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Wisconsin Ranks 12th in Nation for Child Well-Being

Public policy investments contribute to improved opportunities for children,
but federal health care cuts threaten progress

(Madison, WI)—Boosted by sound federal, state and local policy investments, Wisconsin’s children experienced marked progress in well-being placing the state 12th in the nation for overall child well-being, according to *2017 KIDS COUNT[®] Data Book* released today by [the Annie E. Casey Foundation](#). But recent threats to health care, education, and other programs could jeopardize Wisconsin families.

Wisconsin Council on Children and Families Executive Director, **Ken Taylor**, calls on local, state, and federal leaders to continue investing in children and families and resist cutting investments that help children, families, and communities thrive. “Over the years, public investments in programs and policies that support children and families have played a huge role in improving outcomes for kids,” said Taylor.

“More kids have access to health insurance, are graduating on time, and are growing up to be contributing members of our society. These investments are benefitting everyone and making our communities, our state, and our nation stronger,” Taylor added.

The annual *Data Book* uses 16 indicators to rank states across four domains—economic well-being, education, health, and family and community context. The state has made improvements in areas like economic well-being, with less children in Wisconsin living in poverty. The state has also seen improvements in education. The percentages of fourth graders below proficient in reading and eighth graders lacking proficiency in math declined slightly.

However, it’s very concerning that Wisconsin’s lowest ranking is in the health category, where it ranks 28th. In each of the indicators within the health category, Wisconsin’s ranking dropped compared to other states. This is unfortunate because the state was once a national leader in children’s health.

Even with the concerning ranking in health, recent investments in providing children and families access to quality and affordable health care have paid off. Children with no health insurance in Wisconsin dropped 20 percent since 2010, in large part due to key provisions of the Affordable Care Act (ACA) and the Children’s Health Insurance Program (CHIP). Wisconsin

may have seen even stronger gains had it accepted federal support to expand Medicaid, which is one of the reasons other states have surpassed Wisconsin.

Dr. Ken Loving, CEO of Access Community Health Centers, warns that backtracking on gains made in health care could put the well-being of children at risk. “We’ve made great strides in health care by getting more kids the health coverage they deserve. This means more kids are getting regular check-ups, seeing a doctor when they’re ill, and parents are also getting care so they can focus on providing for their children,” Loving said. “Making cuts to programs that provide children and families with access to health care is going to take our communities and state backwards. A healthy child will fare better in school and in life.”

Despite gains in health care, 46,000 children in Wisconsin still remain uninsured. The number of uninsured children in Wisconsin could fill every seat in Milwaukee’s Miller Park with an excess of 3,800 kids. In addition, the uninsured rates in the state aren’t evenly distributed by race. While over two-thirds of the uninsured children in Wisconsin are white, Native American children are three times as likely to be uninsured and Latino children twice as likely to be uninsured than their white peers.

Much more work must be done in Wisconsin to specifically address the disparity rates in health insurance coverage among children of color. **Dr. Christine Athmann** of UW Health and assistant director of the Native American Center for Health Professions, believes that filling the health care gaps among Native American children should be a priority for policymakers, health care advocates, and health professionals.

“Despite being the only population legally guaranteed health care in this country by way of treaty rights, Native Americans and their children continue to have limited access to quality and affordable health care and suffer significant health disparities compared to the majority population,” said Athmann.

Athmann added, “The Indian Health Service (IHS), the main provider of health care to Native people, considerably lags in funding compared to other government funded health care programs including Medicare, Medicaid and the Veterans Administration. Additionally, urban Indian health clinics receive minimal funding from IHS despite more than 60% of Native Americans living within urban communities and off the reservation. Better access to preventative and mental health services are first steps at addressing health issues and disparities and ensuring that Native American children can live healthy and productive lives.”

To ensure that Wisconsin’s kids are healthy and can reach their full potential, the Wisconsin Council on Children and Families strongly urges state and federal policymakers to invest in the following areas:

- **Health** – The state should not reverse the progress Wisconsin is making on providing more children with health insurance. Policymakers should be making it easier to get insured, not more difficult.
- **Education** – Investing in education, particularly in the early years, can position a child for success in school and in life.

- **Work** – To generate more jobs that provide families a livable wage, Wisconsin must invest in transitional jobs, a program that offers jobs to unemployed, low-income adults in certain areas of Wisconsin, and pay caregivers better wages.

The *2017 KIDS COUNT Data Book* will be available June 13 at 12:01 a.m. EDT at www.aecf.org. Additional information is available at www.aecf.org/databook, which also contains the most recent national, state and local data on hundreds of indicators of child well-being. Journalists interested in creating maps, graphs and rankings in stories about the Data Book can use the KIDS COUNT Data Center at datacenter.kidscount.org.

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The Wisconsin Council on Children and Families is a multi-issue policy research and advocacy organization promoting statewide policies that ensure a safe and healthy future for every child in Wisconsin. For more information, visit www.wccf.org.

The Annie E. Casey Foundation creates a brighter future for the nation's children by developing solutions to strengthen families, build paths to economic opportunity and transform struggling communities into safer and healthier places to live, work and grow. For more information, visit www.aecf.org. KIDS COUNT is a registered trademark of the Annie E. Casey Foundation.