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CONTACT: William Parke-Sutherland, Health Policy Engagement Coordinator

WParkeSutherland@kidsforward.net, 608-284-0580, ext. 317

Jon Peacock, Research Director

jpeacock@kidsforward.net, 608-284-0580, ext. 307

Progress Has Stalled in Covering Wisconsin Children

Analysis shows the number of uninsured Wisconsin children remained unchanged between 2016 and 2018

MADISON, WI – The number of uninsured children increased nationally by more than 400,000 between 2016 and 2018, reversing a long-standing positive trend according to a [new report](#) released by the Georgetown University Center for Children and Families. Nationwide, more than 4 million children were uninsured in 2018, the highest level since the Affordable Care Act’s major coverage provisions took effect in 2014.

In Wisconsin, an estimated 51,000 children were uninsured in 2018, largely unchanged from 2016, when approximately 50,000 children were without health insurance. This stagnation took place during a period of economic growth when children should be gaining health coverage.

“Recent policy changes and the failure to make children’s health a priority have undercut bipartisan initiatives and the Affordable Care Act, which had propelled our nation forward on children’s health coverage,” said Joan Alker, executive director of the Georgetown University Center for Children and Families and a research professor at the McCourt School of Public Policy. “Stalled progress and serious erosion of child health coverage is due in large part to the Trump Administration’s actions or inactions that have made health coverage harder to access and have deterred families from enrolling their eligible children in Medicaid and CHIP.”

The report finds the following factors have contributed to the erosion in children’s health coverage nationwide: cuts to enrollment outreach and advertising; efforts to repeal the Affordable Care Act and cut Medicaid; inadequate oversight over state Medicaid programs that have created more red tape barriers; and the creation of a climate of fear and confusion for immigrant families that discourages them from enrolling eligible children in Medicaid or CHIP.

“This news is troubling and underscores why we must keep Medicaid strong and move towards full expansion in Wisconsin,” said William Parke-Sutherland, health policy engagement coordinator for Kids Forward. “We know that when parents are insured, their children are more likely to be insured and the whole family is better protected from medical debt and financial insecurity.”

Parke-Sutherland noted that the impact of the Trump Administration's actions may show up more fully in 2019 and 2020, particularly for immigrant families and their citizen children who are eligible for health insurance. Latinx children in Wisconsin have higher uninsured rates than white, Black, or Asian children in the state.

Although Wisconsin was once a leader in insurance coverage for kids, it now ranks 21st and is well behind each of the neighboring, according to Parke-Sutherland. "If Wisconsin caught up with the lower uninsured rate in Iowa, there would be almost 15,000 fewer uninsured children," he said.

The majority of uninsured children are eligible for Medicaid or the Children's Health Insurance Program but are not currently enrolled. This is particularly true for Native American children who are uninsured at the highest rate in the state, and many of them are likely eligible for Medicaid or BadgerCare in Wisconsin. The state should work directly with impacted communities to identify and mitigate barriers to access and enrollment.

"As a pediatrician, I understand first-hand how important health insurance coverage is to my patients; it helps ensure children can receive the care and services they need, when they need them," said Lanre Falusi, MD, FAAP, American Academy of Pediatrics national spokesperson. "The findings in this report are deeply concerning to me. For children who are uninsured, I worry about the critical services they are missing out on and what it will mean for their short- and long-term health. Our federal leaders must advance policies that ensure children can get the health care they need to grow up healthy and thrive."

Along with the report, the Georgetown University research center launched a new interactive [data hub](#) that provides a more in depth look at child health care trends in Wisconsin and across the country, allowing users to compare a variety of metrics across states.

This is the ninth 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. CCF is based at the McCourt School of Public Policy at Georgetown University in Washington, D.C.

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Kids Forward, formerly the Wisconsin Council on Children and Families, advocates for effective, long-lasting solutions that break down barriers to success for children and families in Wisconsin. Using research and a community-informed approach, Kids Forward works to help every kid, every family, and every community thrive.