



## **PRESS RELEASE**

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### **2006 NM KIDS COUNT Date Book Shows Need for Early Childhood Investment**

ALBUQUERQUE—New Mexico Voices for Children releases its 2006 KIDS COUNT data book today. The book gives a statistical snapshot of the health and well-being of children in New Mexico, with data at both the state and county levels.

This year, KIDS COUNT Program Manager Sara Beth Koplik, Ph.D., highlighted information that is gathered in the Pregnancy Risk Assessment Monitoring System (PRAMS) survey, which is sent to every new mother by the state Health Department. While there is good news, the PRAMS data also shows some disturbing trends.

New Mexico has very low rates of so-called “healthy births.” A healthy birth is one in which all factors during the pregnancy were positive – the mother intended the pregnancy, received prenatal care, and did not drink, smoke or experience domestic violence. Only 11 percent of New Mexico’s births are considered healthy by these measures.

Other factors that don’t bode well for the state’s youngest children include nutrition and health care. New Mexico’s new mothers report not having enough to eat more often than do parents with older children. Also, Medicaid enrollment has dropped since 2000 even though child poverty has risen.

“This constellation of factors show us why kids don’t come to school ready to learn,” said Sara Beth. One answer is voluntary home visiting by a nurse or social worker. “It’s a great way to tackle multiple risk factors,” she added. So far only two counties have a voluntary home visiting program – Rio Arriba and Grant. Rio Arriba’s program is just starting.

Early child education and quality day care also better prepare children for school because extremely important brain development takes place in infancy and early childhood.

On the positive side, the data show that teen pregnancy rates are continuing to drop in New Mexico, which mirrors a national trend. However, while New Mexico women have lower rates of alcohol and tobacco use during pregnancy, they suffer higher rates of physical abuse.

The 2006 New Mexico KIDS COUNT data book is available online at <http://www.nmvoices.org/kidscount.htm>. Call Sharon Kayne at 505-244-9505 ext. 30 or reply to this email if you’d like a hard copy mailed to you. ###