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## **Moving Toward Health Outcome Equity in Wisconsin**

New Issue Brief Explores Causes, Solutions to State's Health Disparities

Wisconsin must take aggressive steps to address racial and ethnic disparities in child health outcomes, according to a new WisKids Count issue brief released today by the Wisconsin Council on Children and Families (WCCF).

The brief, "Building on our Strength: Achieving Equity in Health Outcomes for Children and Families in Wisconsin," examines the state's race-based disparities in a number of key health indicators, and recommends several strategies for addressing these gaps.

"Wisconsin's racial and ethnic disparities have long been among the worst in the country," said Martha Cranley, director of WCCF's KidsCount project. "There so much more we could be doing to address the problem from a public policy perspective."

"Building on our Strength" notes disturbing figures in several health-related areas, including these:

- The 2008 infant mortality rate for Black infants (13.8 per 1,000 live births) was more than twice as high as the rate for White infants
- The rate of Black children born at low birth-weight was more than twice the rate for non-Hispanic White children in 2007.
- African American and Hispanic teenagers are three times as likely to give birth compared to the state average for all teens.

The brief points to several underlying causes for these health outcome disparities. One of the most important factors at play is poverty, which affects children's health in a variety of ways. In 2007, children of color in Wisconsin were nearly five times as likely as White children to be living in poverty. Latino children were twice as likely as White children to be poor.

"Poverty is at the root of so many negative outcomes for kids," said WCCF Executive Director Ken Taylor. "We could go a long way toward addressing racial and ethnic health disparities by getting a better handle on child poverty in our state, as we've tried to do through our Vision 2020 Campaign to end child poverty in Wisconsin." (For more information, see [www.2020wi.org](http://www.2020wi.org).)

However, poverty is only one factor. Taylor noted that social, political and environmental forces directly related to race play major roles well.

(more)

Other factors contributing to health disparities, according to the brief, include:

- the availability of healthy, nutritious foods in neighborhood markets; white Americans are five times more likely than black Americans to live in a neighborhood with a supermarket.
- access to adequate, safe housing; for example, inadequate housing has led to huge disparities in lead poisoning rates. Black children in Wisconsin are six times as likely as non-Hispanic White children to be poisoned, and Hispanic children are twice as likely as White children.
- exposure to violence;
- access to quality medical and dental services; and
- availability of affordable insurance coverage to pay for those services.

“Building on our Strength” outlines several recommendations for addressing Wisconsin’s health outcome disparities. They include the following:

- Fill gaps in BadgerCare Plus that affect families who are above 150 percent of poverty but unable to afford the insurance offered by their employer.
- Maintain strong BadgerCare Plus outreach and continue to improve enrollment and renewal processes.
- Promote health care reform at the federal level that would eliminate the 5-year Medicaid waiting period for legal immigrants and genuinely make coverage more affordable for everybody.
- Provide additional resources for loans to assist landlords and homeowners with lead abatement efforts.

“Building on our Strength” is available online at [http://wccf.org/pdf/health\\_outcomes\\_wiskids\\_Jan-2010.pdf](http://wccf.org/pdf/health_outcomes_wiskids_Jan-2010.pdf). A wide range of other data on child well-being in Wisconsin is available in WCCF’s 2009-10 WisKids Count Data Book, “Jobs Count,” available at [http://www.wccf.org/pdf/wiskidscount\\_2009-10\\_fullbook.pdf](http://www.wccf.org/pdf/wiskidscount_2009-10_fullbook.pdf).

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