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Number of Poor Wisconsinites Remains High, Income Growth Not Widely Shared

Wisconsin Should Make Investments that Help Put People on the Path to Economic Security

Four years into the nation's recovery from recession, Wisconsin's working families remain considerably worse off than they were before the economic collapse of 2008. New data released today by the U.S. Census Bureau indicates that economic improvement remains elusive for vulnerable households, and it could be several more years before the state's median income and poverty rates return to their pre-recession levels.

According to data from the American Community Survey (ACS), nearly a quarter of a million (237,000) Wisconsin children were living below the poverty line last year. Wisconsin's child poverty rate was 18.4% in 2013, virtually unchanged from the 18.2% rate in the previous year and still far above the 13.3% rate in 2008.

Wisconsin's overall poverty rate edged up slightly to 13.5%, which is roughly one in seven state residents. Although the small increase from 13.2% in 2012 is not statistically significant, the trend over the last five years is much clearer. There were about 755,000 Wisconsinites living in poverty last year, an increase of 186,000 since 2008, when the overall poverty rate was 10.4%.

"Recession or no recession, recovery or no recovery, we simply can't accept three quarters of a million Wisconsinites living in poverty as the 'new normal,'" said Ken Taylor, executive director of the Wisconsin Council on Children and Families. "These figures underscore the need for a comprehensive anti-poverty agenda that spans multiple generations and encompasses investments in a broad range of areas, including jobs, affordable housing, health care, and early education. No policy maker who claims to care about Wisconsin's future can justify ignoring poverty. We all suffer the consequences when so many are poor."

Although the gradual economic recovery has been boosting income for people at the top, most Wisconsinites haven't seen much of an increase in their income since the sharp drop during the recession. Median household income among state residents was \$51,467 in 2013, unchanged from the previous year, and \$2,700 (5%) below the 2009 income level.

Wisconsin continues to experience extreme economic disparities based on race. For example:

- The 2013 poverty rate among Wisconsin residents identifying themselves as Black or African American was 38.4%, compared to 10.1% among White non-Hispanic Wisconsinites.
- Black/African American households in the state had a median income of \$26,900 in 2013, less than half the \$54,600 earned by White non-Hispanic households.

- The Black child poverty rate (52.5% in 2013) was nearly five times the rate for White non-Hispanic children.

New ACS estimates on health insurance coverage, which were released earlier this week, show that nearly 518,000 Wisconsinites, or 9.1%, were uninsured in 2013, a small but not statistically significant increase from 2012.

Jon Peacock, WCCF's research director, noted that the new figures do not reflect the effects of the substantial changes made by the Affordable Care Act that took effect this year, or the changes in BadgerCare eligibility that were implemented in April. "The fact that over half a million Wisconsinites were uninsured last year highlights the need to expand BadgerCare and take full advantage of the federal health care reform law to improve access to quality, affordable health care," Peacock said.

WCCF recommends these measures in response to lingering high poverty rates and the large number of uninsured Wisconsinites:

- Increase the minimum wage and then adjust it each year for inflation.
- Reverse the cuts enacted in 2011 to Wisconsin's Earned Income Tax Credit for low-income working families and to the state's Homestead Tax Credit program, which provides targeted property tax relief for low-income homeowners and renters.
- Maintain federal funding for supports that help lift families out of poverty, such as food stamps and federal unemployment benefits.
- Expand BadgerCare to cover all adults up to 138% of the federal poverty level – which would not only help many struggling families, but is also projected by the Legislative Fiscal Bureau to save state taxpayers more than \$260 million in the next biennium.
- Give businesses access to a well-trained workforce by providing schools and colleges the resources they need to prepare students for employment. And provide students with the financial aid they need to succeed in their educational efforts.

See income, poverty and health insurance data for selected counties in the tables below.

(more)

Little Improvement in Poverty and Income in Wisconsin

County	Child Poverty			Poverty			Median Household Income (in 2013 \$s)	
	2009 Percent	2013 Percent	2013 Number	2009 Percent	2013 Percent	2013 Number	2009 Number	2013 Number
Brown	15.8%	17.4%	10,643	10.8%	12.5%	30,968	\$54,923	\$51,160*
Dane	10.6%	15.3%*	16,394	13.3%	14.2%	70,542	\$62,694	\$60,081
Dodge	12.3%	9.3%	1,671	9.1%	8.5%	7,103	\$54,376	\$51,151*
Eau Claire	15.3%	11.2%	2,409	16.2%	13.0%	12,613	\$47,479	\$49,204
Fond du Lac	13.1%	8.1%	1,776	9.4%	8.1%	8,023	\$54,107	\$54,198
Jefferson	13.1%	13.8%	2,611	11.5%	11.2%	9,094	\$57,671	\$51,235*
Kenosha	17.8%	23.0%	9,217	13.2%	17.0%*	27,538	\$57,253	\$51,013*
La Crosse	13.5%	17.3%	4,099	12.7%	15.9%	17,793	\$54,691	\$51,551
Manitowoc	8.4%	14.2%	2,402	9.1%	10.7%	8,494	\$52,522	\$47,181*
Marathon	13.7%	15.2%	4,806	10.5%	11.0%	14,731	\$53,888	\$51,635
Milwaukee	29.9%	33.3%*	76,875	20.1%	22.2%*	207,325	\$45,683	\$41,959*
Outagamie	12.3%	10.4%	4,447	9.2%	8.6%	15,121	\$59,384	\$56,433*
Ozaukee	5.4%	6.6%	1,263	5.3%	6.3%	5,468	\$79,650	\$70,899*
Portage	8.5%	9.7%	1,358	12.5%	14.7%	9,841	\$54,346	\$49,872
Racine	18.3%	19.4%	9,040	12.2%	12.8%	24,323	\$56,392	\$54,209
Rock	20.2%	22.0%	8,199	13.2%	14.6%	22,915	\$53,180	\$47,118
St. Croix	9.1%	6.5%	1,439	6.8%	6.1%	5,207	\$71,289	\$67,502
Sheboygan	14.2%	20.1%	5,301	9.0%	11.5%	12,842	\$56,372	\$50,678*
Walworth	15.8%	13.8%	3,149	14.0%	12.8%	12,878	\$53,716	\$52,057
Washington	6.6%	12.1%	3,663	5.4%	7.5%	9,791	\$65,908	\$66,391
Waukesha	6.3%	6.8%	6,015	4.8%	5.7%	22,168	\$78,939	\$75,368*
Winnebago	13.5%	17.6%	6,240	12.9%	12.9%	20,803	\$50,641	\$49,776
Wood	11.2%	15.1%	2,275	8.1%	11.5%*	8,375	\$49,243	\$47,726
Wisconsin	16.7%	18.4%*	236,697	12.4%	13.5%*	755,551	\$54,210	\$51,467*

* The change from 2009 to 2013 is statistically significant.

(more)

Health Insurance in Wisconsin, 2013

County	Children without Insurance		Total Population without Insurance	
	Percent	Number	Percent	Number
Brown	3.3%	2,078	8.2%	20,614
Dane	4.0%	4,274	7.4%	37,423
Dodge	1.5%	281	6.7%	5,611
Eau Claire	5.2%	1,118	9.5%	9,613
Fond du Lac	4.7%	1,046	7.1%	7,112
Jefferson	3.8%	727	7.9%	6,621
Kenosha	3.9%	1,590	11.9%	19,713
La Crosse	2.7%	647	8.2%	9,414
Manitowoc	5.4%	919	6.6%	5,267
Marathon	4.7%	1,510	8.3%	11,173
Milwaukee	4.2%	9,854	12.5%	118,242
Outagamie	5.5%	2,402	8.8%	15,710
Ozaukee	3.0%	586	5.3%	4,573
Portage	3.0%	422	7.2%	5,073
Racine	5.5%	2,570	10.6%	20,273
Rock	4.9%	1,899	12.2%	19,364
St. Croix	1.8%	414	5.9%	5,026
Sheboygan	2.7%	716	8.1%	9,109
Walworth	2.7%	624	8.9%	9,133
Washington	1.5%	450	4.5%	5,913
Waukesha	3.2%	2,886	5.2%	20,355
Winnebago	5.0%	1,798	7.6%	12,447
Wood	4.8%	753	8.2%	6,030
Wisconsin	4.7%	61,288	9.1%	517,796

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