



TAY-Hub

Transition-Age Youth
Research & Evaluation Hub

COUNTIES MATTER:

The Influence of County Context on Services and Outcomes for Transition-Age Youth in Care

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DISCLAIMER

The CalYOUTH study was performed with the permission of the California Department of Social Services; however, the opinions and conclusions are solely those of the authors and do not represent the policy or opinions of the collaborating agencies or any California Department.

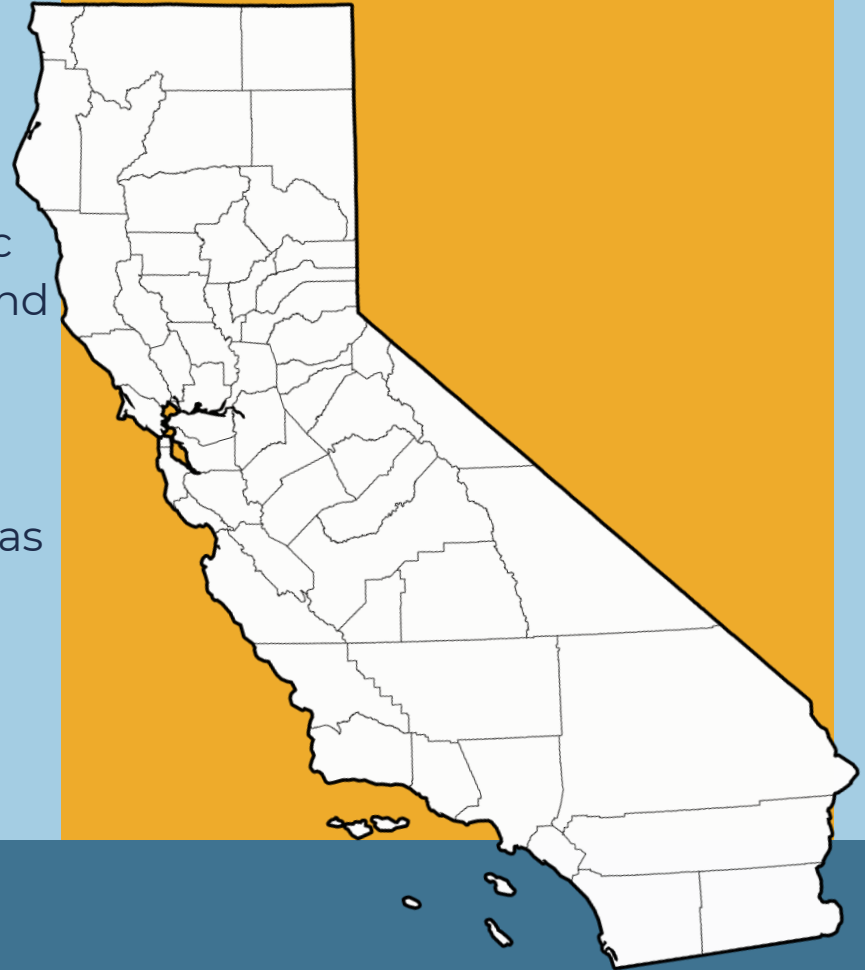
Introduction

- The child welfare system in the US varies across jurisdictions; some states have centralized systems while others have county-administered systems.
- The type of administration affects: the centralization of authority, fiscal responsibility, policy implementation, foster care licensing procedures, and public agency workforce development.
- In California, the state government sets policies and provides funding, while each of the 58 counties administers child welfare services.



Purpose

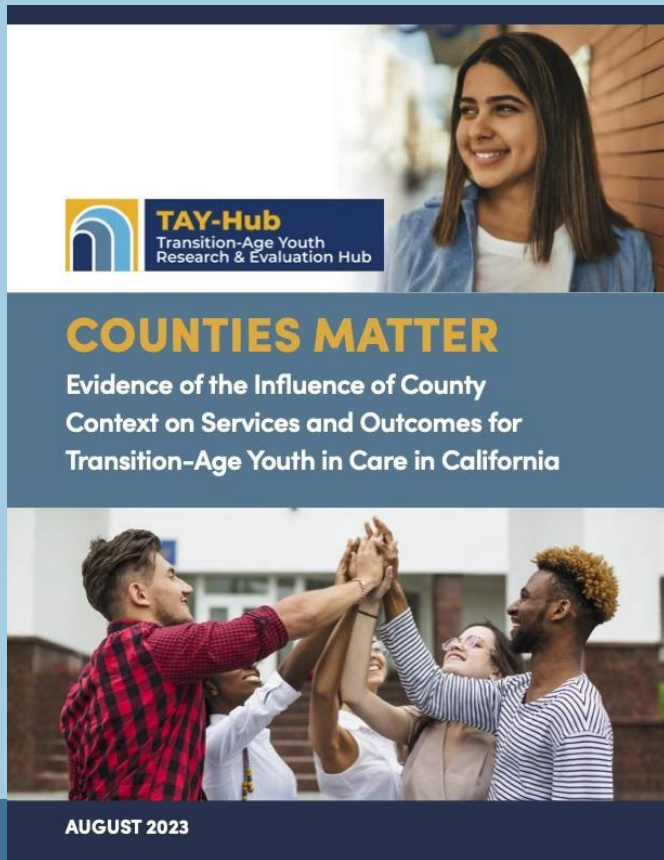
County-level factors, such as socioeconomic context and collaboration between social and health services, court systems, and nongovernmental providers, can affect the availability of services and outcomes of transition-age youth (TAY). Little research has examined how county-level characteristics shape TAY outcomes, particularly in light of California's implementation of extended foster care (EFC).



Background


The CalYOUTH study, a 10-year evaluation that assessed the well-being and outcomes of young people in California who were eligible for EFC measured between-county variation in its implementation. The resulting report summarizes:

- CalYOUTH findings to date on between-county variation in EFC implementation; and
- Aspects of county context associated with how long youth remain in care, the services they receive, and a wide range of outcomes they experience.




Methods

TAY participated in surveys and shared information on well-being indicators such as education, employment, health, housing, and relationships.



Caseworker surveys assessed service availability, coordination, and the implementation of EFC as well as caseworkers' perceptions of training and services, interagency collaborations, and the age at which youth are ready for independent living.



Additionally, the study considered workforce specialization by calculating the proportion of caseworkers focused on specialized services for older youth.



Other Data Sources

Publicly available data sources were leveraged to investigate the socioeconomic and political context of counties and its impact on service delivery and outcomes for transition-age youth. Data sources included:

- American Community Survey for employment rates;
- U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development for fair market rent estimates; and
- California Secretary of State Office for voter registration data.

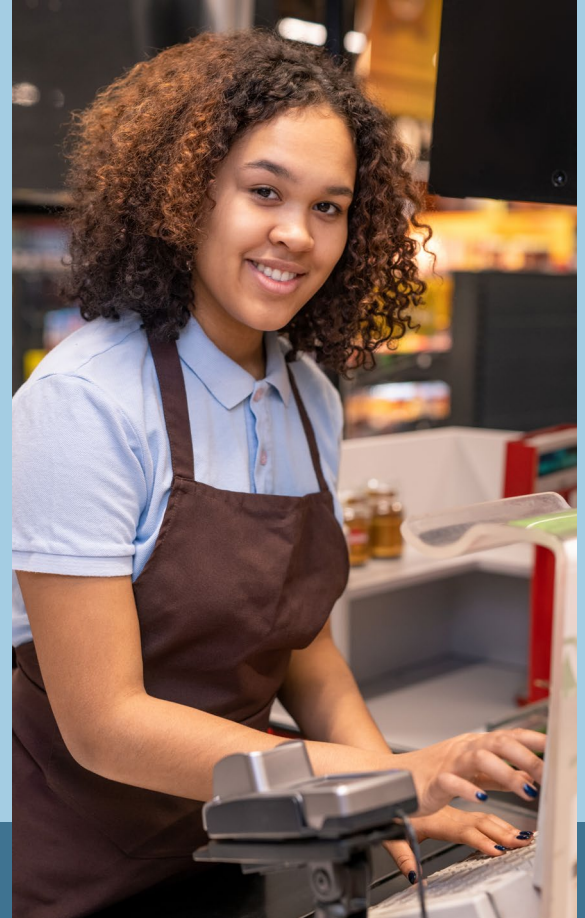
Findings

Studies using CalYOUTH data have revealed various associations between county-level factors and outcomes for transition-age youth in California.



Findings

- Caseworkers' perceptions of service availability and cross-system collaboration varied across counties, with education, employment, and independent living preparation services being considered most helpful.
- Caseworkers generally perceived the need for services and support beyond age 18 but some expressed concerns about EFC would foster dependence on government support systems.
- The length of EFC stays varied by county and was influenced by caseworkers' satisfaction with interagency collaboration and court personnel's support.





Findings

Youth satisfaction with independent living transition planning differed between counties, with higher unemployment rates and perceived service availability associated with greater youth participation. County factors including urbanicity, cost of living, and interagency collaboration affected:

- housing options;
- educational outcomes;
- mental health service utilization; and
- employment and earnings.

Takeaway

The findings from CalYOUTH emphasize the importance of county contexts in shaping outcomes for TAY.

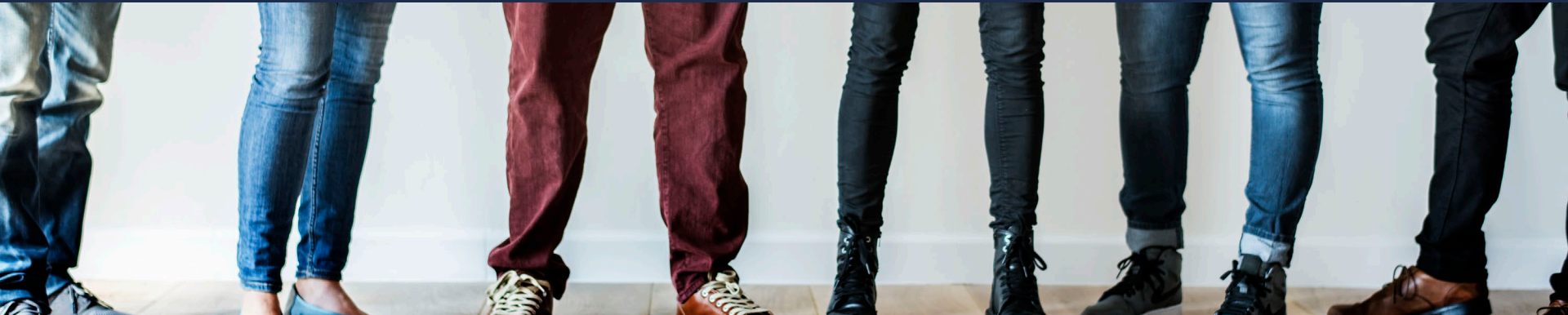
- Factors such as the demographic characteristics of a county's population, (e.g., urbanicity and voters' political affiliation), and the availability of housing and supportive services are tied to youth outcomes during their transition to adulthood.
- Collaboration between child welfare and other agencies, as well as specialized case management for TAY, also play crucial roles.



Implications

The report emphasizes the significance of considering local variation when planning/ providing services and assessing results.

- Federal policy entrusts states with the responsibility of overseeing child welfare services within counties, based on the principle of subsidiarity. This principle suggests that central governments should focus on tasks that cannot be performed effectively at a more local level, allowing local governments to address the unique needs of their residents. Managing child welfare at the county level in a diverse state like California aligns with this principle and offers a chance to adopt innovative approaches developed by counties.





TAY-Hub

Transition-Age Youth
Research & Evaluation Hub

The Transition-Age Youth Research & Evaluation Hub (TAY-Hub) seeks to improve policies and practices affecting TAY by monitoring outcomes and through applied research that is grounded in engagement with members of the child welfare services community, including those with lived experience of foster care.

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The TAY-Hub aims to foster learning by enabling state and county collaboration, with the goal of enhancing outcomes and well-being for TAY.