



Action for Healthy Communities

# San Luis Obispo County Data Report

August 1999

## About the San Luis Obispo Community Health Foundation

The San Luis Obispo Community Health Foundation, an independent, nonprofit corporation, is committed to improving the overall health status of San Luis Obispo County residents by supporting quality health care, health education and healthy communities. The Foundation participates in cooperative projects, supports a variety of educational programs and promotes volunteerism. The volunteer Board of Directors represents an array of health, business and community leaders.

For more information about Action for Healthy Communities contact:

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Additional copies of the Data Report are available for \$15.00 by contacting the San Luis Obispo Community Health Foundation.

## About the Researcher

Applied Survey Research (ASR) is a nonprofit, social research firm dedicated to helping people build better communities by creating meaningful data, facilitating information-based planning and developing custom strategies. The firm was founded on the principle that community sustainability and program success are closely tied to assessment of needs, evaluation of goals and development of appropriate responses. The Action for Healthy Communities project is a prime example of a comprehensive evaluation of the needs of the community.

Its goal is to stimulate dialogue about growing trends and to devise informed strategies for shaping future policies and effective actions.

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## Project

### Overview

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What is the quality of life like in San Luis Obispo County? Do residents feel safe? Are there enough employment opportunities? Do people feel they have access to good schools and services? Is our community healthy?

These are just a few of the questions that a consortium of public and private health, education, human service and civic organizations set out to answer when they began the Action for Healthy Communities project. As defined, the goals are:

Raise public awareness of human needs, changing trends, emerging issues and community problems;

Provide accurate, credible and valid information on an ongoing basis to human services planners and those providing funds;

Provide information for individual institutions to guide decision-making about creation, management, and redesign of programs;

Establish community goals using measurable quality of life Indicators that will lead to positive, healthy development for individuals, families and communities;

Develop and support collaborative action plans to achieve the community goals.

With these goals in mind, the collaborative intends to provide the most relevant information about the needs of residents to point the community toward specific initiatives or changes that will have a real effect on the quality of life for all.

### Introduction

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Since February, 1998, the San Luis Obispo Community Health Foundation has convened a broad collaborative of public and private organizations to build healthy communities. The Action for Healthy Communities Collaborative believes that by sharing resources and working together, more comprehensive useful planning tools can be developed. It is also felt that a more comprehensive approach to assessing quality of life Indicators will enable organizations that allocate resources to more effectively address critical community concerns. In December, 1998, the Collaborative selected Applied Survey Research, a non-profit social research firm, to conduct the assessment for San Luis Obispo County. The Data Report is considered only the first step in this comprehensive planning process. The next phase involves identifying goals and action plans.

The Collaborative embraces a broad definition of health and an action-oriented philosophy. An expected outcome of the project is ongoing cooperation in planning and service delivery to more effectively address key issues identified in this Data Report.

The Collaborative believes that a healthy community is determined by the physical, emotional, psychological, socioeconomic and spiritual well-being of its residents.

The Collaborative celebrates the collaborative spirit of all individuals and organizations involved with this ongoing effort. We especially thank our financial sponsors for their support, encouragement and faith in the process.



## Mission and Guiding Principles

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The mission of the Collaborative is to “develop a comprehensive planning approach to identify and address community needs through collaborative efforts with community partners to implement effective programs that improve community health and well being.”

The Collaborative has adopted these guiding principles:

- Long-term approach to planning and program development
- Creation of a collaborative planning mechanism
- Commitment to a community driven process with consumer empowerment
- Assessment should result in identification of priorities and action plans

## Desired Outcomes

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The Collaborative has developed the following desired outcomes for this community assessment:

To study the community health and services that exist in order to:

1. Provide accurate, credible and valid information on an ongoing basis to health and policy makers, human service planners and funders concerning the creation, management and support of programs.
2. Encourage collaboration and partnerships to facilitate improved service delivery which is

coordinated, holistic and consolidated within the community.

3. Set Community Health Indicators which can serve as the basis for the formulation of Community Goals that will lead to a community-wide vision and plan for improving community health.
4. Create a baseline assessment which identifies gaps and resources so that strategies for responding to the gaps can be developed.

## Acknowledgements

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### Steering Committee

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### Collaborative Partners

Adult Services Policy Council  
Area Agency on Aging  
California Polytechnic State University  
Central Coast Health Partners  
Children’s Services Network  
City of San Luis Obispo Human Relations  
Commission  
Community Health Centers of the Central Coast  
County of San Luis Obispo:  
City/County Library  
Department of Social Services  
Health Agency  
Office of Education  
Planning Department  
Probation Department  
Cuesta College  
Economic Opportunity Commission  
Economic Vitality Corporation

Environmental Center of San Luis Obispo  
Foundation for Community Design  
Morro Bay Community Collaborative  
Paso Robles Health Collaborative  
SLOCO Access  
San Luis Obispo Chamber of Commerce  
San Luis Obispo Childcare Planning Council  
San Luis Obispo Community Health  
Foundation  
San Luis Obispo County Health Commission  
San Luis Obispo County HIV CARE  
Consortium  
San Luis Obispo County Medical Society  
San Luis Obispo County YMCA  
Taylor Consulting Group  
Tenet Health Systems  
United Way of San Luis Obispo County

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### Major Financial Sponsors

Central Coast Health Partners  
City of San Luis Obispo  
Community Health Centers of the Central Coast  
County of San Luis Obispo:  
Health Agency  
Department of Social Services  
Planning Department

Probation Department  
Economic Opportunity Commission  
San Luis Obispo Community Health Foundation  
The California Endowment  
Tenet Health Systems  
United Way of San Luis Obispo County

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Supporting Financial Sponsors

Area Agency on Aging

Cuesta College

Foundation for Community Design

PG&E

San Luis Obispo County YMCA

San Luis Obispo Friends of the Library

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Desktop publisher, Sherry Sheffield Dougherty of Sheffield Graphics.

Cover Design, Stephen Lee Hughes of ShowTel

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**A special thank you to all of the San Luis Obispo County  
volunteers and businesses who assisted in surveying their  
community**

## The Community Assessment Process

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This community assessment model provides a comprehensive view of the quality of life in San Luis Obispo County. It is based on credible primary (public opinion) data and secondary (empirical trend) data that are gathered for a series of Indicators in five areas —the economy, education, health, public safety, natural and social environment. These components are described below.

### Quality of Life Indicators

Indicators are a mechanism for getting feedback about a system that might otherwise be too large and complex to understand. As an example, we might ask ourselves, “Do people have adequate access to health care? Increasing use of the emergency room for non-emergency purposes, could be an Indicator that they do not.

For the purposes of this project a special group known as the Action for Healthy Communities Collaborative developed over sixty-five quality of life Indicators. This committee was represented by a rich mixture of professionals, advocates, and community volunteers, all of whom were experts in the respective areas under study.

The Collaborative used special criteria to develop the quality of life Indicators used for this project. This criteria stipulated that Indicators need to be understandable to the general user and the public; to be responsive quickly and noticeably to real changes and to have relevance for policy decisions and be available on a yearly basis.

## Methodology

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### Primary Data

Data is the raw material for Indicators. Measures of community progress depend upon consistent, reliable, and scientifically accurate sources of data. One of the types of data gathered for this project is primary (public opinion) data. There is much to be learned from people’s perception of their community, especially when those perceptions contradict the empirical evidence about its conditions. For instance, in the area of public safety, crime rates may be going down while perceptions of danger are going up.

For this reason, in March 1999, Applied Survey Research conducted a random telephone survey of over 500 county residents in both English and Spanish. The intent of the survey is to be fairly representative of the overall demographics of the county while ensuring representation of special population groups. Respondents are asked open-ended questions that elicit opinion as well as questions which present options to choose.

There is a 95% confidence that the opinions of survey respondents reflect those of the general population within approximately +/- 4.3%. It is important to note that all surveys have some inherent biases. This study’s bias probably appears in the area of respondent self-selection and the capturing of opinion of those willing to contribute 30 minutes of their time to the community.

In addition to the telephone surveying, trained community volunteers and Applied Survey Research staff went out in the community and distributed surveys to residents and selected groups and organizations throughout the county. Self-administered face-to-face (community) surveys were conducted, which averaged about five minutes in length. Face-to-face surveys enabled the project to reach those groups that may be under represented in the telephone survey including those who do not have a telephone, live in rural areas, have disabilities, lower incomes and difficulty with their non-native language. Over 3,600 face-to-face surveys were collected.

## Secondary Data

Another type of data used for this project is secondary or empirical data. Secondary data is collected from a variety of sources including but not limited to: the U.S. Census, federal, state, and local government agencies, academic institutions, economic development groups, health care institutions, libraries, schools, local police, sheriff and fire departments and computerized sources through on-line databases and the internet.

## Data Report

Each year, the primary and secondary data gathered for each quality of life Indicator will be compiled into a Data Report. The intent of this report is to provide an in-depth look at all aspects of life in San Luis Obispo County. Graphs have been created for some primary data Indicators and are formatted in a standard fashion. Ethnicity, income, senior and geographic breakdowns have been incorporated in many of the primary data Indicators as well. Please refer to the legend for explanations of frequently used symbols and notations throughout the report.

## Suggested Uses of this Report

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Because the scope of this project is so broad it may take a while to become familiar with the data and format of the report. The tips shown below are offered to make the report more useful to the user.

### For a Broad Overview of Quality of Life Issues in San Luis Obispo County

It is best to review the first few pages of each of the five sections of the report—Economy, Education, Health, Public Safety, Natural and Social Environment. Each of these sections begins with a summary of the research area.

### For Information about Trends that may Impact your Business or Organization

Within each of the five research areas there is a wealth of information on a wide range of issues.

## Legend

**North County** Adelaide, Atascadero, California Valley, Camp Roberts, Cholame, Creston, Lake Nacimiento, Paso Robles, Pozo, San Miguel, Santa Margarita, Shandon, Templeton, Welsona, Whitley Gardens

**North Coast** Baywood, Cambria, Cayucos, Harmony, Los Osos, Morro Bay, San Simeon

**San Luis Obispo** City of San Luis Obispo, Avila Beach

**South County** Arroyo Grande, Grover Beach, Halcyon, Huasna, Nipomo, Oceano, Pismo Beach, Shell Beach, Other

**% Change** Describes change in value between the current and previous year data

 Denotes a telephone survey question

 Denotes a face-to-face (community) survey question

One of the most useful features of this report is the display of trend data, where it is available. A tremendous amount of detailed information can be found that may help identify new customers or emerging needs, or explain changes in the local environment that will have future impacts. Whenever possible, demographic breakdowns of data, most commonly by ethnicity, income, seniors or geographic areas have been included.

### For Data to Support or Refine your Services and Products

This information is intended to be used in your own reports and proposals, and as a baseline for performance systems. There are trained analysts who can come and speak with groups about the information in this report.

