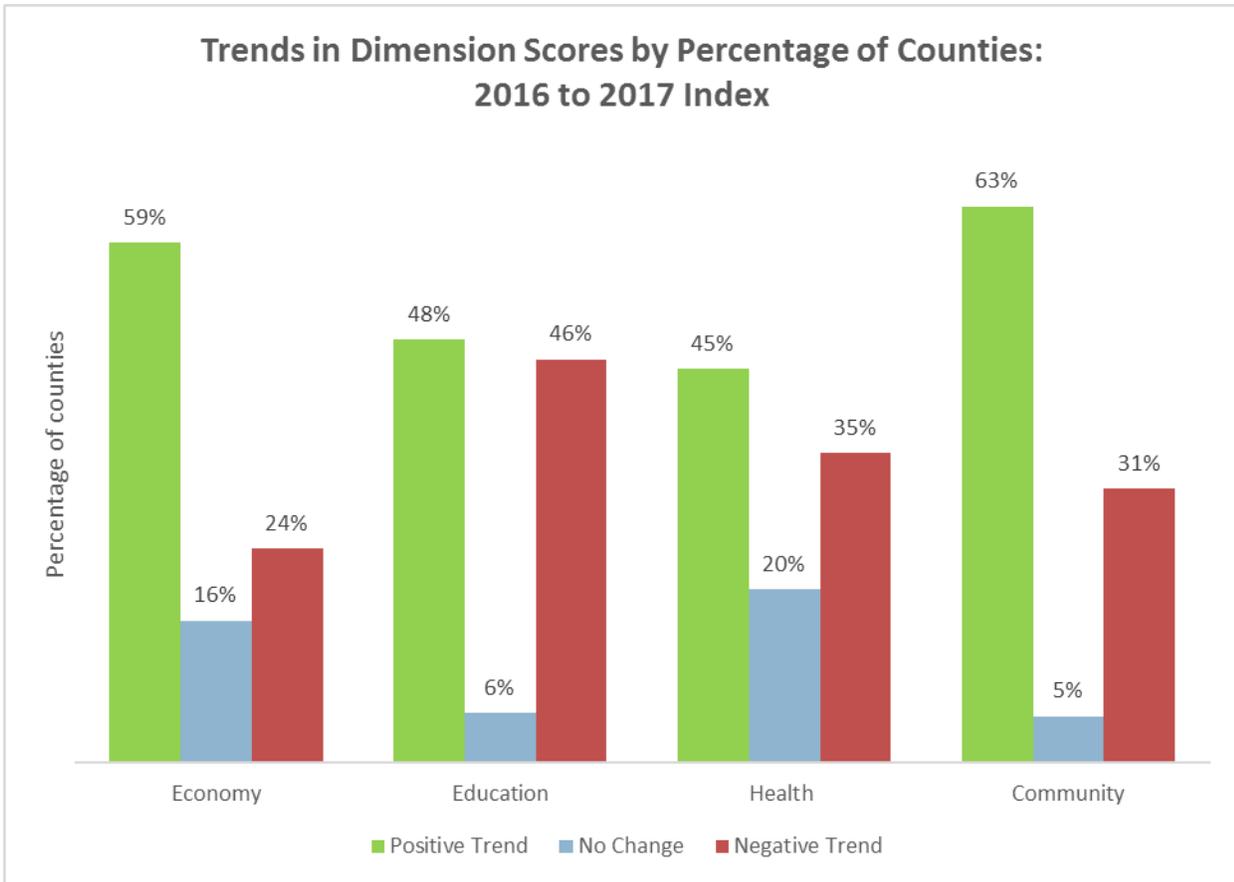
- Jobs
- Wages
- Affordable housing
- Broadband internet subscription
- High school graduation
- Postsecondary education
- Health insurance coverage
- Youth disconnection
- Access to healthy food

²¹ There are 1,390 counties with Opportunity Grades in both 2016 and 2017. The number of counties having both 2016 and 2017 scores in the individual indicators and dimensions ranges from 579 to 3,137.

Divergently, more counties lost ground on the following indicators:

- Income inequality
- Access to banking services
- Preschool enrollment
- Low birth weight
- Deaths related to drug/alcohol use or suicide
- Access to primary health care

County-Level Changes in Opportunity Index Scores by Dimension: 2016 to 2017			
	Positive Trend (percentage of counties)	No Change (percentage of counties)	Negative Trend (percentage of counties)
OPPORTUNITY INDEX	69.5%	16.2%	14.3%
Economy	59.4%	16.2%	24.4%
Education	48.3%	5.7%	46.0%
Health	45.0%	19.7%	35.3%
Community	63.5%	5.3%	31.2%



According to our methodology, Williamson County, Tennessee (population approximately 212,000 and part of the Nashville metropolitan area) is the county with the greatest opportunity. Williamson County has consistently scored high, receiving an A on the Opportunity Index every year since 2012. According to demographic data, 86 percent of the county’s residents are white. Unemployment and poverty are low (2.6 percent and 5.1 percent, respectively) and educational attainment is high; on the four dimensions of opportunity, Williamson County performed highest in Education.

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 and in New Mexico. Moreover, about one-third had 2017 grades of F after receiving a higher grade in 2016; all of these counties experienced drops in their Education dimension scores since 2016, and most had also seen decreases in the Community dimension.

Opportunity remains segregated by race and ethnicity, as half of the counties with the lowest levels of opportunity are those in which people of color are the

majority. In particular, there is extremely low opportunity in many American Indian and Alaska Native communities.²² No county that was more than 20 percent American Indian or Alaska Native received an Opportunity Grade higher than a C.

While well-being should not be determined by where one lives, this year's Opportunity Index demonstrates that the distribution of opportunity across the United States is highly unequal, according to multiple measures. The counties where opportunity is lowest face unique challenges. In Luna County, New Mexico (population 24,476), the unemployment rate is 17.3 percent—more than four times the national average. Only about one in three households in Apache County, Arizona (population 71,594) has a broadband internet subscription. In McDowell County, West Virginia (population 19,698), only about one in 12 adults has an associate degree or higher, and drug/alcohol-related poisoning or suicide kills residents at nearly four-and-a-half times the national rate.

The county with the most-improved Opportunity Grade from 2016 to 2017 was Jasper County, Texas (population 35,460). Although it certainly faces challenges, Jasper County moved from a D- in 2016 to a C- in 2017, driven by strong improvements in the Education and Health dimensions.

Roberts County, Texas (population 918) had the highest score in the Economy dimension, largely influenced by its very low poverty rate (1.5 percent, which is one-tenth the national average) and a relatively high rate of affordable housing. The independent city of Falls Church City, Virginia (population 13,964) had the highest score in the Education dimension. In Falls Church, more than four in five adults have an associate degree or higher, which is twice the national average. Health opportunity was highest in Lincoln County, South Dakota (population 52,826), which also received an A for overall opportunity; nearly 95 percent of people under the age of 65 in Lincoln County have health insurance. Finally, Boyd County, Nebraska (population 2,011) had the highest score in the Community dimension. Boyd County's rate of youth disconnection is exceptionally low, at 2.6 percent, and its rate of violent crime is just one-eighth the national rate.

These county trends are summarized in the table below. In cases where multiple counties have the same value, the number of counties is listed.

²² American Indian and Alaska Native is defined by the Census Bureau as someone "having origins in any of the original peoples of North and South America (including Central America) and who maintains tribal affiliation or community attachment."

Top, Bottom and Most-Improved Counties by Indicator				
INDICATOR	TOP COUNTY	BOTTOM COUNTY	MOST IMPROVED SINCE 2016	MOST IMPROVED SINCE 2011
OPPORTUNITY GRADE	13 counties received an A, including two each in NJ, VA and WI	18 counties received an F, including five each in LA and NM	Jasper County, TX	a
Economy	Roberts County, TX	Willacy County, TX	Baldwin County, GA	a
Unemployment rate (percentage of the population ages 16 and older who are unemployed and seeking work)	Three counties in CO	Nine counties, including four in AK and two in CA	Jefferson County, MS	Greene County, AL
Median household income (2010 dollars)	Eight counties, including five in VA	Sumter County, AL and McCreary County, KS	Hudspeth County, TX	Magoffin County, KY

INDICATOR	TOP COUNTY	BOTTOM COUNTY	MOST IMPROVED SINCE 2016	MOST IMPROVED SINCE 2011
Percentage of the population below the federal poverty level (the amount of pretax cash income considered adequate for an individual or family to meet basic needs)	Roberts County, TX and Borden County, TX	115 counties with poverty rates over 30 percent	Maverick County, TX	Duval County, TX
80/20 ratio (ratio of household income at the 80th percentile to that at the 20th percentile)	Skagway County, AK	25 counties where income at the 80th percentile is more than seven times income at the 20th percentile	Ziebach County, SD	Motley County, TX
Number of banking institutions (commercial banks, savings institutions and credit unions) per 10,000 residents	182 counties, including 47 in ND or SD, where there are more than 10.5 banks per 10,000 residents	San Jacinto County, TX	Chatham County, GA	Iron County, MO
Percentage of households spending less than 30 percent of their income on housing-related costs	Roberts County, TX and Sully County, SD	Bronx County, NY	Orange County, VA	Manassas Park City, VA
Percentage of households with subscriptions to broadband internet service	Douglas County, CO	Five counties in AR, AZ, MS, NC and NM	San Juan County, NM	^a

INDICATOR	TOP COUNTY	BOTTOM COUNTY	MOST IMPROVED SINCE 2016	MOST IMPROVED SINCE 2011
Education	Falls Church City, VA	East Carroll Parish, LA	Concho County, TX	Coffee County, GA
Percentage of 3- and 4-year-olds attending preschool	Five counties in CO, GA, MA, TX and VA	17 counties, including four in MO and four in TX	Des Moines County, IA	Hot Spring County, AR
On-time high school graduation rate (percentage of freshmen who graduate in four years)	27 counties concentrated in TX ²³	19 counties, including four in CA	Bienville Parish, LA	a
Percentage of adults 25 and older with an associate degree or higher	Arlington County, VA and Falls Church City, VA	Kusilvak Census Area, AK	Warren County, GA	Bacon County, GA
Health	Lincoln County, SD	Three counties, including two in AK	Nome Census Area, AK	a
Percentage of infants born weighing less than 5.5 pounds	Wright County, MN	13 counties across the South	Wilson County, TN	a
Percentage of the population under age 65 without health insurance coverage	McPherson County, NE	40 counties, including 15 in TX	Lincoln County, ID	a
Deaths attributed to alcohol or drug poisoning, or suicide (age-adjusted rate per 100,000 population)	Hidalgo County, TX and Lincoln County, SD	75 counties, including 22 in KY and 13 in WV	Bath County, KY	a

²³ Because Texas school districts did not report graduation rates on time to the Department of Education, on-time graduation rates in Texas come from state rather than federal sources.

INDICATOR	TOP COUNTY	BOTTOM COUNTY	MOST IMPROVED SINCE 2016	MOST IMPROVED SINCE 2011
Community	Boyd County, NE	Three counties in AK, HI and MS	Northwest Arctic Borough, AK and Yukon-Koyukuk Census Area, AK	^a
Percentage of youth ages 16–24 not in school and not working	16 counties, including six in NE	211 counties, including 31 in GA, where disconnection is over 30 percent	Wilkinson County, GA	Jefferson County, WI
Incidents of violent crime reported to law enforcement agencies (per 100,000 population)	21 counties, including six in NE and five across ND/SD	Calhoun County, GA and St. Louis City, MO	Decatur County, KS	Menominee County, WI
Number of primary care physicians (per 100,000 population)	21 counties where there are more than 175 primary care physicians per 100,000 residents	207 counties without primary care physicians	Hodgeman County, KS	^a
Number of grocery stores and produce vendors (per 10,000 population)	162 counties with more than 6.25 outlets per 10,000 residents	Wagoner County, OK	Kings County, NY	Brookings County, SD

^a Due to updates to the Opportunity Index and its indicators, comparisons cannot be made from 2011–2017.

Correlations Between Indicators

Which individual components of the Index bear the closest relationship to overall opportunity? *For counties*, the indicator most closely associated with the overall score is the percentage of the population with an associate degree or higher (the percentage of disconnected youth and the median household income closely follow). *For states*, youth disconnection is most closely associated with opportunity, followed by the incarceration rate. For both states and counties, the percentage of households spending less than 30 percent of their income on housing is *negatively* associated with overall opportunity: that is, overall opportunity is higher where housing expenditures are greater. This may reflect a highly competitive housing market in areas that are especially desirable, perhaps because they score high on many of our indicators of opportunity.

How do the various indicators that comprise the overall Opportunity Index relate to one another? There is a strong positive correlation, at both state and county levels, between the rate of youth disconnection and the poverty rate; areas with higher poverty also tend to have high rates of youth who are not in school or working. Other research commissioned by Opportunity Nation finds that disconnected youth are nearly twice as likely to live in poverty, compared with youth who are employed or in school.²⁴ Another notable finding, also at both state and county levels, is that youth disconnection is negatively correlated with the percentage of adults with an associate degree or higher. In other words, 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, wherein the education and employment struggles of young people often mirror those of their parents and neighbors.²⁵

²⁴ Lewis, K. & Burd-Sharps, S. (2015). *Zeroing in on place and race: Youth disconnection in America's cities*, 2015. New York, NY: Measure of America of the Social Science Research Council. Retrieved from <http://ssrc-static.s3.amazonaws.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/MOA-Zeroing-In-Final.pdf>.

²⁵ Ibid; Hair, E. C., Moore, K. A., Ling, T. J., McPhee-Baker, C., & Brown, B. V. (2009). *Youth who are "disconnected" and those who then reconnect: Assessing the influence of family, programs, peers, and communities*. Washington, DC: Child Trends. Retrieved from <https://childtrends-ciw49tixgw5lbab.stackpathdns.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/04/8.pdf>.

Not surprisingly, poverty rate and median household income are also closely related: poverty, by definition, is a lack of adequate income. There is also a strong relationship between the poverty rate and broadband internet access. Places where poverty is high often have relatively low access to broadband internet service, at both the state and county levels.

Additional results from the correlation analyses can be found in the *Technical Supplement*.

Conclusion

Despite some necessary adjustments in composition over the years, the purpose of the Opportunity Index remains the same: 1) to shine a light on disparities in opportunity among communities across our nation; and 2) to examine opportunity in a more comprehensive, holistic way that goes beyond employment, new business formation and gross domestic product. To that end, the dimensions and indicators of the Index reflect the evidence of what constitutes thriving communities: an economy that works for all; learning opportunities that build the skills and knowledge essential for success, beginning in early childhood; 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.

The 2017 data tell us that improvements in the Economy dimension have been widespread nationwide, while those in Education, Health and Community are more limited. However, the Economy indicators also show widening disparities in economic well-being. Progress in this dimension is suggested by the declining rate of disconnected youth, lower rates of violent crime and improvements in access to broadband internet services, among other indicators (although geographic disparities persist for each of these). At the same time, we see falling rates of preschool enrollment, decreasing access to banking institutions and healthy food outlets, falling rates of voter registration and rising rates of “deaths of despair.”

We caution against any cause-and-effect inferences from these data, which were not collected as part of a research design that could address questions of causality. However, these data do serve to measure progress, explore disparities, highlight successes and detect priorities for improvement.

The Opportunity Index is not a perfect measure and is limited by what data are available; thus, it is grounded in evidence of what *is* measured, rather than what *might be* measured. To that extent, it reflects facts that are less open to dispute, putting the emphasis on discussions of *why* and *how*.

The Index will be successful if it prompts detailed conversations about opportunity by stakeholders at all levels—from policymakers to community residents. We hope that users of the Index will look to increase opportunity in communities across the nation, perhaps by asking questions like the following:

- “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 similar to us?”

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For more information, visit <http://www.opportunityindex.org> and <http://www.childtrends.org>.