Summary and Findings

North Dakota KIDS COUNT seeks to examine critical issues for North Dakota children and families.
Mirroring a national trend, the teen birth rate in North Dakota has dropped nearly continuously since 2010, from 29 births per 1,000 down to 22 per 1,000 in 2015.

Populations
North Dakota's total population continues to grow as the state enters the second half of the decade, but at a much slower pace than in recent years. From 2012 to 2015, North Dakota's population grew faster than any other state, averaging 2.5 percent growth per year. In 2016, the state's population grew by 0.1 percent to 757,952, the state's highest population on record. Similar to the overall population growth, the number of children in North Dakota grew faster than any state from 2011 to 2015. In 2015 (the most current available age data), children ages 0 through 17 comprised 23 percent of the total population in North Dakota (i.e., 173,926 children). After decades of continuous loss from 1960 to the late 2000s, the number of children has grown consistently since 2008, by approximately 3 percent annually through 2015. The majority of North Dakota counties (33 of 53) had an increase in the number of children from 2014 to 2015, with the fastest growth located in the northwestern portion of the state (McKenzie 18%, Williams 14%, and Burke 9%).

Total Births
In addition to migration, North Dakota's historic population growth can be attributed to more births. After decades of decline, total births began to increase in 2002 when there were 7,755 births. By 2014, there were 11,352 births recorded statewide by the North Dakota Department of Health. In 2015, total births dipped slightly to 11,265. Births to teens in North Dakota totaled 518 in 2015, which is 5 percent of all births statewide. Mirroring a national trend, the teen birth rate in North Dakota has dropped nearly continuously since 2010, from 29 births per 1,000 female teens down to 22 per 1,000 in 2015. Since 2010, the teen birth rate in North Dakota dropped by an average of 10 percent per year for Hispanic teens, 9 percent per year for American Indian teens, 6 percent per year for African American teens, and 4 percent per year for white teens. Despite these improvements, the teen birth rate is still 2 to 4 times higher for minority youth than for white youth in North Dakota.

Race and Ethnicity
Race and ethnicity have important implications for culture, identity, and overall well-being. Children of different races and ethnicities often show large variation in well-being including health, mortality, school performance, and access to family and community resources.

While minority children continue to represent a relatively small percentage of North Dakota's youth overall, the state is becoming more racially diverse. Comprising 15 percent of North Dakota's children in 2015, the number of Black, Asian, and American Indian children combined grew twice as fast as White children from 2010 to 2015. The number of Hispanic youth (6% of all children in North Dakota) grew seven times faster than the number of non-Hispanic children. Estimates suggest that at a national level, there will be no race-ethnic majority among children by 2018 (i.e., White, Non-Hispanic youth will comprise less than 50 percent of all youth nationwide).
Living Arrangements
The majority of all North Dakota children ages 0 through 17 live with their parents, and most children live with both parents. In fact, when compared with other states, North Dakota has the third largest percentage of children living with both parents. Despite this ranking, the composition of North Dakota families is changing. In 2015, 69 percent of North Dakota children lived with both parents. This percentage is down from 82 percent in 1990. During the same period of time, the percentage of children living with a single parent has increased. In 1990, 14 percent of children lived with a single parent. This percentage increased to 23 percent in 2015. Also on the rise is the number of children living with their grandparents. In 2015, 4 percent of North Dakota children lived with a grandparent (7,063 children), which is up from 2 percent in 1990 (2,628 children).

Approximately 1 percent of North Dakota children received foster care services in 2016 (2,381 children). The majority of children in foster care are in a family home (85%). Approximately one in seven children in foster care are in a group home or institution (15%).

While most North Dakota babies are born to married mothers, nearly one-third of births in 2015 were to unmarried women (32%). Births to unmarried women comprised 23 percent of all births in 1994 and grew an average of 3 percent annually through 2005 where it has remained relatively unchanged through 2015. About 13 percent of births to unmarried women were to teenagers. Births to unmarried teens ages 12 through 19 totaled 459 in 2015, which is 4 percent of all births statewide.

Working Parents
Taking care of young children while holding down a job can be challenging. This is especially true for single parents who may have as many child-related demands on their time as married parents, but half as many adults in the household to meet them. Yet, a major contributor to financial stability and well-being of children is secure parental employment. In 2015, 80 percent of North Dakota mothers were in the labor force in 2015, the eighth largest percentage nationwide; nationally, 73 percent of mothers were in the labor force. In addition, 75 percent of children ages 0 through 13 in North Dakota lived in situations where all parents were in the labor force - the ninth largest percentage among states in 2015. Nationally, 68 percent of children lived with parents who are all in the labor force in 2015.

Employed Youth
Employment can provide valuable experience for youth. In moderation, work experience can help youth build skills and can open up valuable opportunities as youth prepare for work and a career. In North Dakota, nearly half of teens ages 16 through 19 were employed in 2015 (45%), which is the second largest percentage among states (behind South Dakota). Among young adults ages 20 through 24 in North Dakota, 75 percent were employed in 2015 - which is the third largest percentage among states (behind Minnesota and Nebraska).
ECONOMIC WELL-BEING

Income and Poverty

North Dakota's unemployment rate continues to be one of the lowest in the nation, per capita income is the 11th highest, and per capita gross domestic product is 7th highest\(^1\)\(^2\). Despite a recent reduction in oil and agricultural commodity prices which has slowed the state's economic growth overall, the economy remains quite strong. The median household income for families with children grew to $72,630 in 2015, up 5 percent from 2010 after adjusting for inflation. Relative to other states, North Dakota has the third lowest child poverty rate in the nation at 14 percent in 2015 (behind New Hampshire and Maryland).

Yet, many working families with children struggle to make ends meet on low wages. In 2015, an income threshold below which was considered insufficient for a family of four with two children to afford basic necessities was $24,036 (the poverty threshold)\(^3\). In North Dakota, 21,716 children were living in families whose income was not meeting this threshold in 2015. These children represent 14 percent of all children in the state.

Younger children (i.e., ages 0 through 4) in the state had a higher poverty rate than older children (i.e., ages 5 through 17) in 2015 (16% compared to 13%, respectively); in eight North Dakota counties, at least one in five children was living in poverty. Children living on American Indian reservations tend to have the highest child poverty rates in North Dakota. Data from 2015 indicate that about half of all children in Rolette and Benson counties were impoverished (49% and 48%, respectively).

Public Assistance

Efforts to assist families that are struggling include various public programs such as the federal Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (i.e., SNAP, formerly the Food Stamp Program) which helped provide food to 37,758 North Dakota children ages 0 through 18 in 2016 (21% of children statewide). In North Dakota public schools, 37,928 children were eligible for free or reduced price lunches in 2016 (33% of total school enrollment). In five of North Dakota's 53 counties, at least half of students were eligible for free or reduced price lunches in 2016 (Sioux, Rolette, Benson, Sheridan and Mountrail).

The Temporary Assistance to Needy Families Program (TANF), designed to help families in need achieve self-sufficiency, provided assistance to 4,649 North Dakota children ages 0 through 19 in 2016, which is down 5 percent from 4,887 in 2015.

In an effort to allow parents to work or attain the education necessary to become employed and self-sufficient, 6,610 children benefited from the North Dakota Child Care Assistance program in 2016 (5% of all children ages 0 through 13 statewide).

Enrollment

Mirroring the growth in the state’s child population, North Dakota school enrollment continues to grow. Throughout the late 1990s and much of the 2000s, average daily enrollment in North Dakota public schools decreased an average of 2 percent per year from 120,538 in 1996-97 to 95,157 in 2008-09. As the result of a growing number of births (a trend which began in 2002) and net in-migration to North Dakota, school enrollment began to increase beginning in 2009-10, averaging about 2 percent annually through 2015-16. Daily enrollment in North Dakota public schools averaged 108,092 in 2015-16, a 1.6 percent increase from the previous year. Overall expenditures in North Dakota public schools averaged $11,945 per student in 2015-16, which is a 4 percent increase from 2014-15.

Effective and appropriate education is an important resource for improving long-term outcomes for children and youth with special needs. In 2016, 14,426 North Dakota children were enrolled in special education (13% of public school enrollment). Of North Dakota children enrolled in special education, 30 percent had a specific learning disability, 20 percent had a speech impairment, 6 percent were emotionally disturbed, 5 percent had an intellectual disability, and 8 percent of students were identified with an Autism Spectrum Disorder.

According to decades of research, the best way to ensure successful students and productive adults in the future is to invest in early childhood development. In North Dakota, 37 percent of children ages 3 and 4 were enrolled in early education programs in 2015 (i.e., programs offering educational experiences preceding kindergarten - including Head Start), which is up from 34 percent in 2010.

Achievement

Most teenagers in North Dakota are engaged in school or work (94% in 2015) and most high school students graduate on time (87% in 2016). Of those students who graduate, many go on for higher levels of education. In Fall 2014, approximately two-thirds of recent North Dakota high school graduates were enrolled in degree-granting postsecondary institutions (69% or 4,825 students).

In preparation for college, nearly all North Dakota students take the ACT which is a national college admissions examination. ACT, Inc. has developed benchmarks in the areas of English, math, reading, and science to measure what it takes to be successful in standard first-year college courses. Based on these four benchmark areas, 58 percent of the 2016 ACT-tested North Dakota high school graduates were ready for college English, 38 percent were ready for college math, 41 percent were ready for college reading, and 33 percent were ready for college science. Approximately one in five graduates (22%) was ready for all four courses.

Education and Early Care (cont.)

Licensed child care is currently meeting less than half (42%) of the potential need for care in North Dakota.

Child Care

North Dakota has the highest proportion of working adults in the nation (79% in 2015) and had the lowest unemployment rate among states from 2009 through 2015. In 2014, 87 percent of North Dakota parents were in the labor force, which is the fifth largest percentage among states. This suggests that most children in the state are in need of quality early care and education opportunities. In fact, 75 percent of children ages 0 through 13 live in families where all the parents are in the labor force (i.e., 93,486 children statewide) - which was the ninth largest percentage among states in 2015.

With most parents working, reliable and affordable child care can help provide parents with greater opportunity to be productive at work and school. In addition, high-quality child care nurtures, stimulates, and supports children as they build the confidence and critical capacities they need to thrive in school and in life.

As of February 2017, North Dakota reported 1,525 licensed child care programs with the capacity to care for 38,835 children. This means that licensed child care programs in the state have the ability to meet approximately 42 percent of potential need (children ages 0 through 13 living in families with all parents in the labor force). According to Child Care Aware of North Dakota, national child care standards recommend that licensed care should meet at least 50 percent of potential need. Currently, three counties in North Dakota (i.e., Cass, Ramsey, and Traill) meet this recommended minimum.

Unlicensed Child Care

Legally recognized yet unlicensed child care providers in the state included 146 self-certified and in-home providers, 23 registered tribal child care providers, and 247 approved relatives in February 2017. Informal networks of relatives, friends, and neighbors provide care for many North Dakota children. These situations are difficult to track and the number of providers and quality of care are not monitored. Yet these providers play an important role in helping North Dakota children begin school ready to learn and succeed.

Child Care Costs and Assistance

Child care has become part of the daily routine for thousands of North Dakota families, many of whom are struggling financially. According to 2016 data from Child Care Aware of North Dakota, care for one infant in a licensed center averages $8,661 annually.

As mentioned in the Economic Well-Being component of this report, the Child Care Assistance Program helped low-income families in North Dakota pay child care bills for 6,610 children in 2016, or 5 percent of all children ages 0 through 13 statewide.
**Vital Records**

A healthy mother is important to the health of a child. Prenatal care can improve birth outcomes and is more likely to be effective if begun early in pregnancy\(^1\). Of the 11,265 North Dakota births in 2015, 14 percent were to mothers receiving no prenatal care or to mothers beginning care after the first trimester. Mothers who do not receive prenatal care are much more likely to give birth to a low birth weight baby\(^1\). In 2015, 692 babies were born with a low birth weight (i.e., less than 5.8 pounds or 2,500 grams), which is 6 percent of all births. North Dakota had the third lowest percentage of low birth weight babies in the nation in 2015\(^2\).

Problems relating to low birth weight can result in infant death. The death of a child is a tragedy for family and friends, and a loss to the community. In 2015, 70 North Dakota babies died within one year of life. Of all North Dakota deaths in 2015, 48 were children ages 1 through 19.

**Hearing Impairment**

Hearing loss can affect a child's ability to develop communication, language, and social skills. The earlier that children with a hearing impairment get services, the more likely they are to reach their full potential. In 2016, nearly all resident live births in North Dakota were screened for hearing loss (99%); of those screened, 11 percent did not pass the initial screening and were referred for further testing.

**Assistance**

The supplemental nutrition program for women, infants, and children (WIC) provides nutritious foods, nutrition counseling, and health and social service referrals to eligible participants at no charge. The number of North Dakota WIC participants totaled 21,003 in 2016. The number of WIC participants has decreased an average of 2 percent annually since 2008.

To assist North Dakota children needing health care, 59,156 youth (28% of youth ages 0 through 20 statewide) received health care assistance through Medicaid in 2016; which is up 4 percent from 57,157 in 2015. In 11 North Dakota counties, at least one-third of young people received Medicaid in 2016.

**Uninsured Children**

Children without health insurance have limited access to health care, which can lead to a greater risk of illness and hospitalization. In addition, a lack of health insurance can have a negative influence on school attendance and participation in extracurricular activities, and increased financial and emotional stress among parents\(^3\). While most children in North Dakota are covered by some form of health insurance, 14,161 were uninsured in 2015, which is 8 percent of all children statewide. Nearly half of uninsured children live in families with low to moderate incomes and are potentially eligible for coverage programs such as Medicaid and Healthy Steps. In 2015, 6,399 uninsured North Dakota children were living at or below 200 percent of poverty, which is 45 percent of all uninsured children statewide.

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SUMMARY AND FINDINGS

Juvenile Court Referrals

Juvenile delinquency has potentially high stakes for both individuals and society as a whole. Delinquency is linked to higher crime rates in adulthood and other negative outcomes. One estimate suggests that between 50 and 75 percent of adolescents who have spent time in juvenile detention centers are incarcerated later in life. A total of 3,471 North Dakota juveniles ages 10 through 17 were referred to court (at least once) for delinquent or unruly behavior in 2016 (5% of all youth ages 10 through 17). Following a national downward trend, the number of North Dakota juveniles referred to court has decreased an average of 5 percent annually since 2003.

In 2016, the five most common delinquent referrals received by the Juvenile Courts were theft of property and shoplifting (14%), disorderly conduct (12%), possession of drug paraphernalia (9%), possession of a controlled substance (9%), and simple assault (7%).

Of the unruly referrals received in 2016 (offenses which only a child can commit), 26 percent were for youth who had runaway, 25 percent were for unlawful possession/consumption of alcohol, 25 percent were for ungovernable behavior, 15 percent were for school truancy, and 9 percent were for such things as tobacco and curfew violations.

Child Abuse and Neglect

Providing children with safe and secure environments free from abuse and neglect will improve the likelihood of positive educational, emotional, and social outcomes that extend into adulthood. In 2016, there were 6,647 children suspected of being abused or neglected in North Dakota. When a suspected case of abuse or neglect is investigated by the North Dakota Child Protection Services Program, a determination is made as to whether services are required to provide for the protection and treatment of a child. Following assessments of the 2016 cases by social workers, it was determined that 1,805 children were in high-risk situations requiring immediate services. The number of children requiring services for abuse and neglect increased 3 percent in 2016. Overall, for every 1,000 children in North Dakota, approximately 10.4 were maltreated in 2016; nationally, the rate was 9.2 per 1,000 in 2015.

Idle Teens

The transition from youth into independent adulthood involves many challenges. While there are multiple pathways to success, the consequences of unemployment, under-employment, or not acquiring post-secondary education can be damaging and enduring. Males who are neither enrolled in school nor working are more likely to engage in delinquent behavior or illegal activities. Females in this group are more likely to become dependent on welfare. Similar to the national average, North Dakota youth who were not in school, not high school graduates, and not in the labor force (referred to as idle teens) comprised 2 percent of all children ages 16 through 19 in 2015.