

Iowa Kids Count: 2007 in Review

Iowa Kids Count 2007: *Trends in the Well-Being of Iowa Children* is Iowa Kids Count's annually produced data book containing child and family data, and information to be used by researchers, policy makers and others. The data book reports on 19 different indicators of child and family well-being for the United States, Iowa and its 99 counties.

The 19 indicators provide a wealth of health, education, welfare and economic data from low birthweight to child deaths, student math and reading test scores to food assistance, and earned income tax credit to child poverty. The indicators in the data book present an extensive cross-section of data and information for educators, researchers, policy makers and others to use.

In addition to providing data at the county, state and national levels, Iowa Kids Count also groups the counties in Iowa together by population size (see county maps on page five for further review and analysis). Counties whose largest city has a population of less than 5,000 people are in the rural category; counties whose largest city has a population of 5,000 – 49,999 are considered small urban; and counties with the largest city's population being 50,000 or more are in the metropolitan county category.

While 2007 data were available for the majority of indicators, Iowa Kids Count had to rely on older data for a few of the indicators. The child poverty data provided by the Census Bureau and the earned income tax credit data from the Internal Revenue Service both had 2005 as their most recent year of data. In addition, the 2007 prenatal care data from the Iowa Department of Public Health were not available at the time of printing and 2006 data were used.

As was the case the past few years, Iowa Kids Count was unable to provide certain birth and mortality indicator data. In an effort to protect the confidentiality of individuals, the Iowa Department of Public Health does not make available administrative data that include incidences of three or less at the county level. Iowa Kids Count was able, however, to provide accurate data for the substate, state and national levels.

The Annie E. Casey Foundation annually produces and disseminates a National Kids Count Data Book comparing the 50 states and the District of Columbia. Almost without exception, Iowa ranks among the top ten percent of states. In comparison to the other states, Iowa always has done remarkably well. However, when Iowa Kids Count compares Iowa to itself, or Iowa in 2007

to Iowa in 2000, the results, unfortunately, are mixed. Of the 19 indicators included in this year's data book, 10 have shown improvement and nine have deteriorated from 2000 to 2007. This reflects no change from last year's figures (2000-2006).

The other two indicators in the health area are child immunization (children fully immunized at age 24 months), which showed a rate increase of three percent and children receiving WIC (Women, Infants and Children Program) services, which showed a decrease of four percent.

Five of the nine health indicators presented in this year's data book have shown improvement during the 2000 to 2007 time period. Two of the three mortality indicators, infant mortality (before age one) and child deaths (age 1-14), both have seen significant rate decreases the past few years (infant mortality - 13 percent and child deaths - 16 percent). The third mortality indicator, teen deaths (age 15-19), unfortunately, has experienced a rate increase of 11 percent during this same time period.

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Two of the three welfare indicators included in the data book, child abuse and neglect, and food assistance (formerly known as food stamps), deteriorated from 2000 to 2007. The rate of children confirmed to have been abused or neglected increased 41 percent during this time period while the percentage of individuals receiving financial assistance for food increased 90 percent. The third welfare indicator, the percentage of individuals receiving Family Investment Program (FIP) financial assistance, decreased 22 percent.

Two birth-related indicators in the health area, teen births and teen unmarried births, have seen rate decreases since 2000. The percentage of births to women age 15-19 and the percentage of births to unmarried teens have decreased seven and 11 percent, respectively. The two remaining birth-related indicators, the percentage of babies born at low birthweight (less than 5.5 pounds) and the percentage of mothers receiving prenatal care (health care during their first trimester of pregnancy) both deteriorated. Low birthweight increased 12 percent from 2000 to 2007 while prenatal care decreased one percent from 2000 to 2006.

Three of the four education indicators presented in this year's Iowa Kids Count data book improved slightly while the other worsened. High school graduation (students entering ninth grade who graduate with their class four years later) showed a slight improvement, increasing two percent from 2000 to 2007.

Student math and reading test scores measure the percentage of students in fourth and eighth grade who are proficient in math and reading on the Iowa Tests of Basic Skills (ITBS), and

the percentage of students in 11th grade who are proficient in math and reading on the Iowa Tests of Educational Development (ITED). Collectively, the proficiency percentages showed an overall improvement from 2003 to 2007, while, individually, they ranged from a very slight decrease to moderate improvement.

The final education indicator, the percentage of students who are eligible for free or reduced-price lunches, increased 22 percent and is the one education indicator that deteriorated from 2000 to 2007. Currently, almost one-third of the students in Iowa (32.2%) are eligible for free or reduced-price lunches.

Of the three economic indicators in this year's data book, two deteriorated while the other showed improvement. The percentage of children who live below the poverty level increased 29 percent from 2000 to 2005 (the most recent year data were available), while the percentage of individuals in the labor force but unemployed increased 46

percent from 2000 to 2007.

The one economic indicator showing improvement was the percentage of income tax filers who received an earned income tax credit. This percentage increased 25 percent from 2000 to 2005 (the most recent year data were available).

The child and family well-being indicator data presented in this report show that Iowa is on the right track in comparison to other states and the United States as a whole. Iowa has a good quality of life and is a wonderful place to raise children. It is important, however,

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not to lose sight of the fact that when the Iowa data are presented in a comparative context to themselves, the improvements can take longer than desired. Nonetheless, it still is a realistic goal for the state to seek genuine improvement on the 19 indicators of child and family well-being presented in this year's Iowa Kids Count data book to benefit the lives of the children and adults in Iowa.