



## **Issues for Children in Michigan**

### ***Poor, Neglected & Undereducated: Children Languishing in Fiscal Crisis***

For the past decade, Michigan has struggled to balance its budget because state revenues have been insufficient to fund basic services and programs. In fact, state revenue estimates are now at their lowest point since 1970.

In response, state leaders have cut more than \$4 billion in spending since 2001, depleted the state's "rainy day fund," adopted some temporary taxes, and relied on federal funds to fill holes in state budgets. Missing have been the longer-term structural solutions necessary to correct Michigan's ongoing structural deficit.

The impact on the state's greatest asset, its children, is undeniable:

- One of every five children in Michigan is living in poverty, up nearly 40 percent since 2000. Young children and children of color are disproportionately affected: over one-third of Michigan's poor children are under the age of six and half of poor children are minority. Family structure also has an impact on the poverty status for a child since almost two of every three poor children in Michigan live in a family headed by a single mother.
- The number of victims of child abuse and neglect has grown by 16 percent this decade, with just under 30,000 cases substantiated in 2008. Unlike common belief, the rate of confirmed cases in urban counties overall was much lower than mid-sized and rural counties. There were 11 victims of every 1,000 kids in urban counties compared with 15 and 18 in mid-sized and rural counties, respectively. Young children are more likely to be confirmed victims of child abuse and neglect, especially infants: approximately 4,500 infants compared to 2,100 one-year olds and 1,700 five-year olds were confirmed victims in 2008.
- Thousands of children no longer have access to the early learning experiences proven to help them achieve in school and ultimately the workplace. Approximately 35,000 at-risk four-year olds in Michigan, who are eligible for Great Start School Readiness or Head Start, are not able to benefit from these programs because there are not enough slots available for all eligible kids.
- High numbers of youths continue to drop out of school, cutting short their chances, and compromising Michigan's future workforce. About 14 percent of students, or 20,600, who should have graduated in 2008 (based on a traditional four-year track) left high school without a diploma. African American, Latino, and American Indian and those from economically disadvantaged households are more likely to dropout or require more than four years to graduate. Meanwhile, there are fewer programs available to help them continue their education or find career training, which greatly affects Michigan's economy. By 2006, one of every three high school dropouts in Michigan had earnings below 125 percent of the federal poverty level. National data reveal that high school dropouts make up the only educational group that pays less in taxes at all government levels than its member receive in public assistance.

- More children are being denied access to services that keep them healthy and out of hospitals and expensive emergency rooms. Although Michigan's rate of uninsured children is lower than the national average (6.2% versus 11.1%), it has risen dramatically in recent years. The uninsured rate for kids under 18 years increased 30 percent from 4.7 percent in 2006 to 6.2 percent in 2007. For kids ages 0 to 5 years there was a nearly 70 percent increase over the same time period from 4.6 percent to 7.8 percent. As families lose jobs and their employer-sponsored health care, more children have become reliant on public insurance programs—more than 1 million children, or 45 percent of all children in the state, were enrolled in Medicaid or MIChild at one point during 2008. This high enrollment comes at a time when the state has cut provider rates significantly, hindering access as fewer doctors accept Medicaid. The number of physicians participating in the Medicaid program dropped from 88 percent in 1999 to 64 percent in 2005.
- Although infant mortality and child death rates have improved, significant disparities continue to exist. In 2007, 980 infants died before their first birthdays compared to 1,100 in 2000. African American babies were almost three times likely to die before their first birthdays compared to white infants (17 deaths for every 1,000 African American infants compared to 6 deaths among white infants). The death rate for children between 1-14 years dropped from 23 deaths per 100,000 in 2000 to 19 deaths in 2007, leaving the total count of 360 child deaths in 2007. Rural and mid-sized counties experienced much higher rates than urban counties: 18 deaths per year per 100,000 in urban counties compared to 23 deaths in mid-sized counties and 27 deaths in rural counties. Racial disparities also exist: the child death rate for African American children was double that of white children with 30 deaths per 100,000 compared with 14 deaths for white children. Latino child deaths are also higher than that of whites with 21 deaths per 100,000.
- Teen birth rates have declined significantly over the past decade—20 percent over 2000 to 2007; however, progress is threatened as the rates recently have begun to rise. In 2000, the rate was 42 births for every 1,000 teenage girls ages 15-19 years old compared to 34 births in 2007, which resulted in 12,200 infants born to Michigan teenagers in 2007.
- The death rate for teens 15-19 years old in Michigan has decreased by 11 percent between 2000 and 2007 equating to 57 per 100,000 teen deaths in 2007 compared to 64 in 2000. Accidents, especially those involving motor vehicles were the primary cause of death for this group. Teen deaths caused by homicide were on the rise in 2006 and 2007—12 deaths per 100,000 teens, which is the same as it was at the beginning of the decade. The rate of teen deaths by suicide has remained relatively steady between 7 and 9 deaths per 100,000 teens between 1998 and 2007. However, Michigan's rate of young people attempting suicide is significantly higher than the national average. Roughly 9 percent of the young people surveyed in Michigan through the Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) reported that they had attempted suicide within the last year, as compared to just under 7 percent nationwide.

Continuing down this path cannot be an option. Vulnerable children and families are being devastated. The quality of life in Michigan has dropped substantially. Without decisive action, the future of Michigan is bleak.

Michigan's Children believes that children are the key to our economic future. In solving the state's budget problems, leaders must prioritize children as our next workforce and place all solutions on the table—including tax reform—in order to create a sustainable base on which to rebuild Michigan's economy.

