New Data Finds Number of Utah Uninsured Children Increasing at Alarming

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Analysis shows 39% increase in the number of uninsured Utah children between 2016 and 2019

An estimated 82,000 Utah children were uninsured last year, a number that has increased by 39 percent since 2016, according to a new report released by the Georgetown University Center for Children and Families. The report finds that Utah had the third largest increase in its child uninsured rate in the nation. Utah's rate of uninsured children was 8.3 percent in 2019, compared to a national rate of 5.7 percent.

Although Utah saw some of the most significant coverage loss, Utah's experience is part of a national trend that left an estimated 726,000 more children without health coverage nationwide. Much of the coverage gain of the Affordable Care Act for children has now been eliminated. Coverage losses have been concentrated in the South and West and have been largest for white and Latinx children.

"For decades, children's health coverage had been a national success story that we could point to with pride, but the data shows the trend is now going in the wrong direction," said Georgetown University Center for Children and Families Executive

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Director Joan Alker. “What’s worse, the number of children losing coverage accelerated from 2018 to 2019 during a time when unemployment was very low. The situation is likely worse today.”

The increase in the number and rate of uninsured children occurred prior to the COVID-19 pandemic and associated economic downturn, and is attributable to losses of public coverage – primarily Medicaid and the Children’s Health Insurance Program (CHIP). The situation has most likely deteriorated in 2020 for children as many parents lost their jobs and health coverage, but there is still no reliable data to estimate the extent of these coverage losses.

“We are seeing a growing number of Utah’s children going without health coverage,” said Jessie Mandle, Senior Policy Analyst for Voices for Utah Children. “This damaging trend will have long-term consequences for children and families across Utah because without health coverage, children cannot access the care they need to grow and thrive.”

Research shows children with health coverage are more likely to graduate from high school, attend college and grow up to be healthier and more productive adults.

“This data proves that it’s more important than ever to eliminate barriers for all children and families in Utah to access quality, affordable health coverage in Utah. We must reduce red tape in our enrollment and renewal process, conduct robust outreach and education efforts so that families know about their coverage options, and ensure that children are eligible for Medicaid and CHIP regardless of citizenship status,” Mandle said.

This is the 10th annual report on uninsured children published by the Georgetown University Center for Children and Families, an independent, nonpartisan policy and research center founded in 2005 with a mission to expand and improve high-quality, affordable coverage for America’s children and families. The report analyzes single-year estimates of summary data from the U.S. Census Bureau’s American Community Survey (ACS) from 2016 through 2019.

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