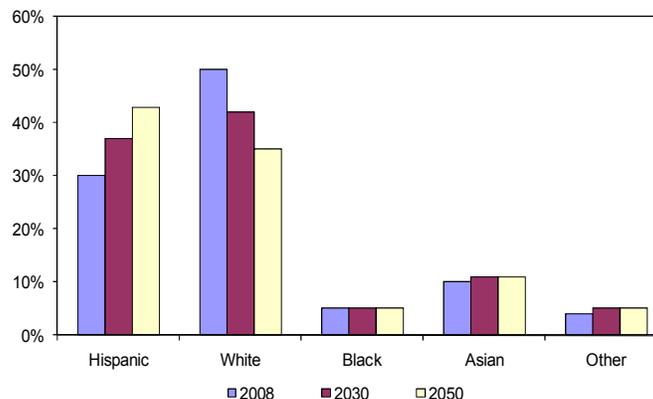


Local Leaders Weigh in on Regional Growth and Implications to Public Health and Safety

As San Diego's principal planning agency, SANDAG is the source for forecasted regional growth information. Recently, SANDAG released its publication, "Our Region. Our Future: 2050 Forecast", a rich source of data that serves as a prediction of the demographic, economic, and land use trends that may be realized in upcoming decades. Key findings from SANDAG's forecast describe a regional population that will be more ethnically diverse, with no single ethnicity comprising the majority (Figure 1). Projections also show an aging population, with those 55 years and older comprising 30 percent of the total population by 2050, an increase from 21 percent in 2010 (not shown). In addition, residents will be living in more densely populated neighborhoods as multiple-family housing units increase to a greater extent than single-family housing over the next 40 years (not shown).

Figure 1
REGION'S ETHNIC DIVERSITY WILL INCREASE OVER NEXT 40 YEARS



SOURCE: SANDAG, 2010

Regional Growth and Public Safety

In the interest of understanding the implications of these growth projections on public health and safety, SANDAG's Public Safety Committee (PSC) recently discussed these issues with a panel of four local leaders: San Diego Police Chief William Landsdowne; San Diego County Sheriff William Gore; San Diego County Probation Chief Mack Jenkins; and Health and Human Services Agency (HHSA) Director, Nick Macchione. Some of the insights and implications they envision from the forecasted projections include:

- An aging population could give rise to greater incidence of elder abuse, specifically financial crimes. According to Mr. Macchione, more than one-third of elder abuse reports to HHSA involve fiduciary abuse, with some committed by family members, and others involving the Internet. Chief Landsdowne cautioned that law enforcement has seen an increasingly sophisticated level of financial cybercrimes and must keep pace with technology to provide effective investigation and interdiction to protect senior citizens.

- Greater ethnic diversity in the region will make it necessary for agencies to maintain cultural competency. As an example, Mr. Macchione reported that 40 languages are spoken by staff at a Kearny Mesa HHS office. Chief Landsdowne recommended fostering greater cultural competency by engaging immigrant youth in grade school to encourage them to choose careers in law enforcement and to form resident advisory groups in ethnically diverse communities to advise patrol officers. Chief Jenkins suggested advocating for changes in criminal justice college curriculum to teach students the skills they will need to work with a more diverse population.
- Overall, panelists believed that greater urban density would not negatively impact public safety. Sheriff Gore referenced the Broken Window Theory¹ which asserts that “decay, not density, contributes to crime”. The Sheriff pointed out that despite decades of growth and higher density in San Diego, crime has declined. The group agreed that the greatest challenge posed by higher density is efficient use of scarce resources and to “change inefficiencies” created by certain federal funding structures that contribute to working in silos.

Planning for the Future

Although officials face challenges as growth projections become reality, the panelists were confident that their track record of leveraging existing resources in a coordinated way will aid future success. Examples given of proven resource-saving programs include: SDPD’s Homeless Outreach Team (pairs patrol officers with mental health experts to engage people living on the streets); Sheriff’s Crime-Free Multi-Housing (reduces calls for service in large apartment complexes); Probation’s Watchful Eye (implements risk-based supervision); and HHS’s Project 25 (consolidates referrals to the mentally ill and homeless). Recommendations put forth by the panelists for future cost-saving strategies include:

- Fostering self-sufficiency in neighborhoods that are less reliant on law enforcement, thus allowing officers to focus on areas that need a greater patrol presence.
- Utilizing the local “2-1-1” information and referral hotline and its increasing number of service applications.
- Continuing to use risk-based supervision to focus on probationers at highest risk of reoffending.
- Creating a healthier, and therefore less crime-prone, public by implementing the national health reform act that now includes mental health treatment.

Overall, the panel members leveled an optimistic gaze at an uncertain future and expressed assurances that they would continue their history of collaboration and coordination to design innovative programs and meet the challenges ahead.

To learn more about the Criminal Justice Clearinghouse and view the 2050 forecast, visit SANDAG’s Web site at www.sandag.org. The complete audio recording of this panel discussion can be accessed at <http://www.sandag.org/index.asp?fuseaction=meetings.sc&mid=PSC101510>, and more information regarding the PSC is available at www.sandag.org/psc.

¹ Wilson, J. Q. and Kelling, G. (1982, March). Broken Windows: The police and neighborhood safety. *Atlantic Monthly*.