Geography of Child Poverty in California

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A quarter of young children in California live in poverty

- Over 750,000 children under age 5 live in families struggling to meet basic needs
- The typical poor family with young children:
  - has $26,000 in total resources per year (including benefits from safety net programs)
  - needs $7,800 more per year to be above the poverty line
- Adverse circumstances in children’s early years can have long-term physical, social, and behavioral consequences
This research

- Focuses on young children age 0–5 in California
- Describes how the circumstances of poverty—and driving factors—vary across the state
- Examines poverty in detail at the subcounty level
- Features an online interactive where users can explore the rich data
- Relies on the California Poverty Measure for 2011–2014, a joint effort of PPIC and the Stanford Center on Poverty and Inequality
Poverty rates vary across the state’s major regions…

CPM poverty rate among young children

- Statewide: 25%
- Los Angeles County: 30%
- Central Coast: 30%
- Orange County: 27%
- San Diego County: 25%
- Central Valley and Sierra: 24%
- Inland Empire: 23%
- Northern region: 22%
- Bay Area: 20%
- Sacramento region: 20%
... but local variation in poverty is even more dramatic
How do poor families make ends meet?

- We consider these major factors:
  - Income from work
  - Coping with California’s high cost of living
  - Access to social safety net benefits
Most poor families with young children have at least one working adult
High cost of living is a burden for working families with young children

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<th>Region</th>
<th>Housing burdened families with young children (%)</th>
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<tr>
<td>Central Valley and Sierra</td>
<td>20%</td>
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CPM poverty threshold (family of four)

- $24,000
- $26,000
- $28,000
- $30,000
- $32,000
- $34,000
How do poor families cope with a high cost of living?

- 55% of poor young children live in overcrowded housing—twice the rate of non-poor young children
  - Rates of overcrowding are higher in costly regions
- Some working parents cope by making extremely long commutes
  - But rates are similar among poor and non-poor families
- Major social safety net programs boost family resources
  - But they do not account for cost of living
Safety net programs reduce child poverty substantially

Note: Safety net programs include CalWORKs, CalFresh, EITC, CTC, school meals, WIC, SSI, General Assistance, federal housing subsidies
Although eligibility is a constraint, there are many opportunities to increase safety net access
How can we lower child poverty in California?

- Increasing earnings is critical, especially in inland California.
- Higher earnings do not offset housing costs in coastal regions.
- Safety net programs are an important boost for nearly all poor families with young children:
  - Efforts to increase enrollment among the eligible population are key.
  - Identifying gaps related to cost of living may also be warranted.
- Varying strategies are needed across California’s diverse regions and local areas.
Notes on the use of these slides

These slides were created to accompany a presentation. They do not include full documentation of sources, data samples, methods, and interpretations. To avoid misinterpretations, please contact:

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Thank you for your interest in this work.