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CENSUS BUREAU REPORT SHOWS WISCONSIN'S RATE OF HEALTH
INSURANCE COVERAGE HIGH
But Report Shows Numbers Slipping

Madison, WI--A U.S. Census Bureau report released today shows Wisconsin's percentage of uninsured as one of the lowest in the nation at 8.7 percent. However, that figure grew by 1.1 percent, or roughly 58,000 people, between 2001 and 2002. The national rate of uninsured is 14.9 percent, according to the report.

"This report continues to underscore the importance of the safety net that Medicaid and BadgerCare provide," said WCCF Executive Director Anne Arnesen. "As unemployment has grown and families are left stranded without health insurance coverage from their former employers, Medicaid and BadgerCare are there to insure that many children and their parents aren't missing critical health care services."

The Census Bureau figures follow on the heels of a report issued last week by the Wisconsin Department of Health and Family Services (DHFS) that showed a somewhat more favorable rate of health insurance coverage for Wisconsin residents. That study concluded that only 4 percent of Wisconsin residents were without health insurance for the entire year examined. However, 11 percent were without health insurance coverage for some or all of the previous year.

"Both of these reports show that the commitment by Wisconsin's employers and policy-makers to provide some type of health insurance coverage is fairly high," said Arnesen. "At the same time, we are not in perfect health when it comes to rates of health insurance coverage, given the fact that we have about a half million individuals who were without health insurance last year."

According to the DHFS report, 35,000 children, birth to 17, were uninsured for the entire year, and an additional 89,000 were uninsured for a portion of the year. In both populations, children living with parents who were unemployed were more likely to lack health insurance than those living with parents who were employed. On the other hand, employment is no guarantee of insurance. Of the 124,000 children uninsured all or part of the year, only 12,000 lived in households with no employed adults.

"Wisconsin should be proud of its rate of health care coverage reflected in both these reports," said Arnesen. "That said, it is essential that policy-makers maintain their commitment to Medicaid and BadgerCare, given the critical role they play in providing coverage for the working poor and families where the parent is unemployed."