nevada kids count newsletter

WHAT’S NEW WITH KIDS?

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Measuring the Effect of Antipoverty Government Programs Using the Supplemental Poverty Measure

The Annie E. Casey Foundation (AECF) released a KIDS COUNT® *Data Snapshot* titled “Measuring Access to Opportunity in the United States.” The *Snapshot* discusses the effectiveness of antipoverty government programs in lifting children out of poverty and provides estimates of the percentage of children in poverty. Data in the *Snapshot* are from the U.S. Census Supplemental Poverty Measure Public Use Research files 2012–2014 and the Current Population Survey, Annual Social and Economic Supplement, 2012-2014.

The Supplemental Poverty Measure (SPM) was created by the U.S. Census Bureau in 2011. It takes into account government noncash assistance from a variety of programs and rising costs and other changes in families’ budgets. Therefore, the SPM is a valuable tool to gauge the effectiveness of antipoverty government programs in reducing child poverty.

The new data reveal that without accounting for government programs (interventions) the U.S. poverty rate for children ages 17 and under for 2011-2013 is 33 percent. Accounting for government programs, the child poverty rate is 18 percent. The programs include the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)/Food Stamps; Women, Infants, and Children (WIC); School Lunch; Cash Welfare (TANF/AFDC); Housing Subsidies; Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP); Social Security; Unemployment Insurance; Worker’s Compensation; Supplemental Security Income (SSI); Child Support; Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC); and Child Tax Credits. Slightly more than 11 million children were lifted out of poverty in the United States because of the programs.

All of the states see a decline in their child poverty rate using the SPM. Kentucky’s and Mississippi’s rates decline is the largest, by 23 percentage points. North Dakota’s rate decline is the smallest, by 8 percentage points. Nevada’s rate decreases by 16 percentage points, from 38 percent to 22 percent. This represents 107,000 fewer children considered to be in poverty in Nevada because of antipoverty government interventions. Nevada, however, is tied with Arizona as having the second highest poverty rate, 22 percent, among the states. California has the highest poverty rate, 27 percent; and Iowa and Wyoming have the lowest poverty rate, 8 percent.

The SPM is a more effective tool in measuring the effectiveness of government programs in reducing child poverty than the official poverty measure, which does not account for noncash benefits or taxes.

It is important to note that the SPM is not a replacement for the official poverty measure—it is an alternative to it.

The AECF recommends investment “in the development—and implementation of the SPM that more accurately tracks progress in ensuring children’s access to opportunity.” According to Laura Speer, associate director for policy reform and advocacy at the ACEF, “The AECF is interested in using the best possible data to drive decisions, especially as they relate to families and children.”

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