



COUNTY OF SAN DIEGO
HHSA
HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES AGENCY

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POVERTY IN SAN DIEGO COUNTY

Areas of Concentrated Poverty and
Food Insecurity

County of San Diego, Health and Human Services
Agency, Public Health Services, Community Health
Statistics Unit

Prepared June 2022

Poverty in San Diego County:
Areas of Concentrated Poverty and Food Insecurity

June 30, 2022

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Inquiries regarding this document may be directed to:

Community Health Statistics Unit
3851 Rosecrans St.
San Diego, CA 92110
(619) 692-6667
www.SDHealthStatistics.com



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Introduction

Poverty as a Social Determinant of Health

In the United States, it is estimated that medical care accounts for only 10-20 percent of the modifiable contributors to healthy outcomes in a population. The other 80-90 percent are “the conditions in which people are born, grow, live, work and age, and the systems put in place to deal with illness,” known as social determinants of health (SDOH).¹ This means that a large proportion of disease burden within a community is shaped by SDOH, such as distribution of income, poverty, and access to healthcare and healthy food.

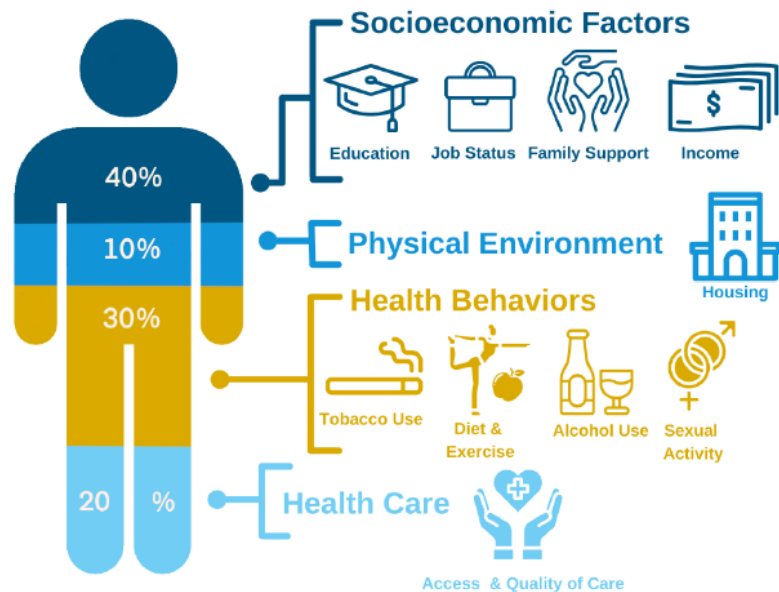


Figure 1: Social Determinants of Health (SDOH), UCLA Health.²

Poverty is an important SDOH because it frequently interacts with various other SDOH which, together, influence health behaviors and outcomes. The distribution of income within a community is often a significant contribution to disproportionate burden of disease among low- and high-income groups. Additionally, individuals experiencing poverty are more likely to live in the same geographic areas rather than living spread out evenly across the Nation.³ Areas of concentrated poverty tend to have less access to positive resources, such as healthy food, education, safe neighborhoods, freedom from discrimination, and adequate housing. As a result, communities of lower socioeconomic status (SES), particularly those with high rates of poverty, have higher rates of morbidity and mortality.⁴ These health inequities increase as poverty rates increase.

Although San Diego County appears to have a low poverty rate compared to other counties in the nation, there remains areas of severe concentrated poverty throughout the county where communities are struggling to make ends meet. Addressing poverty in San Diego County is crucial to achieving health equity.

To view census tracts defined as areas of persistent poverty, historically disadvantaged communities, or census tracts with low food access in San Diego County, visit the Poverty Dashboard Series here: [Poverty Dashboard Series | Tableau Public](#)

Areas of Concentrated Poverty in San Diego County

Previous research has indicated that once the poverty rate in a community reaches 20% or greater, the community is more likely to experience significant systemic issues compared to communities with lower poverty rates. As a result, antipoverty policy interventions have been enacted to target high poverty areas. The interventions rely on the characteristics of communities, rather than individuals, to target resources and carry out projects that directly impact communities.⁵ Under the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, funding is available through the Rebuilding American Infrastructure with Sustainability and Equity (RAISE) grant program to help communities in need of safer, more accessible, and sustainable transportation.⁶ A portion of funding is reserved for projects located in Areas of Persistent Poverty or Historically Disadvantaged Communities, with priority to projects that address climate change, ensure racial equity, and remove barriers to opportunity.

Areas of Persistent Poverty

An “Area of Persistent Poverty” (APP) is defined for the RAISE grant program by the 2021 Consolidated Appropriations Act.⁶ A project is located in an APP for the RAISE grant program if the census tract in which the project is located has a federal poverty rate of at least 20 percent as measured by the 2014-2018 5-year data series available from the American Community Survey of the Bureau of the Census. Overall, San Diego County is not identified as an area of persistent poverty, but there are census tracts within the county that are identified. The map below highlights the census tracts that are identified as an APP.

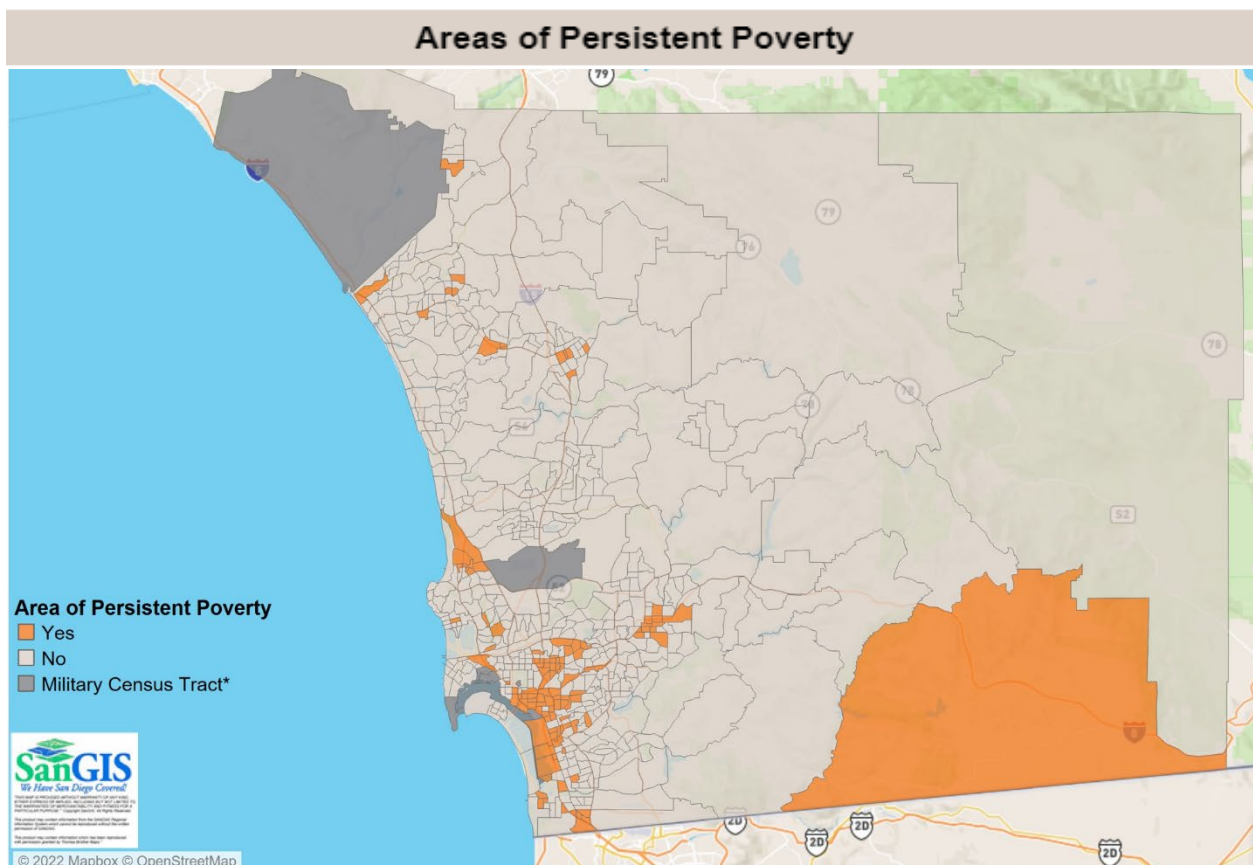


Figure 2: Census tracts defined as areas of persistent poverty, San Diego County, 2021

Table 1: Count of Areas of Persistent Poverty by Region and SRA, 2021	
Geography	Total APP
Central Region	49
Central San Diego	11
Mid-City	22
Southeastern San Diego	16
East Region	13
El Cajon	11
Lemon Grove	1
Mountain Empire	1
North Central Region	12
Coastal	1
Kearny Mesa	3
Peninsula	1
University	7
North Coastal Region	6
Carlsbad	1
Oceanside	2
Vista	3
North Inland Region	8
Escondido	5
Fallbrook	1
San Marcos	2
South Region	24
Chula Vista	7
National City	8
South Bay	9
Grand Total	112

Source: US Department of Transportation, Areas of Persistent Poverty Project (APP) and Historically Disadvantaged Community (HDC) Status Tool. Accessed 5/16/2022. Prepared by: County of San Diego Health and Human Services Agency, Public Health Services, Community Health Statistics Unit, June 2022.

Table 2: Count of Areas of Persistent Poverty by Supervisorial District, 2021	
Supervisorial District	Total APP
Supervisorial District 1	43
Supervisorial District 2	18
Supervisorial District 3	11
Supervisorial District 4	31
Supervisorial District 5	9
Grand Total	112

Source: US Department of Transportation, Areas of Persistent Poverty Project (APP) and Historically Disadvantaged Community (HDC) Status Tool. Accessed 5/16/2022. Prepared by: County of San Diego Health and Human Services Agency, Public Health Services, Community Health Statistics Unit, June 2022.

- A total of **112** Census Tracts were defined as APP in San Diego County.
- Among regions in San Diego County, **Central Region** had the highest number of census tracts defined as APP (49).
- Among San Diego County SRAs, **Mid-City SRA** in Central Region had the highest number of census tracts defined as APP (22).
- Among Supervisorial Districts in San Diego County, **Supervisorial District 1** had the highest number of census tracts defined as APP (43).

Historically Disadvantaged Communities

Historically disadvantaged communities are areas which have been subjected to disproportionate impacts from one or more environmental hazards, socio-economic burdens, or both.⁷ For the purpose of the 2022 Notices of Funding Opportunity, and consistent with OMB's Interim Guidance for the Justice40 Initiative, Historically Disadvantaged Communities include (1) certain qualifying census tracts, (b) any Tribal land, or (c) any territory or possession of the United States.⁸

The map below shows census tracts defined as historically disadvantaged communities.

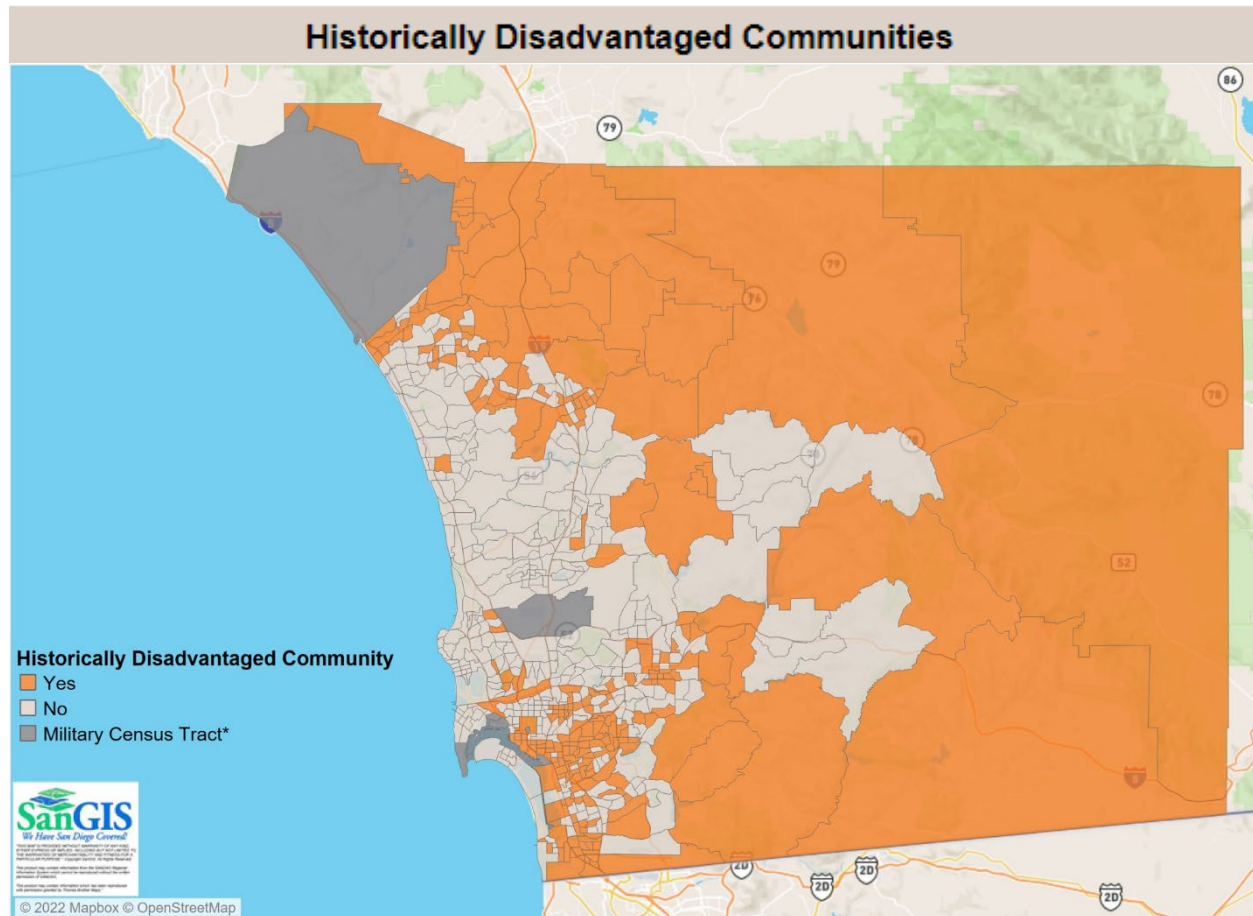


Figure 3: Census tracts defined as historically disadvantaged communities, San Diego County, 2021

Table 3: Count of Historically Disadvantaged Census Tracts by Region and SRA, 2021	
Geography	Total HDC
Central Region	59
Central San Diego	13
Mid-City	18
Southeastern San Diego	28
East Region	46
El Cajon	13
Harbison Crest	3
Jamul	3
La Mesa	4
Laguna-Pine Valley	1
Lakeside	4
Lemon Grove	7
Mountain Empire	1
Santee	2
Spring Valley	8
North Central Region	10
Kearny Mesa	7
Peninsula	1
University	2
North Coastal Region	27
Carlsbad	1
Oceanside	17
San Dieguito	1
Vista	8
North Inland Region	47
Anza-Borrego Springs	1
Escondido	17
Fallbrook	9
North San Diego	1
Palomar-Julian	1
Pauma	1
Poway	2
Ramona	3
San Marcos	8
Valley Center	4
South Region	50
Chula Vista	13
National City	11
South Bay	20
Sweetwater	6
Grand Total	239

Source: US Department of Transportation, Areas of Persistent Poverty Project (APP) and Historically Disadvantaged Community (HDC) Status Tool. Accessed 5/16/2022. Prepared by: County of San Diego Health and Human Services Agency, Public Health Services, Community Health Statistics Unit, June 2022.

Table 4: Count of Historically Disadvantaged Communities by Supervisorial District, 2021	
Supervisorial District	Total HDC
Supervisorial District 1	71
Supervisorial District 2	56
Supervisorial District 3	19
Supervisorial District 4	42
Supervisorial District 5	51
Grand Total	239

Source: US Department of Transportation, Areas of Persistent Poverty Project (APP) and Historically Disadvantaged Community (HDC) Status Tool. Accessed 5/16/2022. Prepared by: County of San Diego Health and Human Services Agency, Public Health Services, Community Health Statistics Unit, June 2022.

- A total of **239** Census Tracts are defined as Historically Disadvantaged Communities in San Diego County.
- Among regions in San Diego County, **Central Region** had the highest number of census tracts defined as HDCs.
- Among SRAs in San Diego County, **Southeastern San Diego SRA** had the highest number of census tracts defined as HDCs.
- Among supervisorial districts in San Diego County, **Supervisorial District 1** had the highest number of census tracts defined as HDCs.

High Poverty Census Tracts

Currently, the federal government's poverty thresholds and guidelines are used to determine poverty rates throughout the United States. The federal poverty threshold remains the same across different states, counties, and cities, despite the variability in the cost of living.⁹ This leads to an underestimation of the number of individuals struggling to make ends meet in high-cost areas, including San Diego County.¹⁰ In 2021, the income needed to make ends meet in a single adult household in San Diego County was almost four times more than the Federal Poverty Level (FPL).¹¹ For this reason, the number of individuals living *below 200% of FPL* in a geographic area more accurately reflects poverty in San Diego County.

The two maps below highlight the difference in concentrated areas of poverty when using the FPL versus 200% of FPL to measure poverty.

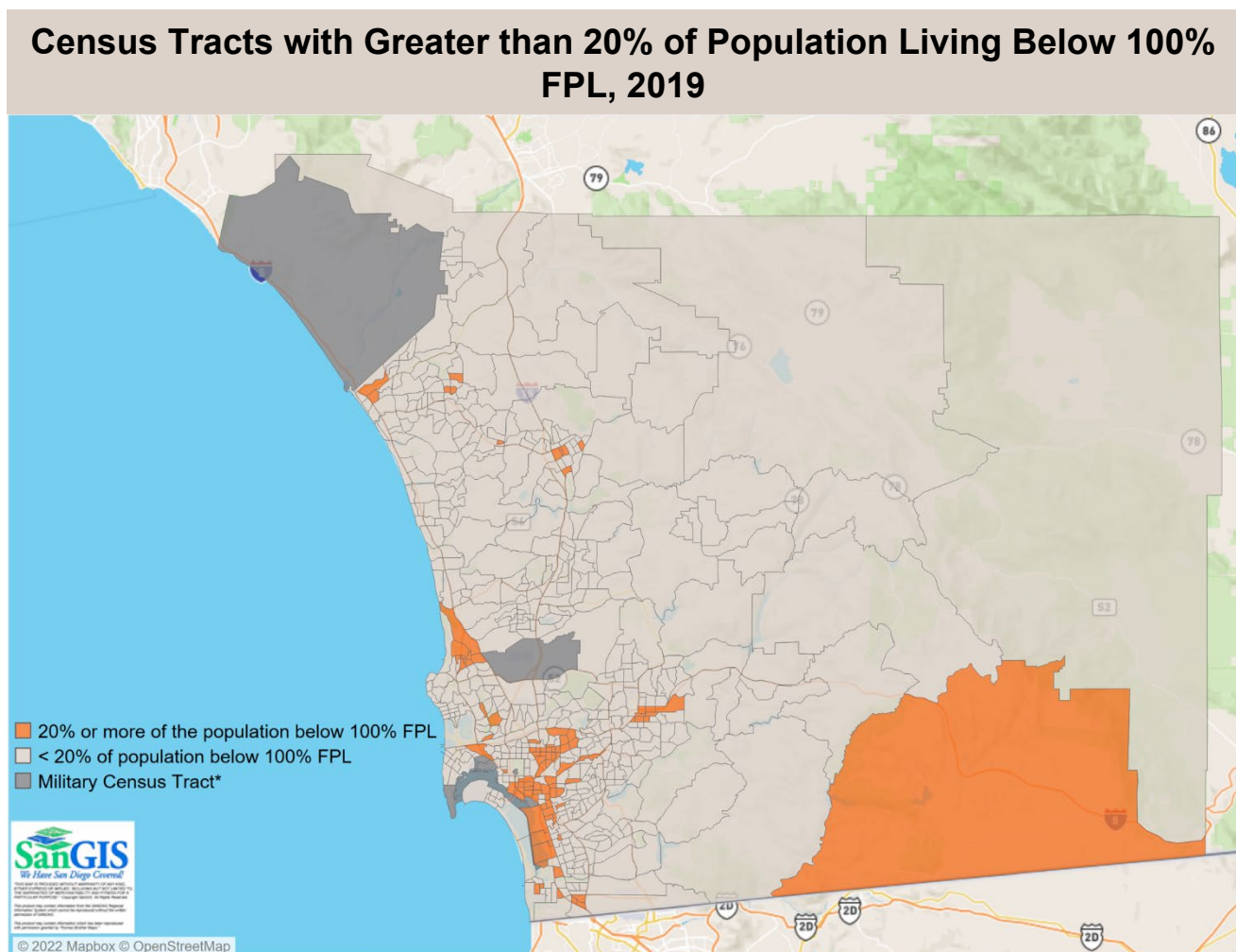


Figure 4: Census tracts with greater than 20% of population living below 100% FPL, San Diego County, 2019

Census Tracts with Greater than 20% of Population Living Below 200% FPL, 2019

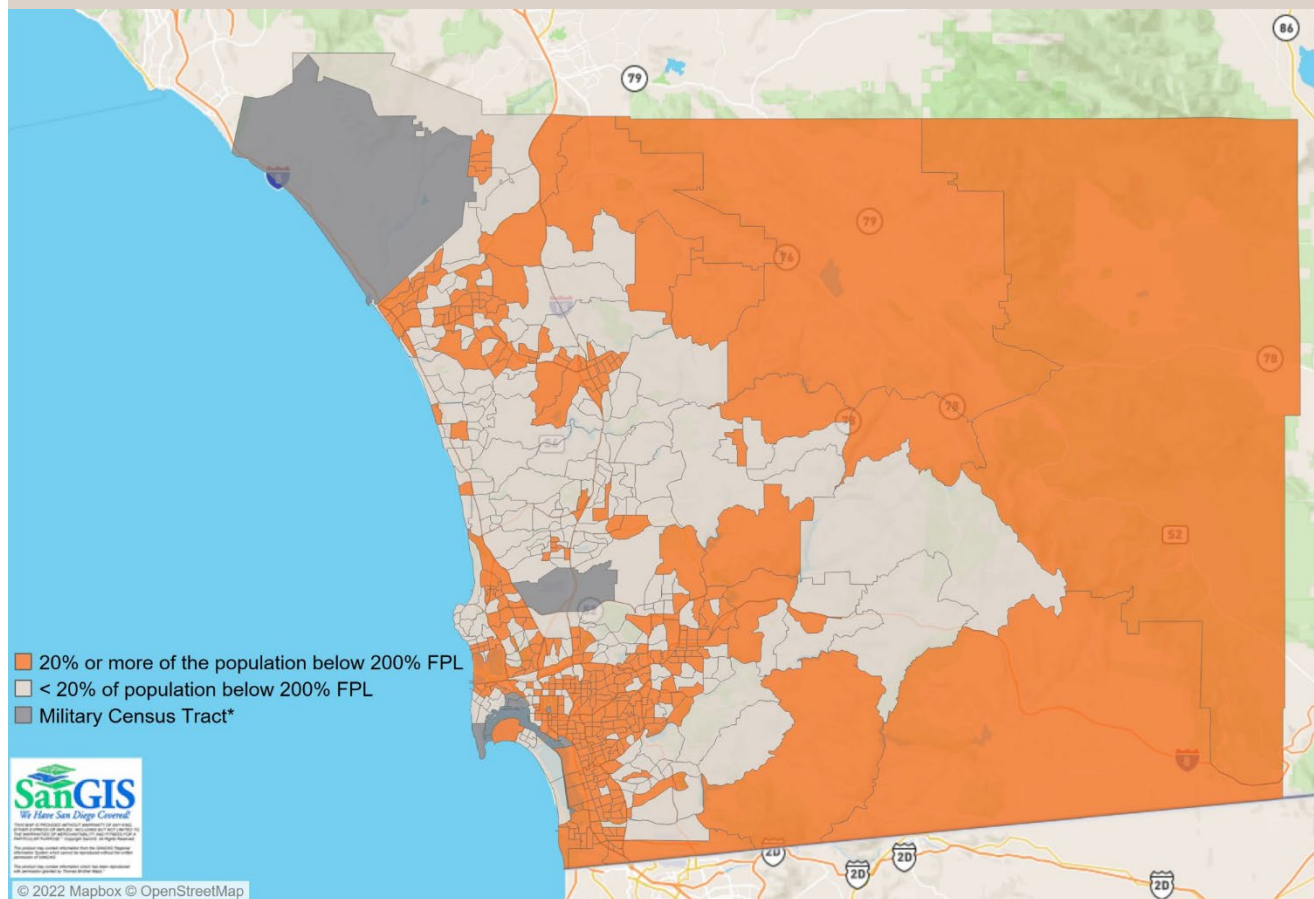


Figure 5: Census tracts with greater than 20% of population living below 200% FPL, San Diego County, 2019

There are significantly more areas of high poverty in San Diego County than the FPL estimates.

The Census Bureau considers areas with greater than 20% of the population living below the FPL to be high poverty areas. Additionally, research indicates areas with greater than 20% of the population living below FPL have greater risk of adverse outcomes. When using the FPL to measure poverty, San Diego County appears to have 93 census tracts with high poverty. However, when using 200% of the FPL to measure poverty, there are 370 census tracts with high poverty.

The map below shows the percentage of residents in each census tract living below 200% FPL.

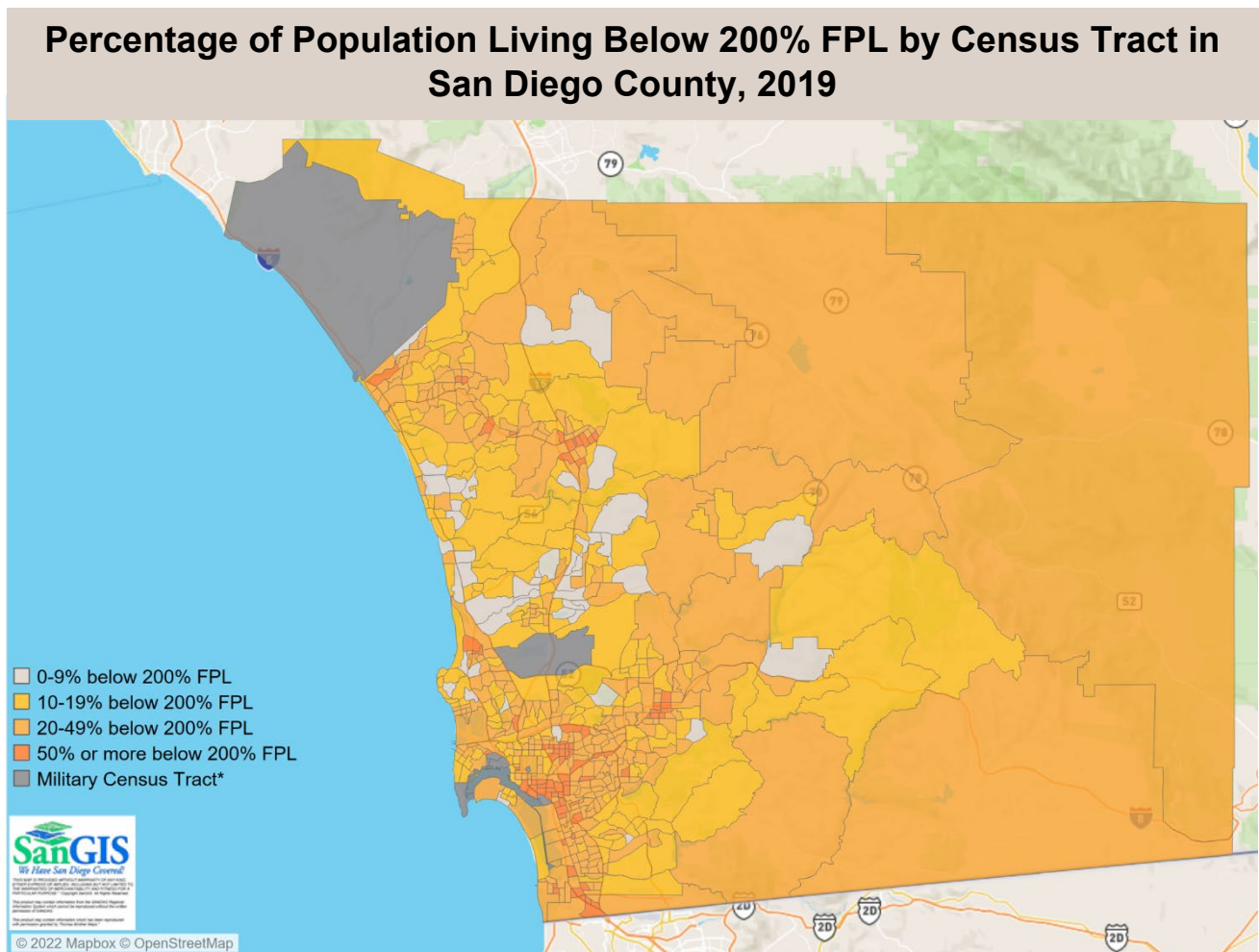


Figure 6: Percent of population living below 200% FPL by census tract, San Diego County, 2019

In San Diego County, 77 census tracts had a poverty rate of 50% or more in 2019.

In 2019, half or more of residents in approximately 12% of San Diego County's census tracts were living below 200% of the FPL.

Table 5: 25 Census Tracts with Highest Percent of Population Living Below 200%FPL in San Diego County, 2019

Census Tract (CT)	Region	SRA	Supervisory District	Gini Index	Percent of Population Under 100% FPL	Percent of Population Under 200% FPL
1 CT 29.04	Central Region	Mid-City	2	0.50	55.63%	75.2%
2 CT 24.02	Central Region	Mid-City	4	0.39	27.44%	74.8%
3 CT 22.01	Central Region	Mid-City	4	0.51	31.26%	69.5%
4 CT 202.14	North Inland Region	Escondido	3	0.46	42.25%	68.4%
5 CT 159.01	East Region	El Cajon	2	0.41	28.97%	68.3%
6 CT 49	Central Region	Central San Diego	1	0.46	28.48%	68.3%
7 CT 27.09	Central Region	Mid-City	4	0.49	47.20%	67.5%
8 CT 23.02	Central Region	Mid-City	4	0.43	31.06%	67.4%
9 CT 26.02	Central Region	Mid-City	4	0.37	20.74%	67.4%
10 CT 36.01	Central Region	Southeastern San Diego	1	0.43	23.49%	66.9%
11 CT 27.07	Central Region	Mid-City	4	0.41	37.15%	66.4%
12 CT 195.02	North Coastal Region	Vista	5	0.39	20.11%	66.2%
13 CT 48	Central Region	Central San Diego	1	0.41	31.07%	65.9%
14 CT 33.03	Central Region	Southeastern San Diego	1	0.38	30.84%	65.2%
15 CT 26.01	Central Region	Mid-City	4	0.42	31.18%	65.1%
16 CT 157.03	East Region	El Cajon	2	0.45	35.30%	64.5%
17 CT 123.02	South Region	Chula Vista	1	0.53	30.99%	64.1%
18 CT 27.08	Central Region	Mid-City	4	0.41	30.53%	63.9%
19 CT 202.07	North Inland Region	Escondido	3	0.37	16.23%	63.7%
20 CT 202.02	North Inland Region	Escondido	3	0.36	28.42%	63.3%
21 CT 186.03	North Coastal Region	Oceanside	5	0.44	33.41%	63.2%
22 CT 100.09	South Region	South Bay	1	0.43	18.41%	62.0%
23 CT 22.02	Central Region	Mid-City	4	0.41	32.74%	61.9%
24 CT 202.13	North Inland Region	Escondido	3	0.44	31.88%	61.9%
25 CT 35.02	Central Region	Southeastern San Diego	1	0.45	30.25%	61.6%

Sources: 2015-2019 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, Tables B17024, B19083. Prepared by: County of San Diego Health and Human Services Agency, Public Health Services, Community Health Statistics Unit, June 2022.

Nearly 3 in 4 residents in census tracts 29.04 and 24.02 were living below 200% of the FPL in 2019.

Across the County, 27.8% of San Diego residents were living below 200% of the FPL. However, some geographic areas within San Diego have significantly higher rates of poverty, including census tracts 29.04 and 24.02 in Central Region, where about 75% of residents live below 200% of the FPL.

In 2019, 133,146 residents were living in the 25 census tracts with the highest poverty levels in San Diego County.

Within the 25 census tracts with the highest poverty levels in the county, nearly 90,000 residents were living below 200% the FPL.

Gini Index

In addition, income inequality may further increase health disparities.¹² The Gini Index, a summary measure of income inequality, is used to examine unequal income distribution in a community. The Gini coefficient ranges from 0, perfect equality, to 1, perfect inequality.¹³

Table 7: 10 Census Tracts with Greatest Income Inequality in San Diego County, 2019					
	Census Tract (CT)	Region	SRA	Supervisory District	Gini
1	CT 28.01	Central Region	Mid-City	2	0.66
2	CT 53	Central Region	Central San Diego	4	0.66
3	CT 83.12	North Central Region	Coastal	3	0.59
4	CT 176.04	North Coastal Region	San Dieguito	3	0.57
5	CT 171.06	North Coastal Region	San Dieguito	5	0.56
6	CT 82	North Central Region	Coastal	4	0.55
7	CT 214	North Central Region	Peninsula	4	0.54
8	CT 81.02	North Central Region	Coastal	4	0.54
9	CT 27.10	Central Region	Mid-City	4	0.54
10	CT 109	South Region	Coronado	1	0.54

Sources: 2015-2019 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, Table B19083. Prepared by: County of San Diego Health and Human Services Agency, Public Health Services, Community Health Statistics Unit, June 2022.

Among census tracts in San Diego County, CT 28.01 and CT 53 in Central Region had the greatest income inequality.

In 2019, CT 28.01 in Mid-City SRA and CT 53 in Central San Diego SRA had a Gini coefficient of 0.66. The closer the Gini coefficient is to 1, the greater the income inequality.

Implications

Examining federal poverty rates at the census tract level is necessary to identify areas of concentrated poverty.

The federal poverty rate is about 12% in San Diego County. Across Regions, Central Region has the highest federal poverty rate, 17.5%, and the highest federal poverty rate across all subregional areas (SRA) is 24.9% in Mountain Empire SRA. However, there are 54 census tracts within San Diego County with a federal poverty rate higher than 25%. These areas of high concentrated poverty are located in various regions and SRAs throughout San Diego County and may go unnoticed when poverty data is presented at the County, regional, and subregional area levels.

The federal poverty rates underestimate poverty in San Diego County.

Because the poverty thresholds remain the same across different geographies, despite the variability in the cost of living, the federal poverty rates significantly underestimate the number of individuals living in poverty in San Diego County. When the number of individuals living *below 200% of FPL* in a geographic area is used to calculate poverty rates in San Diego County, the rates increase considerably.

Federal funding opportunities are limited in San Diego County.

Antipoverty policy interventions frequently use federal poverty rates to identify areas of concentrated poverty to be eligible for funding, including areas of persistent poverty and historically disadvantaged communities. This means that some census tracts in San Diego County may not be eligible for funding opportunities despite high levels of poverty due to the high cost of living in San Diego.

Food Access and Insecurity



A healthy diet and good nutrition are an important contribution to positive health outcomes. The food that individuals eat is frequently influenced by accessibility and affordability of food retailers. Some communities, particularly low-income and rural areas, may face significant barriers in accessing healthy and affordable food retailers, which may result in poor diet and food insecurity.¹⁴ Identifying communities with low food access is an important step to improving food insecurity in San Diego County.

Food Insecurity

Among the regions in San Diego County, East Region had the highest percent of adults with income less than 200% FPL that experienced food insecurity (46.6%).

From 2018-2020, nearly half of East Region's adult population who made less than 200% the FPL were unable to afford enough food. Nearly 40% of the adult population whose income was below 200% FPL in North Central Region and North Coastal Region experienced food insecurity.

Table 8: Food Insecurity* by Region, San Diego County, 2018-2020

Region	Percent of Population Experiencing Food Insecurity
Central Region	26.9%
East Region	46.6%
North Central Region	38.5%
North Coastal Region	39.8%
North Inland Region	30.9%
South Region	27.7%

**Among adults whose income was less than 200% FPL.*

Source: UCLA Center for Health Policy Research, Los Angeles, CA. AskCHIS 2018-2020. Accessed 5/27/2022.

Prepared by: County of San Diego Health and Human Services Agency, Public Health Services, Community Health Statistics Unit, June 2022.

Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)

Table 9: 10 Census Tracts with Highest Percent of Population Receiving SNAP Benefits, 2019

	Census Tract (CT)	Region	SRA	Supervisory District	Percent of Population Receiving SNAP Benefits
1	CT 27.09	Central Region	Mid-City	4	38.9%
2	CT 159.01	East Region	El Cajon	2	37.7%
3	CT 157.03	East Region	El Cajon	2	36.1%
4	CT 157.01	East Region	El Cajon	2	34.5%
5	CT 33.05	Central Region	Southeastern San Diego	1	34.5%
6	CT 35.02	Central Region	Southeastern San Diego	1	32.1%
7	CT 33.01	Central Region	Southeastern San Diego	1	31.5%
8	CT 153.01	East Region	El Cajon	2	31.5%
9	CT 139.07	East Region	Spring Valley	2	31.2%
10	CT 31.15	Central Region	Southeastern San Diego	4	31.0%

Sources: 2015-2019 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, Table, DP03. Prepared by: County of San Diego Health and Human Services Agency, Public Health Services, Community Health Statistics Unit, June 2022.

Among census tracts in San Diego County, census tract 27.09 in Mid-City SRA had the highest percent of population receiving food stamps.

In 2019, almost 39% of residents in census tract 27.09 were receiving food stamps.

Food Access

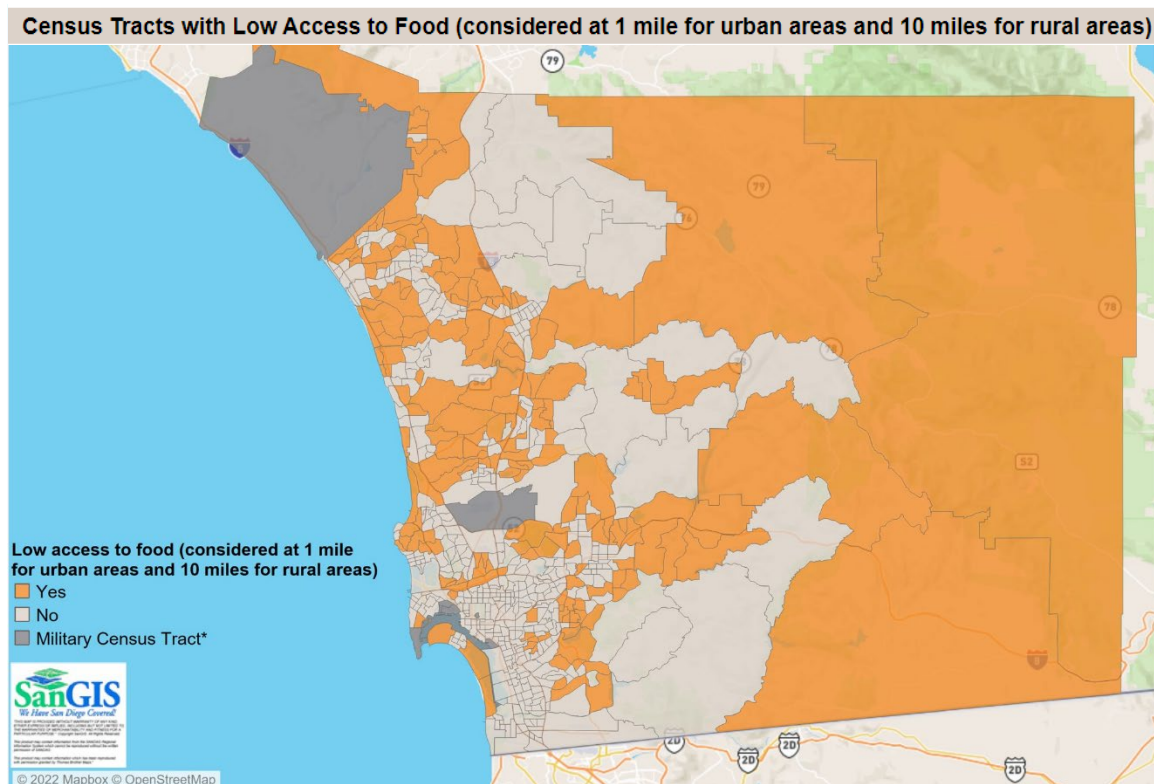


Figure 7: Census tracts with low food access, San Diego County, 2019

The map above shows census tracts with low access to food. Low access to healthy food is defined as being far from a supermarket, supercenter, or large grocery store. A census tract is considered to have low access if a significant number or share of individuals in the tract is far from a supermarket. Census tracts with a significant number (at least 500 people) or share (at least 33 percent) of the population is greater than 1 mile from the nearest supermarket, supercenter, or large grocery store for an urban area of greater than 10 miles for a rural area are considered to have low access to food.

In 2019, 186 census tracts in San Diego County had low access to food.

Approximately 30% of census tracts in San Diego County had low access to food.

Conclusion

Poverty is a social determinant of health (SDOH) that can contribute to inequitable access to resources and opportunities and increase the risk of adverse health outcomes. To achieve health equity in San Diego County, poverty and income inequality must be addressed at the community level by first identifying communities living in poverty. Identification of areas of concentrated poverty can inform policy makers of communities in need of targeted resources and interventions. Although San Diego County appears to have a low poverty rate compared to other counties across the country, there are communities throughout the county that are experiencing disproportionate levels of poverty.

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