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Poverty Stubborn, Income Stagnant — But Good Signs as Health Coverage Jumps in Iowa Following Reform *New Census data provide picture of what Iowa families are facing*

IOWA CITY, Iowa (Sept. 17, 2015) — New Census data offer a mixed picture of the economic challenges Iowans are facing in key measures of family prosperity.

Poverty and income data remained largely unchanged in 2014 from 2013, while health coverage jumped as new reforms took effect.

The Iowa data, released this week from Census' American Community Survey (ACS), show:

- A stubborn crest of poverty hinders about 8 percent of families and 12 percent of all Iowans. This has been building over the last decade.
- Better access to health coverage in 2014 from the year before. This is a general trend in states, with greater shares covered in Medicaid expansion states such as Iowa.
- Iowa's long-stagnant income picture appears to be holding, with a 2014 median household income level of \$53,712, which is not statistically changed from 2000.

The new health-coverage data show Iowans gaining both in public coverage, which includes the expansion of Medicaid resulting from the Affordable Care Act, and in private coverage.

Overall in Iowa, the number of uninsured fell by about 59,000 from 2013 to 2014, as the share of Iowans uninsured dropped from 8.1 percent to 6.2 percent in that year. The ACS found 189,000 Iowans to be uninsured in 2014.

"These are good signals for health reform and the use of public policy to secure better economic standing for families who are struggling," said Mike Owen, executive director of the Iowa Policy Project, part of the Iowa Fiscal Partnership along with another nonpartisan organization, the Child and Family Policy Center (CFPC) in Des Moines.

"On poverty and income, on the other hand, clearly we need to do more," said Charles Bruner, executive director of CFPC.

Bruner pointed to longer-term comparisons. Child poverty remained around 15 percent in 2014 — 14.9 percent, down from 15.7 percent the year before, but not a significant statistical difference.

"That rate is up from 13.1 percent in 2007, before the last recession, so we have work to do," Bruner said.

The total poverty rate in 2014 was 12.2 percent, down from 12.7 percent the year before, but not considered a significant change statistically. At the same time, the 2014 number was a significant increase from 11 percent in 2007 and from 10 percent in 2000.

Family poverty was also statistically unchanged. It was 7.9 percent in 2014 from 8.1 percent the year before, and 7.4 percent in 2007.

Median household income was \$53,712 in 2014 — compared with \$53,031 the year before. It was also statistically unchanged from 2007 (\$53,994 in 2014 dollars) and from 2000 (\$52,483 in 2014 dollars).

Nationwide, states that have implemented the Medicaid expansion resulting from Obamacare have, as a group, lower uninsurance rates than states that had not expanded Medicaid by January 2014. While uninsured rates fell for both groups of states, the expansion states showed 9.8 percent uninsurance in 2014, down from 13.2 percent. The non-expansion states' decline was smaller, at 13.5 percent, down from 15.8 percent in 2013.

Finally, while not part of the Census data released this week, food security remains a stubborn issue for many Iowa families trying to make ends meet.

A separate, annual report from the USDA showed this area is not improving — with over 11 percent of Iowa households experiencing food insecurity, and a marked increase over the decade. About half again as many households faced more severe food issues on average — 4.6 percent — in 2012-14 as in 2002-04.

Reports from the Iowa Fiscal Partnership are available at www.iowafiscal.org.

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