

Child Well-Being in Michigan



This review of changes in child well-being in Michigan reflects mixed results. Of the 14 core indicators tracked by the Kids Count in Michigan project, the state made progress on seven, lost considerable ground on four, and saw little or no change at all on another three. Outcomes for adolescents showed improvement while maternal and infant well-being and child safety weakened.

Progress

- **Declining teen birth and death rates:** Between 1997 and 2004¹ teen birth and death rates in Michigan dropped by roughly one-quarter. Almost 12,000 teens gave birth in 2004 versus 16,000 in 1997. The rate declined from 48 to 34 of every 1,000 teenaged girls, ages 15–19. Roughly 100 fewer teens died—441 versus 542. The rate dropped from 80 to 61 deaths per 100,000 teens, ages 15–19.
 - Almost 12,000 teens gave birth in 2004 compared to roughly 16,000 in 1997. The rate declined from 48 to 34 of every 1,000 teenaged girls, ages 15-19.
 - Roughly 100 fewer teens died in Michigan in 2004 compared to 1997—441 versus 542. The rate dropped from 80 to 61 deaths per 100,000 teens, ages 15–19.
- **Lower child death rates:** 2004 child death rates in Michigan were 17 percent lower than in 1997. The rate dropped from 25 to 21 deaths per 100,000 children, ages 1–14. Roughly 100 fewer children died—409 versus 510.
- **Fewer youth going into out-of-home care for delinquency:** The rate dropped by 43 percent between 1997 and 2005. Roughly 2,000 youth were in such care in 2005 compared to 4,000 in 1997.

Challenges

- **More children living in low-income families:** Participation at free or reduced prices in the National School Lunch Program among K-12 students in public schools rose by 17 percent between 1997 and 2005. Roughly two of every five students (623,000) participated at free or reduced prices in 2005. These children lived in families with incomes only marginally above poverty with financial resources still inadequate to meet basic needs. While child poverty in Michigan in 2003 (15%) was lower than in 1997 (18%), more recent data for the state from the American Community Survey showed child poverty stood at 19 percent in 2005, higher than the 1997 rate.²
- **More child victims of abuse or neglect:** Roughly 28,000 children in Michigan were confirmed victims of abuse or neglect in 2005 compared to almost 21,000 in 1997. The rate rose by 43 percent—from 8 to 11 child victims per 1,000 children, ages 0–17. These children suffered harm from the failure or inability on the part of their parents or guardians to protect them or provide for them. The rate of children going into out-of-home care due to abuse or neglect was also up—by 16 percent, and the rate of children in families investigated—by 13 percent.

- **No improvement in maternal and infant well-being:** In 2004 roughly 10,700 babies in Michigan were born at low-birthweight (less than five and one-half pounds), putting them at risk for chronic disease, disability and even death. The 2004 rate of 8.2 percent barely changed from the 1997 rate of 7.7 percent. The state's infant mortality rate (8 deaths per 1,000 live births) meant that roughly 1,000 infants died before their first birthday in 2004.

What can we do to improve the economic security of children?

As Michigan struggles to adapt to the loss of manufacturing jobs and erosions in wages and benefits for workers, implications of the impact on families with children must be considered as policy alternatives are developed. For many families wages from a job do not provide enough income to meet the basic needs of the family.

While the state and federal government sponsor an array of programs such as cash assistance, food stamps, and child care subsidies to assist low-income families, these programs routinely have stringent income eligibility ceilings that prevent many needy families from qualifying to receive the benefits. In several programs, the benefits end well before families have the means to meet basic needs. State and federal fiscal policies have eroded the capacity to assist vulnerable families.

¹ These annual rates and numbers are based on three-year averages: 2002-04 and 1995-97.

² These more recent data from the American Community Survey are available only for the state and the 28 counties and 21 places in the state with population over 65,000.