

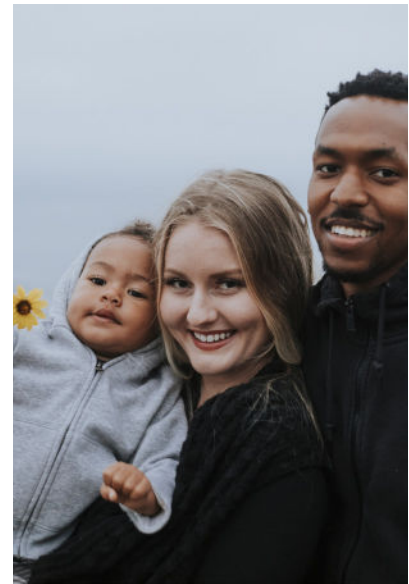


# The State of Babies, Toddlers, and Families' Social-Emotional Health in **California**





The State of Babies Yearbook (SOBY) is a resource that tells the important story of what it is like to be a very young child. Importantly, it also explores substantial disparities and inequities in young children's experiences when examined by race/ethnicity, income, and geographic setting. SOBY provides a national and state-by-state snapshot on the well-being of infants and toddlers by examining data across 60 indicators (from national data sets such as Census Bureau's America Community Survey and National Survey of Children's Health) to show how infants, toddlers, and their families are faring in three policy domains of Good Health, Strong Families, and Positive Early Learning Experiences. States are grouped into four tiers (for each policy area and overall) based on how they fare on selected indicators and policy domains representing progress toward ensuring access to health care, paid family and medical leave, quality early learning opportunities, and more.



## Good Health

California's **1.4 million** infants, toddlers, and families deserve continued and equitable opportunities for a strong, healthy start in life. We know that no matter how stable and loving a family a child is born into, outside factors (e.g., economic stability, the ability to take paid leave to bond with infants, access to high-quality health care and high-quality early care and education) affect the child's neural development, with potentially long-term effects. Children born into adverse experiences like chronic unrelenting stress, poverty, hunger, unstable housing, and/or little opportunity for positive interactions with caregivers are more likely than other children to fall behind early, lag in later educational and earnings achievements, have poorer health and mental health, or even die earlier. The continued well-being of California's families is dependent on their ability to nurture and provide for their children.

Working Effectively

G R O W

Improving Outcomes

G R O W

Reaching Forward

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Getting Started

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STATE OF BABIES  
YEARBOOK 2021

[stateofbabies.org](https://stateofbabies.org)

While California performs better than national averages on several indicators of the 2021 SOBY, continued investments and policies that effectively address economic security, health care access/affordability, infant and early childhood mental health, food security and nutrition, maternal and child health, housing assistance and access to quality/affordable child-care will help California continue to work effectively in the Good Health Domain.

### Factors That Can Affect Social-Emotional Development

The foundation for healthy social-emotional development includes a child's social-emotional well-being, physical development, cognitive development, and a strong parent-child attachment. The bond between a parent and child builds the child's ability to form relationships with others, express emotions, and face difficult challenges. Beginning in infancy, children recognize the type of care they receive from the adults in their lives. Babies who engage with responsive, consistent, nurturing caregivers and who are living in safe and economically secure environments are more likely to have strong emotional health.

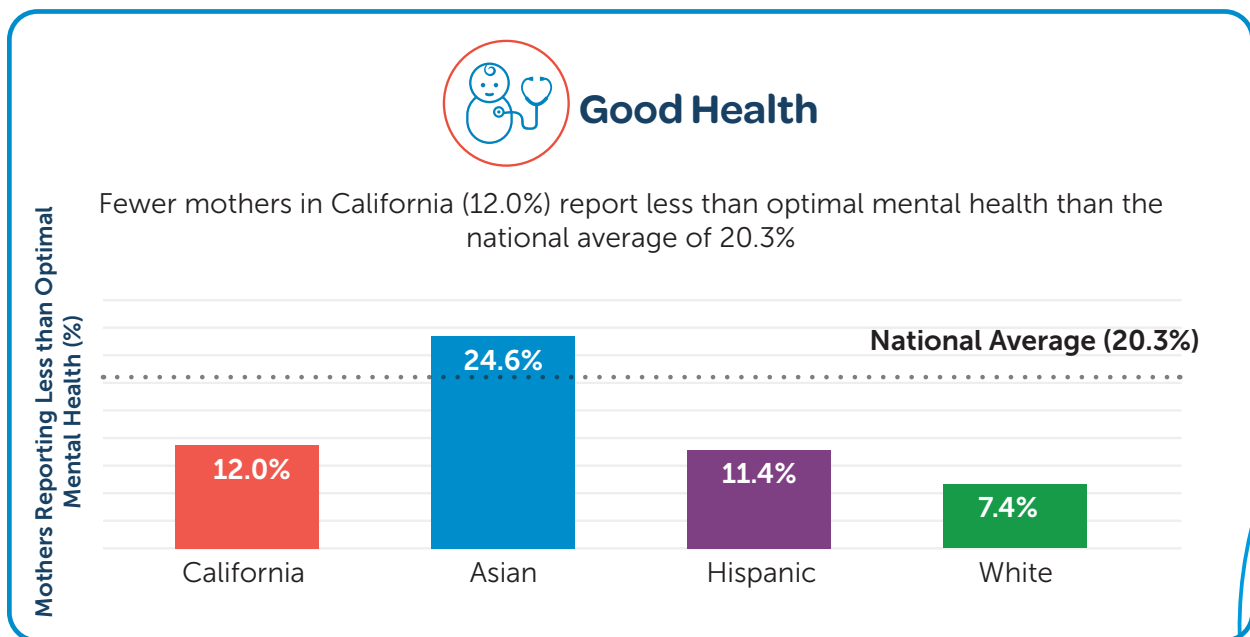
Parents want the best for their children; this is an essential premise for those who provide support to infants and toddlers and for how public policies and programs are formulated and implemented. The connection between maternal and child mental health and well-being are interdependent; mental health includes each family member's emotional, psychological, and social well-being. Most parents have a deep, emotional commitment to their child's well-being. The parent's capacity to be attuned, consistently meet the infant's needs, and nurture a healthy attachment relationship depend on the status of the parent's own mental health. When parents find it difficult to manage their feelings, thinking, and reactions to daily stressors, this can be a sign of low or less-than-optimal mental health.

The connection between maternal and child well-being is particularly important among women of color and their babies due to the intergenerational effects of and lived experiences with institutional and interpersonal racism. At the time of the 2021 SOBY, fewer mothers in

#### California's Medicaid plan...

- ✓ Recommends maternal depression screening during well-child visits
- ✓ Covers social-emotional screening for young children
- ✓ Covers IECMH services at home and at pediatric/family medicine practices
- ✗ Does not cover IECMH services in early childhood settings

California (12%) reported less-than-optimal mental health than the national average of 20.3% however, the mental health and resilience of Asian families and particularly mothers is of concern as 24.6% of Asian mothers reported less-than-optimal mental health. This could be due to additional pressures associated with racism, however, our SOBY data precedes the latest most overt signs of that during COVID. Racism can influence maternal health before and throughout pregnancy and affects babies' starts in life. If mental health challenges are left untreated, they may adversely affect the parent-child relationship and the young child's overall health, development, and learning.



### California Responds to the Needs of its Infants, Toddlers, and Families

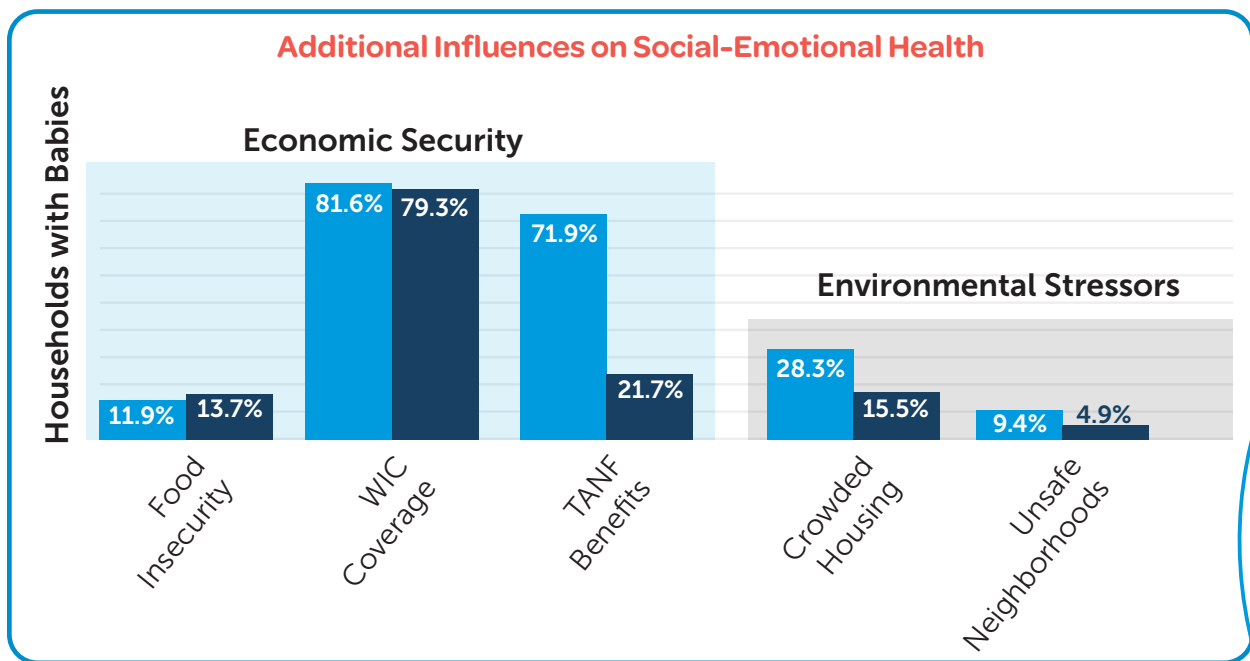
California continues to implement strong policies to promote good health. There's an incredible opportunity to further strengthen support for parents' mental health and therefore that of their children. The recently enacted FY2022 California budget includes a significant investment in a Children and Youth Behavioral Health Initiative. This funding could not come at a more crucial time for California families and represents a huge step toward improving parents' mental health and closing any existing health equity gaps. The most glaring Behavioral Health challenges in California are borne inequitably by communities of color, low-income communities, LGBTQ+ communities, and in places where adverse childhood experiences are widespread





and prominent. How California addresses issues often sets a standard for other states and the nation. Some of the key components of the Initiative that will benefit infants, toddlers, and their families include:

- Starting in 2022-23, Medi-Cal, the state's Medicaid program, will cover family therapy for children who have a mental health diagnosis, as well as children without a diagnosis but who may be at risk for later concerns.
- Medi-Cal will add caregiver-child behavioral health visits, ensuring families will be screened for behavioral health problems, interpersonal safety, tobacco and substance misuse, and social determinants of health, and families will receive referral follow-up to make sure they obtain the services.



### What You Can Do to Continue the Momentum in California

- Be an advocate for babies at [stateofbabies.org/take-action](https://stateofbabies.org/take-action)
- Learn more about the State of Babies through a deep dive with panelists who discuss Maternal Child Health at [stateofbabies.org/summit](https://stateofbabies.org/summit)