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Census Bureau Data Bring Mixed News for Wisconsin

Uninsured Rate Declines, but Poverty and Racial Disparities Persist

MADISON, WI – Despite modest gains in income last year, most Wisconsinites are still making less than they did before the Great Recession, according to new data released by the Census Bureau today. In addition, Wisconsin had the 5th highest increase in income inequality over the past ten years and continues to experience extreme economic disparities based on race.

Median household income in Wisconsin grew to \$56,811 last year, which is \$696 more than the median in 2015, after adjusting for inflation. However, that is not a statistically significant increase, and it is well behind the median income gain for the country as a whole of \$1,340 last year.

“Economically, Wisconsin was stuck in neutral in 2016,” said Tamarine Cornelius, analyst at Kids Forward. “We haven’t been taking strong action to make sure that everyone has access to economic opportunity, and the result is that Wisconsin incomes and poverty rates were not significantly better last year. That stands in contrast to what happened at the national level, where both incomes and poverty rates made significant gains from 2015 to 2016.”

Cornelius noted that median household income in Wisconsin last year was still \$1,745 below the inflation-adjusted value in 2007, a decline of 3.0 percent. At the national level the pattern is different, with household income last year 1.9 percent above the pre-recession level.

According to the new data from the American Community Survey (ACS), about 198,000 Wisconsin children were living below the poverty line last year, which for a family of four means that they earned less than

\$24,250 in 2016. Wisconsin’s child poverty rate stayed about the same, at 15.7 percent last year. That means we still haven’t made progress from the 2007 rate of 14.4 percent.

Wisconsin’s overall poverty rate also stayed about the same at 11.8 percent which means that nearly one in eight state residents struggled to afford basic necessities in 2016. There were about 662,000 Wisconsinites living in poverty last year.

Ken Taylor, executive director of Kids Forward said the new figures show that the economy still isn’t working for everyone, resulting in too many families not making ends meet. “We need to make sure everyone has the opportunity to climb the economic ladder and build a secure future,” he said.

Wisconsin continues to experience extreme economic disparities based on race. African American households in the state had a median income of \$28,276 in 2016, less than half the \$60,087 earned by White non-Hispanic households. The 2016 poverty rate was 32.9 percent among Wisconsin residents identifying

themselves as Black or African American, and 22.6 percent for Hispanics, compared to 8.7 percent among White non-Hispanic Wisconsinites.

The disparities are even more pronounced in the poverty rates for Wisconsin children:

- The Black child poverty rate (42.7 percent) was more than four times the rate for White non-Hispanic children, and also well above the national rate for Black children of 34.3 percent.
- The child poverty rate among Hispanics (27.8 percent in 2016) was nearly three times that of White non-Hispanic children.
- The poverty rate among American Indian children (38.7 percent) was more than four times the rate among White non-Hispanic children.

The new data show that income inequality has increased more in Wisconsin over the past ten years than in most other states. Economists estimate income disparities using a measure called the “Gini index.” According to the Census Bureau, income inequality grew by 3.9 percent nationally from 2006 to 2016, but 6.5 percent in Wisconsin. The figures indicate that 38 other states still have more income inequality than Wisconsin, but the Wisconsin increase was the fifth largest in the nation.

One bright spot in the new Wisconsin data is in the estimates of health insurance coverage. According to the Census Bureau, an estimated 300,000 Wisconsinites, or 5.3 percent, were uninsured in 2016, which is a drop of 218,000 from 2013. Jon Peacock, Kids Forward’s research director, said Wisconsin could improve upon that if it takes advantage of the portion of the federal health care reform law that finances expansions of Medicaid coverage for adults up to 138 percent of the federal level.

Kids Forward has recommended a number of measures to help all Wisconsinites have the opportunity to build a better life for themselves and their kids. Among those is giving businesses access to a well-trained workforce by providing schools and colleges the resources they need to prepare students for employment. Other Kids Forward recommendations include increasing the minimum wage, reversing cuts to Wisconsin’s Earned Income Tax Credit for low-income working families; and expanding BadgerCare to cover all adults up to 138 percent of the federal poverty level.

Ken Taylor stressed the importance of making policy changes that help families struggling to make ends meet. “If Wisconsin is going to thrive, everyone needs a shot at opportunity,” Taylor said. “Policymakers must not ignore the persistent poverty and racial disparities that plague our state.”

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

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Kids Forward, formerly the Wisconsin Council on Children and Families, advocates for effective, long-lasting solutions that break down barriers to success for children and families in Wisconsin. Using research and a community-informed approach, Kids Forward works to help every kid, every family, and every community thrive.

County	Child Poverty			Poverty			Median Household Income (in 2016 \$s)	
	2007 Percent	2016 Percent	2016 Number	2007 Percent	2016 Percent	2016 Number	2007 Number	2016 Number
Brown	15.5%	11.6%	7,049	10.6%	9.8%	24,823	\$60,364	\$57,783
Dane	10.8%	10.4%	11,361	10.9%	11.3%	58,325	\$70,380	\$70,796
Dodge	14.0%	15.7%	2,725	8.7%	9.8%	8,242	\$59,356	\$55,856
Eau Claire	8.4%	11.8%	2,488	13.2%	13.4%	13,273	\$49,952	\$49,821
Fond du Lac	6.6%	9.3%	2,029	8.5%	6.6%	6,554	\$57,915	\$58,310
Jefferson	3.7%	11.0%	1,999	6.3%	9.8%	8,002	\$63,281	\$58,703
Kenosha	13.1%	23.1%	8,872	12.2%	14.0%	22,835	\$61,496	\$59,417
La Crosse	16.3%	11.3%	2,619	14.1%	14.1%	15,979	\$56,120	\$54,823
Manitowoc	14.3%	7.1%	1,107	9.0%	8.9%	6,928	\$54,856	\$51,752
Marathon	10.7%	17.3%	5,203	7.2%	11.2%	14,934	\$61,797	\$54,774
Milwaukee	25.9%	28.0%	64,144	17.8%	19.6%	181,954	\$49,540	\$47,607
Outagamie	6.9%	13.5%	5,828	6.7%	8.7%	15,680	\$65,870	\$61,149
Ozaukee	5.7%	7.5%	1,443	5.1%	6.6%	5,667	\$86,443	\$84,415
Portage	11.8%	11.4%	1,490	12.9%	11.9%	7,926	\$56,399	\$53,655
Racine	12.0%	21.9%	9,809	8.0%	13.9%	26,423	\$59,479	\$55,706
Rock	15.9%	21.2%	7,909	10.7%	13.3%	21,082	\$56,339	\$50,729
St. Croix	6.0%	7.7%	1,703	5.8%	6.5%	5,623	\$76,053	\$72,865
Sheboygan	13.5%	6.3%	1,624	8.3%	5.4%	6,094	\$60,298	\$54,059
Walworth	10.1%	7.1%	1,562	9.5%	11.2%	11,176	\$62,544	\$58,302
Washington	7.5%	5.7%	1,732	5.2%	5.4%	7,163	\$75,667	\$73,502
Waukesha	3.9%	5.8%	4,996	4.0%	5.1%	20,268	\$83,442	\$81,878
Winnebago	11.5%	16.0%	5,457	9.5%	12.2%	19,587	\$58,399	\$56,754
Wood	13.2%	9.8%	1,489	8.8%	8.7%	6,315	\$58,385	\$51,887
Wisconsin	14.4%	15.7%	198,480	10.8%	11.8%	661,565	\$58,556	\$56,811

County	2013 Total Uninsured		2016 Total Uninsured	
	Percent	Number	Percent	Number
Brown	8.2%	20,614	4.8%	12,328
Dane	7.4%	37,423	3.6%	18,737
Dodge	6.7%	5,611	3.6%	2,994
Eau Claire	9.5%	9,613	6.6%	6,733
Fond du Lac	7.1%	7,112	4.4%	4,383
Jefferson	7.9%	6,621	3.7%	3,128
Kenosha	11.9%	19,713	6.1%	10,219
La Crosse	8.2%	9,414	4.3%	5,046
Manitowoc	6.6%	5,267	3.6%	2,818
Marathon	8.3%	11,173	6.3%	8,416
Milwaukee	12.5%	118,242	6.8%	63,668
Outagamie	8.8%	15,710	3.8%	6,883
Ozaukee	5.3%	4,573	2.4%	2,090
Portage	7.2%	5,073	5.1%	3,570
Racine	10.6%	20,273	5.4%	10,240
Rock	12.2%	19,364	4.8%	7,680
St. Croix	5.9%	5,026	4.7%	4,061
Sheboygan	8.1%	9,109	3.1%	3,465
Walworth	8.9%	9,133	5.8%	5,936
Washington	4.5%	5,913	4.0%	5,388
Waukesha	5.2%	20,355	2.7%	10,648
Winnebago	7.6%	12,447	4.5%	7,380
Wood	8.2%	6,030	4.4%	3,203
Wisconsin	9.1%	517,796	5.3%	300,206