



**For Immediate Release**  
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### **New Tool to Ensure California's Babies and Families Get the Services They Need**

*First 5 Association of California and Children's Data Network Unveil California Strong Start Index*

ALAMEDA, CALIFORNIA -- Today, First 5 Association of California and Children's Data Network (CDN) launched a new tool to help service providers, policymakers, and government agencies more effectively support children and families and direct resources where they are needed most.

The California Strong Start Index, funded by the Heising-Simons Foundation, uses information collected at birth to understand the conditions under which California's babies are born in any given neighborhood, county, or region. The index focuses on resources that promote resilience and shows wide variability in access to these resources among the half a million babies born in California each year.

"Every baby deserves a strong start, regardless of where they live," said Moira Kenney, executive director of First 5 Association of California. "Using the Strong Start Index, we can understand in real time which neighborhoods need additional resources so we can ensure babies and young children get the services and informal supports they need during this critical time in their development."

Statewide, babies are born with an average of nine of the 12 Strong Start resources. In some neighborhoods, however, babies are born with an average of only six resources, while in others babies have 11 resources on average.

Resources come in the form of family, health, services and financial assets that are used to create a Strong Start score for every child. They include factors such as healthy birth weight, parental education level, and parents' ability to afford and access health care. These factors are tied to good outcomes and resilience throughout a person's lifespan.

Using the Strong Start Index, state and local policymakers can improve how services and supports for children and families are allocated in California -- and ensure children are supported from a younger age. The index is unique in that it's universal for every child; begins at birth with objective data; and takes a comprehensive, strengths-based approach.

The data allows California to understand the assets babies have at birth at a very local level by using Census tracts -- a federal designation used to organize data at a more granular level than a city or county -- as a proxy for neighborhoods. Viewing the data in this way highlights the discrepancies that exist across communities. For example, two babies born a few streets away from each other can have disparate Strong Start scores. With this information, local service providers can prioritize the interventions that are most needed in a given neighborhood and community.

“The Strong Start Index will help us target our home visiting programs more strategically,” said Angie Dillon-Shore, executive director of First 5 Sonoma County. “It will increase our confidence that we are serving the right neighborhoods, and help us understand gaps in services in a place-based way. Overall, the Strong Start Index will enhance our ability to reach moms and babies that will benefit most.”

Over time, the Strong Start Index can grow to include even more indicators for resilience and success.

“This is the first version. We hope that as California moves forward with greater data integration efforts, the index can evolve and grow to meet the state’s needs,” said Emily Putnam-Hornstein, director of the Children’s Data Network at the University of Southern California, and an associate professor at the USC Suzanne Dworak-Peck School of Social Work.

To learn more about The Strong Start Index, please visit [strongstartindex.org](http://strongstartindex.org).

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### **First 5 Association of California**

First 5 Association is a nonprofit membership organization that advocates for and works with the state’s 58 First 5 county commissions to build strong, effective and sustainable systems serving California’s youngest children and their families.

### **Children’s Data Network**

Based at the Suzanne Dworak-Peck School of Social Work at the University of Southern California, the Children’s Data Network is a data and research collaborative focused on the linkage and analysis of administrative records in service of improving the health, safety and well-being of children.

### **The Heising-Simons Foundation**

The Heising-Simons Foundation is a family foundation based in Los Altos, California. The Foundation works with its many partners to advance sustainable solutions in climate and clean energy, enable groundbreaking research in science, enhance the education of our youngest learners and support human rights for all people.