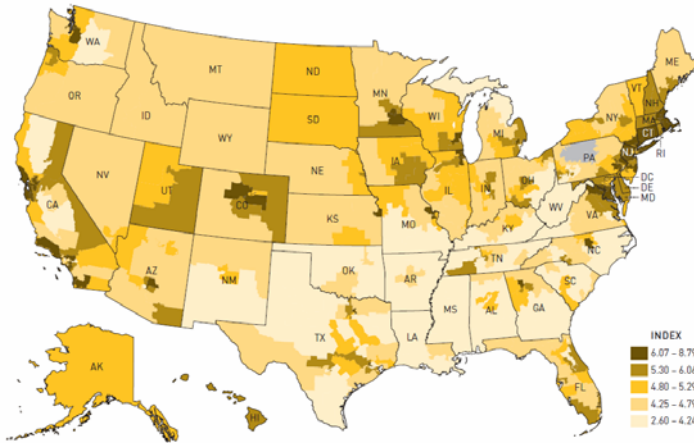


The American Human Development Index

The American Human Development Index is a composite measure of well-being and opportunity. It combines indicators in three fundamental areas—health, knowledge, and standard of living—into a single number on a scale from 0 to 10. **Health** is measured using life expectancy, calculated from mortality data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. **Knowledge** is measured using two indicators: school enrollment and degree attainment. Both indicators are from the U.S. Census Bureau. **Standard of living** is measured using median earnings of all workers 16 and older, also from the Census Bureau.



The American Human Development Project of the Social Science Research Council calculates the American HD Index for the 50 states, the 435 congressional districts, women and men, and for major racial/ethnic groups and publishes the resulting rankings.

The American HD Index provides a snapshot of where different groups stand today in relation to one another and sets a benchmark for evaluating progress over time. The latest national index scores were released in November 2010. This map shows congressional district rankings; the darker colors represent higher scores.

Why do we need an American Human Development Index?

Because national well-being cannot be measured by Gross Domestic Product (GDP) alone. The American HD Index allows for a greater understanding of the opportunities and constraints of ordinary people. GDP answers an important question: how is the economy is doing? But the American HD Index answers an equally—if not more—important question: how are people doing?

Why measure health, knowledge, and standard of living?

Many factors influence a person's well-being and access to opportunity, from politics to the environment to housing to family ties—and more. But most people agree that good health, access to knowledge, and a decent material standard of living are the basic building blocks of a decent life. These are the three ingredients of the widely respected global Human Development Index that the United Nations produces each year to assess progress in countries around the world. The American Human Development Index is a modification of this well-honed international tool; it measures the same areas as the global index, but uses indicators more appropriate to the context of an affluent democracy. The American HD Index, like the global Index, is rooted in the conceptual “capabilities” framework developed by Nobel Laureate Amartya Sen.



How can the American HD Index be used?

The American HD Index is a tool for assessing the relative well-being and access to opportunity of different groups of Americans. Since the release of the first *Measure of America* in 2008, many philanthropic organizations and social service providers have adopted the Index as a way of assessing need, setting priorities, and tracking change. Political officeholders and candidates have used the Index to raise awareness of key issues, make the case for new policies and resources, and understand what is (and isn't) working—and why. Teachers are using the Index in classes on American society. Journalists have used the Index to help readers understand social and economic conditions and to explore opportunity and progress in the United States. Because some of its indicators do not change quickly, the Index is less responsive to short-term impacts of economic fluctuations or policy changes. The Index is therefore coupled with a “Dashboard” of more sensitive indicators to serve as an early-warning system of extreme deprivation. Learn more in *The Measure of America 2010-2011: Mapping Risks and Resilience*, or at our website, www.measureofamerica.org.