

Two reports recently released by the Census Bureau's American Community Survey (ACS) provide new information regarding the state of child poverty in the United States from 2012 to 2013. Both reports found a statistically significant decline in poverty between 2012 and 2013.

Despite this, **poverty rates for children in Massachusetts continue to climb**. Data from the US Census Bureau reveals that children in Massachusetts have higher rates of poverty than both the state's general population as well as children nationally. Furthermore ACS research from 2011- 2013 shows that Massachusetts families with children under the age of 5 are more at risk of experiencing poverty, a developmental period crucial for children's growth and brain development and influential on lifelong health.

So, why are children in Massachusetts experiencing poverty at a higher rate than children nationally?

Expensive childcare. Massachusetts is one of the most expensive states in the country for childcare. According to ChildCare Aware of America, the average annual cost of full-time care for an infant is \$16,430. For a family of three living at the federal poverty level, this is a staggering 86 percent of family income. Even a family of three in Massachusetts that has an income of 200 percent of the poverty level will spend, on average, 43 percent of their income on childcare.

Rising housing costs. According to the Center for Budget and Policy Priorities, 229,600 Massachusetts renters are severely housing cost-burdened, paying more than 50% of their monthly income on rent. The Massachusetts Rental Voucher Program (MRVP), which provides very low income households rental assistance, helps to make housing affordable for families in need, but there currently are not enough vouchers to meet the need. Rising housing costs, limited supply, and an insufficient number of housing vouchers put families on the economic margins, at risk for housing insecurity and homelessness. Our research has shown that housing insecurity takes a toll on children's health and development and forces families to sacrifice other basic needs, like food or healthcare, when confronted with unaffordable housing.

Access to earned sick time. In addition to expensive childcare and housing, there are almost 1 million Massachusetts workers who lack access to earned sick time. This means that almost a third of Massachusetts' workforce have to decide between getting paid or taking care of themselves or a loved one. For parents without access to earned sick time, taking care of a sick child provides additional challenges for families and children in Massachusetts. Earned sick time is essential to maintaining healthy workplaces and healthy families.

What can be done?

Children's HealthWatch monitors the effects of multiple hardships experienced by families living in poverty, including: food insecurity, energy insecurity, and housing insecurity. Each of these hardships, often experienced together, are harmful to a child's growth and development, increasing his or her risk of poor health, developmental delays and hospitalizations. Massachusetts cannot afford to have its children living in poverty. Funding affordable childcare programs, increasing funding for housing assistance, like MRVP, and making earned sick time a right of all Massachusetts workers, are meaningful investments in Massachusetts' children and the families that provide for them.

[Children's HealthWatch](#) is a nonpartisan network of pediatricians, public health researchers, and policy and child health experts committed to improving children's health in America. Every day, in urban hospitals across the country, we collect data on children ages zero to four who are from families experiencing economic hardship. We analyze and release our findings to academics, legislators, and the public to inform public policies and practices that can give all children equal opportunities for healthy, successful lives.

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