A growing number of families in the Coachella Valley, an area renowned for its beautiful landscape, highly celebrated music festival, mild winter climate and luxurious resorts, face a hidden and daunting struggle to survive. **Nearly half of Coachella Valley residents live below the 200 percent federal poverty line**, which is more than 10 percentage points higher than throughout the state of California. This alarming statistic, that nearly one in two Coachella Valley residents live in at or near poverty, illustrates the particularly acute conditions in the region—and the situation has not improved as the broader California economy has improved. While the percentage of Californians living below 200 percent of the federal poverty line has declined in recent years, poverty in the Coachella Valley continues to increase [Figure I]. This single statistic illustrates the extreme economic hardship that so many Coachella Valley families must confront, and which produces daily deprivation and vulnerability.

Not all Coachella Valley families face equally grave conditions. Rather, poverty in the Coachella Valley differs significantly across race and ethnicity, and also across neighborhoods. In particular, **Hispanic residents, who account for more than 50 percent of the population, are almost three times more likely to face poverty than White residents**. Poverty is also concentrated in neighborhoods located in the southeast and northwest of the Valley, which have a greater proportion of Hispanic residents. [Map 1]
The Origin of Lift To Rise
In mid-2015, Coachella Valley community partners came together to deliberately address the deteriorating economic conditions and growing economic disparity in the Coachella Valley. They shared a common vision: to turn the tide on economic inequality, and to create a new landscape of possibility where “All Coachella Valley families are healthy, stable and thriving.”

From the initial pilot project, Collaborating for Clients (C4C), funded by the Laura and John Arnold Foundation, the Lift To Rise collective impact initiative has evolved. During the first year, the local partners in the Coachella Valley collaborated with the USC Price Center for Social Innovation to conduct a community needs assessment, which would allow them to identify targeted dimensions along which to strategically intervene. This needs assessment assessed conditions and trends over time in 8 different policy sectors. Through this deep quantitative analysis, and in conjunction with deep stakeholder engagement, partners chose four headline indicators in three policy domains in which to focus their work: (1) Childhood Obesity, (2) Mental Health, (3) Rent Burden and (4) Opportunity Youth.

In year two, Lift To Rise conducted another needs assessment focused specifically on the four headline indicators. Concurrently, community partners have begun to engage in organizing and policy work in these areas, organized within two Collaborative Action Networks (CANs) for Rent Burden and Childhood Obesity. Through the work underway in the CANs, Lift To Rise has begun to align work and undertake interventions to tackle the critical problems that Coachella Valley families are struggling with on a daily basis.

Initial Focus on Housing Stability and Childhood Obesity
On average, Coachella Valley families lag behind families in other areas of the state across most social indicators. Within the Coachella Valley, significant disparities exist across neighborhoods, and also across racial
and ethnic groups, with the most marginalized families within the Coachella Valley experiencing the most extreme poverty and vulnerability. Below is the summary of key findings related to housing stability and childhood obesity, along which Lift To Rise has begun to organize thus far.

Rent Burden
Almost 60 percent of Coachella Valley households pay more than 30 percent of their income on rent, which is widely recognized as the threshold after which residents are considered “rent burdened”—they pay so much of their monthly income on rent that they may be forced to make sacrifices in order to afford rent. The share of rent burdened residents in the Coachella Valley is higher than California by 2.1 percentage points. Since rent in the Coachella Valley is significantly lower than the statewide average, the rent burden problem is largely driven by extremely low incomes in the region. Almost 79 percent of households earning less than $50,000 annually are rent burdened, while less than 18 percent of households who earn $50,000 or more a year are rent burdened. Therefore, the incidence of rent burden is overwhelmingly concentrated among the poorest households, and the majority of rent burdened residents live in census tracts with high poverty rates. Hispanic households are more likely to experience rent burden than White households, although the gap has recently decreased. However, since Hispanic households have more household members on average, their remaining income after rent is divided among more people. This means that Hispanic households are left with less money left over after rent to spend on each family member—forcing household members to tradeoffs between essential spending like food, energy, and other necessities.

Childhood Obesity
The share of obese children in the Coachella Valley is approximately 30 percent, which is similar to the childhood obesity rate in California. Within the Coachella Valley, however, significant differences exist across race and ethnicity. While over 32 percent of Hispanic children in the Coachella Valley are obese, less than 18 percent of White children in the Coachella Valley are obese. The obesity rate of Black children and those in other race and ethnic groups ranges from 21 - 25 percent. Therefore, the problem of childhood obesity is concentrated among youth of color, and particularly Hispanic children.
NEXT STEPS

Expand Interventions Focused on Housing Stability: The Housing Stability Collective Action Network is working on interventions designed to reduce rent burden and increase financial stability for Coachella Valley residents. Test strategies have focused on creating immediate stabilizing mechanisms, specifically targeting the acutely vulnerable migrant farmer worker population. Future interventions could focus on economic inequality across multiple dimensions: financial stability tools, intended to alleviate urgent financial stressors; financial asset building, such as expanding access to emergent financial services and lending structures; and of course, jobs.

Develop Childhood Obesity Interventions: The Childhood Obesity Collective Action Network has begun to work to identify, develop, and implement pilot programs to reduce childhood obesity in Coachella Valley. This CAN created a pilot series of nutrition workshops for Coachella Valley youth, hosted at the Boys and Girls Club of Cathedral City, designed to teach children about healthy eating habits and involving cooking lessons. Currently, the CAN is working to build out strategies to continue understanding resident need, the barriers to healthy living, and how to support residents.

Identify Mental Health Interventions: According to the Health Assessment and Research for Communities, approximately 22 percent of adults in the Coachella Valley have been diagnosed with one or more mental health disorders. The most common diagnosis in the Coachella Valley is depressive disorder, followed by anxiety disorder. Between 2010 and 2016, the share of adults who have seriously considered suicide almost doubled, from 2.4 to 4.5 percent. Additionally, mental health estimates indicate that 14 percent of Coachella Valley residents are likely experiencing poor mental health conditions for more than two weeks a month. This is an area of concern that warrants further action.

Identify Interventions Targeting Opportunity Youth: The share of opportunity youth (individuals between the ages of 16 and 24 who are not in school and also not working) in the Coachella Valley is over 18 percent, which is almost 5 percentage points higher than the share in California. While a greater share of opportunity youth is Hispanic, the share of White opportunity youth has continuously increased, narrowing the gap between the two groups. This is another area that requires the development of targeted interventions.