



# **Executive Summary**

## ***Lane County Survey of Children and Families 2007***

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### **Introduction**

Oregon's Lane County Department of Children and Families (DCF) commissioned a survey of Lane County residents regarding issues important to children and families first in 1996, and again in 2007. Representatives from DCF and Lane Council of Governments (LCOG) collaborated to devise survey questions that can measure public priorities for benchmarks set to improve the lives of residents in Lane County. Northwest Survey & Data Services (NSDS) was selected to collect data for the 2007 survey. Topics included issues in children's health and education, as well as general economic and social issues. Some of the questions were included on the original 1996 survey, and some are new to this year's data gathering efforts.

### **Methodology**

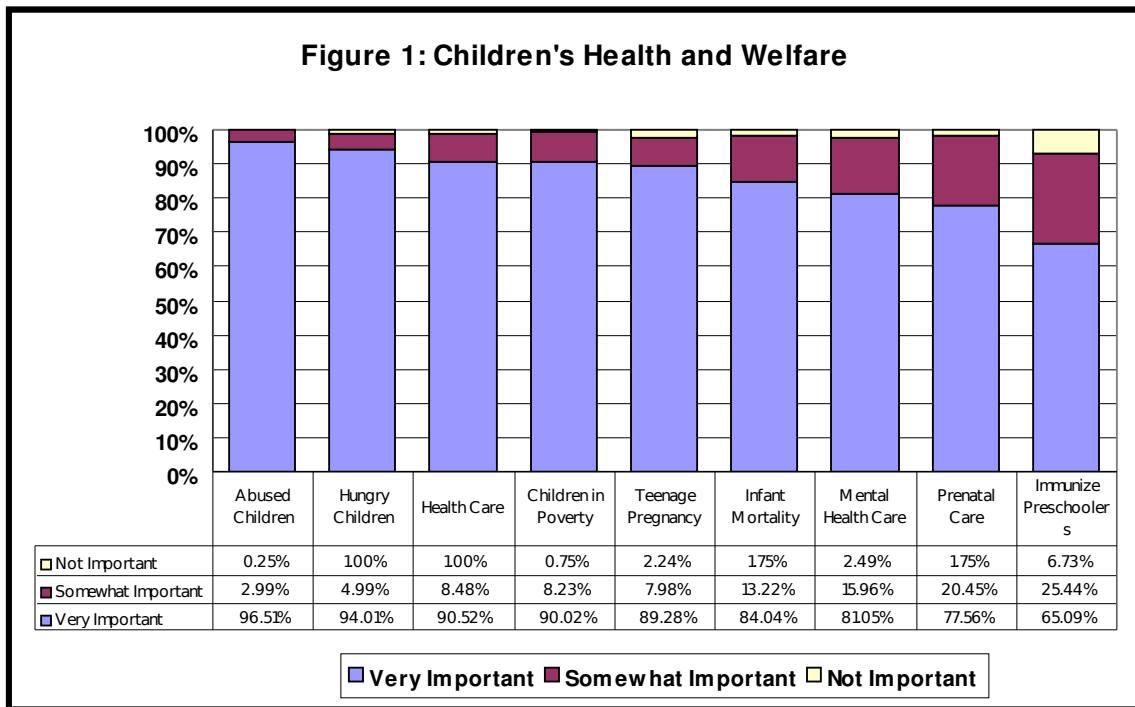
For the 2007 survey, potential respondents were selected at random from all working telephone numbers in Lane County, Oregon. All interviews were conducted at residences; no interviews were conducted at businesses, government offices, or other non-residential locations. For this survey of 401 respondents, the margin of error is  $\pm 4.9\%$ . This means that for any result the true answer, if generalized back to the entire population of Lane County, will be within 4.9 percentage points above or below the result reported here. For answers in which a large percentage of respondents all have the same opinion, the margin of error will be smaller. For example, a result in which 85% of people have the same opinion has a margin of error of only  $\pm 3.5\%$ . Please see the Sample Report section of this document for information regarding the response rates and call attempt efforts.

## Survey Results

In order to qualify for the 2007 survey, respondents had to be over age 18, live in Lane County, and be either the head of their household, or someone who jointly made household decisions. After qualification, respondents were asked to rate the importance of 29 items or social issues. For each item they were asked if it was “very important”, “somewhat important”, or “not important.” The items can be broken down into four distinct categories: items related to children's health and welfare; items related to children's education; general social issues; and general economic issues.

### Children's Health and Welfare

Respondents were asked about nine issues related to children's health and welfare. All nine items were considered “very important” by a majority of respondents. In fact, for four of the nine items, over 90% of respondents thought this issue was “very important.” Topping this list was the issue of child abuse, where 97% of respondents gave a rating of “very important.” This was the highest rated issue of all 29 items. The two items with the lowest percentage of “very important” scores were prenatal care and childhood immunization, with 78% and 65% respectively. Figure 1 below shows the importance ratings for all nine issues.



Although general support for idea that these are important issues is very high, there is some variation among respondents. For eight of the nine issues women are more likely to think the issue is “very important” than are men. In most cases this difference is around 10 percentage points, although on the issue of reducing the number of hungry children the difference is almost 20 percentage points. The only one of the nine issues where men were more likely than women to think the issue was “very important” was for childhood immunization. This issue was the lowest ranked of the nine child health and welfare issues, and only a few more men than women (2%) rated it “very important.”

Similarly, households with children present consistently had a higher percentage of respondents who rated each of these nine issues as “very important” when compared to households without children present. The difference between these two types of households was not as striking as the difference between men and women, but typically averaged about five percentage points.

Finally, it was common for older respondents, respondents with high incomes, and those with a higher education to have a slightly lower percentage when rating each of these nine issues as “very important.” This difference did not always exist, but sometimes was substantial. See the Banner Tables Section of the report, for example Table 29, on access to mental health services for children and youth.

We have no information as to why these classes of respondents might rate any of these nine issues related to children's health lower than the general population. But it is possible that they are either past the age where they are likely to be involved with children on a daily basis, or are affluent enough that access to health services is not a barrier in their lives.

### **Children's Education**

In addition to questions about issues of children's health, respondents were also asked six questions related to children's education. Here too, a majority of respondents rated all nine issues as “very important.” However, in general this high importance rating was given by fewer respondents than was seen with children's health issues. The children's education issue seen as most important was the reduction in number of high school students who drop out of school. Almost as important was to increase reading and math scores at the 8<sup>th</sup> grade level, followed closely by increasing reading and math scores at the 3<sup>rd</sup> grade level. The issue seen as least important was to have more children prepared for kindergarten. Figure 2 below shows the rating scores for children's educational issues.

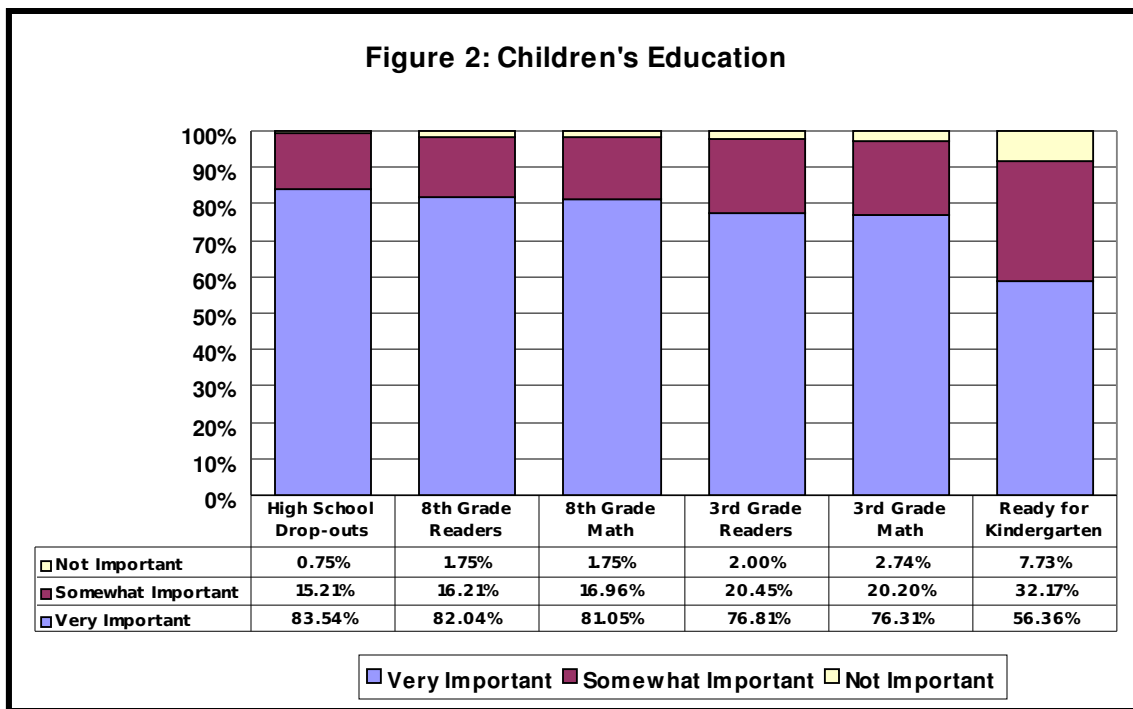


Figure 2 shows an interesting result. The issue seen as “very important” by the highest percentage of the population of Lane County concerns the oldest children, those in high school. The next two highest issues concern the next oldest children, eight graders. This pattern continues, with third grade reading and math issues next in the ratings and finally, kindergarten is at the bottom. Although this survey gathered no information that would

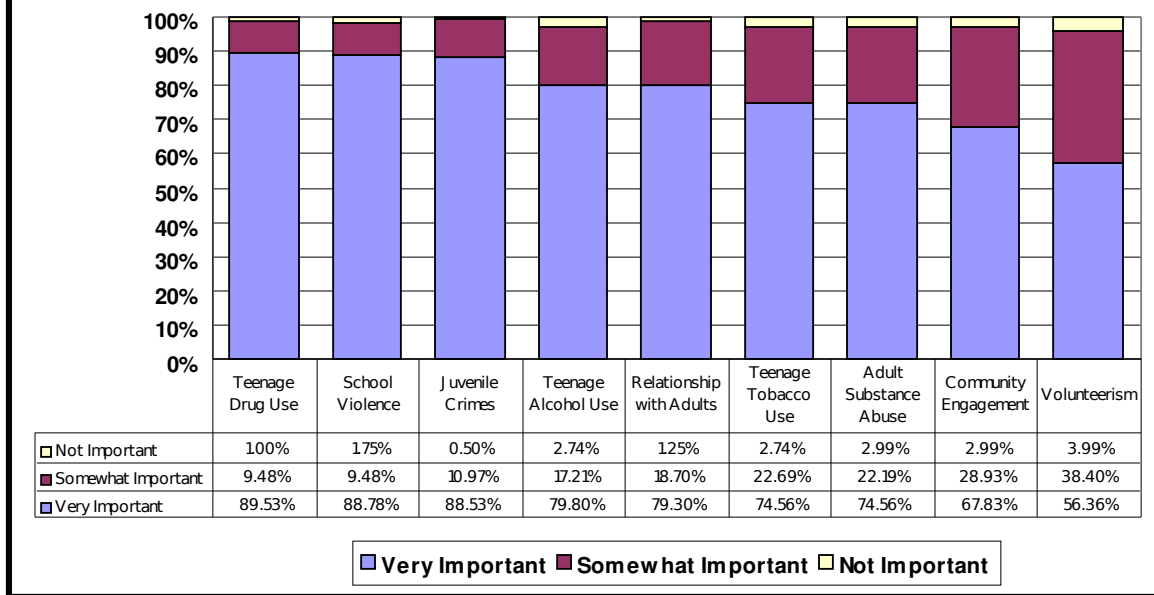
help explain this result, it appears that concern for children's education increases as the children get older. When the two extremes, kindergarten and high school, are examined, the percentage of respondents who feel the issue is “very important” is one and a half times greater for staying in high school vs. being prepared for kindergarten.

Among the respondents, the biggest variation in ratings was again due to gender, with more women than men giving a “very important” rating to all six of the educational issues. For some of the issues, dropping out of high school, and preparation for kindergarten, respondents with children at home were more likely to give a high importance rating than those without children. For the other 4 educational issues the differences between those with or without children in the home were insignificant. Similarly, age, income, and education were occasionally related to lower rating scores, but not consistently. See the Banner Tables Section of this report for more detail.

### **Social Issues**

Although just over half the questions in the 2007 survey focused on either children's health or educational issues, the survey also included nine questions on social issues related to adults and youth. Some of the questions concerned dangerous youth behaviors such as school violence, teenage drug use, and juvenile crime. Not surprisingly, these issues were seen as “very important” by approximately 90% of all respondents. Other issues, such as teen alcohol use, teen tobacco use, and adult substance abuse were seen as “very important” by 75% to 80% of respondents, as was the importance of teens having more supportive relationships with adults. The other social issues asked about, increasing community involvement and increasing volunteerism, were seen as “very important” by substantial majorities of the population of Lane County, but not at the same level as the importance of reducing the negative social issues involving substance use and violence. See Figure 3 below for the ratings for all nine of these issues.

**Figure 3: Social Issues**



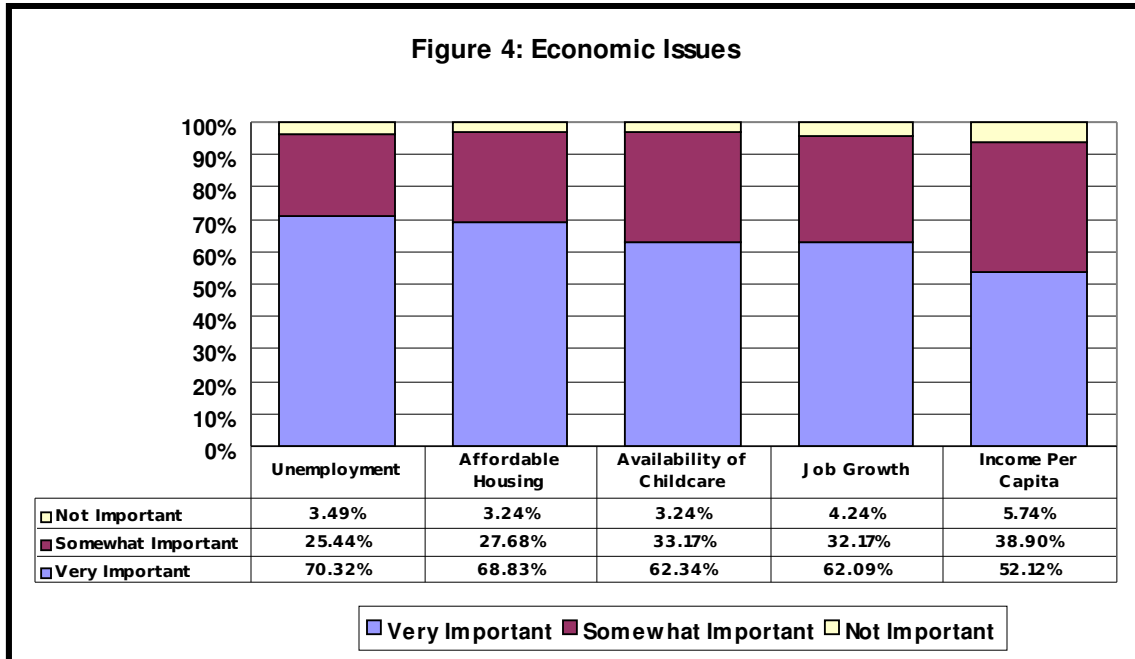
The difference between the percentage of women and the percentage of men who gave “very important” ratings to these nine social issues is again the dominant individual difference. For all nine issues women were 10 or more percentage points ahead of men in giving the highest importance rating. One issue, reducing adult substance abuse, was particularly interesting, with 81% of women thinking it was “very important”, while only 64% of men felt that way. Another issue where there was an interesting gender difference was on the topic of volunteerism. Sixty-one percent of women thought it was “very important” to increase volunteerism, while only 48% of men felt similarly. This was one of only two issues in the survey where a majority of men did not feel that an issue was “very important.”

The lack of presence of children in the respondent's home, higher education, high income, and older age all had occasional effects on reducing the importance level. However, these effects were not systematic and rarely exceeded a few percentage points. See the Banner Tables section of the report for more detail on demographic differences.

### **Economic Issues**

The final set of issues asked about in the 2007 survey were five questions related to economic issues. All five of these questions had a majority of Lane county residents who

thought they were “very important.” However, as a group these questions had the smallest percentage of respondents who reported feeling this way. Ratings of “very important” had a high of 70% for the idea of reducing unemployment, down to 52% for increasing income per capita. The issues of increasing affordable housing, child care, and job growth were all scored as “very important” by approximately 65% of respondents. See Figure 4 for rating scores for these five issues.

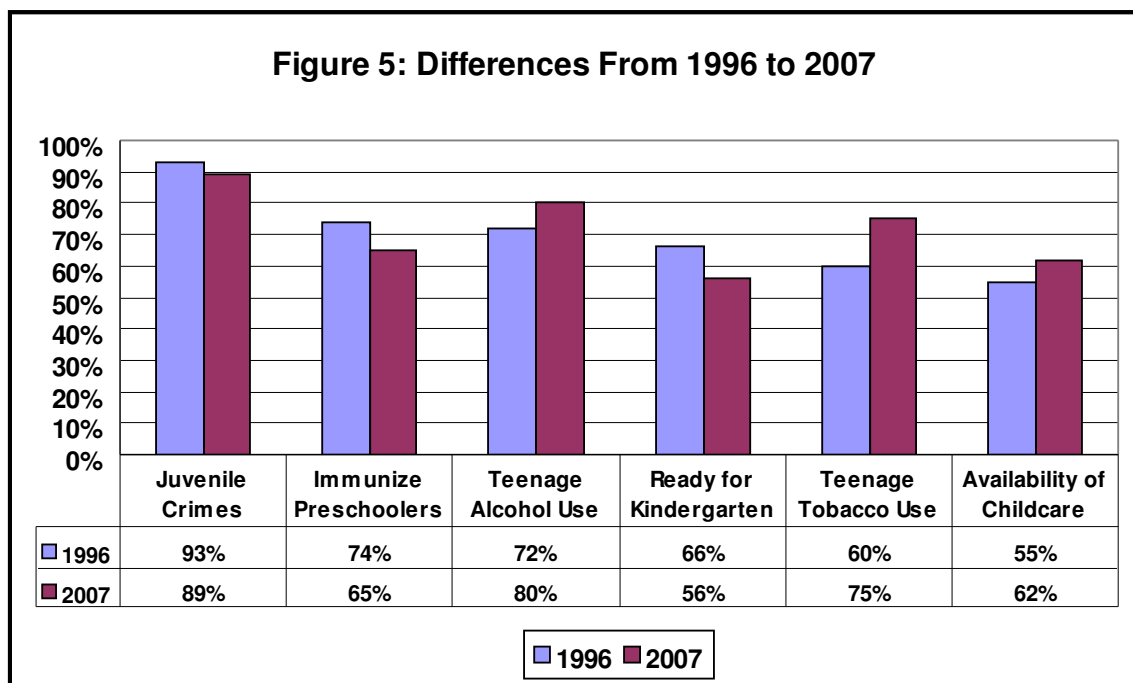


Some of these five economic issues brought out distinct differences between respondents based on gender, income, and education. In particular, the issue of increased income per capita did not have a majority of strong support among men (46%), those with incomes over \$65,000 a year (40%), or among those with undergraduate college degrees (39%). On all five issues women were more supportive than men, and high income and high education levels continued to have the effect of reducing the percentage of respondents who saw these issues as “very important.”

### Comparisons with the 1996 Survey

The 1996 Lane County Survey of Children and Families measured attitudes toward 12 of the 29 issues measured in 2007. These issues included: abused children; juvenile crimes; children in poverty; teen pregnancy; teen use of drugs; teen use of alcohol; teen use of tobacco; high school drop-outs; childhood immunization; preparation for kindergarten;

and childcare facilities. When looking at these items, one issue that stands out clearly is child abuse. Both in 1996 and 2007, more respondents felt it was “very important” to reduce the number of abused children in Lane County than any other issue (96% and 97%, respectively). For six of these issues, the percentage of respondents who saw the issue as “very important” has remained the same or within one or two percentage points from the results in 1996. These small changes are well within the margin of error for the two surveys and it is best to conclude that public attitudes on these six issues have not changed. However, for six of the issues there have been changes from 4% up to 15% in how the public views the importance of each issue. Figure 5 below shows the percentage of “very important” scores given for each of these six issues in 1996 and in 2007.



As can be seen from Figure 5, the percentage of respondents who view each of these issues as “very important” may have gone either up or down. Compared with 1996, many more respondents in 2007 gave a “very important” rating to teen uses of tobacco and alcohol, and to the availability of childcare. However, the perceived importance of childhood immunization, preparation for kindergarten, and juvenile crimes have clearly declined since 1996.

It is also worth noting here that the five issues with the largest swings in perceived importance between 1996 and 2007 are also the five issues out of the 12 measured in 1996 that had the lowest percentage of “very important” scores attached to them. In other

words, those issues for which opinion was most divided in 1996 were also the issues that showed the most change between 1996 and 2007. For the issues where opinions were almost uniform (80% or greater) that the issue was “very important”, there was almost no change in opinion between 1996 and 2007.

## **Conclusion**

The 2007 Lane County Survey of Children and Families asked the adult population of the county to assess the importance of 29 issues of medical, educational, economic, or social importance. All of these were serious issues and not surprisingly all were seen as “very important” by a majority of the county. Nevertheless, there were differences in the extent to which the public viewed issues as important. Child abuse had a higher rating of “very important” than all other topics in the survey. Children's health issues, with the exception of immunization – a somewhat politicized issue – were generally seen as “very important” by almost everyone. Children's education was seen as “very important” by a strong majority, but did not get the extremely high scores that some of the health issues received. Similarly, some social issues, with the exception of violence, crime, and teen drug use, were seen as “very important” by an even smaller majority of people. And finally, all the economic issues were seen as “very important” by relatively small majorities.

Although it is not possible to know the exact priority Lane County residents might assign to each of the 29 issues investigated in the 2007 survey, it is reasonable to assume that those issues seen as “very important” by large majorities are more important to the population as a whole, than those where smaller majorities assigned the highest importance score. However, it is also clear that each of these issues has a majority of support for the idea that it is an important issue and needs to be addressed.

This report summarizes the significant survey results. Readers can look at the Topline Section of the report for the exact question wording and the summarized responses to each question. Readers may refer to the tables in the Banner Tables Section of this report for more detail and to find cross-tabulations of each question with a wide range of demographic information.

