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***Poverty and income stagnation persist since recession;
health coverage grows following Medicaid expansion***
New Census data show mixed signals in Iowa

DES MOINES, Iowa (Sept. 15, 2016) — New Census data offer a mixed picture of the economic challenges Iowans face in key measures of family prosperity.

Poverty and income data remained unchanged in 2015 compared with 2014, while health coverage continued to expand following implementation of health reform.

The latest Iowa data from Census' American Community Survey (ACS) show:

- Largely unchanged poverty — around 14 percent for children and 12 percent for all Iowans — that remained stubbornly consistent since the Great Recession.
- Modest signs of change to Iowa's stagnant income picture. Iowa's 2015 median household income level of \$54,736 was not statistically changed from 2014 or 2007—but did reflect a nearly 3 percent gain from 2000.
- Better access to health coverage in 2015 from the year before, which itself was a gain from previous years. The new health-coverage data show Iowans gaining both in public coverage, which includes the expansion of Medicaid resulting from the Affordable Care Act, and in private coverage. Just 5 percent of Iowans are without health insurance.

"We are starting to see some signs that the economic recovery is reaching Iowans — and we certainly have made great gains in covering Iowans with health insurance — but we are still neglecting other fundamentals families need to thrive," said Mike Owen, executive director of the Iowa Policy Project, part of the Iowa Fiscal Partnership along with another nonpartisan organization, the Child and Family Policy Center (CFPC) in Des Moines. These include an adequate minimum wage, child care assistance for working families and food assistance.

"Iowa data look somewhat better than the U.S. average, but that does not reflect the whole story," said Anne Discher, senior research associate at CFPC. "The number of people struggling economically remains too high and is holding back our state's economy and hampering our kids' futures."

Median income

Median household income in Iowa was \$54,736 in 2015 — statistically unchanged from 2014 and from 2007. The 2015 figure does reflect a statistically significant increase from 2000, when Iowa's adjusted median income was \$53,492.

Poverty

The total poverty rate in 2014 was 12.2 percent, the exact same as in 2014. In 2007, the overall poverty rate was 11.0 percent. Poverty among children declined slightly in 2015, from 15.3 percent in 2014 to 14.4 percent. The poverty rate among families was also statistically unchanged. It was 7.7 percent in 2015, from 7.9 percent the year before and 7.4 percent in 2007.

Health insurance coverage

The most concrete improvements showed up in health coverage. Nineteen out of 20 Iowans are now covered by health insurance, thanks in large part to the Affordable Care Act and Iowa’s Medicaid expansion.

The latest census data, released earlier this week, show that the percent of Iowans who were uninsured dropped from 8.1 percent in 2013 to just 5.0 percent in 2015. While 248,000 Iowans were without insurance in 2013, the number had dropped to 155,000 by 2015.

Only four states have a lower percent of the population without health insurance: Massachusetts, Hawaii, Minnesota, and Vermont, plus the District of Columbia.

Across the country, the gap between states that expanded Medicaid and those that did not has widened. Twenty-eight states, including Iowa, chose to expand Medicaid eligibility in 2014 or 2015. The uninsured population has declined faster in the last two years in the states that chose to expand.

Thanks to Iowa’s decision, more people are getting the care they need so they can go to work, take care of their kids, and be healthy, productive members of their communities.

A separate, annual report from the USDA showed little improvement in food security for Iowa families — with 10.6 percent of Iowa households experiencing food insecurity on average from 2013-15, down but not by statistically significant amounts from 2010-12 or 2003-05. About half as many households faced more severe food issues on average — 4.5 percent — in 2013-15. That also was statistically unchanged, though both food insecurity and very low food security were below U.S. estimates of 13.7 percent and 5.4 percent, respectively.

Reports from the Iowa Fiscal Partnership are available at www.iowafiscal.org.

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Editor's Note: The original version of this news release has been updated to include the food security report from the U.S. Department of Agriculture.