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New Census Bureau Data Show Continued Decline in Job-Based Coverage in Wisconsin
CPS Findings Highlight Need for Ongoing Commitment to BadgerCare Plus and Other Reforms

Roughly one in eleven Wisconsin residents lacked health coverage in 2007 and 2008, according to Census Bureau data released today. While that represents one of the lowest percentages of uninsured in the country, employer-provided health insurance continued to decline both in Wisconsin and nationwide. There were about a half-million uninsured people in the state, and the figures will likely get worse in 2009 because of the recession. According to the Wisconsin Council on Children and Families, these numbers highlight the need to enact comprehensive health care reform and the importance of sustaining our commitment to the state's health care safety net.

A comparison of the Census data from 2000-01 with the averages for 2007-08 reveals the effects of the economic challenges in Wisconsin and elsewhere in the Midwest, as manufacturing employment declines. For Wisconsin the data over that time period show:

- The poverty rate grew from 8.6% in 2000-01 to 10.4% in 2007-08.
- Median family income (adjusted for inflation) fell by \$3,537 – from \$55,761 to \$52,224.
- The number of people with employer-sponsored insurance fell by about 213,000.

“While Wisconsin continues to do better than many states, the loss of manufacturing jobs the state has seen is having an impact not only on families’ economic well-being, but on health care as well,” said Jim Moeser, acting executive director of the Wisconsin Council on Children and Families. “It’s more important than ever to focus on finishing the job of covering every child and family in the state.”

The data released today on the Census Bureau's website come from the Current Population Survey; it represents the only state-by-state data available on health insurance trends over time. On September 22, the Census Bureau will release additional estimates of state and local health insurance status (along with a wealth of data on poverty and income) from a different survey, the American Community Survey. However, that release will not provide information on health insurance trends because health insurance questions were not asked on that survey before 2008.

The Census figures for Wisconsin average two years of survey data in order to improve the reliability of the estimates. 8.9% of Wisconsin residents were uninsured in 2007-08, compared with 9.1% in 2005-06. 7.4% lacked coverage at the start of the decade (2000-01).

About 213,000 fewer Wisconsinites were covered by employer-based insurance in 2007-08 than in 2000-01, with the percentage covered through their jobs dropping from 78.1% to 70.7%. However, the availability of public coverage such as BadgerCare has enabled the state to avoid the sharp increase in the number of uninsured that has plagued many states as employer coverage declined. It is important to note that these figures do not reflect the loss of 81,000 Wisconsin jobs in the first seven months of 2009.

Despite the fact about half a million Wisconsin residents were uninsured in 2007-08, Wisconsin had the nation's fourth-lowest percentage of uninsured. "As working parents lose their jobs and employers cut back on benefits, BadgerCare Plus and other health care safety net programs have helped Wisconsin maintain its position as a national leader in ensuring that its residents have access to health care services," said Moeser.

Moeser added, "Today's numbers show the importance of finishing the job of ensuring that everybody has health insurance so that a downturn in the economy need not mean financial ruin for hard-working families. As state policymakers continue to struggle with budget shortfalls, it is crucial that we work to find sufficient revenue to continue building on the success of BadgerCare Plus. The debate in Washington could end in reforms that provide permanent solutions, but we must sustain our own momentum here in Wisconsin as the federal process plays out."

The data released today indicate that Wisconsin's overall poverty rate in 2007-08 was 10.4%. This did not represent a statistically significant change from the 10.2% figure for 2006-07. Median family income remained essentially unchanged over that period. It should be noted that this data is derived from a sample too small to draw conclusions about local communities, and the 2007-08 data largely misses the impact of the recession. Data from the American Community Survey, to be released September 22, is based on a much larger sample and will offer a more telling snapshot of poverty in Wisconsin, including information for certain large communities and breakdowns by race and other demographic factors.