

# Iowa Kids Count: 2005 in Review

**T**he Iowa Kids Count data book, *Iowa Kids Count: Trends in the Well-Being of Iowa Children, 2004-2005* has a new look this year. After producing 10 books that have contained a lead essay and data on eight indicators of child well-being, Iowa Kids Count has decided to forego the essay this year and, instead, has added eleven new indicators.

The additional indicators present a wealth of health, education, welfare and economic data from child immunization to prenatal care, food assistance to student test scores, and earned income tax credit to child poverty. The additional indicators provide a deeper cross-section of information for researchers and policy makers 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 maps on page five for further analysis). Counties whose largest city has 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 metropolitan counties.

This year, for the first time, Iowa Kids Count was unable to provide certain birth or mortality indicator data. In an effort to protect the confidentiality of individuals, the Iowa Department of Public Health did not make available administrative data that included 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.

When the Annie E. Casey Foundation releases its National Kids Count Data Book each year comparing the 50 states and the District of Columbia, Iowa usually ranks among the top five states. In comparison to the other states, Iowa always has done well. However, when Iowa Kids Count compares Iowa in 2005 to where Iowa was in 2000, the results are mixed. Of the 19 indicators included in this year's data book, eleven have shown improvement, seven have deteriorated and one has remained relatively unchanged.

The health indicators have shown a great deal of improvement during the 2000 to 2005 time period with six of the nine presented in the data book improving. Two of the three mortality indicators – infant mortality (before age one) and child

deaths (age 1-14) both have seen rate decreases in excess of 15 percent (infant mortality - 16 percent and child deaths - 18 percent). However, the third mortality indicator, teen deaths (age 15-19), experienced a rate increase of 29 percent during this time period.

Two of the four birth-related indicators in the health area also have seen rate decreases since 2000.

The percentage of births to women age 15 - 19 and the percentage of births to unmarried teens both decreased 11 percent. Of the two remaining birth-related indicators, the percentage of babies born at low birthweight (less than 5.5 pounds) increased 17 percent and the percentage of mothers receiving prenatal care (health care during their first trimester of pregnancy) remained relatively unchanged, increasing less than one percent.

The other two indicators in the health area are child immunization (children fully immunized at age 24 months), which showed a rate increase of nine percent and children receiving WIC (Women, Infants and Children Program) services, which showed an increase of 12 percent.

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 2005. The rate of children confirmed to have been abused or neglected increased 66 percent during this time period while the percentage of individuals receiving financial assistance for food increased 68 percent. The third welfare indicator,

the percentage of individuals receiving Family Investment Program (FIP) financial assistance, decreased seven percent.

Of the four education indicators presented in this year's Iowa Kids Count data book, three improved slightly while the other worsened. 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 11<sup>th</sup> grade who are proficient in math and reading on the Iowa Tests of Educational Development (ITED). The proficiency percentages ranged from no change to a slight improvement from 2003 to 2005.

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Another education indicator, high school graduation (students entering seventh grade who graduate with their class six years later), increased two percent. The final education indicator, the percentage of students who are eligible for free or reduced-price lunches, increased 18 percent from 2000 to 2005.

Three new economic indicators were added to this year's data book. The percentage of income tax filers who received an earned income tax credit increased 23 percent from 2000 to 2003 (the most recent year data were available). The remaining economic indicators, unemployment and child poverty, have deteriorated the past few years. The percentage of

individuals in the labor force but unemployed increased 76 percent from 2000 to 2005, while the percentage of children who live below the poverty level increased 14 percent from 2000 to 2003 (the most recent year data were available).

**There is room for improvement on each of the 19 indicators of child well-being tracked by Iowa Kids Count. These improvements are needed both for the children's own well-being and for society's future needs.**

When compared to the rest of the nation, Iowa's quality of life makes it a good place to raise kids. However, these data need to be placed in the context of what Iowa could and should achieve for its children. There

is room for improvement on each of the 19 indicators of child well-being tracked by Iowa Kids Count. These improvements are needed both for the children's own well-being and for society's future needs.