

# RACE COUNTS

## **TOWARD IDENTITY AND VISIBILITY:**

**1 MILLION SWANA  
CALIFORNIANS  
STRONG**

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The RACE COUNTS team would like to thank all those that were involved in the creation of this report. This includes Catalyst California staff from multiple teams across the organization:

**Executive Team:**

Mike Russo

**Office of Strategic Initiatives:**

Jesse Saucedo

Matt Trujillo

**Communications:**

Tessie Borden

Roxana Reyes

Ronald Simms, Jr.

**Research & Data Analysis:**

Alexandra Baker

Leila Forouzan

Hillary Khan

Maria T. Khan

Chris Ringewald

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# INTRODUCTION

Southwest Asian and North African (SWANA), often referred to as Middle Eastern and North African, communities make up a vibrant and multifaceted population who enrich California's cultural, economic, and social fabric. Unfortunately, SWANA individuals are often rendered invisible in data collection and public discourse. This report seeks to shine a light on California's SWANA community, particularly through the lens of five critical issue areas: safety and justice, economic opportunity, health care access, healthy built environment, and housing.

Achieving racial equity means more than addressing disparities—it requires transforming the biased and discriminatory systems that create and perpetuate these inequities. For SWANA communities, such barriers are compounded by a lack of data. Classified as “White” in most demographic data, SWANA individuals are excluded from conversations that center communities of color, making their specific challenges and needs invisible. This erasure not only obscures inequities but also hinders meaningful interventions and policy solutions. Furthermore, the classification of SWANA as White can disregard the many multiracial solidarity efforts this community participates and leads in.

Data invisibility is a profound challenge for SWANA communities. Without disaggregated

data, their realities remain hidden, and their voices are marginalized. The absence of accurate representation in official statistics means policymakers and advocates lack the tools needed to address disparities or measure progress effectively. This report aims to address this gap by providing nuanced, community-informed data that captures the distinct experiences of SWANA individuals. It serves as a call to action for inclusive data practices that honor the full spectrum of California's diversity.

Systems change is essential to advancing racial equity for SWANA communities. The inequities highlighted in this report are not isolated incidents but the result of entrenched systems that prioritize some while marginalizing others. Addressing these systemic issues requires more than incremental reforms; it demands transformative change that centers SWANA communities in the policymaking process. By highlighting the inequities California's SWANA community faces, this report seeks to inspire a shift in how systems operate to promote fairness and opportunity for all.

At the heart of systems change is the power of community. SWANA communities possess deep reservoirs of resilience, creativity, and strength. They are already leading efforts to address inequities through grassroots organizing, advocacy, and mutual aid. However, these efforts often occur in the absence of institutional

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support. This report emphasizes the importance of uplifting community power and ensuring SWANA voices are central to the solutions that affect their lives. By highlighting community-led strategies and success stories, we aim to demonstrate the transformative potential of centering those most impacted by inequities.

The five issue areas examined in this report represent foundational elements of a just and equitable society. In the realm of safety and justice, SWANA individuals face both over-surveillance and under-protection from both local and federal law enforcement. A recent example that highlights this inequity is the detainment of Mahmoud Khalil, a Columbia University graduate student, Palestinian activist, and legal permanent US resident, who was arrested by Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) in the middle of the night, detained, and threatened with deportation.<sup>i</sup> Mahmoud is just one example of the unfortunate mistreatment SWANA communities face by law enforcement officers. Economic opportunity remains

uneven, as SWANA workers often encounter discrimination, wage gaps, and limited access to high-growth industries. Health care access is another pressing concern, with many SWANA families navigating systemic barriers to culturally competent and affordable care. Similarly, the healthy built environment—including access to clean air, safe spaces, and public infrastructure—is unevenly distributed, leaving SWANA communities disproportionately exposed to environmental hazards. Finally, the housing crisis continues to impact SWANA individuals, who face rising rents, housing discrimination, and barriers to homeownership.

In the following pages, we present a detailed analysis of each issue area. Through this work, we hope to advance racial equity, challenge data invisibility, and support systems change—all while amplifying the power and potential of SWANA communities. Together, we can create a California where all communities, including those rendered invisible for too long, have the opportunity to thrive.

## RACE COUNTS SWANA definition

RACE COUNTS uses the term SWANA because it is a geographic-based term rather than Middle Eastern and North African (MENA) which, although widely understood, centers Europe. The terms SWANA and MENA are often used interchangeably and often refer to the same communities, though communities tend to prefer the term SWANA as “Middle Eastern” is a term rooted in racist orientalist ideologies. However, public agencies and many partners may still use MENA due to it being more familiar to many.

- When speaking about SWANA data, we’re speaking about data relating to people of the region or those who tie their ancestry to the region.
- There is no singular definition, with various data collection efforts using different definitions. Our Catalyst California definition is based in Census ancestry data since that is the largest SWANA data source. Recently, the U.S. Office of Management and Budget (OMB) added Middle Eastern or North African (MENA) as a race category to federal data collection. This will dramatically increase the amount of data for SWANA people in the U.S., most notably in the 2030 Census. Afghan, Armenian, Sudanese, and Turkish are NOT included in the new federal MENA category, but we include them based on a clear preference from community partners. We are also working with partners to understand whether to improve the definition through the inclusion of additional groups like Somali and Circassian. Each year, we will review changes in U.S. Census ancestry and race data to identify potential updates for our definition as well. This year, we will also review the text of AB 91 (Harabedian) to assess additional updates. We are also closely watching the Trump administration’s efforts to hinder the U.S. Census Bureau’s work through actions, like disbanding Census Advisory Committees, which will likely impact MENA data collection.
- Collection efforts aside, Catalyst California in consultation with community partners defines SWANA ancestries<sup>a</sup> as: Afghan, Algerian, Arab, Armenian, Assyrian/Chaldean/Syriac, Bahraini, Berber<sup>b</sup>, Egyptian, Emirati, Iranian, Iraqi, Israeli, Jordanian, Kurdish, Kuwaiti, Lebanese, Libyan, Middle Eastern, Moroccan, North African, Omani, Palestinian, Qatari, Saudi Arabian, Sudanese, Syrian, Tunisian, Turkish, Yazidi, and Yemeni.

a These terms are those used by the Census Bureau, and as such may not reflect the most current or preferred terms of these communities.

b Berber is the term historically used by the Census Bureau though many in this community prefer the term Amazigh. Recently, the Census Bureau added the term Amazigh and, as a result, in future RACE COUNTS reports and products we will include Amazigh in our SWANA ancestry list.

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It is important to note that California's SWANA population is extremely diverse and not a monolith. Though there are many throughlines within California's SWANA population, SWANA communities have a breadth of racial, religious, immigrant, and ancestral backgrounds. Furthermore, the SWANA community speaks a rich variety of languages. Given the diversity within California's SWANA community, we hope that future data collection efforts go beyond the inclusion of a broad SWANA category to include disaggregated sub-categories and that researchers include a SWANA category in their analysis.

SWANA Ancestry	Population
Armenian	246,285
Iranian	210,625
Other Arab	69,396
Lebanese	63,675
Afghan	61,122
Egyptian	58,380
Arab	39,941
Syrian	32,219
Turkish	31,106
Israeli	29,206
Assyrian/Chaldean/Syriac	26,497
Palestinian	25,932
Iraqi	24,399
Jordanian	15,752
Moroccan	10,310
Sudanese	4,117

Source: American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates 2018-2022, Table B04006.  
Ancestries included in this table are the only SWANA ancestries that appear in the data for California.

# METHODOLOGY

At RACE COUNTS, we have devised methods to analyze data about SWANA people that, to our knowledge, have not been explored to this depth before. Our process included researching the existing SWANA data landscape, developing a draft methodology, sharing the methodology with SWANA-serving organizations, and integrating their feedback.

The methodology devised has three primary methods based on data availability and applicability: reporting data for SWANA people that is collected, calculating data for SWANA people based on data by ancestry, and calculating weighted averages of exposure for SWANA people.

First, collecting data for SWANA populations is available for: Perception of Safety, Usual Source of Health Care, Got Help for Emotional/Mental or Alcohol/Drug Issues, and Asthma Prevalence from the California Health Interview Survey (CHIS)<sup>c</sup>; Low Birthweight<sup>d</sup> from the Centers for Disease Control; and Officer-Initiated Stops from the California Department of Justice, though the latter is for the combined SWANA / South Asian population.

Second, calculating data by SWANA ancestry is available because of Census microdata linkages to ancestry for: Living Wage, Connected Youth, Employment as Officials & Managers, and Housing Quality from American Community Survey 5-Year Public Use Microdata estimates. This method involves finding people earning a living wage, for example, and then identifying which of those people have SWANA ancestry based on our definition.

Third, indicators of exposure can be calculated in relation to populations of any race. We calculated the proximity of SWANA populations to: Drinking Water Contaminants, Environmental Hazards, Toxic Releases, and Greenspace.

## Data limitations

Public agencies systematically erase SWANA people by grouping them as White in data collection, though **many do not identify that way**. In addition, inconsistent definitions of SWANA lead to questions around data reliability and comparisons. We are also limited in the SWANA definitions and SWANA ancestry definitions available in each data source. While our methodology was successful

c For additional research using CHIS data to examine Arab American health behaviors and outcomes please see [Differences in health behaviors and health outcomes among non-Hispanic Whites and Arab Americans in a population-based survey in California](#) and [Relevance of the “Immigrant Health Paradox” for the Health of Arab Americans in California](#).

d This dataset includes data for foreign-born SWANA birthing parents only.



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in producing SWANA data for 14 of 47 RACE COUNTS indicators studied, the majority of RACE COUNTS indicators lack SWANA data, including zero indicators for the Democracy and Education Issue Areas. This missing data means for example, that we can't see the disparities in voting and other political participation in SWANA communities, which can be linked to institutional and linguistic barriers, as well as experiences with political participation in countries of origin. Small sample sizes in survey data mean that SWANA data are also primarily available at the state level and for only the most populous counties and few cities.

## Findings overview

Broadly, we see that California's systems and policies are not sufficiently serving SWANA communities, and may be harming these communities. Across the 14 indicators examined in RACE COUNTS we find that:

- SWANA outcomes differ from White outcomes: SWANA Californians have worse outcomes compared to White Californians for 12 of the 14 indicators.

- Statewide, SWANA residents are the most likely to live close to environmental hazards, and they have the second-highest exposure to contaminated drinking water.
- Statewide, police officers are more likely to stop SWANA drivers than the average Californian driver.

## Demographic profile

Nearly one million people with SWANA ancestry live in California: 948,962<sup>e</sup> people in 2022. SWANA residents comprise 2.4% of the state population, which is comparable to the American Indian / Alaska Native share of the state population (2.6%).

Los Angeles County is home to the largest number and percentage of SWANA people, and Southern California has a large share of SWANA residents when including Orange and San Diego counties. The cities of Los Angeles, Glendale, and San Diego are home to the largest numbers of SWANA residents.

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<sup>e</sup> Data source: American Community Survey 2022 5-Year Estimates Table B04006.

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### SWANA Population by County

State / County	SWANA Population	Percentage of Total Population
California	948,962	2.4
Los Angeles County	383,094	3.9
Orange County	94,813	3.0
San Diego County	83,840	2.5
Santa Clara County	49,854	2.6
Sacramento County	42,633	2.7

Source: American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates 2018-2022, Tables DP05 and B04006

### SWANA Population by City

City	SWANA Population	Percentage of Total Population
Los Angeles	184,605	4.8
Glendale	75,237	38.7
San Diego	30,176	2.2
San Jose	25,446	2.5
Irvine	24,822	8.2
El Cajon (SD)	19,677	18.6

Source: American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates 2018-2022, Tables DP05 and B04006

## Key county-level findings

This report highlights findings using RACE COUNTS SWANA data at the state level. The RACE COUNTS data platform includes SWANA data, where available, at the city and county levels as well. While this report doesn't focus on the SWANA data at the city or county levels, we have provided some key county findings from that data below.

- In Los Angeles County, SWANA residents are the least likely to get help for self-diagnosed mental/emotional or alcohol/drug issues.
- In Stanislaus County, SWANA youth are least likely to be in school and/or employed.
- In Orange County, foreign-born SWANA birthing parents are the second most likely to have a baby with low birthweight.

These county level findings highlight the reality that the SWANA Californians lived experiences can vary significantly depending on where they live. As such, we encourage those interested in understanding the inequities SWANA Californians face to visit [RACE COUNTS](#) to explore local level data.

## Hate crimes

The SWANA community, with its rich religious, cultural, and ethnic diversity, faces high levels of hate crimes, including anti-Jewish, anti-Muslim, and anti-Arab violence. While these forms of hate are often discussed separately, they are deeply interconnected in how they impact SWANA individuals, regardless of their specific background. What mainstream sources categorize as anti-Muslim or anti-Arab hate crimes often target SWANA people of any religion or ethnicity, as these crimes are rooted in racialized perceptions rather than actual identity. Anti-Muslim hate, for example, does not only affect Muslims but also anyone perceived as Muslim—a perception that often applies to SWANA individuals in general. This misperception stems from a long history of SWANA erasure, where the complex and varied identities of the region are flattened into a singular, monolithic image that equates SWANA identity with Muslim or Arab identity. As a result, the entire community is made vulnerable to violence that ignores the reality of its diversity, reinforcing harmful stereotypes and exacerbating systemic marginalization.

During the first Trump administration the U.S. saw an increase in reported hate crimes.<sup>ii</sup> Given President Trump’s divisive rhetoric and policies directed at the SWANA community, including the “Muslim ban,” the SWANA community is the target of many such crimes. Following the escalation of violence in Israel and Palestine in October 2023 there was a heightened level of anti-Muslim, anti-Jewish, and anti-Arab violence, which particularly impact SWANA communities.<sup>iii</sup> A 2024 report by the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR) found that in 2023, CAIR received the highest number of anti-Muslim hate complaints in its history. Similarly, a 2023 report by CAIR’s California chapter found that, compared to other students, East Asian, Black / African, and North African / Middle Eastern students reported higher rates of being bullied.<sup>iv</sup> Given the recent increase in anti-Muslim hate and the second Trump administration, it is important that we track data on hate crimes.

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### Reported hate crimes against SWANA communities in California 2001-2023

Most Serious Bias	Hate Crimes
Anti-Jewish	3,203
Anti-Islamic (Muslim)	572
Anti-Arab	422
Total	4,197
Source: California Department of Justice - Open Justice, Hate Crime data, 2001-2023	

People reported more than 4,000 hate crimes against specific sub-groups of SWANA Californians between 2001 and 2023, according to the California Department of Justice's Open Justice data portal. The majority of those hate crimes included a most serious bias against Jews, and nearly 1,000 hate crimes directed towards Muslims and people categorized as Arabs. It is important to note that the categories presented in the data are based on the perpetrator's perception of the individual(s) impacted. In this way, hate crime data can perpetuate the erasure of SWANA people who do not identify as Jewish, Muslim and/or Arab and the conflation of SWANA identity with Muslim or Arab identities. SWANA-led community organizations also say that hate crimes are vastly underreported due to barriers such as language, unfamiliarity with reporting procedures, and fear of retaliation.

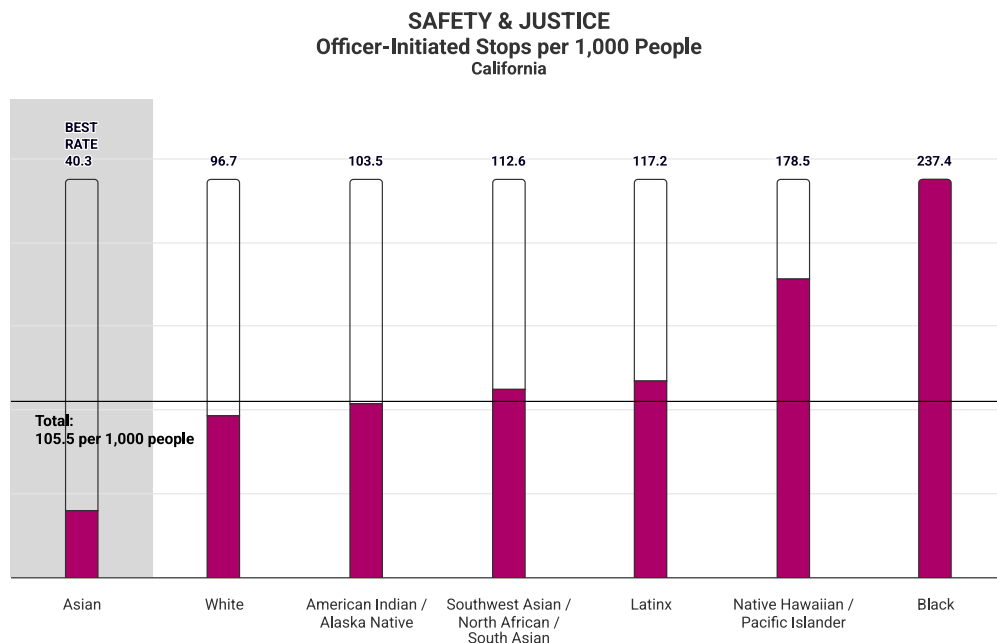
### Partner spotlight: Council on American-Islamic Relations - LA

The [Council on American-Islamic Relations](#) (CAIR) is America's largest Islamic civil liberties group, with its mission to enhance understanding of Islam, protect civil liberties, promote justice, and empower American Muslims. CAIR-LA is dedicated to advancing the interests of the Muslim community through effective legislative advocacy. Its staff work tirelessly to shape policies that protect civil rights and foster understanding. Their team of experts tracks legislation, builds coalitions, and engages with policymakers to ensure that the Muslim community's voice is heard.

# SAFETY AND JUSTICE

For decades, the “tough-on-crime” policies have devastated communities of color in California, failing to advance real community safety. Due to the over-policing of communities of color and low-income communities, Californians of color are particularly likely to come into contact with the criminal legal system and face economic and housing challenges as a result. Statewide, police officers are more likely to stop SWANA<sup>f</sup> residents than the average resident.

California law enforcement stopped 213,686 SWANA residents in 2022, or 112.6 SWANA people per 1,000 SWANA people.

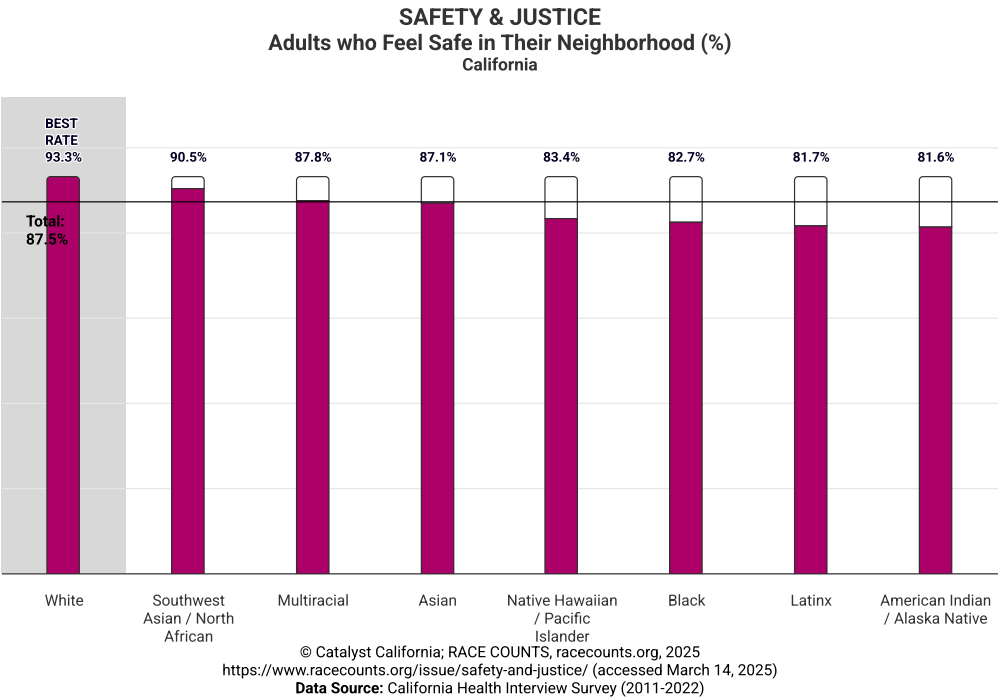


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<https://www.racecounts.org/issue/safety-and-justice/> (accessed March 14, 2025)  
**Data Source:** Open Justice Data, California Department of Justice (2022); American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, Tables DP05, B04006, and B02018 (2018-2022)

<sup>f</sup> The Racial and Identity Profiling Act (RIPA) data is based on the officer’s perception of race, not self-identification, and the SWANA group includes individuals who the officer perceived as SWANA or South Asian.

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Statewide, SWANA residents perceive their neighborhoods to be safer than the average Californian. An estimated 412,000 SWANA adults report feeling safe in their neighborhoods all or most of the time, 90.5% of all SWANA adults.



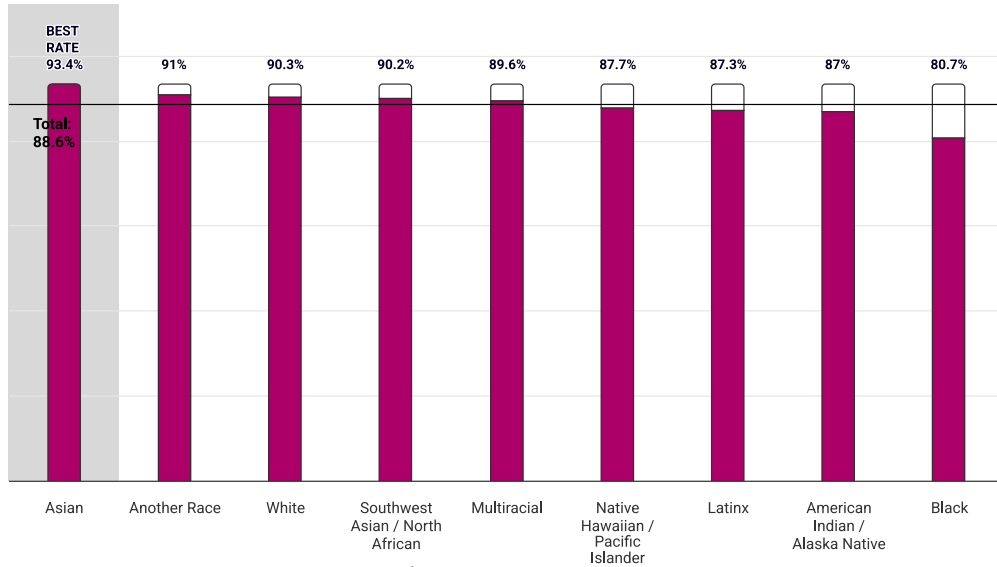
# ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY

Providing Californians of color equitable access to real economic opportunities is essential for all Californians to thrive. The data on economic opportunity showcases that communities of color are disproportionately suffering from structural barriers that impede their ability to thrive. Historically, many SWANA immigrants have faced challenges such as underemployment, discrimination, and language barriers in this country. These challenges often resulted in lower wages and limited job growth. Despite these challenges, many SWANA community members are entrepreneurs and business owners and vital contributors to the economic prosperity of our state. By improving access to fair and diverse economic opportunities, more individuals in the SWANA community can overcome obstacles, build better professional networks, and contribute more to the broader economy. This, in turn, helps to reduce economic disparities and promotes a more inclusive society where everyone can participate in and benefit from economic growth.

Our findings reveal that statewide, 90% of SWANA youth are currently in school and / or employed, compared to Asian youth who had the best rate at 93%. This translates to an estimated 93,531 SWANA youth ages 16-24 who are ‘connected’, meaning in school and / or employed. Statewide, SWANA youth are slightly more likely to be ‘connected’ than the average Californian youth, though there is variability by county. For example, in Stanislaus County SWANA youth are the least likely to be in school and / or employed among all groups.

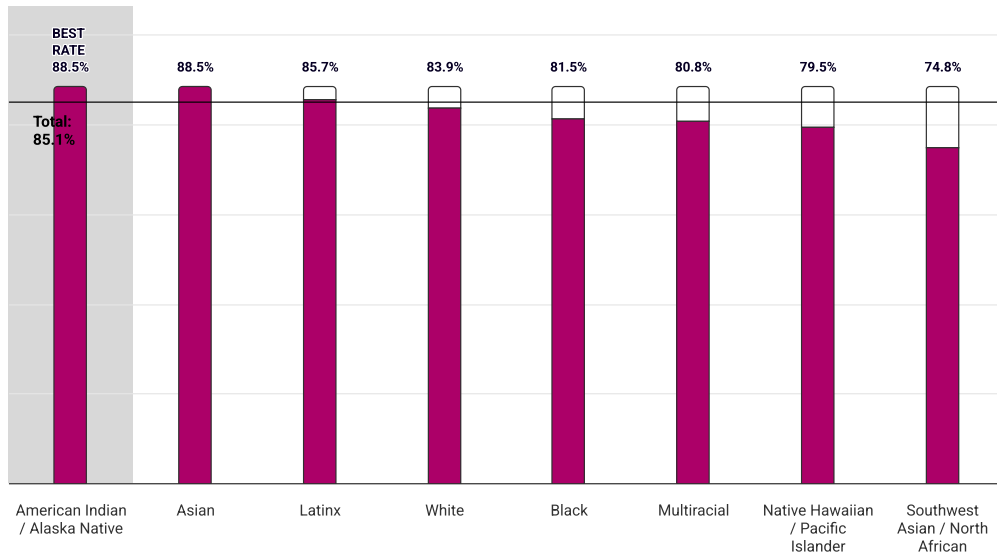


### ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY Youth in School and/or Employed (%) California



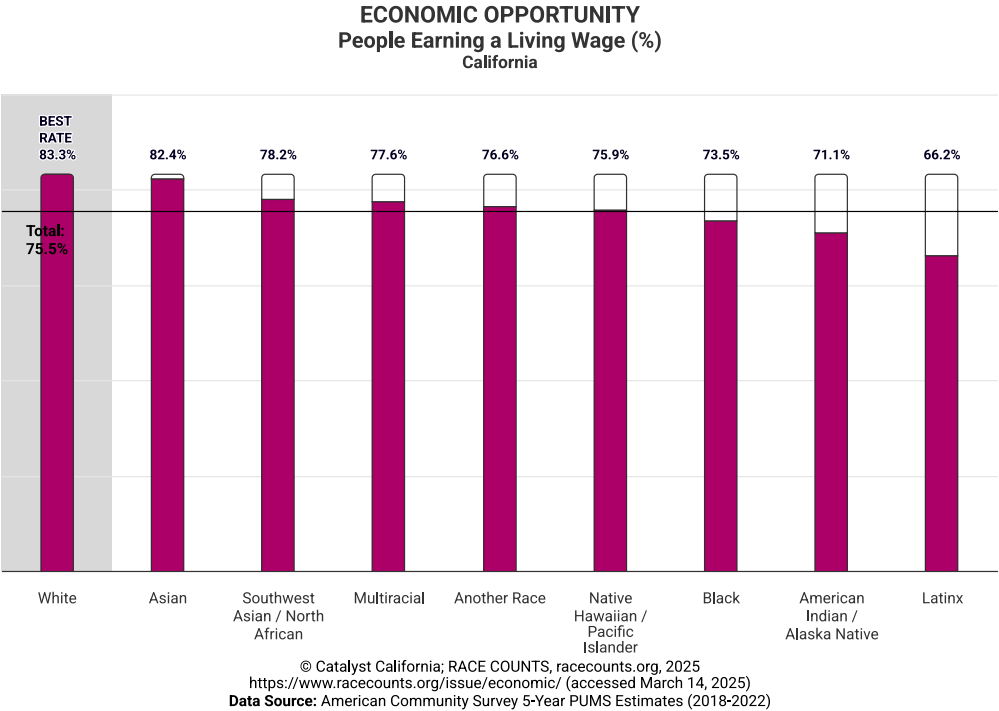
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<https://www.racecounts.org/issue/economic/> (accessed March 14, 2025)  
**Data Source:** American Community Survey 5-Year PUMS Estimates (2018-2022)

### ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY Youth in School and/or Employed (%) Stanislaus County

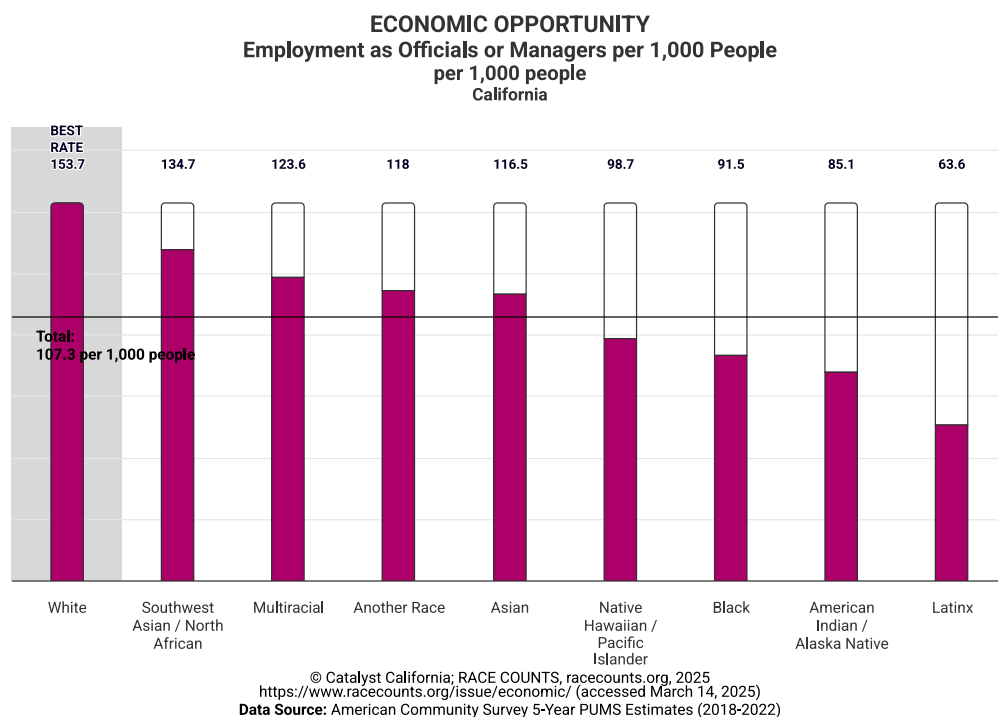


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<https://www.racecounts.org/issue/economic/> (accessed March 14, 2025)  
**Data Source:** American Community Survey 5-Year PUMS Estimates (2018-2022)

An estimated 268,174 SWANA workers aged 16-64 earn a living wage, \$15.50 or more per hour. That number is equivalent to 78.2% of SWANA workers and is 5.1% points lower than the 83.3% of White Californians earning a living wage.



RACE COUNTS calculations of American Community Survey estimates find that 135 per 1,000 SWANA workers aged 18-64 are employed as an official or manager, compared to White workers who are employed as officials and managers at rate of 154 per 1,000.



### **Partner spotlight: Arab American Civic Council**

Established in 2011, the **Arab American Civic Council** (AACC) advances community power and grassroots democracy by moving people, organizations, and policy towards justice and equity. AACC envisions an empowered Arab American community thriving in an America that is just and equitable for all. The Arab American Civic Council conducts community workshops directed towards the Arab American community to facilitate their civic participation on the local, state, and national levels. The interactive workshops are hosted in person and virtually on various topics, including civic engagement and participation.

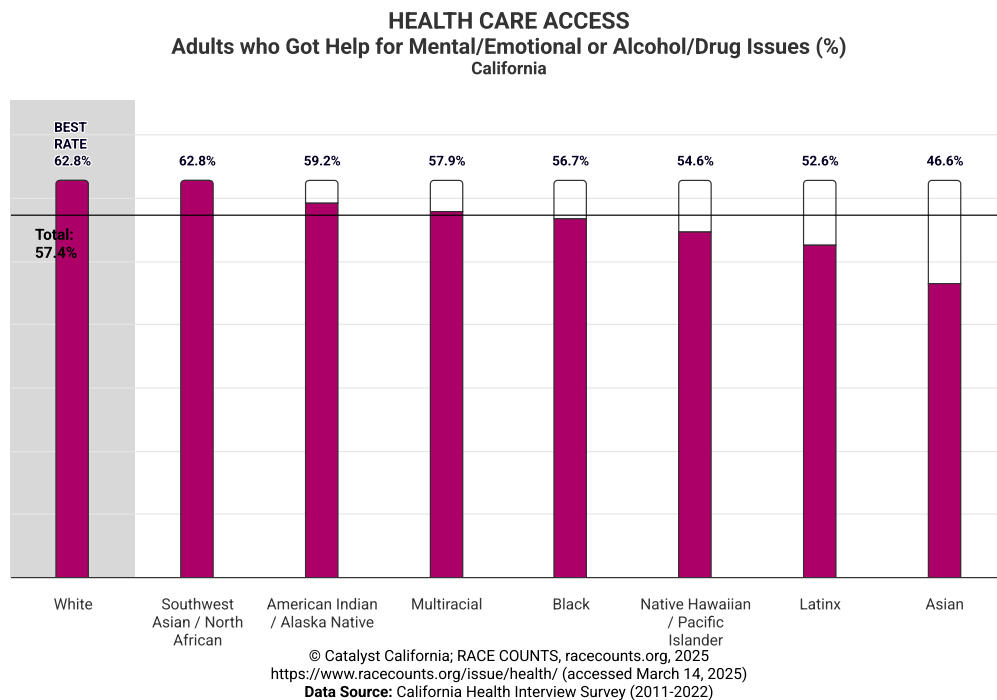
After more than two decades of advocacy and community engagement led by the Arab American Civic Council and other community members, the Anaheim City Council voted in favor of a formal designation of Little Arabia in late 2022. Additionally, this vote included a Brookhurst Corridor Study that was guided by the Little Arabia designation. The designation formally recognized the contributions of Arab Americans, and the broader Southwest Asian and North African communities located in the city of Anaheim.

# HEALTH CARE ACCESS

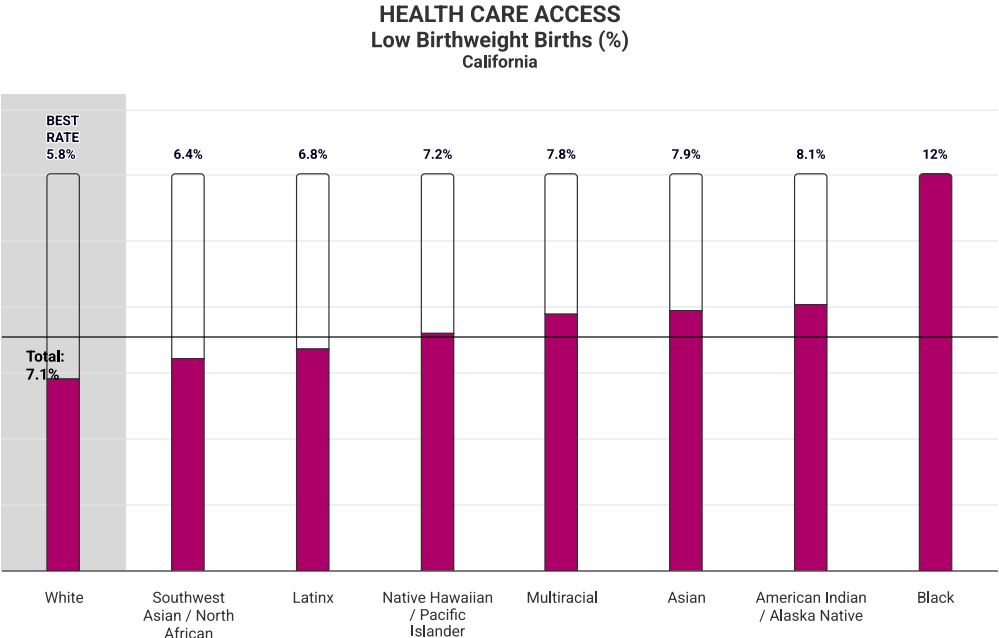
Access to health care is crucial for the SWANA community, as it directly impacts their overall well-being, quality of life, and ability to participate fully in society. Many individuals in the SWANA community face significant barriers to health care, including language differences, cultural misunderstandings, discrimination, and lack of familiarity with the health care system in their communities. These challenges can lead to delayed care, low-quality care, and underutilization of essential medical services. Health care access is critical for the mental health of the SWANA community, many of whom have experienced trauma related to displacement, conflict, or migration. Mental health services that are culturally sensitive and linguistically appropriate are particularly important for addressing the unique needs of this community.

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RACE COUNTS data reveals that statewide, 63% of SWANA residents who needed help actually got help for self-diagnosed mental/emotional or alcohol/drug issues. This finding is consistent with research that showed that SWANA Californians living in Northern California, in particular Iranian women, had high rates of mental health stressors.<sup>v</sup> Statewide, SWANA adults, along with White adults have the best rate (62.8%) of receiving sought after help for mental/emotional or alcohol/drug issues. However, in Los Angeles County, with the largest SWANA community, they fare worst among all groups. Only 43% of SWANA adults who needed this type of care received it.

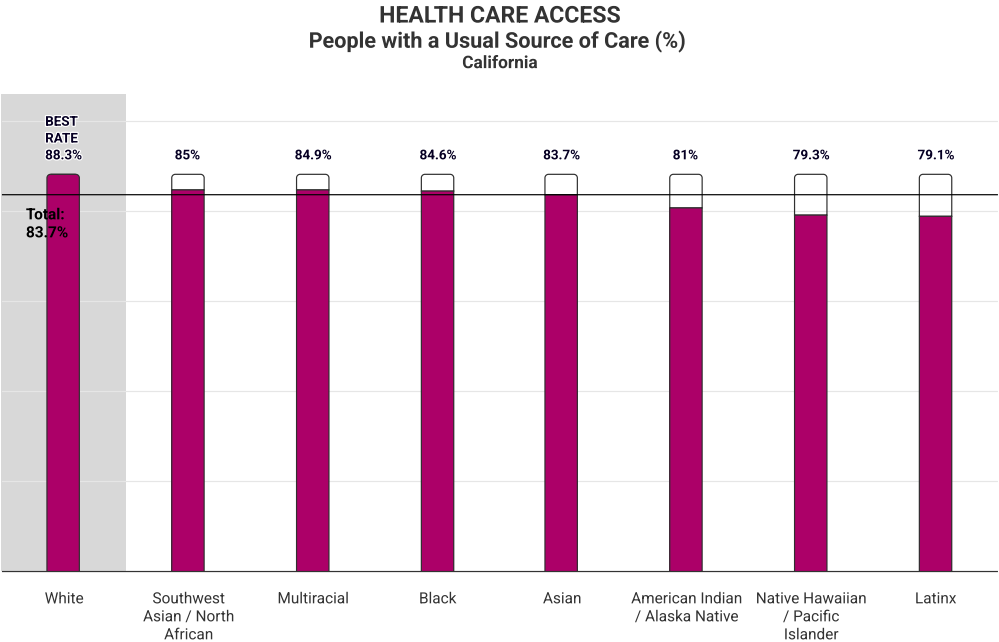


Among foreign-born SWANA birthing parents, 6.4% of them had a baby with low birthweight. This compares to 12% of Black birthing parents. In Orange County, another area with a large SWANA community, the SWANA low birthweight rate is the second highest among racial groups at 7.4%. Factors such as access to quality prenatal care, limited employment opportunities, socioeconomic status, and cultural differences in healthcare utilization can significantly influence birthweight outcomes. The prevalence of low birthweight rates among SWANA birthing parents in Orange County is consistent with other research that finds that foreign-born SWANA birthing parents have greater odds of having a low birthweight baby than foreign-born non-SWANA birthing parents.<sup>vi</sup>



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<https://www.racecounts.org/issue/health/> (accessed March 14, 2025)  
Data Source: US Department of Health and Human Services, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), National Center for Health Statistics, Division of Vital Statistics, CDC WONDER Online Database (2016-2022)

Statewide, 85% of SWANA residents have a usual source of care such as a doctor’s office, HMO, health or hospital clinic, slightly above the state average of 83.7%. This relatively high level of access to care paired with the higher prevalence of low birthweight births helps illustrate that access is not the only factor in determining health outcomes.



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<https://www.racecounts.org/issue/health/> (accessed March 14, 2025)  
Data Source: California Health Interview Survey (2011-2022)

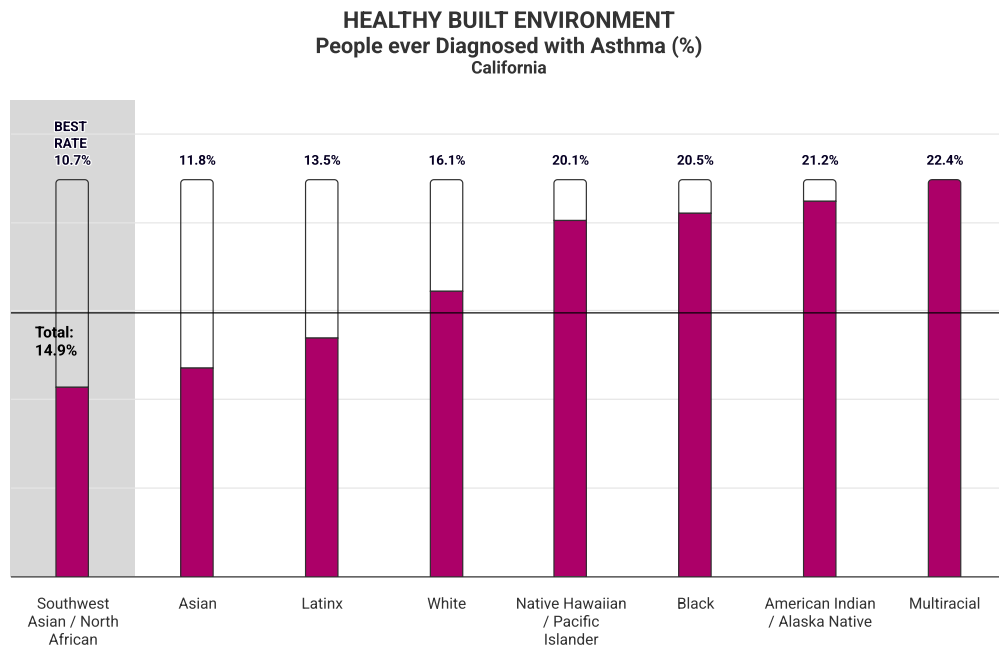


# HEALTHY BUILT ENVIRONMENT

A healthy built environment refers to urban planning and infrastructure that promotes physical, mental, and social health, such as access to greenspace, clean air, walkability, and proximity to essential services like health care, schools, and grocery stores. Communities of color are particularly vulnerable to climate change and its related disasters and have the least resources to withstand their impacts. Harmful effects on our current environment stem from settler colonialism, racialized land use policies including redlining, polluting industries, labor exploitation, and a society organized around consumption.

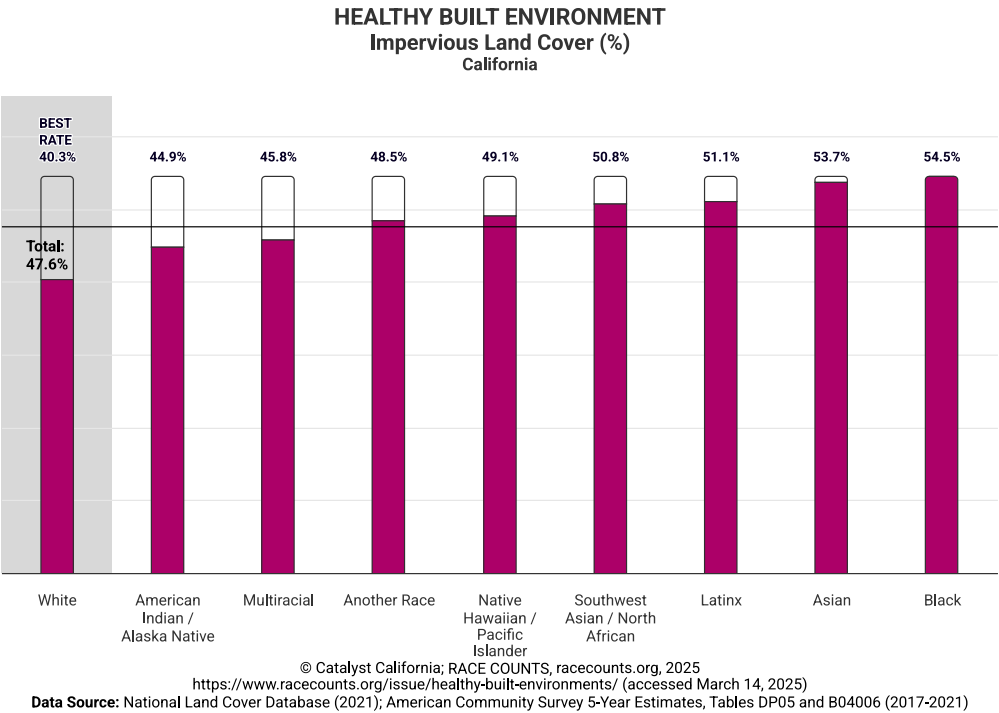
# RACE COUNTS

SWANA residents have the lowest rate of people who have ever been diagnosed with asthma in California at 11%, roughly half the rate of the groups with the highest rates of asthma diagnosis, American Indian / Alaska Native and multiracial residents. The low rates of asthma diagnosis in the SWANA community may be a result of asthma being underdiagnosed as SWANA Californians have limited access to culturally competent health care.

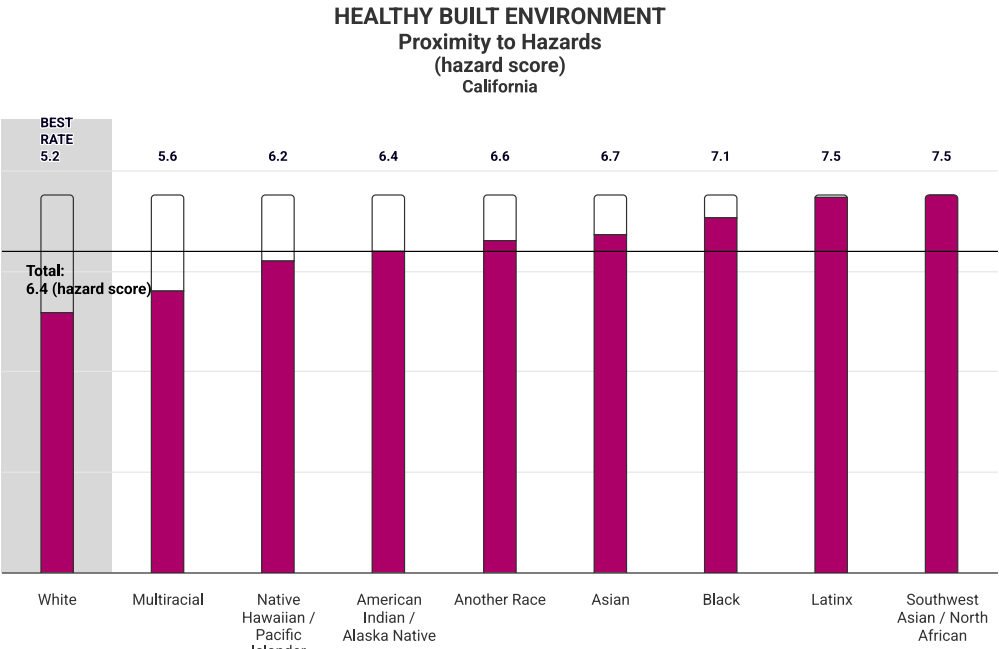


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<https://www.racecounts.org/issue/healthy-built-environments/> (accessed March 14, 2025)  
**Data Source:** California Health Interview Survey (2011-2022)

For SWANA communities in California, who often reside in densely populated neighborhoods, the lack of accessible greenspace can exacerbate existing health disparities and social challenges. The shortage of greenspace results from the prevalence of impervious land uses, such as buildings, parking lots, and roads. Statewide, SWANA residents live in communities with 51% of land covered by impervious surfaces, a higher percent than state residents as a whole. This prevalence means that SWANA residents face a higher risk of exposure to environmental stressors, which can contribute to respiratory problems, heat-related illnesses, and other health concerns.



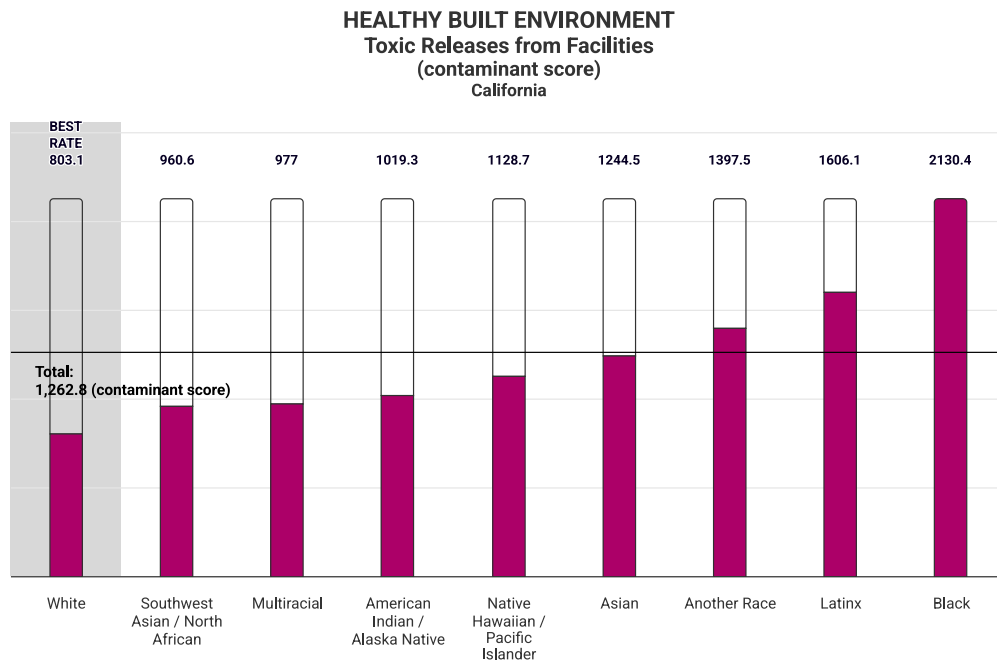
SWANA Californians, along with Latinx Californians, are the most likely to live in communities close to environmental hazards, defined here as places contaminated with harmful chemicals requiring clean up by property owners or the government, because chemicals at these sites can move through the air or groundwater. Communities of color and low-income people are generally more likely to be near these hazards as a result of racialized housing policies and unresponsiveness of government to these communities. People living near these sites are more likely to be exposed to chemicals than people living further away. Scientists have found toxic metals in house dust and pesticides in the blood of people who live near contaminated sites.



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<https://www.racecounts.org/issue/healthy-built-environments/> (accessed March 14, 2025)  
**Data Source:** OEHHA Cal Enviro Screen 4.0 (2021); American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, Tables DP05 and B04006 (2016-2020)

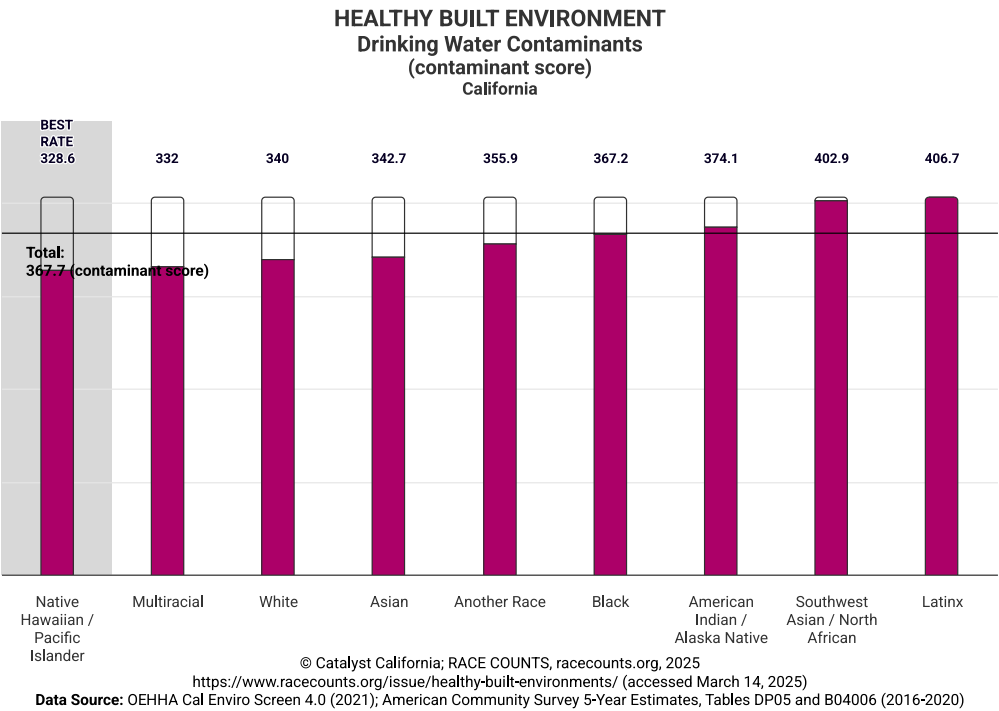
# RACE COUNTS

People living near facilities that release toxic chemicals into the air are at a higher risk of exposure than people living further away. Statewide, SWANA residents are the second least likely to live near facilities releasing toxins into the air, compared to Black residents who are the most likely to live near facilities releasing toxins.



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<https://www.racecounts.org/issue/healthy-built-environments/> (accessed March 14, 2025)  
**Data Source:** OEHHA Cal Enviro Screen 4.0 (2021); American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, Tables DP05 and B04006 (2016-2020)

SWANA Californians and Latinx Californians, live in areas with the highest drinking water contaminant scores, which are based on the number and amount of contaminants in the water. Rural and agricultural areas, such as parts of the Central Valley, often see higher levels of contamination due to agricultural runoff, pesticides, and the overuse of fertilizers.<sup>vii</sup> For the SWANA community, existing challenges related to language barriers and immigration status can limit their ability to address public health concerns relating to clean water and other environmental issues.



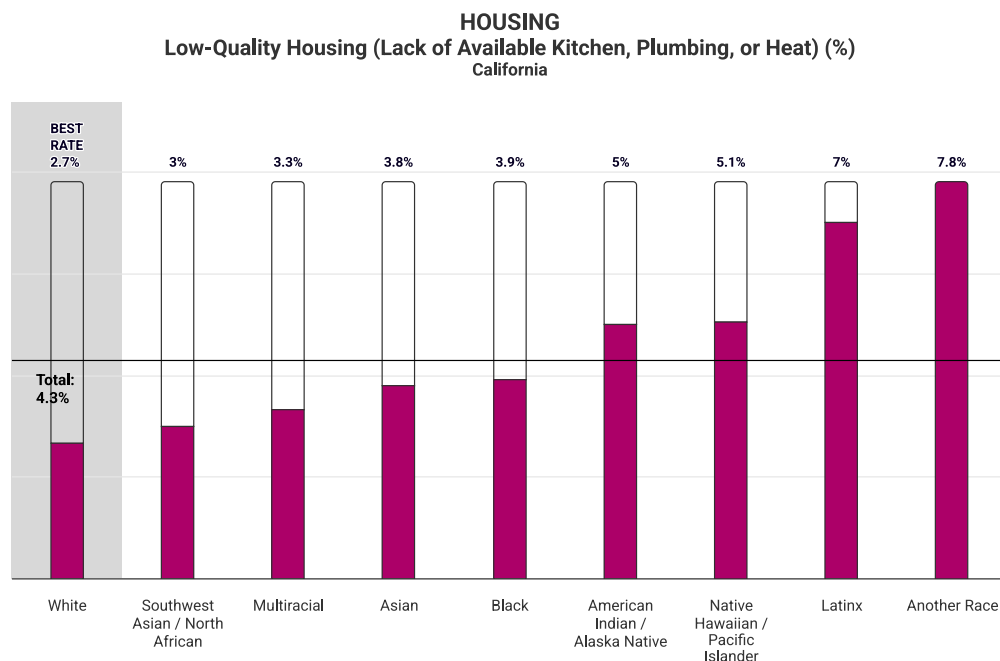
## **The L.A. wildfires' impact on the SWANA community**

The L.A. wildfires upended the lives and livelihoods of many of the region's communities of color. In particular, the residents of Pasadena and Altadena were devastated by the Eaton Fire. Both Pasadena and Altadena are home to sizable SWANA communities. Over 6,000 SWANA residents and over 3,500 SWANA residents call Pasadena and Altadena home, respectively. SWANA people represent more than 8% of Altadena's population and more than 4% of Pasadena's, both much higher than at state level (2.4%). Unfortunately, the lack of SWANA data makes it difficult to assess the impact that the fires have had on this community. However, we do know that many community centers serving the region's SWANA communities were lost to the fire.<sup>viii</sup> Furthermore, RACE COUNTS data show that L.A. County's SWANA residents are most likely to live in communities with environmental hazards, making them particularly vulnerable to the negative impacts of poor air quality resulting from the fires. RACE COUNTS data also shows that L.A. County's SWANA residents are most likely to live in communities with higher levels of drinking water contaminants, an issue that will likely worsen because of the wildfires. To truly understand the impact of the L.A. wildfires on the region's SWANA residents, more and better data including the use of a SWANA category and significant outreach to the community are needed.

# HOUSING

California continues to have an affordable housing crisis where a profound shortage leaves far too many low-income communities of color without residential stability, leading to a rise in homelessness. The majority of the state's renters are from communities of color, who have historically faced barriers to access housing. A recent survey conducted by a network of SWANA serving organizations based in Orange County found that 46% of respondents were at risk for homelessness.<sup>ix</sup> Unfortunately, due to a lack of housing data for SWANA communities, we do not yet have a full picture of their housing challenges.

Statewide, 3% of SWANA residents live in low-quality housing, i.e., units that lack a kitchen, plumbing, or heat. Latinx residents are most likely to live in low-quality housing units, with a rate of 7%. Low-quality housing is linked to a range of health problems, including respiratory diseases like asthma, chronic allergies, and other infections caused by exposure to unsanitary conditions.



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<https://www.racecounts.org/issue/housing/> (accessed March 14, 2025)  
Data Source: American Community Survey 5-Year PUMS Estimates (2018-2022)



# CONCLUSION

This report highlights the importance of disaggregated data that allows us to examine the inequities impacting California's SWANA communities. Without SWANA data, we would not be able to quantify disparities faced by them. For example, we wouldn't be able to show that SWANA communities are the group most likely to live close to environmental hazards, to have the second highest exposure to contaminated drinking water, and, compared to the average Californian, are more likely to be stopped by police officers. Moreover, we find that at the state level, SWANA communities have worse outcomes compared to White Californians for 12 of the 14 indicators included in this report.

While this report represents a large step forward in providing and analyzing data for California's SWANA community, more SWANA data is needed. The CA MENA

Civil Rights Coalition - which uses the term MENA (vs. SWANA) to be consistent with the Census' use of the MENA term - is fighting against SWANA data invisibility through the [#CountMENAINCA](#) campaign. The campaign is advocating for the passage of the [California MENA Inclusion Act](#) (AB-91) that would require state agencies to include a distinct MENA category for all state data collection. With the passage of the California MENA Inclusion Act we will see a significant increase in the availability of SWANA data, which will help us to better understand the inequities that the SWANA communities face. In addition to visiting [RACECOUNTS.org](#) to dive deeper into our SWANA data specifically, and racial inequity data more broadly, we also encourage Californians to learn more about the CA MENA Civil Rights Coalition and the [#CountMENAINCA](#) campaign.

### **San Diego passes MENA data resolution**

While the CA MENA Civil Rights Coalition<sup>\*</sup> is advocating for SWANA data at the state level, a number of coalitions and organizations are advocating for SWANA data at the local level. Thanks to the efforts of local organizations and advocates, the San Diego County Board of Supervisors unanimously adopted the addition of a MENA category to their data collection efforts. The San Diego Unified School District soon followed by passing a resolution introducing a MENA category for student data. Other local wins include the City of Anaheim and City of Bell voting to support the California MENA Inclusion Act. These wins show that the fight for increased data inclusion is not just a fight happening at the state level but also a fight happening in local communities throughout California.

# ENDNOTES

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