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The Higher Rates of Asthma in Low Income Communities in San Diego

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The Higher Rates of Asthma in Low Income Communities in San Diego

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Background:

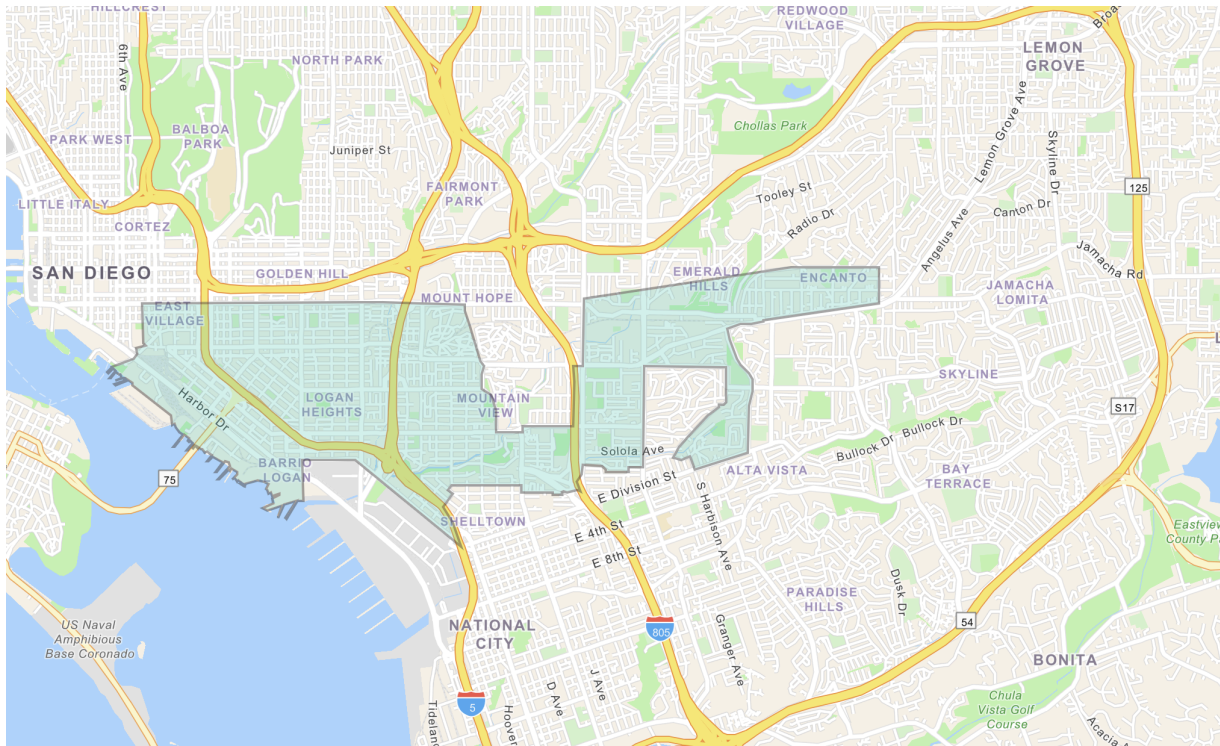
In San Diego, there are higher levels of asthma in lower income communities. This is a clear example of environmental injustice, with lower income communities being more subject to pollution, waste facilities in their environments, less access to education and healthcare, and more. The area of San Diego that is affected has been named a “Promise Zone” by the federal government¹, which is an area that is promised to be assisted due to lower education rates, lack of access to healthy foods, and lack of affordable housing. Promise zone areas receive preference for certain competitive federal grant programs, a federal liaison assigned to help designees navigate federal programs, and more². These investments into benefits that help promise zones are aimed towards helping residents with improved resources and infrastructure or community support. This area of San Diego is 6.4 square miles spanning East Village and Barrio Logan East to Encanto; more than 80,000 residents live in this zone³. The neighborhoods being designated as a promise zone shows that help is essential, specifically government action from our legislators.

¹<https://www.sandiegouniontribune.com/news/politics/story/2022-04-08/new-analysis-shows-low-income-san-diego-areas-suffer-from-sharp-disparities-on-income-asthma>

² <https://www.hudexchange.info/programs/promise-zones/promise-zones-overview/>

³<https://www.sandiego.gov/economic-development/san-diego-promise-zone#:~:text=The%20San%20Diego%20Promise%20Zone%20covers%20a%206.4%2Dsquare%2Dmile,City's%20most%20under%2Dresourced%20communities.>

San Diego Promise Zone Geographic Boundaries ⁴



This map displays the area designated as a Promise Zone in San Diego.

Contributing Factors:

The City of San Diego rezoned Barrio Logan area after World War II to allow “polluting industries, junkyards, metal plating shops, and other toxic businesses incompatible with a residential community”⁵. Additionally the community was divided by the construction of the interstate 5 freeway. Many residents were displaced and many lost their homes in the mid 1960s⁵. The Coronado Bridge’s construction further added to these displacements and destruction of homes in 1967. These freeways running through the communities in the Promise Zone contribute high rates of emissions and pollution, leading to the ozone pollution in the area being the 8th

⁴<https://sandiego.maps.arcgis.com/apps/webappviewer/index.html?id=4d64f3b5fe0d4869a92c3f198421b453&extent=-13045305.0498%2C3850909.0323%2C-13030447.6024%2C3859212.0045%2C102100>

⁵<https://www.environmentalhealth.org/communities/logan/#:~:text=After%20World%20War%20II%2C%20the,the%20construction%20of%20Interstate%205.>

worst in the United States, and causing the residents to have a higher risk of developing cancer from air toxins than 93% of the country ⁶. The East Village, Barrio Logan, Logan Heights, and more are also portside communities and are burdened by impacts from the freight, rail, and industry factors⁷. These communities also face stationary sources including aircraft parts, manufacturing, a power generation plant, metal recyclers, welding shops, paint shops, and more ^{^7}. The Promise Zone is a very diverse community, as of 2020 it was 71% Hispanic and Latino residents, 12% Black and African American, 6% Asian, and 9% White and the median household income was \$38,567 ⁸. The Citywide median in contrast was \$79,646. These demographics display that the impacted community was largely people of color and lower income. Due to this, the City of San Diego allowed them to suffer from these racist institutional practices. They were subject to separating their communities, high pollution, poor air quality, higher risks of cancer and other detrimental health conditions, and much more.

Related Policies

1) The Community Air Protection Program (AB 617): AB 617 was passed in 2017 and signed by Governor Brown. As a result the Community Air Protection Program (CAPP) was established. The focus is to reduce exposure in communities most impacted by air pollution. One part of the program is offering emission reduction grants. Additionally, the California Air Resources Board (CARB) and air districts are required to develop and implement additional emissions reporting, monitoring, reduction plans , and measures to reduce air pollution exposure in disadvantaged communities⁹.

⁶ <https://www.environmentalhealth.org/our-work/clean-air/>

²<https://ww2.arb.ca.gov/our-work/programs/community-air-protection-program/communityhub-2-0/portside-environmental-justice#:~:text=The%20community%20is%20impacted%20by,cumulative%20air%20pollution%20exposure%20burden.>

⁸ <https://business.ca.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/San-Diego-Promise-Zone.pdf>

⁹ <https://community.valleyair.org/>

2) Community Emissions Reduction Program: In 2019, the California Air Resources Board selected the Portside Environmental Justice Neighborhoods Community to develop a community emissions reduction program, which was adopted by the district board in July 2021¹⁰. This plan transitioned from an air monitoring only plan to an emissions reduction program. The plan involves strategies including outreach and community engagement, incentives, rule development, enforcement, heavy duty trucks, land use, working waterfront activities, and advocacy measures. Their goals include reducing diesel PM from 2018 levels by 80% by 2031, establish ZEV HD/MD truck charging infrastructure, by February 2022, establishing an estimated cancer risk reduction goal, develop a vision for park/ green space for the portside community to increase park space by 30% by december 2022, and more¹¹.

3) Promise Zone Initiative: A partnership between “federal government and local government agencies, community based organizations, direct service providers, residents, and business owners to streamline resources and deliver comprehensive support”¹². There are six goals involved for San Diego including– increasing economic activity, housing affordability, access to healthy communities, improving educational opportunities, creating jobs, and prioritizing safety¹².

Policy Evaluation

The communities residing in the Promise Zone in San Diego are subject to some of the worst environmental injustices in the United States. The higher rates of asthma are just one visibility of this issue.

¹⁰<https://ww2.arb.ca.gov/our-work/programs/community-air-protection-program/communityhub-2-0/portside-environmental-justice#:~:text=The%20community%20is%20impacted%20by,cumulative%20air%20pollution%20exposure%20burden>

¹¹<https://www.sdapcd.org/content/dam/sdapcd/documents/capp/meetings/portside-csc/022823/CERP%20Goals%20and%20Strategies%20Handout.pdf>

¹²<https://www.sandiego.gov/economic-development/san-diego-promise-zone#:~:text=The%20San%20Diego%20Promise%20Zone%20covers%20a%206.4%2Dsquare%2Dmile,City's%20most%20under%2Dresourced%20communities>

Both the legislators of California through the Senate and Assembly, as well as the local City Council of California must invest in solutions that will reduce emissions, educate residents and provide more equitable access to health care, stop the disproportionate zoning of industrial sources in the neighborhood, and more. These solutions include providing accessible healthcare for residents, education on harmful effects of pollution, personal protective equipment, and more. Accountability must be held towards racist zoning practices as well as corporations and large companies that heavily pollute the area. The practices that allow lower income areas to be consistently chosen as sites for hazardous waste facilities or factories must change. Through the Promise zone initiative, collaboration with all these different entities, especially community based solutions will have a strong impact. The most important thing is strong legislation and funding for these areas. AB 617, or the Community Air Protection Program is some of the strongest and most important legislation involving air quality and higher rates of asthma in San Diego. Through AB617 the legislature approved funding for “early actions to address localized air pollution through targeted incentive funding to deploy cleaner technologies in these communities, as well as grants to support community participation in the AB 617 process”¹³. Communities of color have historically been left out of the policy process even though they are the most affected, so this legislation to include them is incredibly important. The policies surrounding disproportionate rates of asthma are expanding every year. As we learn more about the harmful effects of pollution and emissions on these neighborhoods, it is essential to continue advocating for more funding, education, and strict policies. It is also important to maintain and implement restorative justice practices for the impacted communities.

¹³ <https://ww2.arb.ca.gov/capp/about>