North Dakota KIDS COUNT seeks to examine critical issues for North Dakota children and families.
While racial and ethnic minority children continue to represent a relatively small percentage of ND’s youth, the state is continuing to become more racially and ethnically diverse.


2Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), National Center for Health Statistics. PRB Analysis of CDC data. Retrieved from https://datacenter.kidscount.org


SUMMARY AND FINDINGS

Population

Following seven years of continuous, rapid growth from 2008 to 2015, North Dakota’s population began to stabilize. Increasing an average of 2.4 percent annually, the state’s population grew from 641,421 in 2008 to 754,859 in 2015. Since 2015, North Dakota’s population has remained relatively unchanged, with the current 2017 estimate at 755,393 people.

North Dakota’s population growth was partly due to an increase in the number of births. Total births began to increase in 2002 when there were 7,755 babies born in North Dakota. By 2014, there were 11,352 births recorded statewide. Despite relatively little change in the number of births since then, this decade-long trend in births along with an in-migration of families has resulted in a growing child population in North Dakota. Similar to the overall population change in the state, the total child population ages 0 through 17 grew an average of 2.7 percent per year from 2008 to 2016, reaching 176,311 children.

During the period of rapid population growth in North Dakota, from 2008 through 2015, the majority of counties in the state (all but nine) had an increase in child population, with the fastest growth located in the far western portion of the state (i.e., Regions 1 and 8). The current 2016 estimates suggest the growth has moderated, with nearly half of counties losing child population.

Teen Births

In contrast to the growing number of total births in the state, the number of teen births has been decreasing. In 1982, the 1,264 teen births comprised 10 percent of all resident births in North Dakota. In 2016, there were 473 teen births which represented about 4 percent of total births statewide. Since 2008, the teen birth rate has dropped an average of 5 percent per year for both American Indian and white teens, 3 percent per year for Hispanic teens, and 2 percent per year for black teens. Despite these improvements, the teen birth rate is still 3 to 6 times higher for racial and ethnic minority teens than for white teens 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 racial and ethnic minority children continue to represent a relatively small percentage of North Dakota’s youth, the state is continuing to become more diverse. Comprising 16 percent of North Dakota’s children in 2016, the number of black, Asian, and American Indian children combined grew three times faster than white children from 2010 to 2016. The number of Hispanic youth (6% of all children in North Dakota) grew seven times faster than the number of non-Hispanic children. Despite the increase in racial and ethnic diversity among North Dakota’s child population, the state is less diverse than most states, ranking 42nd out of 50 states in 2016 (in the percent of non-white and Hispanic youth).
SUMMARY AND FINDINGS

Living Arrangements
The majority of all North Dakota children ages 0 through 17 live with their parents, and most children live with both parents. When compared with other states, North Dakota had the fourth largest percentage of children living with both parents in 2016 (68%). Despite this ranking, the composition of families in North Dakota, and throughout the nation, is changing. While 68 percent of North Dakota children live 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 2016. Also on the rise is the number of children living with a grandparent. In 2016, 4 percent of children lived with a grandparent (7,142 children), which is up from 2 percent in 1990 (2,628 children).

Approximately 1 percent of North Dakota children received foster care services in 2017 (2,471 children). The majority of children in foster care are in a family home (86%) and 12 percent live in a group or institutional setting. Parental drug abuse is now the leading reason for a child’s placement in foster care (37% of cases in 2017).

While most North Dakota babies are born to married mothers, nearly one-third of births in 2016 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 2016. About 12 percent of births to unmarried women were to teenagers. Births to unmarried teens ages 12 through 19 totaled 423 in 2016, which is 4 percent of all births statewide.

Working Parents
Taking care of young children while holding down a job can be challenging. Yet, a major contributor to financial stability and well-being of children is secure parental employment1. In 2016, 79 percent of North Dakota mothers were in the labor force, the eighth largest percentage among states; 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 residing in the household were in the labor force - the ninth largest percentage among states in 2016. Nationally, 68 percent of children lived in households where all parents were in the labor force.

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 career2. In North Dakota, nearly half of teens ages 16 through 19 were employed in 2016 (45%), which is the third largest percentage among states (behind South Dakota and Iowa). Among young adults ages 20 through 24 in North Dakota, 76 percent were employed in 2016 - which is the second largest percentage among states (behind Minnesota).
ECONOMIC WELL-BEING

Significant disparities in the child poverty rate exist in North Dakota when disaggregated by race and ethnicity.


SUMMARY AND FINDINGS

Income and Poverty

North Dakota ranks first in the nation with regard to the economic well-being of children according to the 2018 KIDS COUNT® Data Book¹. The state’s unemployment rate continues to be one of the lowest in the nation², per capita income is the 11th highest³, and per capita gross domestic product is third highest among states³. The median household income for families with children grew to $75,818 in 2016, up 8 percent from 2010 after adjusting for inflation. North Dakota has the second lowest child poverty rate among states (13% in 2016, behind New Hampshire at 11%).

While there was a slight improvement in the child poverty rate in 2016, significant disparities exist in North Dakota, with respect to age, race and ethnicity, family type, and place. Younger children are more likely than older children to live in families struggling to cover basic expenses for housing, food, transportation, health care, and child care (15% and 12%, respectively). Hispanic and Asian children (19% each) are twice as likely as white children (8%); black children (42%) are five times more likely and American Indian children (47%) are six times more likely than white children to live in poverty. Children living with a single parent are seven times more likely to live in poverty than children living with two married parents (34% and 5%, respectively). Children living on reservations tend to have the highest child poverty rates in North Dakota. Data from 2016 indicate that about half of all children in Sioux, Benson and Rolette counties were living in families with incomes below the poverty line.

In 2016, the income amount considered sufficient for a family of four (i.e., two adults, two children) to afford basic necessities was $24,339 (i.e., poverty threshold)⁴. Research shows, however, that families need an income of at least twice the official poverty threshold to cover basic living expenses⁵. In North Dakota, 31 percent of children live in families earning less than twice the poverty threshold.

Public Assistance

Efforts to assist families that are struggling include various public programs such as the federal Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) which helped provide food to 37,427 North Dakota children ages 0 through 18 in 2017 (20% of children statewide). In North Dakota public schools, 37,597 children were eligible for free or reduced price lunches in 2017 (32% 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 2017 (Sioux, Rolette, Benson, Sheridan, and Grant).

The Temporary Assistance to Needy Families Program (TANF), designed to help families in need achieve self-sufficiency, provided assistance to 4,528 North Dakota children ages 0 through 19 in 2017, which is down 3 percent from 4,649 in 2016.

In an effort to allow parents to work or attain the education necessary to become employed and self-sufficient, 4,892 children benefited from the North Dakota Child Care Assistance program in 2017 (3% 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. 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 2016-17. Daily enrollment in North Dakota public schools averaged 109,376 in 2016-17, a 1.2 percent increase from the previous year. Overall expenditures in North Dakota public schools averaged $11,715 per student in 2016-17, which is a 3 percent increase from 2015-16.

Effective and appropriate education is an important resource for improving long-term outcomes for children and youth with special needs. In 2017, there were 15,175 North Dakota children enrolled in special education (14% of public school enrollment). Of North Dakota children enrolled in special education, 30 percent had a specific learning disability, 19 percent had a speech impairment, 9 percent of students were identified with an Autism Spectrum Disorder, 7 percent were emotionally disturbed, and 5 percent had an intellectual disability.

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, 36 percent of children ages 3 and 4 were enrolled in early education programs in 2016 (i.e., programs offering educational experiences preceding kindergarten - including Head Start) - which is the third smallest percentage among states.

Achievement
Most teenagers in North Dakota are engaged in school or work (95% in 2016) and most high school students graduate on time (87% in 2017). Of those students who graduate, many go on for higher levels of education. In Fall 2016, approximately two-thirds of recent North Dakota high school graduates were enrolled in degree-granting postsecondary institutions (68% or 4,877 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, 56 percent of the 2017 ACT-tested North Dakota high school graduates were ready for college English, 40 percent were ready for college math, 40 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. When disaggregated by race and ethnicity, data show that minority youth face significant obstacles to college readiness. Hispanic students are two times less likely to meet all four benchmarks than white students in North Dakota. Black students are six times less likely and American Indian students are eight times less likely than white students to meet all four benchmarks for college readiness.

Approximately 1 in 5 high school graduates in 2017 who took the ACT were ready for all college-level courses in English, math, reading, and science (22%).


Nearly all ND parents are employed, suggesting a need for quality early child care and education opportunities.


SUMMARY AND FINDINGS

Child Care

North Dakota has the highest proportion of working adults in the nation (79% in 2016) and the second lowest unemployment rate among states (2.6% in 2017). In 2014, 85 percent of North Dakota parents were employed, which is the second largest percentage among states (behind Iowa and Minnesota tied for first). 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., 96,010 children statewide) - which was the ninth largest percentage among states in 2016.

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 2018, there were 1,470 licensed child care providers in North Dakota with the capacity to care for 40,228 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, five counties in North Dakota (i.e., Adams, Cass, Logan, Ramsey, and Traill) meet this recommended minimum.

Unlicensed Child Care

Legally recognized yet unlicensed child care providers in the state included 135 self-certified and in-home providers, 17 registered tribal child care providers, and 170 approved relatives in February 2018. Combined, these providers had the capacity to care for 1,162 children.

Informal networks of relatives, friends, and neighbors provide care for many North Dakota children. These cases 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 prepare North Dakota children for school and future success.

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 2017 data from Child Care Aware of North Dakota, care for one infant in a licensed center averages $8,935 annually - and can reach up to $15,210.

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 4,892 children in 2017, or 3 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 11,364 North Dakota births in 2016, 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 2016, 751 babies were born with a low birth weight (i.e., less than 5.8 pounds or 2,500 grams), which is 7 percent of all births. North Dakota had the sixth lowest percentage of low birth weight babies in the nation in 2016\(^2\).

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 2016, 69 North Dakota babies died within one year of life. American Indian babies were twice as likely to die in infancy as white babies\(^1\). Of all North Dakota deaths in 2016, 41 were children and youth ages 1 through 19. The majority of these deaths was due to injury (43% were accidents and 23% were suicides)\(^4\).

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 2017, nearly all resident live births in North Dakota were screened for hearing loss (99%), of those screened, 10 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 20,431 in 2017. The number of WIC participants decreased an average of 2 percent annually since 2008.

To assist North Dakota children needing health care, 59,899 youth (28% of youth ages 0 through 20) received health care assistance through Medicaid in 2017, which is relatively unchanged from 59,156 in 2016. In 11 North Dakota counties, at least one-third of young people received Medicaid in 2017.

Uninsured Children

Children without health insurance have limited access to health care, which can lead to a greater risk of illness and hospitalization. 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\(^5\). While most children in North Dakota are covered by some form of health insurance, 13,129 lack coverage. Relative to other states, North Dakota has the sixth highest uninsured rate for children at 7 percent in 2016. Nearly half of uninsured children (48%) live in families with low to moderate incomes and are potentially eligible for programs such as Medicaid and Healthy Steps\(^6\).

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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 3,591 North Dakota youth were referred to court (at least once) for delinquent or unruly behavior in 2017 (5% of all youth ages 10 through 17). Following a national downward trend, the number of North Dakota juveniles referred to court decreased an average of 5 percent annually from 2003 to 2016. Reversing this trend, the number of referrals to juvenile court in North Dakota increased by 4 percent in 2017.

In 2017, the five most common delinquent referrals received by the Juvenile Courts were theft of property and shoplifting (14%), disorderly conduct (11%), simple assault (10%), possession of a controlled substance (9%), and possession of drug paraphernalia (8%).

Of the unruly referrals received in 2017 (offenses which only a child can commit), 28 percent were for youth who had runaway, 24 percent were for unlawful possession/consumption of alcohol, 24 percent were for ungovernable behavior, 13 percent were for school truancy, and 11 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 2017, there were 6,728 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 2017 cases by social workers, it was determined that 1,981 children were in high-risk situations requiring immediate services. The number of children requiring services for abuse and neglect has increased an average of 8 percent each year since 2010. Overall, for every 1,000 children in North Dakota, approximately 11.2 were maltreated in 2017; nationally, the rate was 9.1 per 1,000 in 2016.

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 (i.e., idle) comprised 2 percent of all teens in 2016 (872 teens).