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Minority Kids Much Likelier To Be Poor

By Katie Burford

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Hispanic, American Indian and black children are more than twice as likely to live in poverty as white children in New Mexico, according to a report by a children's advocacy organization.

"What we see is a tremendous gap between the economic well-being of Anglo children and the economic well-being of Native American and Hispanic children," said Kelly O'Donnell, research director for **New Mexico Voices for Children**.

The report, unveiled Tuesday, notes that minorities, when tallied together, exceed the state's white population.

Minorities make up 66 percent of the state's child population yet 87 percent of children living in poverty belong to a minority group.

The statistics were compiled using raw data from the 2000 Census, O'Donnell said. The federal poverty level in 1999, which is when the census data was collected, was \$16,700 or less for a family of four.

The report also examines other disparities, including income and access to technology.

The average income for a white mother working full-time in 1999 was \$30,859— that's \$6,447 more than the average Hispanic mother earned and \$7,560 more than the average American Indian mother.

Minority children are also five times more likely than white children to live in a home that doesn't have a telephone.

"Of course these days, access to a telephone often means access to the Internet and access to that whole realm of learning and familiarity with technology," O'Donnell said.

The number of Hispanic and American Indian children being raised by their grandparents has risen sharply, according to the report.

New Mexico also has the nation's highest rate of uninsured children; 16 percent of white children are uninsured compared to 17 percent of Hispanic children and 40 percent of Indian children.

O'Donnell criticized a proposal, supported by Gov. Bill Richardson, to reduce Medicaid payments. She said the measure would further widen the gap between whites and minorities.

"When we fail to take care of our low-income population, what we inadvertently do is widen the gap," she said.

Kay Monaco, New Mexico Voices for Children executive director, said putting money into Medicaid makes sense because it creates health-care jobs and the state's federal match for the program is higher than most states.

"For every dollar we spend in this state, we have a guaranteed return of three dollars," she said. "It's an economic engine in New Mexico."

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