



PRESS RELEASE

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2006 KIDS COUNT data shows some improvement, more decline Child poverty rising, but state EITC, universal health care could change outcomes

ALBUQUERQUE— More New Mexico parents are working, and while they are paying less for their housing than much of the rest of the country, they're still more likely to live in poverty. Those are just some of the findings from the 2006 KIDS COUNT data, which is compiled annually by the Annie E. Casey Foundation.

As it has for years, New Mexico continues to rank toward the bottom of the 50 states when it comes to the health and well-being of our children. New Mexico ranks 48th overall, down from 46th last year. Only Louisiana at 49th and Mississippi at 50th did worse.

Nationally, there was improvement in four of the 10 main indicators studied, but New Mexico stats did not mirror all of these improvements. While the death rate for children aged one to 14 improved nationwide, that rate was significantly worse in New Mexico – 45 percent worse – continuing a downward trend since 2000. Where New Mexico made gains in the same indicators as the rest of the nation – in decreased teen death rate, teen birth rate, and the percent of teens who are high school dropouts – the Land of Enchantment was still ranked near the bottom.

Of the three indicators that show worsening conditions nationwide, New Mexico saw even greater decline in two of them – low birth weight and the percent of children living in poverty. New Mexico also saw an increase in the percentage of children living in single-parent homes, while the national average was unchanged.

Not all the news is grim, however. While the infant mortality rate showed no change nationwide, New Mexico continued to improve, earning a rank of 15th in this category.

The KIDS COUNT report looks at other measures besides the 10 main indicators, some of which show that New Mexico is doing better at getting some services to children. We're doing better than the national average on immunizing two-year-olds. While we're still below the national average on the percentage of kids who have health insurance as well as those

who live in households where at least one parent works, we've improved significantly from previous years. And while we rank 50th in the percentage of children who live in "working poor" families (those making below 200 percent of the Federal Poverty Level), we do better – ranking 35th – in the percent of children who live in extreme poverty (less than 50 percent of the FPL).

NM Voices for Children is working on several initiatives that could greatly improve outcomes for our children. Among them is free and accessible health care for all of the state's children, affordable quality early child education, which would lead to better high school graduation rates, a state earned income tax credit to piggyback on the federal EITC, and a statewide higher minimum wage.

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New Mexico Voices for Children is a progressive nonprofit organization advocating for policies to improve the health and well-being of New Mexico's children, families and communities.
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