

# ACTION for Healthy Communities 2001 Indicators Report

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## Introduction

ACTION for Healthy Communities is pleased to present this Indicators Report tracking the quality of life in San Luis Obispo County as expressed by community residents and measured by important indicators. The report is divided into seven sections corresponding to the adopted goals of ACTION for Healthy Communities. Each section contains indicators that measure progress made over time toward achieving those goals.

ACTION believes that a healthy community is determined by the physical, emotional, psychological, socioeconomic and spiritual well being of its residents. In 1998, the Foundation for Community Design (FCD) published its *Compact: A Guide for Future Planning*, the first document containing San Luis Obispo County quality of life indicators. In 1999, ACTION for Healthy Communities, focusing more specifically on the health and human service needs of our county, published its *Data Report*. This report identified a spectrum of community needs following extensive surveying of some 4,100 county residents via random telephone sampling and face-to-face interviews. In 2000, the FCD carried its Visions into *Compact 2000*, updating them with new statistical data.

ACTION has blended the FCD's six Visions into the seven key goals noted in this report, and has updated the measures with new data, while adding new key indicators.

A comprehensive set of data tables has been compiled into the *2001 Comprehensive Report*, copies of which are available for a fee of \$25 through the San Luis Obispo County Community Foundation, P.O. Box 1580, San Luis Obispo, CA 93406 (805) 543-2323 ■ Fax (805) 543-2346

The ACTION 1999 Data Report is available on line at [www.unitedwayslo.org](http://www.unitedwayslo.org).

Since February 1998 when the ACTION for Healthy Communities collaborative was first convened by the San Luis Obispo Community Health Foundation, it has been the belief that sharing resources and working together can develop more comprehensive and useful planning tools. 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.

Based on its initial work, and the Foundation for Community Design's six Visions, ACTION has established the following seven goals upon which to focus our community-building efforts. Various community initiatives are underway, and others may be considered, to address these goals.

### **ACTION FOR HEALTHY COMMUNITIES: COMMUNITY GOALS**

<b>Area</b>	<b>Community Goal</b>
Basic Needs	All persons have the basic necessities of life, including food and decent, safe and affordable housing.
Social Environment	All persons have the opportunity to engage in the civic, recreational, and cultural aspects of their communities.
Education	All students enter school ready to learn, and graduate from high school prepared for the workforce or higher education, and have an interest in life-long learning.
Natural Environment	We maintain and enhance the health and beauty of the natural environment by living within our natural resources and human abilities, and we plan and manage development.
Health	All persons practice healthy behaviors, and have access to and use preventive and primary healthcare services that enable them to maximize their physical and mental well being.
Public Safety	All persons feel and are safe in their homes, schools, workplace, and communities.
Economic	All persons have employment opportunities and support services that enable them to achieve their highest individual level of self-sufficiency.

## The Data

The 1999 and 2001 telephone surveys were conducted with random-digit-dialing samples drawn proportionately from all active phone exchanges in the County. A total of 809 people were interviewed in 2001, yielding 95 percent confidence that the opinions of survey respondents reflect those of the general population within approximately +/- 3.5 percent. When wording and methodology were identical, statistical comparisons were made between the 1999 and 2001 survey results (544 people were interviewed in 1999).

Differences in results are statistically significant if there is 90 percent confidence that the population proportions are different. It is important to note that all surveys have some inherent biases. People often overestimate behavior that is considered politically

correct (such as frequency of volunteering). However, if the same questions are asked from year to year, relative changes in those behaviors can be accurately tracked.

Some of the indicators include only descriptions of the indicators without data. In some cases, data will not be available until a later date; in others, resources to collect, compile, and present the data were not available at this time. If known, information on when and where the data will be available is included in the narrative.

ACTION for Healthy Communities believes that all the indicators presented are valid and important. ACTION recommends, encourages, and supports local agencies to continue data collection efforts for all these indicators in future publications.

## ***Acknowledgements***

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### **Steering Committee**

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### **Collaborative Partners**

Adult Services Policy Council	Health Agency	San Luis Obispo Childcare Planning Council
Area Agency on Aging	Planning Department	San Luis Obispo Community Health Foundation
Arroyo Grande Community Hospital / French Hospital Medical Center	Probation Department	San Luis Obispo County Community Foundation
Atascadero Community Link	Economic Opportunity Commission	San Luis Obispo County Health Commission
Atascadero Youth Task Force	Economic Vitality Corporation	San Luis Obispo County HIV CARE Consortium
Children's Services Network	Environmental Center of San Luis Obispo	San Luis Obispo County Medical Society
City of San Luis Obispo Human Relations Commission	Foundation for Community Design	San Luis Obispo County Office of Education
Community Health Centers of the Central Coast	Paso Robles Health Collaborative	San Luis Obispo County YMCA
County of San Luis Obispo: Library	People's Self Help Housing Corporation	Taylor Consulting Group
Department of Social Services	SLOCO Access	Tenet Health Systems
	San Luis Obispo Chamber of Commerce	United Way of San Luis Obispo County

### **Major Financial Sponsors**

Arroyo Grande Community Hospital / French Hospital Medical Center	Department of Social Services	San Luis Obispo County Community Foundation
Children & Families Commission of SLO County	Planning Department	Sierra Vista Regional Medical Center
Community Health Centers of the Central Coast	Probation Department	The California Endowment
County of San Luis Obispo: Health Agency	Economic Opportunity Commission of SLO County	United Way of San Luis Obispo County
	San Luis Obispo Community Health Foundation	

### **Supporting Financial Sponsors**

Area Agency on Aging	Foundation for Community Design	San Luis Obispo County Office of Education
	Mission Community Bank	San Luis Obispo County YMCA

# Meeting Basic Needs

ACTION Goal: All persons have the basic necessities of life, including food and decent, safe and affordable housing.

## INDICATOR A1

### Lacking Basic Needs

This indicator reports on the percentage of county residents who report that their basic needs are not met on a monthly basis. Basic needs have been defined in the telephone survey as food, clothing, childcare, housing and health care.

#### Why Is It Important?

Ensuring that residents have access to basic needs is a fundamental responsibility of a compassionate community. Tracking trends in this area helps us determine how well we're fulfilling this responsibility.

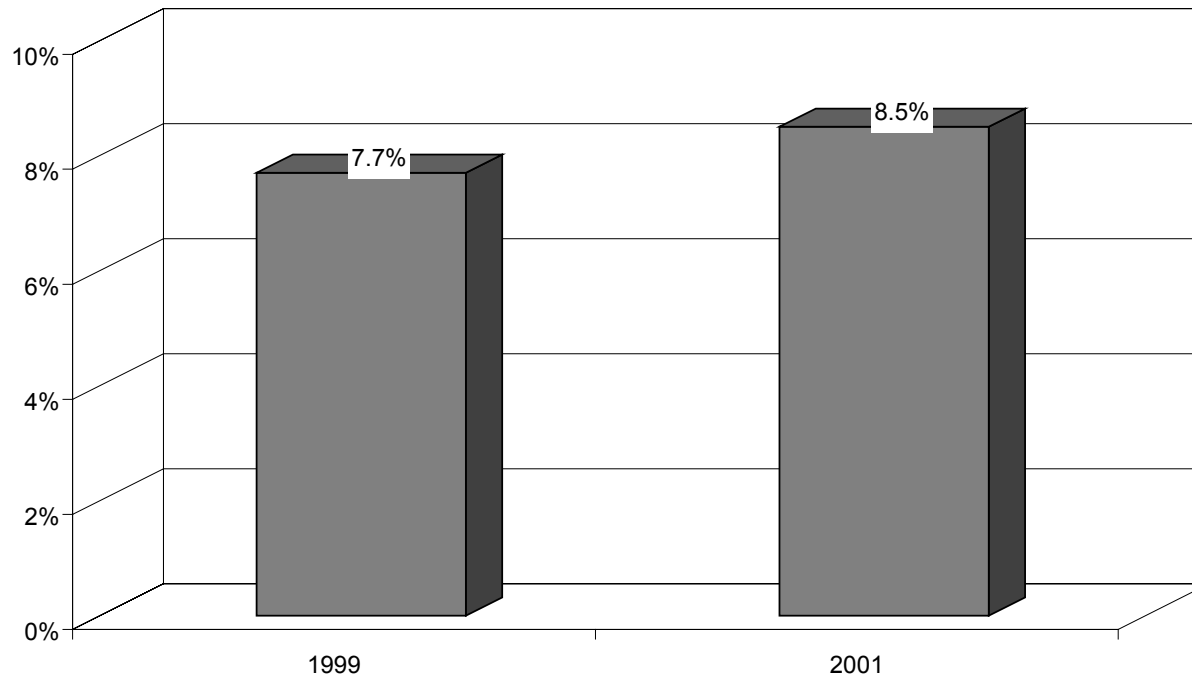
#### How Are We Doing?

The 1999 and 2001 ACTION telephone surveys contained the following question, which was posed to randomly selected adults in the county:

"In any given month, do you have to go without basic needs such as food, clothing, childcare, housing or health care?"

The 2001 survey results showed that 8.5 percent of the respondents had to go without basic needs in a given month. This figure is up slightly from the 1999 survey results of 7.7 percent. In both surveys, respondents identified health care (41%), food (24%) and clothing (23%) as the three items they were most often go without. Please note that the difference between 7.7 percent and 8.5 percent is not statistically significant, meaning it could be the result of chance.

### Lacking Basic Needs



Source: ACTION for Healthy Communities telephone surveys, 1999 & 2001

INDICATOR A2

## Homeless Shelter Overcapacity

This indicator measures the number of people turned away from the homeless shelter when demand exceeds the number of available beds. In the future, ACTION would like to monitor the total number of people receiving shelter plus overcapacity requests.

### Why Is It Important?

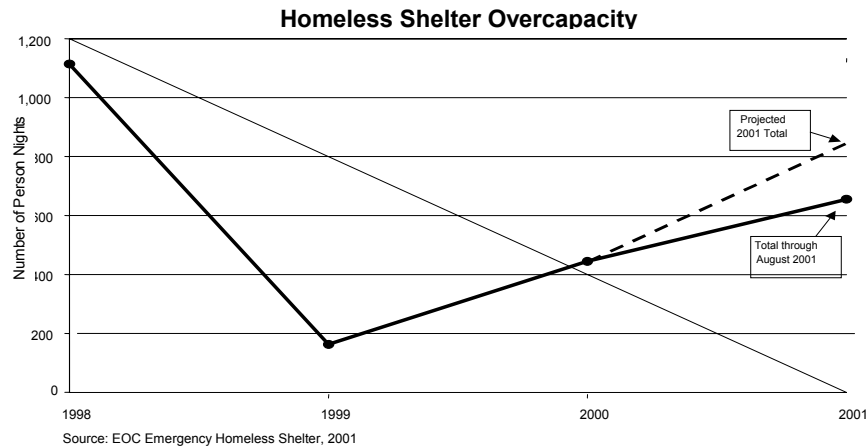
Without the stability of a home, people have increased difficulty in gaining and retaining employment, transportation, health care, child care, and many other services. The National Alliance to End Homelessness indicates that alleviating homelessness requires three things: affordable housing, sufficient employment income, and the availability of services to help address personal problems that are often associated with homelessness, including mental illness, physical illness, domestic violence, and substance abuse.

### How Are We Doing?

There are no good data available on the total number of homeless people in San Luis Obispo County. The EOC Emergency Homeless Shelter, located in the City of San Luis Obispo, has a capacity of 49 beds per night, plus overflow capacity of 15-35 beds provided in collaboration with the Interfaith Coalition for the Homeless (ICH), bringing the total annual shelter capacity in San Luis Obispo to 25,000 shelter nights. The shelter capacity increased in 1999 when the EOC-ICH overflow program expanded its services from 7 to 12 months.

Though this shelter serves clients from throughout the county, most homeless persons from outlying areas, especially North County, are unable or reluctant to travel to the San Luis Obispo shelter.

The number of shelter nights sought varies dramatically depending on the weather. Overcapacity more than doubled from 1999 to 2000, and is on pace to double again this year. This reflects the increasing length of time that homeless people utilize the shelter, and possibly an increase in the number of homeless people in the area.



INDICATOR A3

## Food Bank Services

This indicator tracks the number of service incidents provided by food banks and shelters affiliated with the Food Bank Coalition of San Luis Obispo County. This measure is distinct from the number of people served, as many people receive multiple meals/groceries from food banks and shelters.

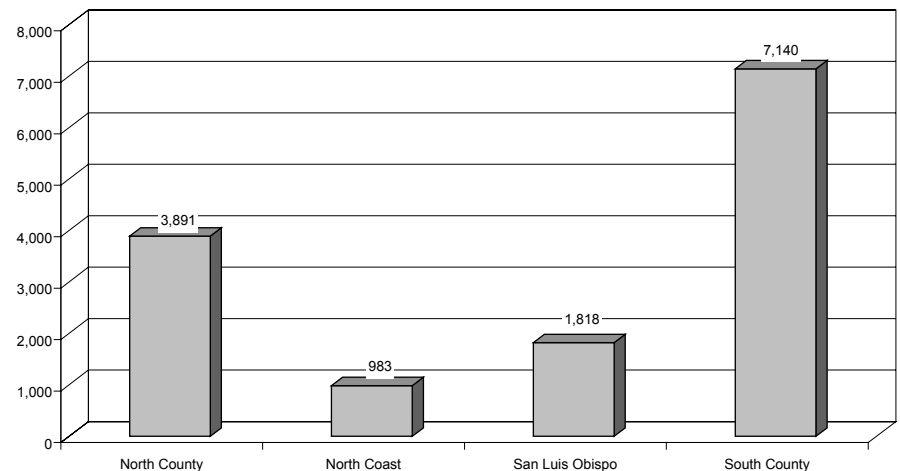
### Why Is It Important?

Food is a basic need. Good nutrition enhances a person's health and well being. It prevents some chronic diseases and minimizes the impact of others. When financial resources are scarce, some people opt to meet other needs and forego nutrition, which can lead to numerous problems.

### How Are We Doing?

Most recent available data are from 1998, when an average of 13,832 meals was served each month. Without data from multiple years, trends cannot be identified. By area, more meals were served in South County than in other areas. While South County contains approximately 23 percent of the County population, it served more than half of the meals. The proportion of meals served in North County was comparable to its population proportion; in the City of San Luis Obispo and on the North Coast, the proportion of meals served was less than half that of the population proportion.

Average Number of Meals Served per Month (1998)



Source: Food Bank Coalition of San Luis Obispo County, 1999

Note: Includes Pantry and United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) distribution.

**INDICATOR A4**

## Affordable Housing Units

This indicator would track the number of homes in the county set aside for people with lower incomes.

**Why Is It Important?**

Rising housing costs affect most residents of the county. That widespread impact is best measured by the Housing Opportunity Index (Indicator G2 in Economy section). However, those who feel the impact of housing costs most acutely are those families and individuals with lower incomes. At the extreme, when residents can no longer afford any available housing they may become homeless.

Housing can be affordable to lower-income people either because the private housing market provides units they can afford, or because some type of government or non-profit program provides units that cost less than the going market rates. Of course, if the private housing market were providing adequate numbers of low cost units, there would be no need for public housing subsidies. It appears unlikely the private market will supply those homes any time soon. Thus, the need for publicly subsidized housing.

**How Are We Doing?**

The county is planning to track the number of housing units in the county that are subsidized by any government program. The county plans to track such numbers for families of three different income levels that are used in various programs: Very Low (50% of county median income, which is currently \$25,100 for a family of four), Lower (80%/\$40,150), and Moderate (120%/\$60,250). The most widely used housing subsidy program is Section 8, which requires participants to have incomes below the Very Low level. ACTION for Healthy Communities supports the county's plans to begin tracking the number of affordable units as an indicator of how much we, as a community, are doing to help people with lower incomes keep roofs over their heads.

**INDICATOR A5**

## School Meals Program

This indicator notes the proportion of local public school students enrolled in the Free or Reduced Price Meal Program, administered by the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

**Why Is It Important?**

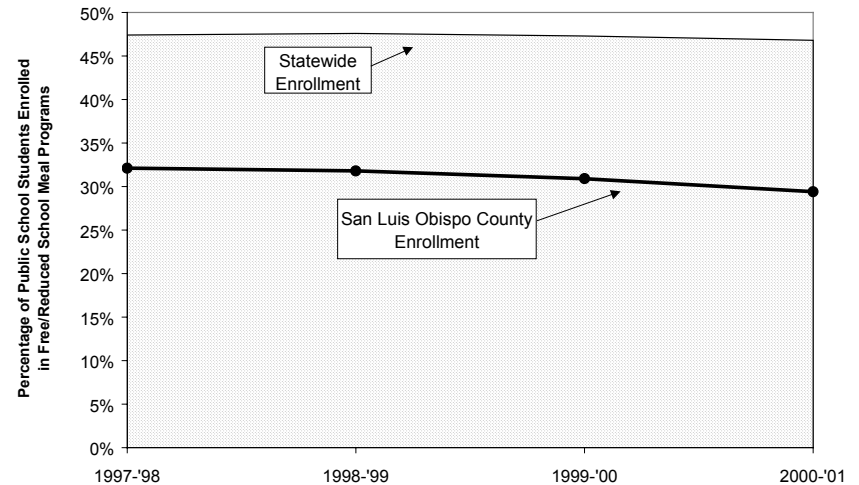
Children enrolled in the school meals program come from low-income families who are at most risk of hunger and food insecurity. According to the state Department of Education, the program offers a convenient method of providing nutritionally balanced meals at a low price for parents struggling to make ends meet. For schools, the program enhances children's learning abilities by contributing to their physical and mental well being. Studies have shown that children whose nutritional needs are met have fewer attendance and discipline problems and are more attentive in class.

**How Are We Doing?**

Meal program enrollment is by application and is based on the income of the child's parent or guardian being less than 185 percent of the poverty level. Enrollment means the student's family has met eligibility criteria and is "signed up" to participate. Because 97 percent of eligible families enroll (at least in 2000-2001), enrollment is a proxy for eligibility (for which historical data is unavailable).

In 2000-2001, 29.4 percent of public school children in San Luis Obispo County were enrolled in the program (30.2 percent were eligible). This is far below the state average. Countywide enrollment has dropped slightly each of the last three years, while the statewide rate is essentially stable. This suggests that the proportion of low-income families with school-aged children is declining.

**School Meal Program Enrollment**



SOURCE: California Basis Educational Data System (CBEDS), 2001

