



THE WELLBEING PROJECT  
2017 WELLBEING INDEX  
FINDINGS SUMMARY

WORKING TOGETHER *to*

DEFINE, MEASURE,  
*and actively* IMPROVE

*Wellbeing*

IN SANTA MONICA



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# 2017 WELLBEING INDEX FINDINGS SUMMARY

A city is more than a collection of ZIP codes. In the best cases, it's a vibrant community where residents reinforce each other so that all can achieve the lives they want to live.

Santa Monica is known around the world for its sunny streets and the Pacific waves lapping at the Pier. But for the nearly 94,000 people who live in Santa Monica, it's home – where they play, study and work; where they sleep and shop; where they walk, drive and jog; where they dream about how they want to live and do their best to make it happen.

In many ways, it is working. Santa Monica residents tell us they are overwhelmingly satisfied with their lives. They have improved in several key areas since the Wellbeing Project was introduced in 2015:

- There has been a huge increase over two years in the number of Santa Monica residents who say they can count on their neighbors (84% now versus 56% in 2015)
- Median household income, one measure of prosperity, is up modestly over two years
- Those who take the train to work have more than quintupled (6% now versus 1% in 2015), just before the Expo Line extension went into service

But there is still a long way to go.

Santa Monica is the first city in the nation to systematically measure how well its residents are able to thrive, and how the city can help them do it better.

## Introduction

Four years ago, Santa Monica won a \$1 million prize from the Bloomberg Philanthropies Mayors Challenge to create the Wellbeing Project. The idea was to use the emerging international science of wellbeing, the study of the measurable things in successful

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communities, and using those measurements to guide how a city can better provide for its people.

In 2015, Santa Monica launched its first Wellbeing Index, statistics drawn from the city's records, commercial data sources, surveys and social media that took over a thousand hours to analyze. The result was a benchmark compilation that let the city's elected officials, professional staff, non-profit partners, and anyone else who was interested see where things stood across six distinct categories.

Figuring out what to count and how best to count it came from a partnership with the leading minds in the science of wellbeing from RAND Corporation and U.K.-based research institute New Economics Foundation (nef) to develop the Index. The Wellbeing framework and measurement areas were then developed with insight from 18 wellbeing experts from around the world, including representatives from the Brookings Institution, United Nations Development Program, several renowned universities and wellbeing research groups. Such a broad base of information helps to give the most comprehensive picture available of the lives Santa Monica residents lead. There's enough information to look at the data in different ways – by geographical area, age, gender, ethnicity, and income category, for instance – that help us see that not everyone in Santa Monica has the exact same experience.

The 2017 Wellbeing Index expands on what we were able to see two years ago. The surveys on which this year's results are based include more than twice as many residents – more than 3,800 -- as the first survey. They include more questions about how Santa Monica residents experience their community, how they balance work and personal life, and what their backgrounds are. It includes more information from the city's Office of Sustainability about how we manage our resources. And this year the Wellbeing Index includes more information about Santa Monica's abundant arts and cultural services, as well as greater information about the health of community members and what they do to maintain it.

The categories, which the Wellbeing Index calls "dimensions," are major areas of measurement. They're broken down into subdimensions, smaller subject areas that make up parts of the whole.

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## Dimensions

The six dimensions measured in the Wellbeing Index are:



**Outlook** - looks at detailed surveys and analysis of what Santa Monica residents say on social media about where they live. It seeks to make sense of how satisfied people feel about their lives and to pinpoint the things city officials might coordinate to help them improve those lives.



**Community** - how residents involve themselves in their community, with measurements of the strength of local networks, how involved residents feel in their city and its government, and how much influence they feel over the decisions their elected and appointed leaders make;



**Place & Planet** - how the people who live in Santa Monica feel about what's around them, including open spaces, buildings, and even the social environment;



**Learning** - a measurement of classical education like schools and colleges, as well as lifelong learning in and out of classrooms, available to Santa Monica residents to let them achieve their potential;



**Health** - measurements of how healthy Santa Monica residents feel, and the resources available to them to help them manage and improve their physical health;



**Economic Opportunity** - the degree to which Santa Monica residents can improve their financial lot in life, key to a community's positive feelings about itself

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## Where We Stand



Overall, the 2017 Wellbeing Index finds Santa Monica residents rate satisfaction with their lives at 7.4 on a scale of 0-10. That's higher than the average for all Americans (which is 6.9) and the same as the Canadians, who have the highest national rate of satisfaction in the world.

Santa Monica residents continue being upbeat, as they were in our 2015 Wellbeing Index: about two-thirds (69 per cent) told us they are happy most or all of the time. An overwhelming number (90 per cent) say they are never or rarely lonely.

Nearly three in four Santa Monica residents (74 per cent) say they are optimistic about the future. Four in five (80 per cent) say life is worthwhile. The Wellbeing Index rates that as flourishing.

However, if we look at different slices of the information, there are some weaknesses. About one in every three Santa Monica residents in the 25-34 age group (31 per cent) are more likely than people of other ages to report having less time than they would like to do the things they enjoy. For other age groups, somewhere between one in three and one in four told us they don't have enough time for the things they enjoy. The standout is the oldest age bracket. About one in 12 Santa Monica residents over the age of 75 say they lack enough time for the things they enjoy. More women than men told us they felt stressed. Hispanic/Latino residents reported greater stress levels than other ethnic groups.



How people fit within their communities is an important indicator of how resilient an area is, particularly in times of need. In the Wellbeing Index, those measures continue to be a mixed bag for Santa Monica – some extremely high indications of how engaged people are in civic processes like voting, but results that can certainly be improved as to whether the city's residents feel their voices are heard in how city government makes decisions that impact them.

Santa Monica made an impressive jump from our survey two years ago in neighborhood trust. The overwhelming majority (84 per cent) told us in the current survey that the people

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in their neighborhoods can be trusted. Two years ago, that number was just over half (56 per cent). Nearly three in four (74 per cent) Santa Monica residents say they plan to stay in their neighborhood for a number of years. Almost half (48 per cent) report that they regularly stop and talk to their neighbors. Close to two in every three (61 per cent) told us they can count on their neighbors.

While these characteristics of the Community Dimension are all very strong, other measures of the Wellbeing Index show substantial room for improvement. Fewer than three in every ten residents (29 per cent) report feeling they have influence on decisions in Santa Monica.



Place and Planet is the Wellbeing Index dimension that accounts for what surrounds us – the buildings, the open space, and the rest of our environment. Many of its components are appearing in the 2017 Wellbeing Index for the first time.

Housing quality remains a key issue in Santa Monica. Roughly half (51 per cent) of the survey respondents told us they were very happy with their homes. That number drops sharply among Santa Monica residents of color.

Residents in every area of Santa Monica have abundant access to parks and bicycle facilities. Santa Monica residents understand that what surrounds them is an important form of human connection. Half of those surveyed (50 per cent) told us the one amenity they'd like to see the city add is more community gardens.

Certain kinds of urban drawbacks to wellbeing -- such as vacant housing and fast-food outlets – are relatively rare in Santa Monica, but the 90401 downtown ZIP code has the greatest number of them in the city.

And another bright note: two in every three new buildings in Santa Monica already meet the two highest standards for green building construction of LEED, Leadership in Energy Design. The goal is for every new building in Santa Monica to be rated either Gold or Platinum by 2020.

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Progress is being made in more sustainable transit. Santa Monica is on track to meet its 2020 target for major employers to have 40 per cent of staff commute by carpool, bicycle or on foot. And mobility patterns are beginning to shift for residents as well, with the opening of Expo (6% now take it to work)

As in every other area, there's still room for improvement. As abundant and beautiful as Santa Monica's outdoor spaces are, fewer than half (42 per cent) of residents say they make use of them a few times a month or less. Three in five residents (60 per cent) told us they used Santa Monica's parks and public libraries a few times a month or less.



Many of the key indicators about how Santa Monica residents learn are strong. But as with measures in other Wellbeing Index dimensions, there is still room for improvement in many areas.

Take Kindergarten Readiness, framed by four different statistics about how ready a child is to start school. Most of the measures improved for Santa Monica students entering kindergarten since the first Wellbeing Index two years ago. Communication skills improved by 8 per cent among these incoming students, physical readiness increased 2%, and social readiness is up 8 per cent. However, one important measure – a student's emotional readiness to start school – declined 3%.

College readiness rates for high school seniors in the Santa Monica Malibu Unified School District show vast differences across racial and ethnic lines. The rates, which are a key factor in determining how much a person will earn in a job later in life and can have much to do with future wellbeing, by group are:

- Whites: 85%
- Hispanics/Latinos: 72%
- Blacks: 52%
- Asian: 95%
- Multi-racial: 82%

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Another set of indicators say much when viewed across racial and ethnic categories: about half of Black and Latino/Hispanic students attend Santa Monica College to earn a degree or transfer to a four year school. About one in three White students at SMC are there for that reason.



The good news about health in the 2017 Wellbeing Index is that a lower proportion of Santa Monica residents suffer from many chronic health conditions – such as coronary artery disease -- than the average American.

And Santa Monica residents report themselves at lower rates than those in surrounding Los Angeles County of being in poor or fair health, or of being diagnosed with diabetes or obesity. Santa Monica has a lower rate of cigarette smoking than Los Angeles County and the rest of the country. In 2016, those without health insurance in Santa Monica stood at 5.9%, a relatively low rate compared to other places.

But there are some health metrics where Santa Monica residents could stand to improve. Two in five Santa Monica residents (40%) say they do not engage in daily physical activity even though the city has wonderful weather, many parks, recreational facilities, special lanes and even paths for bicycles, and a state beach that is known around the world. When students in the Santa Monica-Malibu Unified School District takes annual physical fitness exams in the 5th, 7th, and 9th grades, three in ten (30%) are able to pass them.

A strong number of Santa Monica residents (85%) say they get at least six hours of sleep each night. But only one in five (20%) say they eat the recommended five servings a day of fresh fruit and vegetables. Santa Monica's rate of binge drinking among those 18 years old and above stands at about one in five (18%), it's slightly higher than the U.S. average (16%).

On measures of mental health among young people, nearly one in three 11th graders (29%) in Santa Monica told us they had experienced significant periods of extreme sadness last year. On the other hand, there was strong improvement in young people reporting a caring adult relationship in the last school year (almost nine in ten students – 88%) versus the 2014-2015 school year (three in four students – 75%).



The Economic Opportunity Dimension measures affordability, opportunity and business diversity – factors that play into how Santa Monica residents see their financial health within the community. Overall, Santa Monica has a median household income – a standard economic indicator – of \$76,000 a year. That's substantially above Los Angeles County's median annual household income of \$54,510, California's \$64,500, and the U.S. median of \$55,775.

Nearly half of Santa Monica residents (47% for homeowners, 48% for renters) told us they are spending more than 30% of income keeping a roof over their heads. And despite the fact that more than a third (38%) of all multifamily housing stock in Santa Monica is designated for low- or moderate-income residents, one in four Santa Monica residents say they worry about making the rent or mortgage payment every month. About one in six (16%) worry about losing their job. An almost equal number (17%) say they worry about monthly credit-card payments.

## Slicing the Data

Because the Wellbeing Project collects such a vast array of information, it is possible in many cases to see it from different perspectives. People who analyze statistics refer to it as "slicing the data." While such differing views of statistical information are interesting, they can also be incredibly useful to communities in identifying specific needs within a community and coming up with ways to address those needs.

For instance, if we separate Santa Monica Wellbeing Project statistics by ZIP code, we get a different understanding of the specific needs of Santa Monica's different geographical areas.

### Consider:

- **90401:** Residents report walking more than residents of other areas, make more noise complaints, but have higher praise for community amenities
- **90402:** Residents have the highest life satisfaction in the city, have best health in the city, report more socializing, have a better sense of community and less economic worry than residents of other areas
- **90403:** Residents are the most optimistic in Santa Monica, and have the highest level of trust in their neighbors

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- **90404:** Residents have the lowest life satisfaction in the city, report the least appreciation for community experiences, and have the highest economic worry
  - **90405:** Residents have Santa Monica's highest stress levels, spend the most time in community and public spaces, and have the highest job satisfaction

Similarly, if we slice the data by ethnicity and race, we see how the same basic information can take on different meanings. About one in five Santa Monica residents (20%) are minorities. Asian and Latino/Hispanic residents told surveyors they have the least amount of time to do the things they enjoy. They also reported the least amount of resilience –that is, being able to bounce back when things go wrong in their lives. About one in four Blacks and Latinos/Hispanics (23%) told us it takes them a long time to get back to normal. For Whites and Asians, that number was about one in seven (14% and 15%, respectively). White residents said their general happiness was lower than that of other ethnic groups. However, they said “I am living the best life possible” more often than any other ethnic or racial group. White residents reported the highest levels of health of any group. Black and Asian residents reported getting the least sleep, and Latino/Hispanic residents had the lowest levels of healthy eating.

White residents told us their work/life balance was lower than other groups. Latino/Hispanic residents said they were the least satisfied with housing quality, with Blacks only slightly more satisfied. Latino/Hispanic residents told us they were the least likely ethnic or racial group to socialize in their neighborhoods, spend time outdoors, or engage in physical activity. They also are the group least satisfied with community amenities.

The Wellbeing Index also shows some substantial differences between genders. The differences between how men and women view their lives in some cases are stark:

- Women told us they had more stress, lower life satisfaction, and more economic worries than men
- Men say they had better work/life balance, better job satisfaction, and were happier with housing quality than women
- Women reported they volunteered more, had healthier eating habits, had a better sense of community and more engagement in local decision making than men

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## Summary

The Wellbeing Index continues to provide us with unique views of life in Santa Monica. Some of these views are exactly what we expected. Others are the opposite of what we expected. In some cases, we're gaining insights into issues that until now we were not able to measure.

As diverse as the insights, the answers to finding ways for Santa Monica residents to live their lives to the fullest are varied. We – the residents of our many communities as well as those they select to make decisions on their behalf – need to stay open to new ideas to fulfill potential for everyone.

## Where We Go From Here

The Wellbeing Index is a community asset. We hope the widest possible group will look into these findings and take part in the processes that will play out the rest of this year and next year to make our shared dreams a common reality.