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Walking Among California Adults

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SUMMARY: This policy brief describes two types of walking among California adults: walking for transportation and walking for leisure. Using data from the 2013-14 California Health Interview Survey, the study found that the prevalence of both types of walking has increased since 2003. The prevalence of walking

for both transportation and leisure varies with age, income, race/ethnicity, and neighborhood safety and cohesion. Additional efforts by state and local policymakers, as well as by communities, are needed to reduce disparities and promote walking among adults.

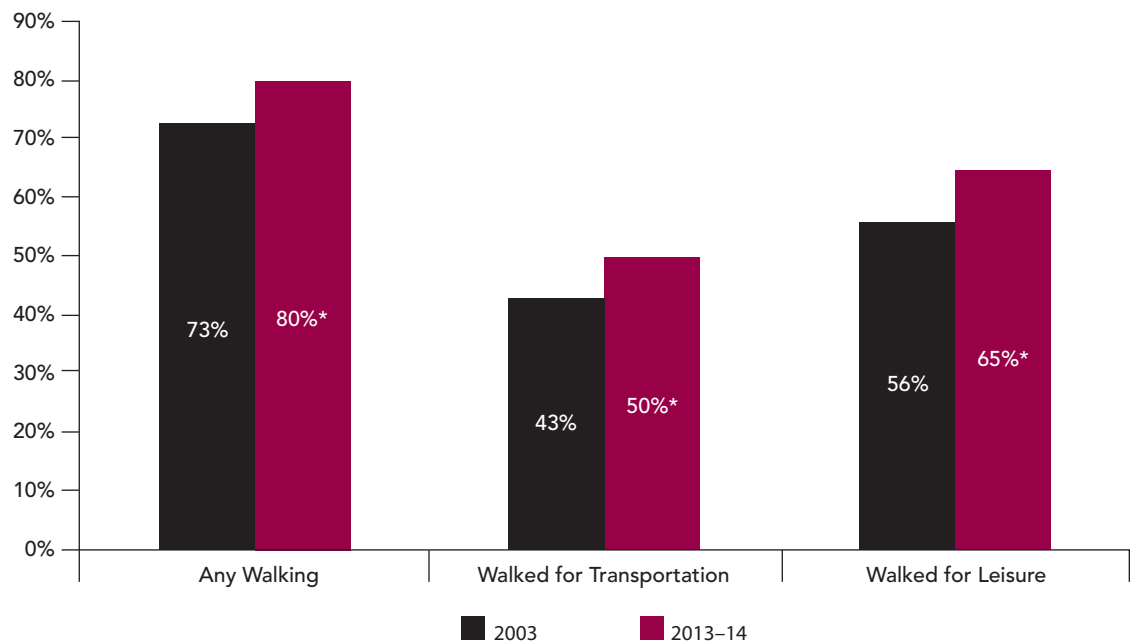
“Regular physical activity helps prevent weight gain and reduces the risks of type 2 diabetes, heart disease, stroke ... and premature death.”

Physical activity has a number of benefits for overall health, physical functioning, and general well-being. Regular physical activity helps prevent weight gain and reduces the risks of type 2 diabetes, heart disease, stroke, osteoporosis, several types of cancer, and premature death.¹⁻³ Physical activity also

improves cognitive function and attention and reduces the risks of dementia and depression.⁴ The Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans recommend that adults engage in at least 150 minutes of moderate or vigorous physical activity each week.⁵ However, fewer than half of adults nationally meet this minimum recommended amount of physical activity.⁶

Exhibit 1

Prevalence of Walking for Transportation, Leisure, or Either Purpose Among Adults 18 Years and Over, California, 2003 and 2013-14

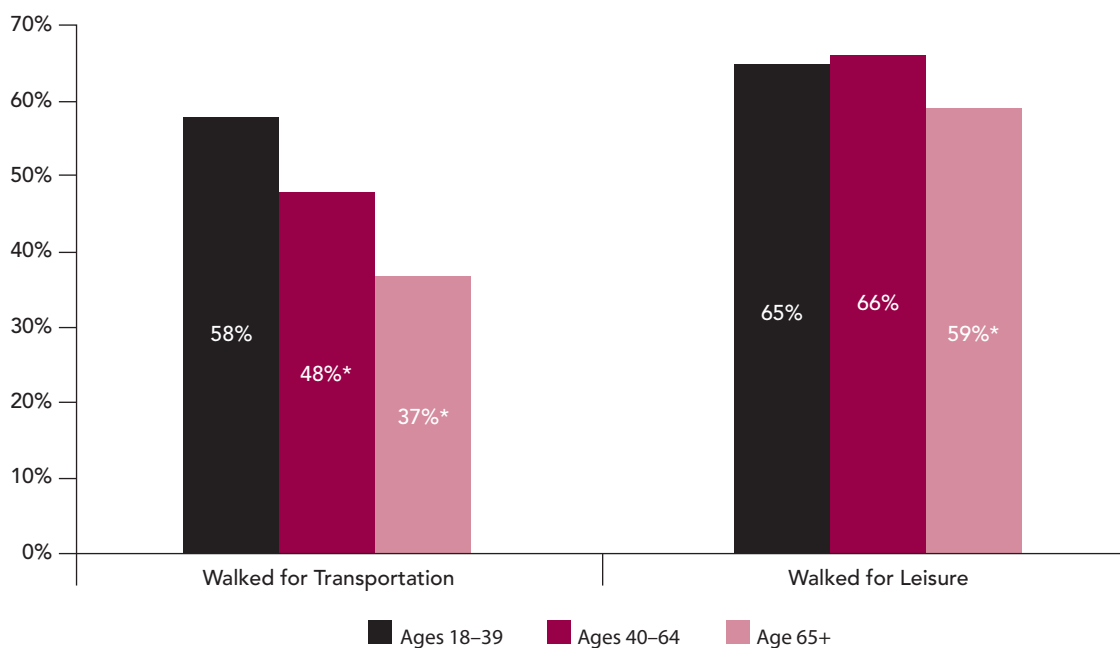


Source: 2003 and 2013-14 California Health Interview Surveys

*Significantly different from 2003

Exhibit 2

Prevalence of Walking for Transportation and Leisure by Age Among Adults in California, 2013-14



Source: 2013-14 California Health Interview Survey

*Significantly different from "Ages 18-39"

“There were increases in all types of walking since 2003.”

Walking is a moderate-intensity physical activity that can provide significant health benefits. Walking can be done for transportation (i.e., to get somewhere) or leisure (e.g., for relaxation, exercise, as a social activity, or to walk a dog). Although adults may get exercise in a variety of ways—including through sports, fitness programs, or on the job—walking is the most common form of physical activity among adults, and it is an important component in overall levels of physical activity.⁷

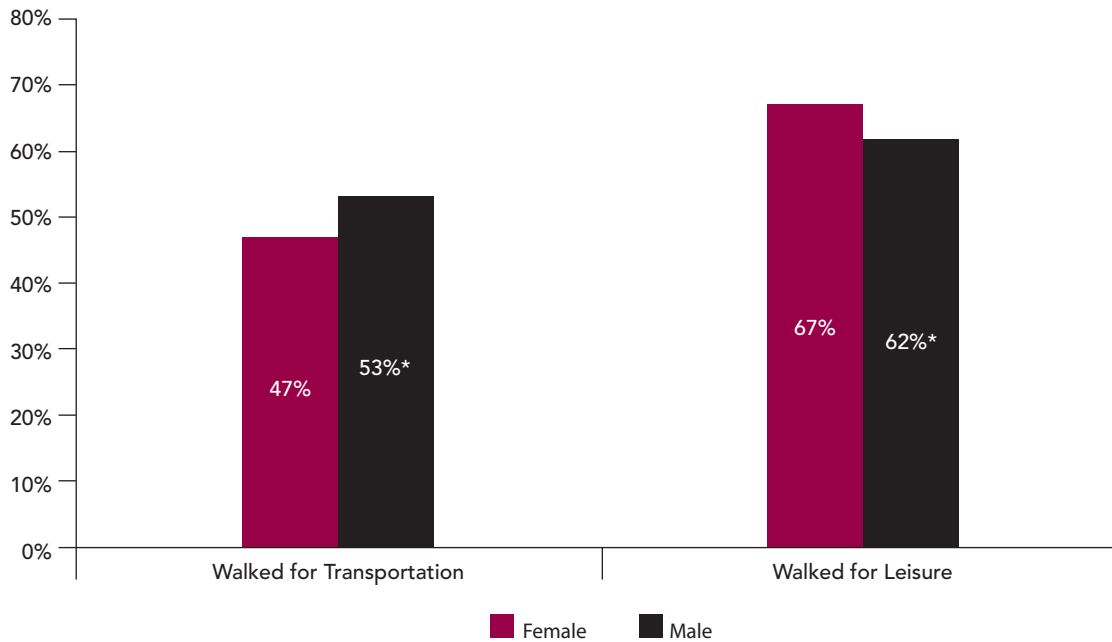
This policy brief describes the prevalence of walking (overall and for leisure or transport) among California adults. It also examines how the prevalence of walking varies by gender, race/ethnicity, income, and neighborhood factors, such as safety and cohesion. The findings presented are based on data from the 2013-14 California Health Interview Survey (CHIS).

Prevalence of Walking Increased from 2003 to 2013-14

In 2013-14, 50 percent of adults in California walked for transportation, 65 percent walked for leisure, and 80 percent walked for either purpose at least once in the previous week. There were increases in all types of walking since 2003 (Exhibit 1). The proportion of adults engaging in either type of walking increased from 73 percent to 80 percent; walking for transportation increased from 43 percent to 50 percent, and walking for leisure increased from 56 percent to 65 percent. Although the vast majority of adults walked at least once per week in 2013-14, only 33 percent met the physical activity recommendations by walking for at least 150 minutes per week. However, it is possible that some adults who do not meet guidelines by walking do meet guidelines when other types of physical activity are also considered.

Prevalence of Walking for Transportation and Leisure by Gender Among Adults in California, 2013-14

Exhibit 3



Source: 2013-14 California Health Interview Survey

*Significantly different from "Female"

Younger Adults More Likely than Older Adults to Walk at Least Once per Week, but Most Older Adults Continue to Walk for Leisure

Younger adults walk more than adults age 65 and older, but walking for transportation differs by age much more than walking for leisure (Exhibit 2). Eighty-four percent of adults ages 18-39 walked at least once per week, compared to 71 percent of adults age 65 and older. These patterns differ depending on the type of walking. The prevalence of adults walking for transportation declined steadily with age, from 58 percent of those ages 18-39 to 48 percent of those ages 40-64, and then to 37 percent of those age 65 and older. The prevalence of

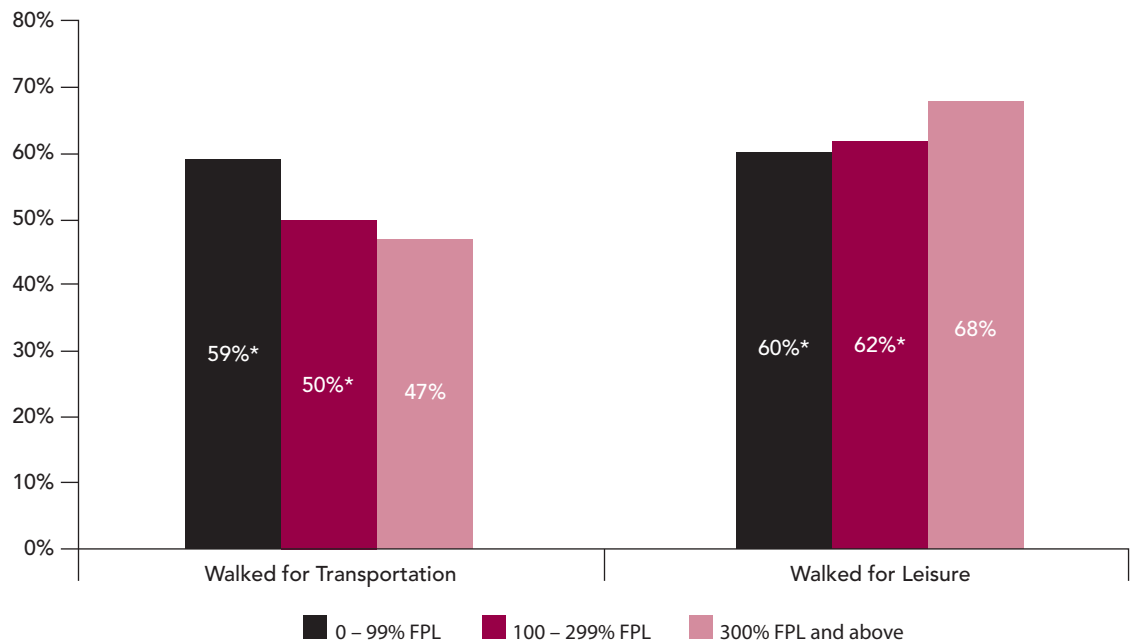
walking for leisure changed much less with age; approximately 65 percent of adults under age 65 walked for leisure, compared to 59 percent of those 65 and older.

Overall, walking does not vary by gender, but there are gender differences in walking for transportation and walking for leisure (Exhibit 3). The prevalence of walking for transport is higher among men than women (53 percent vs. 47 percent), but the prevalence of walking for leisure is higher among women (67 percent vs. 62 percent).

“Overall, walking does not vary by gender, but there are gender differences in walking for transportation and walking for leisure.”

Exhibit 4

Prevalence of Walking for Transportation and Leisure by Income Among Adults in California, 2013-14



Source: 2013-14 California Health Interview Survey

*Significantly different from “300% FPL and above”

“Adults of color and low-income adults are more likely to walk for transportation but less likely to walk for leisure.”

Low-income and African-American Adults More Likely to Walk for Transport, Less Likely to Walk for Leisure

Walking for transportation and walking for leisure also have different patterns as a function of race and income (Exhibit 4 and Exhibit 5). Adults of color and low-income adults are more likely to walk for transportation but less likely to walk for leisure. Specifically, the prevalence of walking for transportation decreases as income increases, dropping from 59 percent among those with incomes below the federal poverty level (FPL) to 47 percent of those with incomes

at or above 300 percent FPL. In contrast, the prevalence of walking for leisure increases with income, rising from 60 percent among those with incomes below the poverty line to 68 percent of those with incomes of 300 percent FPL and above.

Latino (54 percent) and African-American (53 percent) adults have the highest prevalence of walking for transport, significantly higher than the prevalence among white adults (46 percent). Asian adults (50 percent) also have a higher rate than white adults. White adults have

Exhibit 5

Prevalence of Walking for Transportation and Leisure by Race/Ethnicity Among Adults in California, 2013-14

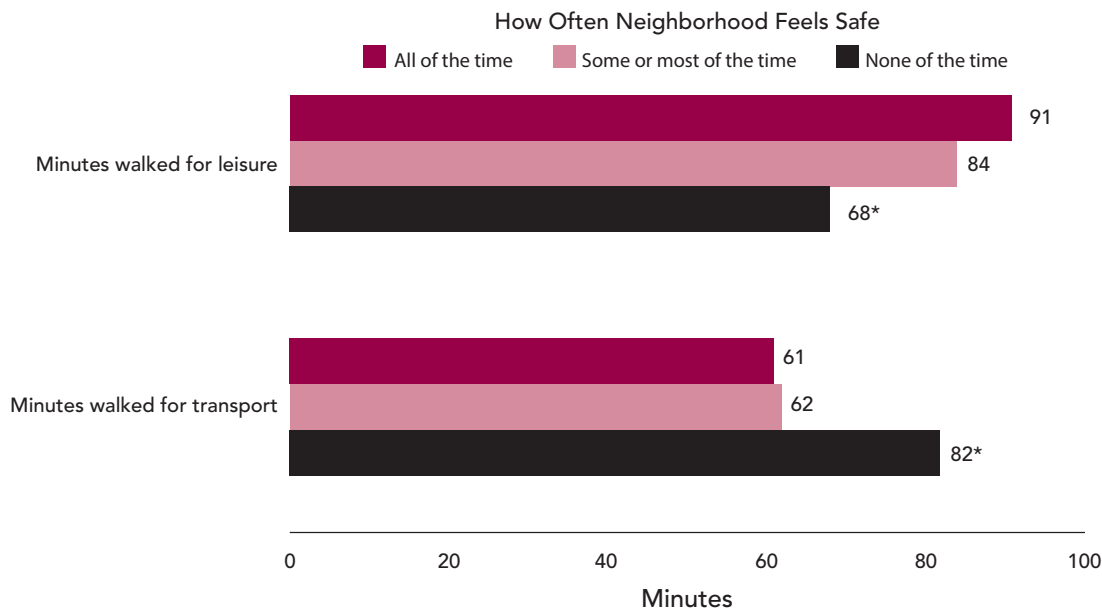
	Walked for Transportation	Walked for Leisure
Latino	54%*	64%
White	46%	66%
African-American	53%*	59%*
American Indian	49%	62%
Asian	50%*	63%
Native Hawaiian	50%	60%
Multiracial	52%	65%
All Adults	50%	65%

Source: 2013-14 California Health Interview Survey

*Significantly different from “White”

Minutes per Week Spent Walking for Leisure and for Transportation by Perceptions of Neighborhood Safety, Adults in California, 2013-14

Exhibit 6



Source: 2013-14 California Health Interview Survey

*Significantly different from "All of the time"

the highest prevalence of walking for leisure, significantly higher than that of African-American adults (66 percent vs. 59 percent).

Safety and Neighborhood Cohesion Related to Walking

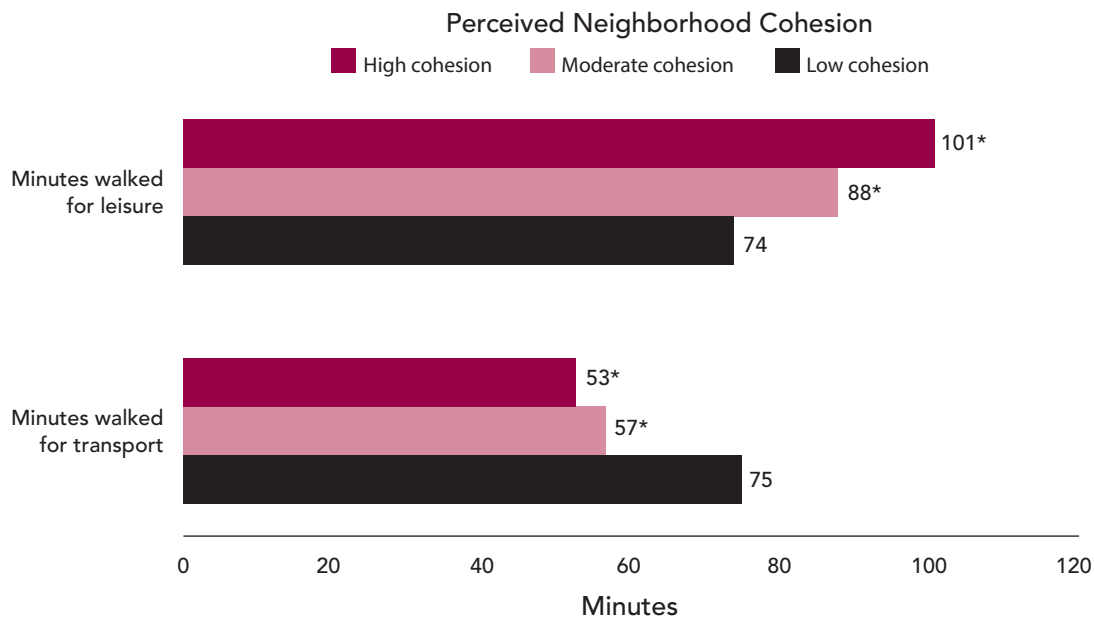
Perceptions of safety are associated with less walking for transport but more walking for leisure. The prevalence of walking for transport was lower among adults who feel safe in their neighborhood all the time than among those who feel safe none of the time (48 percent and 56 percent, respectively). The prevalence of walking for leisure was higher among adults who feel safe in their neighborhood all the time than among those who feel safe none of the time (65 percent and 56 percent, respectively).

A similar pattern was observed for minutes spent walking for transport and leisure (Exhibit 6). Adults who feel safe in their neighborhood all of the time walk less for transport than adults who feel safe none of the time (61 vs. 82 minutes per week). More time spent walking for transport among adults who feel unsafe in their neighborhood may be due in part to low income: Because low-income adults are more likely to walk for transport and also more likely to live in neighborhoods perceived as unsafe, their greater amount of time spent walking for transportation is likely to indicate need rather than preference. The opposite pattern is observed in walking for leisure. Adults who feel safe in their neighborhood all of the time walk more for leisure than adults who feel safe none of the time (91 minutes vs. 68 minutes per week).

“Adults who feel safe in their neighborhood all of the time walk more for leisure than adults who feel safe none of the time.”

Exhibit 7

Minutes per Week Spent Walking for Leisure and for Transportation by Perceived Neighborhood Cohesion, Adults, California, 2013-14



Source: 2013-14 California Health Interview Survey

*Significantly different from "Low cohesion"

“For many adults, walking is the only form of exercise they get.”

Neighborhood cohesion is an indicator of the extent to which adults feel they can trust and depend on their neighbors. Living in a neighborhood in which people trust and depend on one another is related to more walking for leisure but less walking for transport (Exhibit 7). Adults who report high neighborhood cohesion spend more time walking for leisure than adults who report low neighborhood cohesion (101 minutes vs. 74 minutes). Conversely, adults who report high neighborhood cohesion spend less time walking for transportation than those who perceive low cohesion in their neighborhood (53 minutes vs. 75 minutes). Similar patterns are observed in prevalence of walking for leisure and transportation. Adults who report high neighborhood cohesion have lower rates of walking for transport than adults who report low neighborhood cohesion (48 percent vs. 54 percent). Conversely, adults who report high neighborhood cohesion have higher rates of

walking for leisure than those who perceive low cohesion in their neighborhood (68 percent vs 60 percent).

Conclusions and Recommendations

Walking is an important form of physical activity for adults. Adults who walk less may be getting physical activity through other work or leisure activities, but for many adults, walking is the only form of exercise they get. In addition, walking is an important component of overall levels of physical activity. Although 80 percent of adults walked at least once per week in 2013-14, only 33 percent walked for at least 150 minutes per week, the amount of physical activity recommended in the Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans. The prevalence of walking for transportation and for leisure differs significantly by the sociodemographic characteristics of individuals and by the characteristics of their neighborhoods. The data and analysis in this policy brief suggest

that walking for leisure and for transportation are related to income as well as to the safety and cohesion of neighborhoods. The following policy options could help promote walking among adults:

- **Target efforts to improve cohesion and safety of low-income neighborhoods.** Low-income adults and African-American adults walk less for leisure than higher-income and white adults. Focusing efforts to improve cohesion and safety on low-income neighborhoods can improve neighborhood conditions for large numbers of low-income adults and help reduce disparities in walking for leisure.
- **Improve neighborhood safety.** Neighborhood safety was related to more walking for leisure. Strategies to improve perceived and actual neighborhood safety could promote more walking for leisure. Community leaders and local governments can develop neighborhood crime-prevention programs, and government agencies should provide information and support for creating and sustaining these programs. Developing a neighborhood crime-prevention program where one does not exist could increase the amount of leisure-time walking. Such a program could also help build mutual trust and support through the use of community-organizing techniques.
- **Promote social cohesion in neighborhoods.** Higher levels of neighborhood cohesion were related to more walking for leisure. Community leaders and local governments can help build opportunities for the interaction and engagement of neighborhood residents. Research suggests that social cohesion is higher in walkable, mixed-use neighborhoods.⁸ One way to promote social cohesion may be to promote policies that increase the walkability of neighborhoods, including policies that encourage mixed-use development, availability of spaces for recreation (such as parks), and pedestrian-oriented communities (for example, communities that have sidewalks and destinations).

Data Source and Methods

All statements in this report that compare rates for one group with another group reflect statistically significant differences ($p < 0.05$) unless otherwise noted. The findings in this brief are based primarily on data from the 2013-14 California Health Interview Survey (CHIS). Data from CHIS 2003 were also used.

CHIS interviews more than 40,000 Californians every two years. Since 2011, CHIS has been conducted on a continuous basis; in 2009 and earlier, CHIS was conducted biennially. CHIS 2013-14 completed interviews with more than 40,000 households that included 40,240 adults, 2,253 adolescents, and 5,512 children, drawn from every county in the state. Interviews were conducted in English, Spanish, Chinese (both Mandarin and Cantonese), Vietnamese, Korean, and Tagalog. Adults were asked about walking in the past week for transportation (“to get someplace”) and for leisure (“for fun, relaxation, exercise, or to walk the dog”).

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This publication contains data from the California Health Interview Survey (CHIS), the nation's largest state health survey. Conducted by the UCLA Center for Health Policy Research, CHIS data give a detailed picture of the health and health care needs of California's large and diverse population.

CHIS is a collaboration of the UCLA Center for Health Policy Research, California Department of Public Health, California Department of Health Care Services, and the Public Health Institute.

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Endnotes

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