Report Finds Uninsured Children at Highest Level Since 2014

(Phoenix, AZ) – The number of uninsured children in Arizona jumped dramatically more than 10% between 2016 and 2018, reversing a gradual and positive trend, according to a new report released by the Georgetown University Center for Children and Families. Nationwide, more than four million children were uninsured in 2018 (up by more than 400,000), the highest level since the Affordable Care Act’s (ACA) major coverage expansions first took effect in 2014.

In Arizona, an estimated 146,000 children lacked coverage in 2018, even as the state’s and nation’s economies flourished and unemployment dropped, a period during which health coverage rates should be rising. Arizona now has the third highest rate of uninsured children in the nation, with 8.4% of the state’s kids without health insurance. (Texas is highest at 11.2%, Alaska 2nd at 9.4%). Half of all the nation’s uninsured children reside in six states, including Arizona.

“Recent policy changes and the failure to make children’s health a priority have undercut bipartisan initiatives and the Affordable Care Act, which had propelled our nation forward on children’s health coverage,” said Joan Alker, executive director of the Georgetown University Center for Children and Families and a research professor at the McCourt School of Public Policy.

The report finds the following factors have contributed to the erosion in children’s health coverage nationwide: efforts to repeal the ACA and cut Medicaid (AHCCCS in Arizona); delays in federal funding for the Children’s Health Insurance Program (known as KidsCare in Arizona); elimination of the individual mandate penalty; cuts to enrollment outreach and advertising; inadequate oversight over state Medicaid programs that have created more red tape barriers; and a climate of fear and confusion for immigrant families that discourages them from enrolling eligible children in Medicaid or CHIP.

“This is an alarming trend and threatens the gains Arizonans have fought to correct over recent years,” said Siman Qaasim, president and CEO of Children’s Action Alliance. “Children need to grow up healthy in order to succeed and families striving to make ends meet need the financial security to know they aren’t one injury or diagnosis away from financial ruin. I’m confident that we can do better than this; it’s time to double down on our long-standing bipartisan support for children’s health coverage.”

The child uninsured rate increased nationally from 4.7% to 5.2% between 2016 and 2018, according to data from the Census Bureau’s American Community Survey. Coverage losses were widespread, with Arizona among 15 states showing statistically significant increases in the number and/or rate of uninsured children (Alabama, Arizona, Florida, Georgia, Idaho, Illinois, Indiana, Missouri, Montana, North Carolina, Ohio, Tennessee, Texas, Utah and West Virginia).
“As a pediatrician, I understand first-hand how important health insurance coverage is to my patients; it helps ensure children can receive the care and services they need, when they need them,” said Lanre Falusi, MD, FAAP, American Academy of Pediatrics national spokesperson. “The findings in this report are deeply concerning to me. For children who are uninsured, I worry about the critical services they are missing out on and what it will mean for their short- and long-term health. Our federal leaders must advance policies that ensure children can get the health care they need to grow up healthy and thrive.”

Along with the report, the Georgetown University research center launched a new interactive data hub that provides a more in-depth look at child health care trends in Arizona and across the country, allowing users to compare a variety of metrics across states.

This is the ninth annual report on uninsured children published by the Georgetown University Center for Children and Families, an independent, nonpartisan policy and research center founded in 2005 with a mission to expand and improve high-quality, affordable coverage for America’s children and families. CCF is based at the McCourt School of Public Policy at Georgetown University in Washington, D.C.

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