

Rural Counties Need Help Counting Kids in the 2020 Census

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Written by: Terry Haven

COVID-19 has impacted Utah in a variety of ways. One that you may not have thought of is the impact it has had on the 2020 Census. Especially in Utah's rural areas, the pandemic has slowed response rates to this important fact-finding endeavor. But why is the Census important for kids?

In the 2018 KIDS COUNT Data Book, the Annie E. Casey Foundation informed policymakers and child advocates of the troubling consequences for the nation's kids when an undercount of children occurs. Billions of dollars are allocated each year based on Census numbers. In Utah, \$1,156,766,773 was allocated in 2015 for the top 10 child focused Federal assistance programs. Basically, this means that for ever child not counted, Utah loses a little over \$1,000 that could have been used to help our most vulnerable children and their families.

An undercount of young children in the 2020 decennial census would short-change child well-being over the next decade by putting at risk hundreds of millions of dollars of federal funding for programs that are critical to family stability and opportunity.

Which brings us to the COVID-19 pandemic and its consequences for Utah's Census. Currently, Utah ranks 12th nationally in self-reporting for the 2020 Census. Almost 63% of Utahns have responded to the Census. (Minnesota ranks number 1 with 69%). There is a wide discrepancy across Utah's counties, with rural counties falling way short of the average. In fact, there are 6 counties, all rural counties, where under 10% of population has self-reported. In Rich county, only 2% have reported, compared to Morgan county where almost 75% have reported.

Rural counties have unique situations in that they may not have mail delivery to a physical location or the mail delivery information cannot be verified. The Census Bureau has a program called **Update Leave** that is designed to occur in areas where the majority of housing meet those criteria. Census takers drop off invitations to respond and paper questionnaires at the front doors of households while updating the addresses. Utah has 9 counties with at least 70% of households receiving Census packets through Update Leave however, all efforts by the Census Bureau to invite them to respond through Update Leave were put on hold in mid-March due to COVID-19. Only about 5% of these rural households got any kind of outreach before things were paused.

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The Census Bureau recently released information on resuming the initial phase of 2020 Census field operations. Both the Utah Area Census Offices (in Salt Lake and Orem) were included. The two offices run operations for the entire state, with the Salt Lake office in charge of northern Utah and Orem in charge of southern Utah. Significantly, for Utah, resuming field operations means a restart of the Update Leave operation.

The postponement of the operation in mid-March has been one of the main reason for [low response rates](#) in Utah's rural counties. As Update Leave resumes operations we hope that the response rates in Utah's rural counties will increase.

We will count on children to build America's future. Utah must count all children in the ongoing census so we can direct funding to meet their needs. It is not too late to ensure we conduct a census that leads to proper funding, representation and programs for the continued healthy development of kids. If you have not yet answered the Census, please do so. If you've misplaced your invitation to respond you can still do so. Find out more at <https://2020census.gov/en/ways-to-respond.html>. Remember, All Kids Count.

Table 1. Distribution of Federal Funds From 10 Large Child-Focused Federal Assistance Programs that Distribute Funds on Basis of Decennial Census-Derived Statistics (Fiscal Year 2015)

UTAH	Fiscal Year 2015 dollars
Medical Assistance Program (Medicaid) (Children's Portion Only)*	\$475,258,875
Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) (Children's Portion Only)**	\$161,041,523
Title I Grants to Local Education Agencies***	\$88,354,026

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National School Lunch Program***	\$98,325,241
Special Education Grants (IDEA)***	\$109,964,955
State Children's Health Insurance Program (S-SCHIP)***	\$59,109,000
Head Start/ Early Head Start***	\$60,013,184
Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC)	\$45,051,968
Foster Care (Title IV-E) ***	\$26,018,000
Child Care and Development Fund-Entitlement***	\$33,630,000
State Totals	\$1,156,766,773

* Source: Casey Foundation estimates.

Note these estimates do NOT include federal Medicaid expenditures for disabled children.

** Source: Food Research & Action Center (FRAC) analysis of FY 2015 SNAP Quality Control data from USDA, Food and Nutrition Service.

***Source: Andrew Reamer, Counting for Dollars Project, George Washington Institute of Public Policy, George Washington University.

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