

# Percentage of Wisconsin children in poverty rises

## Report shows state kids fare well overall

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Although the well-being of Wisconsin teenagers continues to improve, the percentage of children living in poverty has worsened, according to a national survey released today.

The 19th annual Kids Count Data Book ranks states on 10 key indicators of child well-being. Wisconsin ranks 12th in overall well-being for the second year in a row.

“As usual, Wisconsin ranks pretty high in child well-being, but some things continue to be troubling,” said Martha Cranley, Kids Count director for the Wisconsin Council on Children and Families.

The percentage of children living in poverty, which is defined as an income below \$20,444 for a family of two adults and two children in 2006, increased from 12% in 2000 to 15% in 2006. Nationally, there was an increase from 17% to 18%, or 1 million more children living in poverty. The number of Wisconsin children living in poverty rose from 155,000 to 192,000.

Cranley cited lost jobs, especially in manufacturing, as a likely factor. People who used to have just enough to support a family now need to take on several jobs to meet its needs, she said, and Wisconsin has a high rate of families who are working but are still poor.

Another indicator that got worse: the percentage of infants born weighing less than 5.5 pounds. Such babies are at a greater risk of not surviving their first year and of developmental problems.

Low-birth-weight babies made up 7% of all Wisconsin births in 2005, compared with 6.5% in 2000.

Nationally, 338,565 low-birth-weight babies were born in 2005, the highest level in nearly 40 years, according to the data book.

The data book lists the 2005 national average in low-birth-weight babies overall as 8.2%, while the percentage was 7.3% for non-Hispanic white babies and 13.6% for African-American babies.

Wisconsin reflects the national trend, according to more recent 2006 data from the Department of Health and Family Services.

The percentage of low birth weight was 6.2% among non-Hispanic white babies but 13.5% among African-American babies.

“If we could direct resources toward improving the birth outcomes of black babies, it would actually improve the outcomes for the whole state,” said Murray Katcher, medical officer for community health programs at the Wisconsin Division of Public Health.

Although some indicators of the well-being of children showed a decline Wisconsin, several showed improvement.

The percentage of youths ages 16 to 19 who are high school dropouts declined from 6% in 2000 to 5% in 2006. The teen birth rate — the births per 1,000 females ages 15 to 19 — decreased from 35% in 2000 to 30% in 2005.

The data report is published by the Annie E. Casey Foundation, an organization dedicated to improving the conditions of disadvantaged children.

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