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Growth in Economy Hasn't Helped Families Facing Economic Hardship

Low-wage work for parents leaves kids out of economic recovery

SEATTLE – An additional 78,000 Washington children are growing up in poverty today than in 2008, at the start of the Great Recession. And child poverty is more common for Washington's Pacific Islander/Native Hawaiian, Black, American Indian and Latino children.

Greater child poverty—combined with stagnating wages, unemployment, underemployment and high costs for basic needs like child care—will undermine progress for kids, families and communities, according to KIDS COUNT in Washington and the Annie. E. Casey Foundation, which released the 2015 *KIDS COUNT*[®] Data Book today. The report found that too many children and families are still not feeling the effects of the economic recovery.

In the *Data Book*, Washington ranks 19th overall among 50 states in four domains of child well-being: education, health, family and community, and economic well-being.

Data compiled by the Casey Foundation and by KIDS COUNT in Washington show that Black, American Indian/Alaska Native and Latino children are also disproportionately growing up in high-poverty areas. Our national legacy of structural racism means that many of America's children are born and raised on an unequal and unstable footing.

"These numbers ought to prompt lawmakers and advocates to action," says Paola Maranan, executive director of the Children's Alliance. "Washington can't hold its place in the global economy without making this a great state for all of Washington's kids."

How Washington State's Children are Faring

Economic Security

Compared to the state average of 18 percent, approximately one in three Black, Native American and Latino kids, and one in four Pacific Islander/Native Hawaiian kids, live below the poverty line.

Access to good jobs is key to family well-being. When parents can't find stable employment that pays enough to cover their basic needs, the entire family suffers. While the state unemployment rate has declined since the height of the recession, many people of color in Washington state still struggle to find employment. Among the Black community, unemployment remains as high as 14 percent compared to the state average of seven percent. Hmong, Laotian and Cambodian Americans face similarly high rates of joblessness, according to U.S. Census data.

For those who have work, roughly one in four Black and one in five Latino Washingtonians are nevertheless underemployed—i.e. working fewer hours than they wish, or in jobs for which they are overqualified or underpaid.

Education

The dearth of affordable, culturally competent, quality early learning opportunities is a key driver of the opportunity gap, which sets kids of color up poorly for success in school. Kids of color are up to 30 percent less likely than their peers to be enrolled in preschool. By the time students reach the 3rd grade, the opportunity gap is evident—with Black, Latino, Native American and Pacific Islander/Native Hawaiian students scoring 14-22 percentage points below the state average of 72 percent. This culminates with lower rates of on-time graduation. U.S. Census data suggests that educational attainment is similarly low among families of Hmong, Cambodian, and Laotian descent.

Those who do graduate face significant financial barriers to higher education: in-state tuition for Black and Latino students as a share of median household income is 50 percent higher than the statewide average.

“This kind of data suggests that the most economically vulnerable became more so during the Great Recession,” says Budget & Policy Center Research and Policy Director Lori Pfingst. “With so many kids in families unable to make ends meet, we simply can't claim that Washington is in economic recovery. To see improvement in this data, policymakers must work toward achieving equity for every single child.”

Health Care

There's good news in child health: the share of children who have no health coverage continues to decline, from eight percent in 2008 to six percent in 2013. Nationally, 12 percent of Latino children have no health coverage; here in Washington, just eight percent are uninsured. Credit is due to Washington's strong Apple Health for Kids coverage, created by the state Legislature under the 2007 Cover All Kids law.

Recommendations

The gaps in child well-being by race and ethnicity often prompt more questions, say Pfingst and Maranan. Five-year data on economic security, for example, affords a closer look at the

Housing and child care costs in Washington as a share of median household income:

	Black: 56%
American Indian/Alaska Native: 55%	
	Latino: 54%
	Multiracial: 44%
Pacific Islander/Native Hawaiian: 42%	
	White: 38%
	Asian*: 32%
	State average: 39%

*Contains aggregate data for a diversity of households; Hmong, Laotian, Mien and Cambodian households often experience higher poverty and unemployment rates and therefore lower incomes.

circumstances of Pacific Islander/Native Hawaiian children—a group that’s often not distinguished from families of East Asian descent.

The resulting data shows that Pacific Islander children are growing up in poverty at nearly twice the rate of their Asian American peers.

“Data is a critical tool in understanding and knowing what to do,” says Maranan. “We cannot get the best outcomes for kids furthest from opportunity unless we pull apart the data to see how specific groups of children are faring. That way, we have the information necessary to act.”

The KIDS COUNT Data Center features state- and county-level data—when possible, teasing out the numbers by racial and ethnic categories to provide a fuller picture of Washington’s child population. It’s accessible at <http://datacenter.kidscount.org/data#WA>.

The Casey Foundation recommends policies that result in higher pay, paid sick leave, flexible scheduling and expanded unemployment benefits that will result in higher family income, reduced parental stress and an increased capacity of parents to invest in their kids. Detailed recommendations can be found in the 2014 report, [Creating Opportunity for Families: A Two-Generation Approach](#).

The 2015 Data Book is available **Tuesday July 21, at 12:01 a.m. EDT** at www.aecf.org. Additional information is available at <http://databook.kidscount.org>, which also contains the most recent national, state and local data on hundreds of indicators of child well-being. The Data Center allows users to create rankings, maps and graphs for use in publications and on websites, and to view real-time information on mobile devices.

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KIDS COUNT in Washington (www.kidscountwa.org) is a joint effort of the Children's Alliance (www.childrensalliance.org) and the Washington State Budget & Policy Center (www.budgetandpolicy.org), which are working together to pursue measurable improvements in kids’ lives in Washington state.