



Improvement shown in health indicators

ALBUQUERQUE — While New Mexico is stuck near the bottom in child well-being — ranking 49th out of the 50 states — there is some good news in the annual KIDS COUNT® Data Book, which was set for release on Tuesday, June 13, by the Annie E. Casey Foundation.

“We’ve seen really great improvements in measures of health and, as with last year, we can attribute much of that to the expansion of Medicaid under the Affordable Care Act,” said New Mexico KIDS COUNT Director Amber Wallin. “This is additional proof that the policies enacted at the state and federal levels really do impact the lives of our children and their families.”

KIDS COUNT is a program of the Annie E. Casey Foundation, which releases the annual Data Book ranking states on 16 indicators of child well-being. The indicators, which include measures like the child poverty rate, reading proficiency among fourth graders, and teen birth rates, among others, are organized under four domains: economic well-being, education, health, and family and community. Mississippi was ranked 50th and New Hampshire took the top spot this year.

The Data Book also ranks states on each of the four domains, and that is where New Mexico can see some progress.

“This year we have something to celebrate because our health ranking rose from 44th to 37th, which shows additional and sustained improvement,” said James Jimenez, executive director of New Mexico Voices for Children, which runs the KIDS COUNT program in New Mexico. “The percentage of our children without health insurance, which used to be consistently high, is now lower than the national average.

“This is great for the state because when children have insurance they are more likely to get well-baby and well-child checkups, vaccinations, vision and hearing screenings and other preventive care that helps ensure healthy development and helps them do their best in school,” he added.

In economic well-being, New Mexico saw a very small decrease in child poverty (from 30 percent in last year’s Data Book to 29 percent this year), which bumped the state up from a rank of 50th to 49th in that indicator. The state saw improvements in a few other indicators relating to economic security, but remained behind most of the nation due to its sluggish economy. For example, while the percentage of children living in families burdened by spending more than 30 percent of their income on housing remained at 31 percent from the previous year, the ranking dropped from 20th to 27th because other states improved.

“Despite the progress in children’s health, New Mexico still has a very long way to go before we can say we’re making the best, most strategic investments in our children,” said Wallin. “This is our future workforce, so the investments we make today will pay off for everyone in the long-run.

“Conversely, our unwillingness to make these investments will have negative impacts for years to come,” she added, “because preventing problems — whether it’s child abuse, hunger, poor school outcomes or births to teens who are unprepared for the responsibility of parenting — is always more effective and less expensive than remediating them in the future.”

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