

Pennsylvania Partnerships for Children: One Pennsylvania child in three gets government-funded health insurance.

Text of June 9 press release.

Half of rural children are low-income, says new report recommending policy solutions to alleviate hardship

HARRISBURG -- One Pennsylvania child in three relies on the federal or state government for health insurance, and half of the state's rural children live in low-income families, according to *The State of the Child in Pennsylvania - 2004*, released today by Pennsylvania Partnerships for Children (PPC).

Even in counties that include Lebanon, Lehigh, Centre, and Washington, an average of one child in three lives in a low-income family - below 200 percent of poverty, the report shows.

"The data in this year's report show that it doesn't necessarily matter where children live. Today, too many children in rural, urban and even supposedly comfortable suburban areas of Pennsylvania have the odds stacked against them before they even enter school," said PPC President and CEO Joan L. Benso. "Most people recognize the challenges that children face in our cities, but this report clearly demonstrates that conditions can be even worse for children living in rural communities."

PPC issues the report every two years as part of its efforts to focus attention on the challenges facing Pennsylvania children and families, including access to health coverage, early childhood education, high-quality basic education, family supports, and after-school programs and youth development.

"Right now, nearly half of all fifth graders in Pennsylvania are failing to meet the proficiency standard on our state's reading and math tests, and the data in this report provide some explanation why," Benso said.

"Years of scholarly research from respected institutions such as the National Academies of Science tell us that children born in poverty, or to mothers who lack a high school education, or to mothers who are very young will have a harder time succeeding," Benso said. "And those children may not ever get the chance to succeed unless Pennsylvania invests in the programs kids need to get ready for school, achieve in school and build on the supports they get in their homes and communities."

"Our goal is to make Pennsylvania one of the top 10 states to be a child and to raise a child, and this report provides the directions to get us there," Benso said. Targeted policy attention would improve a range of child outcomes cited in the report, she said, including:

-- Statewide, one child in three is low-income, and the rural rate exceeds the urban rate. In rural and mixed-rural counties, including Greene and Cambria, one child in two is low-income, while the rate is one in three in urban and mixed-urban counties. For a family of four in 2004, that's under \$37,700.

-- One child in seven is born to a mother who lacks a high school diploma, one child in 11 is born to a mother under age 20, and one child in 12 is born at low birth weight.

-- In Pennsylvania, two children out of three have all available parents in the labor force. These children are more likely to have poor-quality child care or unsupervised time. The phenomenon of all available parents in the workforce spans geographical and lifestyle boundaries, with rates equal among types of counties (rural, mixed rural, mixed urban, and urban).

The report offers a blueprint for policymakers and provides detailed data that underscore the challenges facing the state in ensuring that children are provided with the tools needed to succeed in life.

"Children aren't a commodity, no matter how often we refer to them as our future. We know what they need at every phase of their lives, and when those needs aren't met - when circumstances deny them the basic opportunities to succeed - we should step up and provide them," Benso added.

The report comes with a fully searchable CD-ROM that includes breakdowns by county, major municipality, and school

district. A policy analysis details the steps Pennsylvania can make toward the goal of becoming a top 10 state to be a child and to raise a child.

"So much of our focus is on the state Capitol - and rightly so. We're here to help craft public policy that will deliver for our kids," Benso said. "But Pennsylvania is a big state. We are also hoping that The State of the Child will allow local officials to join their state counterparts and get a firm grasp on the specific challenges they confront in their communities."

For a full summary and information on ordering The State of the Child in Pennsylvania - 2004, visit www.papartnerships.org.

-- Pennsylvania Partnerships for Children, www.papartnerships.org, is an independent, nonpartisan voice for the health, education, and well-being of Pennsylvania's children. For information on this topic and other children's issues, contact Diane McCormick, PPC Vice President for Communications, at (717) 236-5680; diane@papartnerships.org.

-- Note on using The State of the Child CD-ROM: Detailed data are on the CD-ROM included with the booklet. The CD-ROM should autorun in any disk drive. To find data on a specific county, major municipalities, and minorities in selected counties, follow the "County Profiles" tab and make the desired selection. School districts, found through the "School District Profiles" tab, are listed by county. For best results, use the navigation tabs instead of the back and forward buttons.

SOURCE: Pennsylvania Partnerships for Children

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