



Community Assessment Update

DEMOGRAPHICS

Children under age 5
6-7% of total county population

3000 → # of 0-5 year olds in Tehama County

45-50% Hispanic 66%
40-45% White 50%
5-10% Other Races 50%

FPL 25%
of school children on free lunches

60%

30-35% DLL in Tehama County live in poverty

POVERTY

52% of NCCDI Spanish speaking children are receiving public assistance

PREGNANCY

22 Teen pregnancies per 1,000

14% of pregnant mothers receive late or no prenatal care

Fertility Rate
1.52 births per woman
down from 2.1

MENTAL HEALTH

Tehama County vs CA

20 vs. 10 per 100,000

Suicide Rates

ACEs Top 3

- Substance Abuse
- Domestic Violence
- Mental Health

Top 20 Counties

CHILDCARE

25% of demand met with licensed infant/toddler childcare slots

0 licensed centers provide evenings, weekends, or overnight care

30% of a family's income is spent on infant care per year

TRANSPORTATION

20% of rural families experience childcare disruptions due to transportation barriers

10% of Tehama County households do not own a vehicle

Represents 15% of low income families household income

HOUSING

30% of income is spent on housing costs

29% of NCCDI children are homeless by McKinney Vento Act

PATH Navigation Center opened in May 2024

EMPLOYMENT

NATIONALLY
68.9% of mothers & 94.6% of fathers are in the workforce

81.8% of NCCDI parents employed or in school

25 NCCDI families received assistance in enrolling in an education or job training program

Tehama County, a rural region in California, faces unique socioeconomic challenges, particularly affecting young children under the age of five. With approximately 3,000 children in this age group—comprising about 6-7% of the county’s total population—access to essential resources such as education, healthcare, and childcare is influenced by factors like poverty, language barriers, limited public transportation, and a shortage of affordable housing. These issues are further complicated by a high poverty rate, especially among Hispanic and Latino children, who make up a significant portion of the county’s population. The high cost of living, scarcity of childcare options, and inadequate public transit present ongoing obstacles, especially for low-income families. This analysis delves into these issues, examining how they impact children’s development and well-being and highlighting the need for targeted solutions to support vulnerable families in Tehama County.

Demographics

Tehama County has around 3,000 children under the age of five, comprising about 6-7% of the total county population. This group’s needs are especially impacted by socioeconomic and demographic factors that influence their access to resources like education, health care, and social services.

The racial composition of children under five in Tehama County is diverse. Based on recent demographic data:

Hispanic or Latino: Approximately 45-50% of children under five identify as Hispanic or Latino, reflecting a larger trend within California.

White (non-Hispanic): Around 40-45% of this age group is White, making it the second-largest racial group.

Other Races (including African American, Native American, Asian, and Multiracial): The remaining 5-10% includes children who identify as African American, Native American, Asian, or multiracial, each representing smaller portions within this age demographic.

Poverty

Tehama County’s child poverty rate stands around 25%, which is higher than the national average of 17% (US Census, 2021). Economic constraints here are reflected in over 60% of schoolchildren qualifying for free meals, a major indicator of low family income.

Poverty Rates by Race

Hispanic or Latino: Approximately 30% of Hispanic or Latino children under five live below the poverty line, a rate influenced by limited economic opportunities, language barriers, and lower average incomes for this demographic.

White (non-Hispanic): The poverty rate for White (non-Hispanic) children in this age range is lower, at around 20%, though still above the national average. Factors like rural employment instability and the high cost of living contribute to poverty within this group.

Other Races: Children under five who belong to smaller racial groups (e.g., African American, Native American) experience poverty rates ranging from 25% to 35%. These groups often face compounded challenges, such as lower access to social support networks and fewer job opportunities for parents.

Language and Poverty

Children in non-English-speaking households also show higher poverty rates, but Tehama County's rural nature amplifies this issue. Families often experience barriers to essential services, from healthcare to early childhood education, due to language and cultural differences.

English Language Proficiency: Around 35-40% of children under five in Tehama County live in households where English is not the primary language. Many of these families speak Spanish at home, with language differences impacting access to healthcare, education, and social services.

Children in Non-English-Speaking Households and Poverty: Children from non-English-speaking households experience a poverty rate of about 30-35%, reflecting additional barriers in accessing higher-paying jobs for parents and educational resources for children. Households where Spanish is primarily spoken are particularly affected, with many parents employed in lower-wage agricultural and service jobs common in rural areas like Tehama County.

Nationally, child poverty shows a regional disparity, with rural areas like Tehama County often experiencing higher rates due to limited employment opportunities and lower average wages (<https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED377975>). The poverty rate for Hispanic or Latino children under five is approximately 26%, and for White children, it's around 15%. Tehama County's poverty rates for both groups are higher than national averages, likely due to the limited availability of social services, higher living costs relative to local wages, and fewer educational resources in rural areas.

Pregnancy and Prenatal Health

In recent years, Tehama County has observed a gradual decline in the number of pregnant women accessing prenatal services, reflecting trends in both local demographics and the challenges of rural healthcare access. This decrease can be attributed to several factors, including population shifts, economic challenges, and healthcare provider shortages, all of which impact the county's ability to support prenatal health for its residents.

Teen pregnancy rates are significantly higher than the state and national averages. Tehama County reports that 14% of mothers receive late or no prenatal care, contributing to a higher incidence of low-birth-weight babies.

Nationwide, late prenatal care affects about 7% of births, highlighting a stark gap in health access in rural Tehama County (<https://escholarship.org/content/qt3wp0k118/qt3wp0k118.pdf>).

1. **Statewide Context:** California has seen a significant reduction in teen birth rates over the last two decades, with the overall rate dropping to around 13.9 births per 1,000

females aged 15-19 as of recent state-level data. However, rural counties, including Tehama, often have higher-than-average rates compared to urban areas.

2. **Tehama County Estimate:** In Tehama County, previous reports indicated a higher-than-average teen birth rate, closer to 20-25 births per 1,000 females aged 15-19, based on historical data from public health resources. This rate reflects socio-economic factors, limited access to family planning resources, and fewer teen-targeted health education programs, which are common in rural communities.
3. **Comparative Trend:** The teen birth rate in Tehama County is likely above the state average due to the rural nature of the community, similar to patterns observed in other California rural counties. This rate has historically been associated with reduced access to healthcare, contraceptive services, and comprehensive sex education.

Statistics on the decline in birth rates for Tehama County specifically are limited, but general trends from California and rural counties provide insight into the local situation:

1. **California's Overall Decline:** California's birth rate reached historic lows, with the state recording about 420,000 births in 2021, down from a peak of 613,000 in 1992. This represents a substantial long-term decline. In rural counties like Tehama, this trend is even more pronounced due to economic factors and population shifts.
2. **Estimated Impact on Rural Counties like Tehama:** In rural regions, birth rates have dropped by around 20-25% over the last decade, a steeper decline than in urban areas. This can be linked to population outflows, with younger residents moving to urban centers for work, and an aging population remaining in these rural areas.
3. **Annual Decline Rates:** California's birth rate decline has been steady at approximately 1-2% per year over the past decade, with the pandemic accelerating this trend due to financial instability and healthcare access challenges. Tehama County likely follows this pattern closely, with added pressures from limited healthcare services contributing to fewer pregnancies.
4. **Comparative Fertility Rates:** California's fertility rate is now around 1.52 births per woman, below the replacement level of 2.1 births. This statewide trend reflects the economic and lifestyle factors influencing Tehama's population as well, where higher living costs, job scarcity, and healthcare access issues contribute to lower fertility rates.

Mental Health

Tehama County has a high demand for mental health services, particularly in rural communities where social and economic challenges contribute to mental health stressors. Economic hardship, limited employment opportunities, and housing instability are common stressors that impact both adults and children, increasing the need for mental health support.

High Rates of Childhood Trauma

A notable portion of children in Tehama County experience adverse childhood experiences (ACEs), such as poverty, parental substance abuse, and unstable housing. Studies show that ACEs are strongly correlated with long-term mental health challenges, including anxiety, depression, and behavioral disorders in children, underscoring the need for early mental health intervention.

- **Parental Substance Abuse:** Substance abuse rates are higher in rural California, including Tehama County, where economic strain and limited mental health services contribute to substance dependency issues among adults. Children in households with substance abuse face higher risks for ACEs related to neglect, abuse, and family instability.
- **Household Economic Hardship:** Poverty is a significant ACE factor in Tehama, with about 25% of children living below the poverty line. Economic hardship correlates with stress, food insecurity, and housing instability, contributing to multiple ACEs, including emotional neglect and parental stress.
- **Exposure to Domestic Violence:** Exposure to domestic violence is a primary ACE reported across rural counties. In Tehama County, where access to mental health and family support services is limited, children may experience or witness domestic conflict, impacting their emotional and psychological development.
- **Mental Health Disorders in the Household:** With fewer mental health resources available in Tehama, untreated mental health conditions among parents and caregivers are more common. This increases the prevalence of ACEs related to parental mental health, such as emotional neglect and inconsistent caregiving.

Accessibility to Mental Health Services

Tehama County faces a shortage of licensed mental health providers, including psychologists, psychiatrists, and counselors. With about 1 mental health professional per 1,000 residents, Tehama County is classified as a Mental Health Professional Shortage Area (MHPSA), as designated by the U.S. Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA). This shortage limits access, particularly in rural areas where transportation barriers further restrict the availability of services.

Impact on Children and Families: For children, especially those under five, there are few specialized mental health resources. Early childhood mental health services, such as trauma-informed care or play therapy, are scarce. Families often must travel long distances to urban areas to receive these services, adding financial strain and time constraints.

Access to School-Based Mental Health Services: Some local school districts have integrated mental health services, providing on-site counselors and social workers for school-age children. However, these resources are typically limited to older children, and support for younger children (preschool and kindergarten) is minimal. Additionally, school-based mental health services are often overwhelmed, with high counselor-to-student ratios that impact the quality and frequency of care.

Insurance and Financial Barriers: Although California's Medicaid program, Medi-Cal, covers mental health services for low-income residents, many local providers in Tehama County do not

accept Medi-Cal due to low reimbursement rates. This leaves low-income families with limited affordable options, and out-of-pocket costs for private services are prohibitive for most families in the county.

Suicide Rates in Tehama County

Tehama County experiences suicide rates higher than the state and national averages, particularly among adults and older adolescents. Recent data shows that Tehama County's suicide rate is around 20 per 100,000 people, significantly higher than California's state average of 10 per 100,000. Economic hardship, rural isolation, and limited access to mental health resources contribute to this elevated risk.

Suicide Among Adolescents and Young Adults: In rural communities like Tehama County, suicide is a growing concern among teenagers and young adults. Factors contributing to this trend include limited access to mental health support, social isolation, and a lack of mental health education or stigma reduction programs in schools. Reports indicate that youth suicide rates have risen in recent years, aligning with national trends but at a higher local rate due to the scarcity of mental health resources.

Risk Factors and Socioeconomic Stressors: Financial stress, housing instability, and employment challenges are key drivers of mental health struggles in Tehama County, particularly for men and older adults. Additionally, substance abuse—often linked to untreated mental health conditions—further increases the risk of suicide. The rate of substance abuse, including alcohol and methamphetamine, is higher in rural California counties, including Tehama, and is often linked to both mental health challenges and higher suicide rates.

Limited mental health services in Tehama affect both children and parents, with high rates of stress and trauma-related challenges. Access to child-centered mental health services is constrained, impacting child development.

While mental health service gaps are a national issue, rural counties like Tehama face amplified barriers due to fewer service providers and longer travel distances for care (<https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED610668.pdf>).

Childcare

Childcare in Tehama County remains a high expense, with many families spending over 30% of their income on childcare. Availability is also limited, with many children placed in unlicensed care. Childcare presents unique challenges and trends, especially concerning the availability and cost for infants and toddlers, as well as the impact of Transitional Kindergarten (TK) on traditional preschool enrollment in rural Tehama County.

Limited Availability: The availability of licensed childcare for infants and toddlers (ages 0-2) in Tehama County is limited. According to recent reports, licensed spaces for this age group meet less than 25% of the demand, meaning that only about 1 in 4 infants and toddlers have access to formal childcare settings. This shortage is more pronounced in rural areas where population density does not support high-capacity childcare facilities.

Cost Burden on Families: The average cost of infant care in licensed centers in California is approximately \$16,500 per year, which is a substantial portion of income for many families in

Tehama County. Given the county's median household income of around \$55,000, families are often forced to spend 30% or more of their income on infant care, which is higher than the recommended 7% by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. This high cost can lead families to seek informal care arrangements or delay returning to work.

Workforce Shortages in Childcare: The shortage of qualified early childhood educators, particularly for infant and toddler care, exacerbates availability issues. Rural areas like Tehama County often struggle to attract and retain childcare providers due to lower wages and fewer benefits in the sector. Many childcare centers report vacancies in staffing positions, leading to waiting lists for infant care and reducing overall capacity.

Transitional Kindergarten (TK) and Preschool Enrollment

Transitional Kindergarten is a state-funded program in California designed as an entry-level kindergarten for four-year-olds, gradually expanding to serve all four-year-olds by 2025. The program is part of California's efforts to improve early childhood education access and readiness for kindergarten, providing free, structured pre-kindergarten for eligible children.

Impact on Preschool Enrollment: With TK's expansion, traditional preschool programs in Tehama County have seen a decrease in enrollment, especially for four-year-olds who now qualify for TK. In many cases, preschool providers have lost up to 20-30% of their four-year-old enrollments as families opt for the free TK programs offered through public schools.

Financial Impact on Private Preschools: Fewer four-year-olds in private or community-based preschools create financial challenges for these providers, who often rely on stable enrollment for sustainability. Many preschools have been forced to re-evaluate staffing and may reduce hours or programs, affecting the diversity of early childhood education options available to families.

Increased Focus on Younger Age Groups: With TK absorbing many four-year-olds, preschools in Tehama County are shifting their focus to younger children, particularly three-year-olds and younger. However, serving infants and toddlers requires different licensing, staffing ratios, and infrastructure, posing additional challenges for providers transitioning to meet this younger age group's needs.

Challenges and Gaps in Infant and Toddler Care

Regulatory and Financial Barriers: The stringent licensing requirements for infant care, such as low child-to-teacher ratios (1:4 for infants), and the need for specialized equipment and facilities, make infant and toddler care costly to operate. Many childcare providers are reluctant to expand infant care options due to high operational costs and limited financial incentives or subsidies.

Parental Employment and Economic Impacts: The lack of accessible and affordable infant care creates barriers for parents, particularly mothers, to participate fully in the workforce. Families without reliable childcare often face disruptions in employment, and in many cases, one parent may choose not to work or work part-time to manage childcare responsibilities. This impacts household income, increases economic strain, and reduces long-term economic growth for the community.

Informal and Unlicensed Care: Due to the lack of formal options, many families turn to unlicensed, informal care arrangements with relatives, friends, or community members. While

these options are often more affordable, they may lack the developmental structure and resources found in licensed facilities, potentially impacting early childhood development for infants and toddlers.

Nationally, the average family spends about 20% of income on childcare, underscoring the financial burden felt more acutely in rural areas with limited facilities (<https://scholarworks.calstate.edu/downloads/g158bq26c>).

Transportation

Public transportation in Tehama is limited, with families relying on private vehicles. For low-income families without reliable transportation, accessing childcare, healthcare, and employment poses a major challenge.

Car Ownership: In Tehama County, approximately 10% of households do not own a vehicle, which is higher than the California state average of 7% for rural areas. This poses significant challenges for accessing essential services, as limited public transportation makes car ownership almost a necessity. Families without reliable vehicles struggle to reach healthcare, childcare, and employment opportunities, impacting their financial stability and quality of life.

Public Transportation Availability: Tehama County is primarily served by two main public transit services: Tehama Rural Area eXpress (TRAX) and ParaTRAX for disabled or elderly individuals. However, the availability is limited, with TRAX operating primarily along fixed routes and offering only a few daily trips. The infrequency and limited geographic reach of TRAX make it difficult for families to rely solely on public transit, especially in more remote parts of the county.

Commute Times: The average commute time for workers in Tehama County is about 27 minutes, slightly higher than the national average of 26 minutes. Due to the rural layout, some families commute over 30 miles to access job centers or essential services, placing an additional financial burden on transportation costs, which average about \$9,000 annually per household.

Impact on Childcare Access: Limited transportation options hinder access to childcare, especially for families without private vehicles or who rely on TRAX. Studies show that nearly 20% of rural families in similar counties across the U.S. experience childcare disruptions due to transportation barriers, which often lead to missed workdays and decreased income stability.

Transportation costs are particularly high for low-income families, often representing over 15% of their household income, compared to the national average of 13%. The high-cost burden stems from the necessity of car ownership, combined with rising fuel prices, maintenance costs, and the absence of affordable public transit alternatives.

Nationally, rural communities report a significantly lower rate of public transit access compared to urban areas (17% vs. 45%, respectively), with only 28% of rural Americans having access to any form of public transit. In Tehama County, this lack of robust transit systems exacerbates mobility challenges, particularly for families with young children who need consistent access to childcare, healthcare, and other resources

Housing

Tehama County has a shortage of affordable housing options, which is a major contributor to financial strain and homelessness among families with young children. The demand for low-cost housing far exceeds supply, with many low-income families spending a substantial portion of their income on rent. According to recent local assessments, nearly 30% of households in Tehama County are cost-burdened, meaning they spend over 30% of their income on housing costs.

Rental Market and Housing Stability: In Tehama County, rental prices have risen in recent years despite stagnant or low-income levels for many families, especially in rural areas. This trend, combined with limited rental assistance resources, has increased housing instability, with some families facing eviction or overcrowding as they share accommodations to reduce costs.

Homelessness Impact on Young Children: Housing instability significantly impacts families with children under five, affecting physical and emotional well-being. Families experiencing homelessness or precarious housing situations often lack access to stable, safe living conditions, which impacts children's development and school readiness. About 4% of young children in Tehama County experience housing instability or homelessness, higher than the national rate of 2.5%. Children enrolled in NCCDI's programs experience homelessness at a much higher rate than county and national levels (29%).

Nationally, the affordable housing crisis is prevalent, but rural communities like Tehama County face compounded issues due to a lack of development in low-income housing, limited rental options, and higher rates of poverty. According to the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), rural areas are often overlooked in federal housing programs, which contributes to a persistent gap in affordable housing access for families in these regions.

Employment

Tehama County, California, is experiencing a dynamic shift in its employment landscape as various industries adapt to changing economic needs and technological advancements. Agriculture continues to lead, employing 25% of the workforce, though recent mechanization has reduced the need for manual labor. Meanwhile, healthcare and social assistance have become increasingly significant, now representing 12% of jobs due to the rising demand for rural healthcare services. Public sector employment, including education, provides stable opportunities, driven by state funding for rural schools. Although retail has declined, sectors like green energy, construction, and transportation are seeing notable growth. These emerging trends underscore Tehama County's gradual diversification beyond its agricultural roots, as construction and logistics offer new employment pathways for residents.

A significant proportion of Tehama County parents with children under the age of six are active participants in the labor force. According to data from the California Child Care Resource & Referral Network, approximately 4,000 children aged 0-12 have parents in the labor force, highlighting the substantial need for childcare services within the county.

Nationally, labor force participation rates for parents with young children are notable. In 2023, 68.9% of mothers with children under age 6 were part of the labor force, while fathers with children under age 6 had a higher participation rate of 94.6%.

Summary

In Tehama County, young children under five experience significant socioeconomic challenges that affect their access to necessary resources. Around 25% of these children live below the poverty line, with Hispanic and Latino families facing the highest poverty rates. Many children in Tehama County also come from non-English-speaking households, which can hinder access to healthcare and educational services. Transportation limitations make accessing childcare and healthcare challenging for families without reliable vehicles, and the region's limited affordable housing options exacerbate financial strains, leading to instability for many. Addressing these issues requires improved access to mental health services, expanded affordable housing, better public transportation, and tailored support for non-English-speaking households to foster a healthier, more stable environment for young children in Tehama County.