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**Health disparities among children threaten the future public health of Oregon;  
Legislators asked to commit to voting for health care for all children.**

*Oregon's independent child advocacy group reports on health disparities among children, calls on legislators to vote for health care for all children this session.*

**Portland, OR – January 23, 2007**– The health of Oregon's children, and the future public health of the entire state, is threatened by significant health disparities among children, according to Children First for Oregon's *County Data Book 2006* released today.

"The health disparities that exist are just one more reason why Oregon needs to set politics aside, and put the health of children first this legislative session," said Robin Christian, Children First for Oregon's Executive Director. "We must make smart investments now or pay later in even higher health care costs and unhealthy communities."

Children First's report shows that children who live in low-income families, belong to a racial or ethnic minority, have immigrant parents or live in rural areas have less access to quality health care and increased risk for poor health.

Family income is one of the strongest determinants of child health. Low-income children are more likely to have multiple health conditions, have higher rates of disability and have worse outcomes and even higher rates of mortality for the same condition when compared to children from higher-income families. These disparities begin at birth and increase as children grow older.

African American, Hispanic and Native American children also experience stark differences in access to care, as well as certain health outcomes, even when controlling for income and insurance status.

Low-income and minority children are more likely to be without health insurance, which severely restricts their access to health care, particularly preventative care.

"The health of our children reflects the health of our state," said Angela Hult of Regence BlueCross BlueShield of Oregon, the presenting sponsor of the report. "Our support of the 2006 Data Book underscores Regence's commitment to raising the profile of at-risk children, expanding public debate on access issues, and ensuring that health care access for all children is a priority."

As a first step towards improving children's health, Children First is calling upon state legislators to sign a pledge committing to vote for affordable, comprehensive health care for all children in Oregon this session. "We have a profound opportunity to improve the course of Oregon's future," said Christian, "Oregonians agree that guaranteeing our children a healthy start in life is a smart idea that deserves strong support from both sides of the aisle."

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Recommendations to reduce and prevent health disparities among children from the 2006 Data Book include:

- Guarantee health insurance for every child in Oregon.
- Expand school-based health services.
- Increase the availability of prenatal care for low-income women.
- Expand proven prevention efforts to improve oral health for all children, like community water fluoridation and cavity prevention programs for children ages 6 to 36 months.
- Promote asthma management in schools.
- Prioritize lead poisoning as a health risk and assure access to screening for children potentially at risk for exposure.
- Target resources to diversity the health care workforce and promote cultural and linguistic competence among health providers.

This year's Data Book also continues Children First's commitment to providing the most current data on the well-being of Oregon's children and their families:

## **Data Highlights**

### **Child Health**

- Over 12% of Oregon children are without health insurance on any given day.
- 50.8% of 8th grade students did not have a medical or physical exam in the previous year.
- 32.6% of 8th grade students did not have a dental cleaning or exam in the previous year.
- 15.4% of 8th grade students are at high-risk for depression and 10.7% report having seriously considered suicide (both rates a slight improvement over the previous year).

### **Family Finances and Stability**

- Nearly 160,000 (18.4%) children live in extreme poverty, a 4% improvement since last year.
- The number of people filing for bankruptcy (8.65 per 1,000) has increased 77% since 2000.
- There are only 17 child care slots available for every 100 children ages 0-13, the same number as last year. The state's benchmark target for 2005 was 25 slots per 100 children.

### **Child Abuse and Neglect**

- 11,255 children are victims of child abuse, neglect or found to be at substantial risk of harm (13.0 per 1,000 children, an 8% increase since the previous year).
- 14,485 children have been in foster care at least once during the past year (a nearly 11% increase over last year).
- On average, 15.4% of children in Oregon's foster care system experience four or more changes in foster placements.

*The 2006 County Data Book, part of the KIDS COUNT project, is made possible by a generous grant from the Annie E. Casey Foundation. Regence BlueCross BlueShield of Oregon, the state's largest not-for-profit health care insurer, is the presenting sponsor of the Data Book.*

*Children First for Oregon is a widely respected, non-profit, non-partisan statewide child advocacy organization. Children First works to make sure that every child is healthy, safe and secure. We support smart investments in proven programs that make Oregon a place where all children thrive. Our mandate is to educate and engage Oregonians to promote programs and policies that get results for kids. Visit our website at [www.childrenfirstfororegon.org](http://www.childrenfirstfororegon.org).*