



National Center for Children in Poverty
Mailman School of Public Health
Columbia University

For Immediate Release

Contact Morris Ardoin, APR, 646-284-9616, ardoin@nccp.org

Note to Editors: New data from the U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey are being released starting this week. For analysis regarding what the data mean for America's children and families, please contact: Morris Ardoin, 646-284-9616.

HOW THE ECONOMY AFFECTS CHILDREN'S HEALTH

National Statistics Tell a Mixed Story

New York City – Researchers at the National Center for Children in Poverty (NCCP), part of Columbia University's Mailman School of Public Health, are concerned that children from poor and low-income families are being left out of the national conversation about health care reform.

“The latest Census numbers tell us that more than 46 million people were uninsured in 2008, and the share of people with job-based health insurance declined from 59.3 percent in 2007, to 58.5 percent in 2008,” says Janice L. Cooper, PhD, director of NCCP. “What do these alarming numbers mean to the children in those families? We’ve seen and heard a lot of talk about what health care reform will or won’t do to the economy, taxpayers, politicians’ futures, and so on, but we haven’t heard a whole lot about how it will really matter on the ground to America’s smallest and most vulnerable citizens – our children.”

Cooper points to recent U.S. Census Bureau statistics showing that from a health-insurance perspective, children from low-income families are faring better than the population as a whole, and this phenomenon could be used as an example of how some government-run programs such as Medicaid and CHIP are actually making a marked difference in the well-being of America’s low-income families.

While that one bright spot among a long list of bad news coming from the Census report is not cause for celebration, warns Cooper, it does provide evidence countering health reform critics that government programs can indeed be effective.

- The percentage of uninsured children in low-income families declined from 18.4% in 2007, to 16.4% in 2008. There was an increase in the percentage of low-income children covered by public insurance such as Medicaid (from 46.9% to 48.7%) and CHIP (from 20.1% to 21.7%) Cooper says this may coincide with the declining share of children from low-income families who have a parent who works full time (from 54.5% to 51.1%) and an increasing share of children from low-income families with part-time/part-year parent(s) (26.4% to 29.2%).

Some other interesting details emerged from the Census numbers:

Poverty by Race and Ethnicity

The percentage of children living in poverty increased among Asian (from 12.7% to 15.0%), Latino (28.7% to 30.5%) and American Indian (25.7% to 31.3%), while there was no notable increase among white and black children.

Low Income Children

Even among children traditionally viewed as less disadvantaged, such as those having parents with college education, low-income rates have increased. To wit: the rate of low-income has increased among children living with parents with at least some college education (from 23.7% to 25.1%), children living in two-parent households (from 26.3% to 28.4%) and among white children (from 26.1% to 27.2%).

Age

Poverty increased significantly among children aged 6 to 11, from 17.3% to 19.1%.

The percentage of children in low-income families (200% of the federal poverty line) increased from 39.1% in 2007 to 40.5% in 2008. Young children under age 6 are more likely to be low-income (44.0%) than their older counterparts and the likelihood of being in a low-income family increased among children who are ages 3 to 4, from 42.6% in 2007, to 44.8% in 2008.

Insurance Status

Among the 46.3 million people who were uninsured in 2008, communities of color continued to be hardest hit. In 2008, people of color made up more than a third of the population but more than half of the uninsured.

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The National Center for Children in Poverty (NCCP) is the nation's leading public policy center dedicated to promoting the economic security, health and well-being of America's low-income families and children. Part of Columbia University's Mailman School of Public Health, NCCP uses research to inform policy and practice with the goal of ensuring positive outcomes for the next generation.