

# Public Safety Issues

ACTION Goal: All persons feel and are safe in their homes, schools, workplace, and communities.

## INDICATOR F1

### Violent and Property Crimes

This indicator measures the number of violent and property crimes reported in San Luis Obispo County.

#### Why Is It Important?

Crime is a reflection of the basic social and economic health of a community. Crime and the perception of crime are directly linked to residents' feelings of safety and security, and is an important element in determining the quality of life in a community.

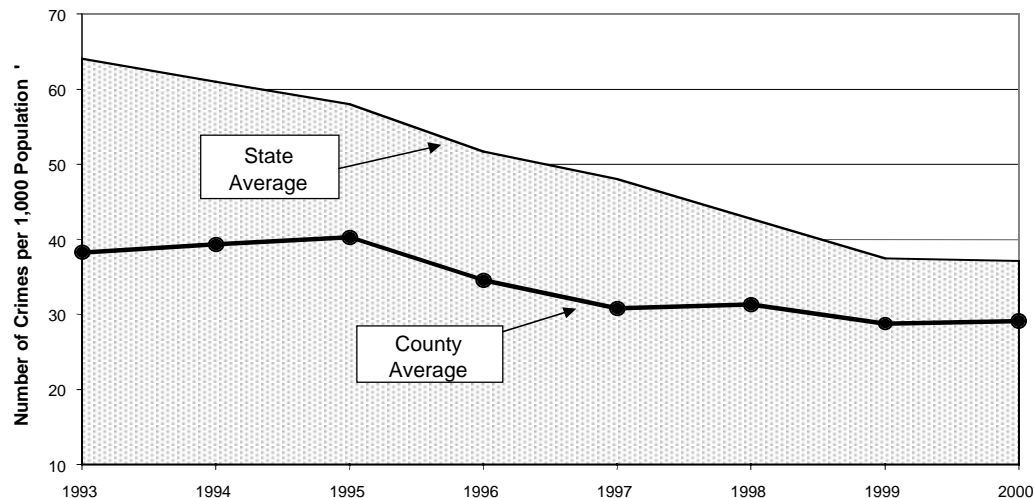
#### How Are We Doing?

The California Department of Justice collects violent and property crime data from all of the county's law enforcement agencies. Specifically, the violent crimes tallied are murder, rape, robbery and aggravated assault. Reported property crimes include burglary, larceny (theft), auto theft, and arson. This is the FBI Crime Index, which is used across the country. The graph shows the number of these crimes per 1,000 population.

Although this indicator has been widely used and reported by the FBI since the 1930s, it suffers several weaknesses. The statistics fail to take into account the number of victims; they merely report the number of incidents. For example, if someone assaults two victims at the same time, law enforcement counts the assault as one. However, from the public's perspective, two individuals have been victimized. In addition, the indicator is limited to major crimes. More numerous but less traumatic crimes, such as driving under the influence, fraud, vandalism, abuse, and disturbing the peace, are excluded from this indicator.

Every year, San Luis Obispo County law enforcement agencies have reported fewer crimes (per capita) than the state average. Paralleling the well-publicized national trend, state crime levels have decreased steadily throughout the 1990s. The county average declined over the same time period, although not as dramatically as the state average.

**Violent and Property Crimes**



SOURCE: California Criminal Justice Profile, 2001  
[http://justice.hdcdojnet.state.ca.us/cjsc\\_stats/prof99/40/1.htm](http://justice.hdcdojnet.state.ca.us/cjsc_stats/prof99/40/1.htm)

INDICATOR F2

# Domestic Violence

This indicator monitors the level of domestic violence in the county. Two measures, the number of domestic violence-related calls for assistance and the number of arrests for domestic violence, provide the data.

### Why Is It Important?

The incidence of domestic violence and abuse is one reflection of the quality of family life. There is a direct link between a healthy community and the incidence of domestic violence.

Researchers have found that domestic violence, especially spouse abuse, is sometimes caused by financial stress in the family. When families experience unemployment or other money problems, violence is more likely to occur.

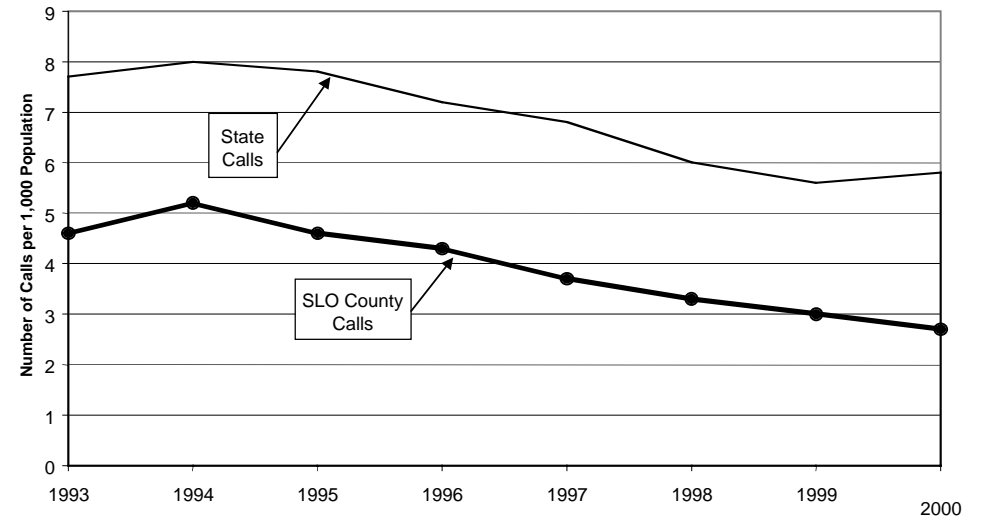
### How Are We Doing?

The accompanying data are based on law enforcement reports from across the county. A "call for assistance" means a police officer was dispatched in response to a call, but no arrest resulted from the officer's visit. In order for an arrest to occur, a victim would have to press charges against the abuser.

Domestic violence appears to be less common in San Luis Obispo County than in the state. During the 1990s, the number of domestic violence calls in the county averaged 3.9 per 1,000 residents compared with 7.0 in the state. The number of domestic violence arrests averaged 1.4 in the county versus 1.7 in the state for the same time period. Note: arrest data since 1998 could not be obtained.

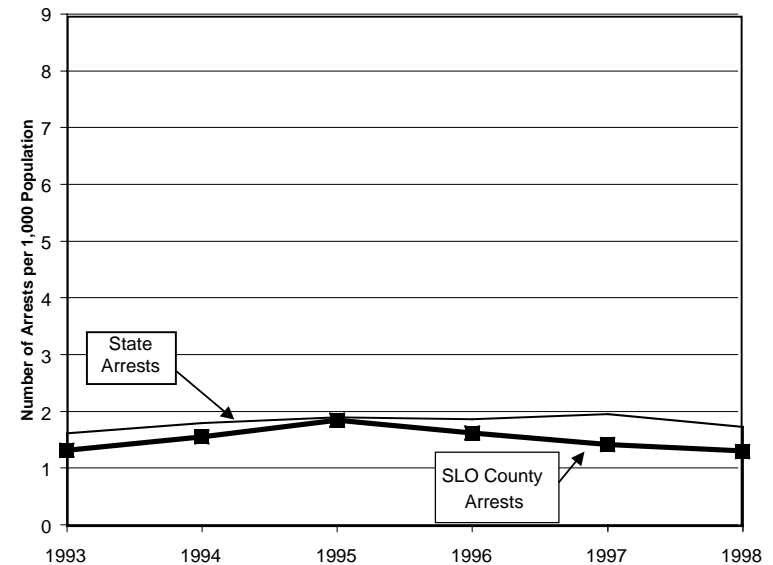
Domestic violence levels, for both the state and county, peaked in the mid-90s and have generally declined since then. This could be due to a growing awareness of the problem of domestic violence and tougher punishments for perpetrators. The trend could also be attributed to the improving economic health of the county and state.

## Domestic Violence Calls



SOURCE: California Department of Justice Criminal Justice Statistics Center, 2001

## Domestic Violence Arrests



SOURCE: California Department of Justice Criminal Justice Statistics Center, 2001

juveniles has increased since 1994-1995, the rate of 602 referral has actually declined.

**INDICATOR F3**

## Juvenile Criminal Activity

This indicator measures the number of juveniles who are apprehended in connection with any type of crime, from minor offenses to felonies.

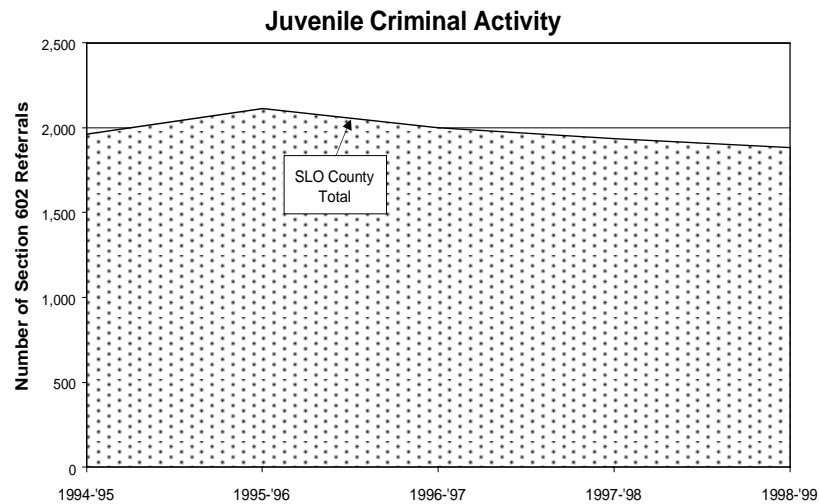
**Why Is It Important?**

The number of juveniles committing crimes is a sign of how well a community (families, schools, and other organizations) is rearing its young people, as well as an indicator of how many youths might be headed toward a life of crime. Communities with low incidences of juvenile criminal activity are perceived to be healthier than communities with higher rates of such crime.

**How Are We Doing?**

The accompanying chart measures juvenile criminal activity by the number of Section 602 referrals. Section 602 refers to the portion of the Welfare and Institutions Code that specifies how juvenile offenders will be treated. The higher the number of 602s, the more crimes juveniles are committing. All apprehended juveniles receive 602 referrals.

The level of juvenile criminal activity in San Luis Obispo County, as measured by 602 referrals, has remained relatively steady since 1994-95. Each year from 1994-95 to 1998-99, between 1,850 and 2,150 young people in this county were given 602 referrals because they were apprehended in connection with crimes. Since the total number of



SOURCE: County Probation Department, Juvenile Services Unit, 2000

**INDICATOR F6**

## Child Abuse Reports

This indicator reports on the level of child abuse in San Luis Obispo County. It reports the number of investigated reports, both emergency and non-emergency responses.

**Why Is It Important?**

There is a direct link between a healthy community and the prevention of child abuse. Child abuse may be more likely to occur in homes experiencing financial difficulties.

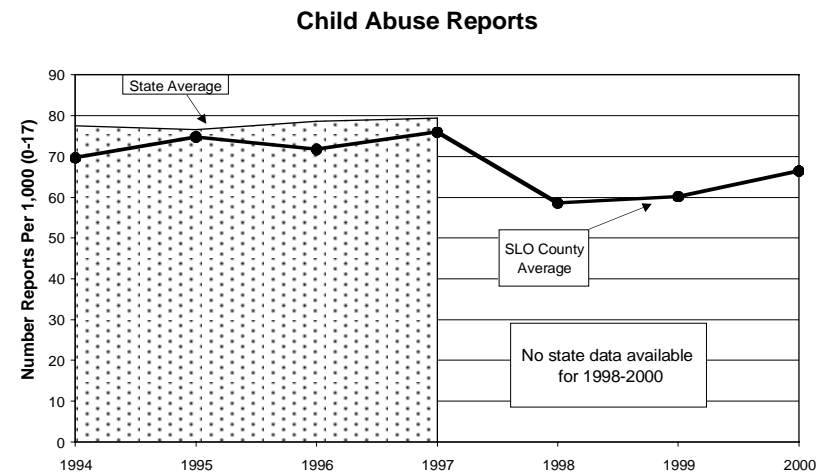
**How Are We Doing?**

The graph shows the number of child abuse reports filed each year by the county Child Protective Services office. This includes reports classified as both emergency and non-emergency. A child who is determined to be at an immediate risk physically, emotionally, or sexually warrants an emergency response. Non-emergency responses are initiated when a child is neglected or when a child alleges physical abuse but has no bruises.

Over the years there have been some changes in what constitutes an abuse "report." Thus, the data may not be a perfect measure of the underlying level of abuse.

The number of child abuse reports has been in the 3,100 to 4,100 range for the past eight years. The county has about 54,000 residents under 18 years of age. However, one family and one child may account for more than one report during a given year. The level of child abuse reports for the county was slightly lower than the state average during the mid-1990s, when statewide data were available.

Unlike domestic violence statistics, child abuse figures do not show a recent decline, and in fact have begun to creep upward. This suggests the favorable local economy has not



helped reduce child abuse.

INDICATOR F4

# Adult Safety Perceptions

This indicator reports how safe county residents actually feel in their neighborhoods.

**Why Is It Important?**

How safe someone feels is a reflection of personal experiences as well as impressions of the general level of crime, which comes largely from the media. Of course, one may be fearful of many activities that are not crimes. Homeless people, rowdy neighbors, dark parking lots, aggressive drivers, and drunks outside a bar may make some uneasy or fearful. However, it is criminal behavior over which society has the most control. If authorities inform the public about the true level of crime in the community, then residents should be able to form an accurate impression of their physical safety.

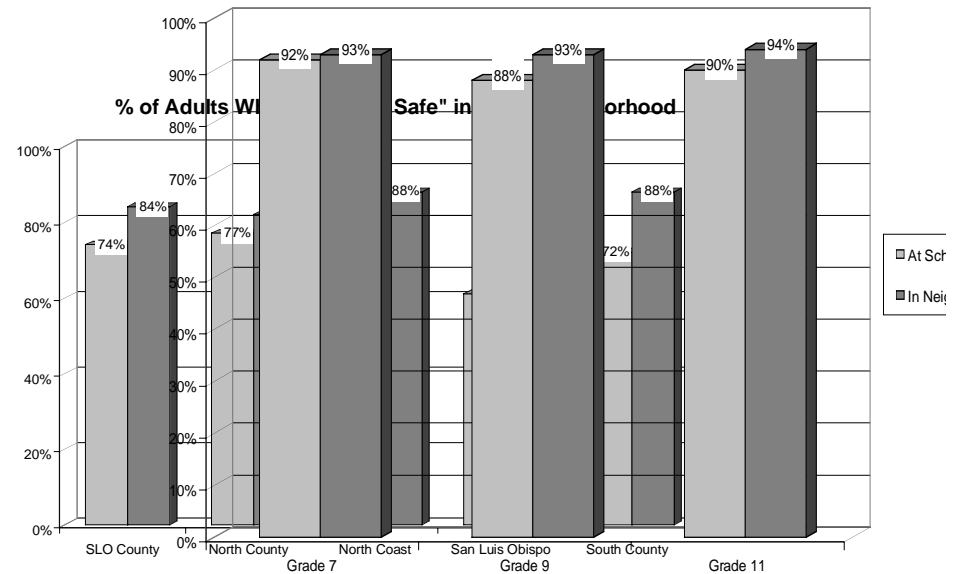
**How Are We Doing?**

This indicator uses the results of ACTION for Healthy Communities telephone surveys of adult residents. Over 500 residents responded in 1999 and over 800 responded in 2001 to the question, "How safe would you say you feel in your neighborhood?"

In 2001, more than five out of six county residents say they feel "very safe" in the neighborhood. This represents statistically significant improvement from the 1999 results. Fifteen percent feel somewhat safe, and only one percent do not feel safe at all.

The North Coast and South County areas had the most respondents say they felt very safe

**Percent of Students Who Feel Safe**



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

SOURCE: California Healthy Kids Survey, 2001

in their neighborhoods (88%). Safety perceptions have improved most dramatically in the City of San Luis Obispo area. The low 1999 results for the City of San Luis Obispo are likely due to the fact that the 1999 survey was conducted at a time when the disappearance of three students was receiving widespread news coverage and publicity.

INDICATOR F5

## Student Safety Perceptions

This indicator reports whether young people feel safe in their schools and neighborhoods.

### Why Is It Important?

Just as it is important for adults to feel safe in the community, it is equally important for children to feel safe in their schools. An educational institution should maintain a safe environment where students can learn without concern for personal safety. A peaceful campus also allows teachers and administrators to focus on educational needs rather than security issues.

### How Are We Doing?

The California Healthy Kids Survey asked students about safety both in their schools and their neighborhoods. Young people in San Luis Obispo County feel relatively safe in both places. Across the three grade levels, nine out of 10 indicate they feel safe at school and an even greater proportion of students say they feel safe in their neighborhoods.

## Economic Issues

**ACTION Goal:** All persons have employment opportunities and support services that enable them to achieve their highest individual level of self-sufficiency.

INDICATOR G1

## Housing Affordability

This indicator reports how many families can afford to buy homes. More specifically, the indicator reports the percentage of homes sold that a family with an average income could afford to buy.

### Why Is It Important?

Home ownership is a goal for many. Home equity is the largest component of most families' assets. Rising home prices increase the owner's equity and expand the local tax base. In addition, home ownership strengthens communities.

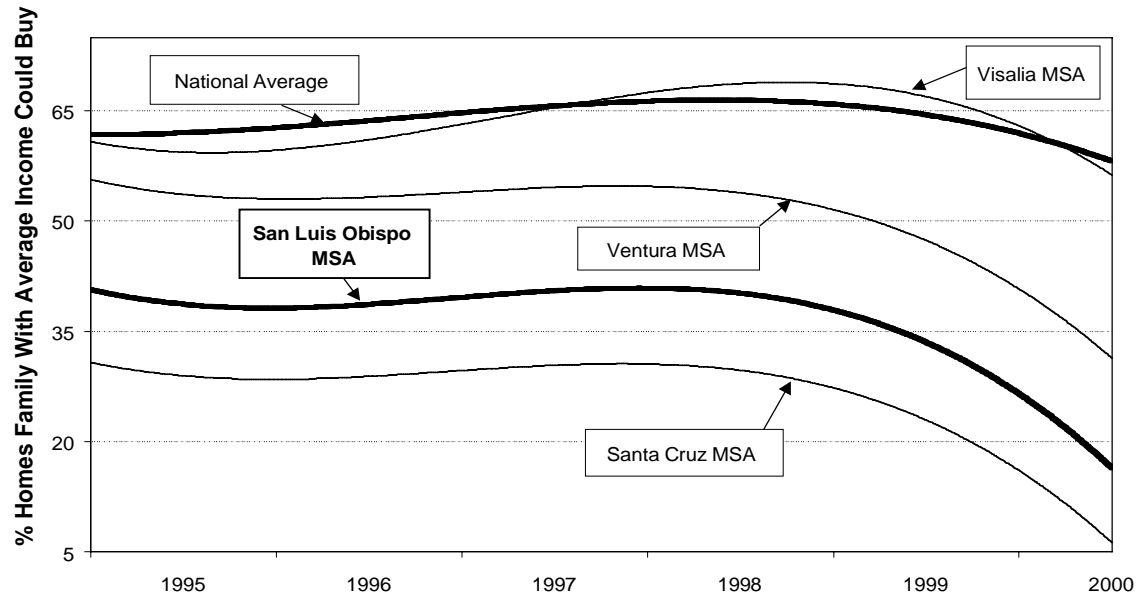
A shortage of homes that families can afford causes them to use a greater percentage of their income on housing. It can also force them to commute farther, or leave the area entirely. Typically, high home prices are also reflected in high rents, both for houses and apartments.

### How Are We Doing?

The accompanying graph shows housing affordability as measured by the Housing Opportunity Index (HOI). Each quarter, the National Association of Home Builders calculates the HOI for all Metropolitan Statistical Areas (MSA) in the country. The local MSA encompasses all of San Luis Obispo County. HOI calculations are based on median family income, mortgage interest rates, and the price of homes sold in the MSA. Home prices are taken from public records.

Housing affordability, which was already poor, has taken a dramatic turn for the worse since 1998, paralleling a statewide trend. In the third quarter of 2000, a family with median income (for the local MSA) could afford to buy only 18 percent of the homes in the county. This makes the San Luis Obispo MSA one of the least affordable in the nation: number 176 out of 181 MSAs. The low Housing Affordability in this area reflects the relatively high home prices coupled with relatively low incomes. Nationally, families could afford to buy 58 percent of the homes sold in their areas. The San Francisco and Santa Cruz MSAs are the least affordable in the nation.

### Housing Affordability



SOURCE: National Association of Home Builders, 2001

**INDICATOR G2**  
**Unemployment**

This indicator tracks the annual average unemployment rate for the county.

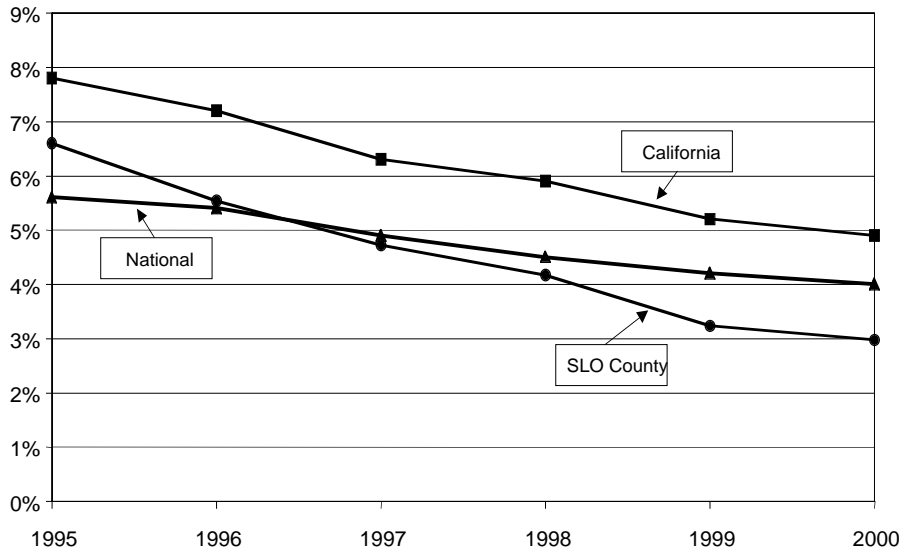
**Why Is It Important?**

A prosperous community has an adequate supply of jobs that generate income sufficient to pay for basic needs. The unemployment rate represents one piece of a complex puzzle that helps us determine whether we're achieving this goal.

**How Are We Doing?**

As shown on the graph below, the County's annual average unemployment rate for 2000 was 3.0 percent. At that time roughly 3,470 people out of a total county labor force of 115,600 were unemployed and actively seeking work. The county's unemployment rate has declined each year since 1993, as has the statewide rate. The county unemployment rate compares favorably to the state and national rates of 4.9 percent and 4.0 percent respectively.

**Annual Average Unemployment Rate**



SOURCE: State of California, Employment Development Department, Labor Market Information Division, 2001

**INDICATOR G3**  
**Availability of Affordable Child Care**

This indicator measures the proportion of parents who say they are unable to obtain needed child care.

**Why Is It Important?**

Parents of all incomes are using child care in increasing numbers and at increasingly varied hours. Many children spend at least some time in child care during their critical developmental years. As a result, child care centers, family child care homes, relatives, and nannies have become essential to working families with children. The availability of child care impacts a community's economic well being and is a key factor in helping welfare recipients attain self-sufficiency. The quality of child care has been shown to have a key role in the development of children.

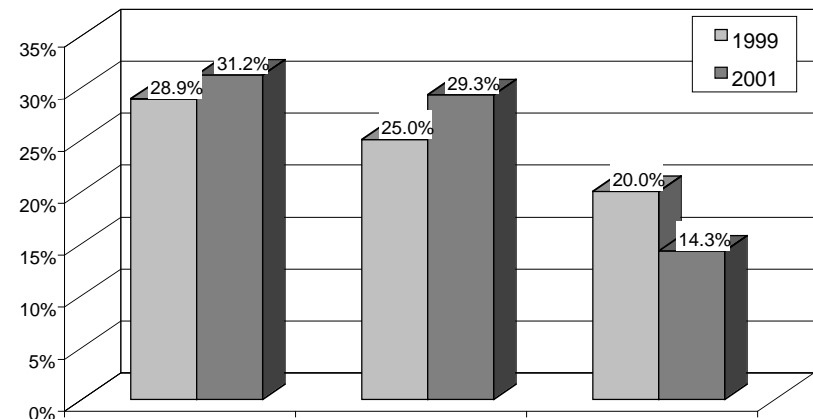
The Child Care Bureau of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services cites research showing that many parents:

- feel isolated when looking for child care and do not initially know what they are looking for;
- are not aware of the availability of child care resource and referral services; and
- cannot afford quality care, even if it is available.

**How Are We Doing?**

The 1999 and 2001 ACTION telephone survey asked parents with children, "Is there a kind of child care you need for your children but cannot get?" In 2001 difficulty in accessing child care was noted 31 percent of households with children age two or younger, and by 29 percent of households with children ages three to five. These figures represent a slight (but not statistically significant) increase from 1999. For households with school-age children, 14 percent reported difficulty accessing child care, a slight (but not statistically significant) drop from 1999.

**% of Households Unable to Receive Needed Child Care**



INDICATOR G4  
**Personal Income**

This indicator tracks the average per capita income of people in the county.

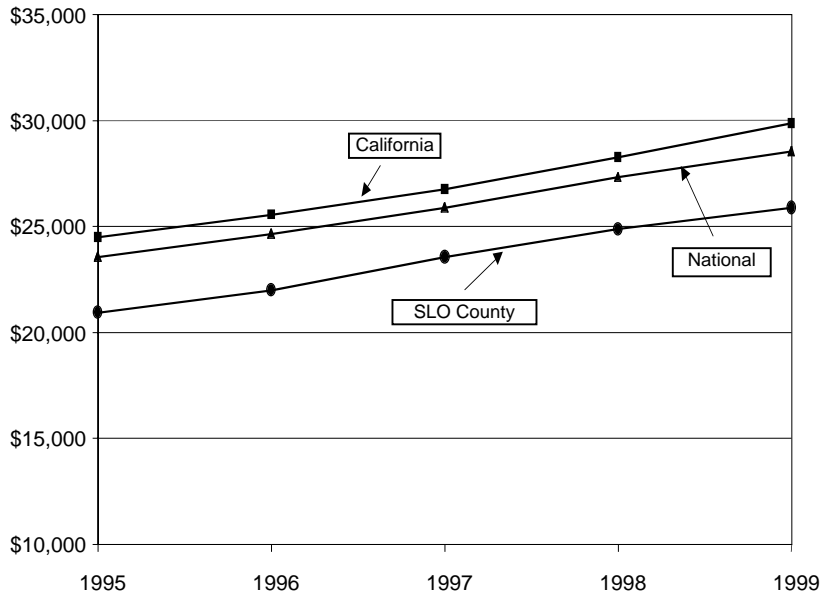
**Why Is It Important?**

Personal income is an indirect indicator of quality of life. Income enables individuals and families to make both necessary and discretionary purchases of goods and services.

**How Are We Doing?**

The graph presented below shows personal income, adjusted for inflation, on a per person basis. Personal income includes wages and salaries, transfer payments (i.e., social security, property and investment income), and income from self-employment. Personal income for county residents has increased 24 percent over the past five years to \$25,888. The county still, however, trails the statewide average of \$29,856 and national average of \$28,546. In 1999 transfer payments and dividend income, both usually associated with retirement, accounted for 43 percent of all income received by county residents.

**Per Capita Personal Income**



SOURCE: U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of Economic Analysis, 2001

INDICATOR G5  
**Economic Well-being**

This indicator reports people's perceptions of their economic status.

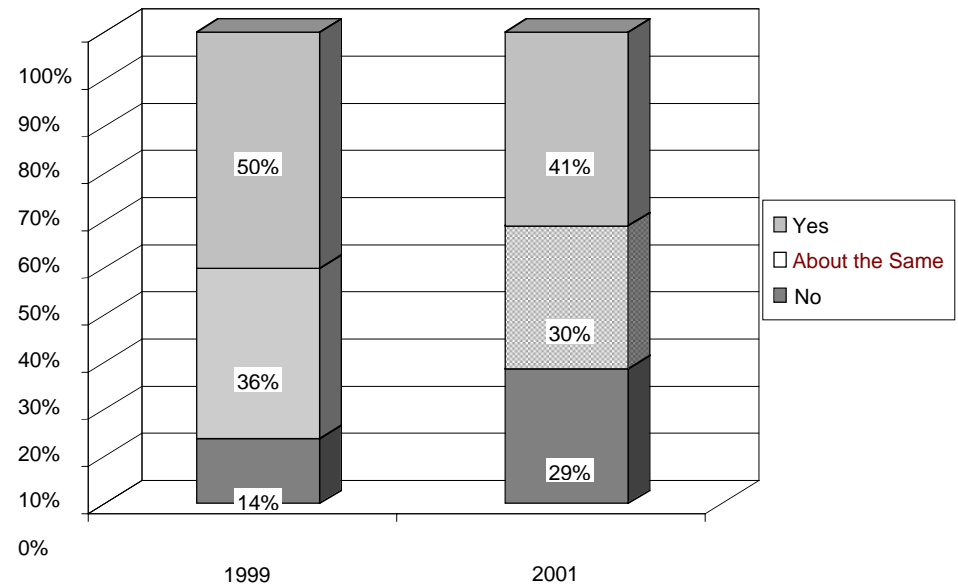
**Why Is It Important?**

While per capita personal income provides an objective measure of income, it may not reflect how people feel about their finances. If costs (such as housing) are high, job security is lacking, or the stock market swoons, people may feel much different from what the objective data show. Therefore, this indicator reports how county residents assess their personal and family economic status relative to the previous year.

**How Are We Doing?**

In 1999 ACTION asked phone survey respondents, "Do you feel you are better off this year than last year?" In 2001 the question was asked again, with the word "economically" added for clarity. While the change in question wording makes the results not statistically comparable, some insights are evident from the accompanying graph. The upward trend of the personal income graph is confirmed in that "yes" responses continue to outnumber "no" responses. However, the proportion of "no" responses more than doubled in 2001, to 29 percent. This may reflect the change in question wording, or slower economic growth that is not yet reflected in personal income data due to the time lag in reporting.

**Better Off This Year Than Last?**



Note: The word "economically" was added in 2001; results are not statistically comparable. Source: ACTION for Healthy Communities telephone surveys, 1999 & 2001