

Nearly 200,000 children remain in poverty in Minnesota

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According to the numbers released Wednesday, September 18 by the U.S. Census American Community Survey, nearly 10,000 fewer Minnesota children lived in poverty in 2012 than in 2011. Despite this slight decrease, Minnesota still has far more children living in poverty than it did at the beginning of the century as the number of children in poverty increased by 69 percent since 2000.

In 2000, 8.7 percent of Minnesota children (108,692) lived in poverty. The numbers released today show 14.6 percent of Minnesota children (183,763) live in poverty, an increase of more than 75,000 children since the turn of the century. More children living in poverty means more children are at risk of the adverse effects poverty has on academic, social and health outcomes.

The state's youngest children experience poverty at higher rates with 17.2 percent of children under age 6 living in poverty. The early years of a child's life are when the brain experiences its most rapid development. The adverse effects of poverty during these years can have lifelong consequences.

While the poverty measure is the most widely known measure of a family's economic well-being, it is not a very good measure of how children in Minnesota are faring, according to Peggy Flanagan, executive director of Children's Defense Fund-Minnesota. "Living above the poverty level is not synonymous with enjoying economic stability," she said. "The cost of basic needs for a family of four far exceeds the poverty guidelines. Families can't make ends meet when they earn just \$23,550 a year (the poverty threshold for a family of four) and they still can't make ends meet when they earn \$24,000 a year. All children need and deserve access to basic needs so they can thrive. We need to identify and invest in the opportunities that will provide productive futures for all of our children. When we invest in Minnesota's children, we invest in the future of our state as a whole."

CDF-MN estimates that basic needs, including food, housing, health care, transportation, taxes and other necessities for a healthy standard of living, for a family of four living in the Twin Cities would require an income of nearly \$52,000 a year. That's more than two times the poverty guidelines.*

"While there are more jobs available due to the economic recovery, many of these jobs are

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paying lower wages that don't allow families to meet basic needs," said Alexandra Fitzsimmons, CDF-MN Legislative Affairs and Advocacy Director. "Most families who live in poverty are working, but they are paid low wages. By raising the minimum wage to \$9.50 we can increase family economic security and improve child outcomes."

Even small increases in family income can improve child outcomes. Findings from a 2011 Brookings Institution study examining the effects of family income and maternal education on school readiness suggest that a \$1,000 increase in a family's annual income during early childhood is associated with gains in children's achievement test scores.

The U.S. American Community Survey shows that nationally, children continue to be the poorest age group in the country, and the rate of child poverty remains at record high levels. Nearly 22 percent (more than 16 million children) of the nation's children live in poverty.

*Poverty is defined as an annual household income of less than \$23,492 for a family of four.