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Despite a Bad Economy, Tennessee Continues to Provide Health Insurance to Children at a Rate Higher than the National Average

New Analysis Shows Progress in Extending Coverage

Nashville – Tennessee made significant progress in reducing the number of uninsured children from 2008 to 2010 and continues to cover children at a rate well below the national average, according to a new report released by the Tennessee Health Care Campaign and authored by the Georgetown University Health Policy Institute’s Center for Children and Families. Tennessee’s rate of uninsured kids declined from 6.5% in 2008 to 5.3% in 2010, meaning more than 16,000 additional children had coverage in 2010, despite challenging unemployment and increases in child poverty. Nationwide, the rate of uninsured children went from 9.0% in 2008 to 8.0% in 2010.

“The progress on children’s health insurance is due to the success of TennCare and CoverKids, which have continued to fill the void created by a decline in employer-based health insurance, high unemployment, and the increasing cost of private health insurance,” said Tony Garr, Policy Director for the Tennessee Health Care Campaign.

Analyzing newly available data from the Census Bureau, the Georgetown researchers examined the changes in coverage rates for children from 2008 through 2010.

In 2008, Tennessee had about 95,700 uninsured children according the report, which uses data from the Census Bureau’s American Community Survey. By 2010, that number had declined to 79,200. Tennessee’s improvement in coverage for kids of 1.2 percentage points over three years is just ahead of the national improvement of 1.0 percentage point.

While state-specific demographic data are not available, nationally there are some important differences worth noting among demographic groups. Hispanic and Native American children remain disproportionately uninsured, older children are less likely to be covered than younger children, and uninsured rates are higher for children living in families earning below 50 percent of the poverty line.

“This report highlights a rare piece of good news at a challenging time for children - poverty has gone up, but more kids are insured,” said Joan Alker, Co-executive Director of the Georgetown Center for Children and Families. “State leaders, with strong federal support through Medicaid and CHIP, have provided some much needed peace of mind to many families struggling to meet their children’s health care needs during perilous economic times. These gains are fragile and could quickly be reversed if state or federal support erodes.”

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