

A PROFILE OF CALIFORNIA GRANDPARENTS  
RAISING GRANDCHILDREN

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

California's grandparents raising children were, until recently, a largely forgotten part of the State's caregiver population. A substantial increase in the number of children being raised solely by relatives, however, along with evidence of their health and social problems, have helped focus needed attention on this growing caregiver group. Substance abuse, the rise in single parent households, HIV/AIDS, sharp increases in female incarceration, teen pregnancy, and policy changes favoring foster care placement of children with relatives over non-relatives are among the reasons for the dramatic growth in grandparent caregiving (Minkler, 1999).

The 294,969 grandparents in California responsible for raising their minor grandchildren in 2000 give California the highest number of such caregivers in the nation (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2002a). Most of California's custodial grandparents are married (75%), female (59%), and employed (56%). About 22% live in poverty (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2002a). California's grandparents raising grandchildren typically occupy this position for a period of several years.

Nine counties had more than 10,000 grandparent caregivers: Alameda, Los Angeles, Orange, Riverside, Sacramento, San Bernardino, San Diego, Santa Clara, and Tulare. With the exception of the latter, all were predominately urban areas. In several rural counties--including Alpine, Del Norte, Lassen, Mendocino, Mariposa, Placer and Siskiyou—over a third of grandparent caregivers had been primary caregivers for under a year. Although the total number of grandparent caregivers in these rural counties tends to be small, this may suggest that problems such as drug abuse and newly implemented legal mandates may now be reaching a critical point in some rural areas.

The inter-county variation observed in grandparent caregiving underscores the need for tailoring programs and policies so that they can best address the concerns of the State's diverse grandparent caregiver populations. County level information provides some important insights into the potential needs of grandparent caregivers. As more census data are released, the State's ability to understand and better respond to the needs of its growing population of grandparents raising grandchildren should increase as well.