

## Adolescent Poverty

For young people, poverty is more than a lack of money. It's a health hazard. Addressing poverty is an important step in improving the well-being of adolescents and providing them with the foundation to reach their full potential.

### Why It Matters

Poverty and health are inextricably linked.<sup>1</sup> Low-income people generally report worse health than those with higher incomes. For example, about four of five (83.8 percent) Colorado adolescents at or below the poverty line report their health is excellent, very good or good, according to the 2013 Colorado Health Access Survey. By contrast, nearly all (99.8 percent) adolescents in families with incomes above four times the federal

poverty level report their health is either excellent, very good or good.<sup>2</sup>

#### Defining the Indicator

The percentage of adolescents between the ages of 13 and 17 living in families with income below the federal poverty level.

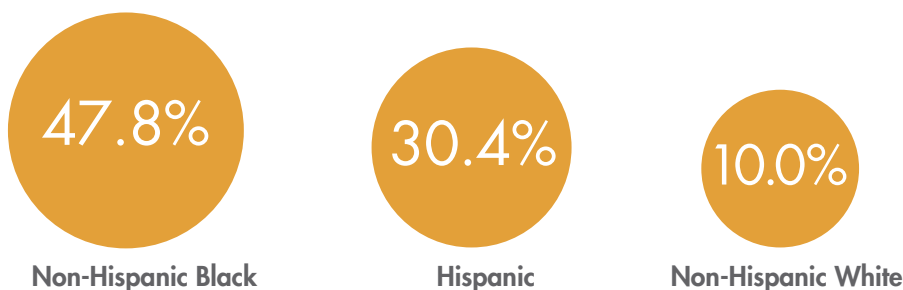
Many factors contribute to poor health among adolescents living in poverty. Their diet may not include enough nutritious foods.<sup>3</sup> Tight finances or lack of safe spaces may limit their opportunities to be physically active.<sup>4</sup> They may live in unstable housing or have broken families, which can interfere with health care.<sup>5</sup>

### In Colorado

Colorado is losing ground in adolescent poverty. The state's adolescent poverty rate climbed about three percentage points between 2011 and 2012, reaching 18.3 percent. This marked the biggest one-year jump since 2006 and dropped Colorado eight places in state rankings – from 14th to 22nd. North Dakota, the best state in this category, had an adolescent poverty rate of 10 percent.

In Colorado, both black and Hispanic adolescents are more likely to live in poverty than their non-Hispanic white peers. In 2012, nearly half of Colorado's black adolescents (47.8 percent) were poor compared with 30.4 percent of Hispanic adolescents and 10.0 percent of non-Hispanic whites. These disparities highlight the importance of targeting poverty and the pressing need to address its impact on adolescents' health and potential.

Percentage of Adolescents Living in Poverty by Race/Ethnicity, CO, 2012



### Adolescents in Poverty

Percentage of adolescents in Colorado living below the federal poverty level:

# 18.3%

Colorado Rank

# 22/50

### Best State

## North Dakota

North Dakota:  
Adolescents in Poverty

# 10.0%

Data from 2012

### What if We Were No. 1?

If Colorado were ranked first instead of 22nd



There would be

# 27,600

fewer adolescents living below the federal poverty level.

## Promising Practices

Tackling poverty requires a range of policies, both economic and educational, and more aggressive efforts to reach those in need of help. Several programs have a proven track record of success.

The Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) – a refundable federal income tax credit for low- to moderate-income workers – is one strategy in the fight against poverty.<sup>6</sup> This tax credit allows qualifying families to keep more of their earnings. An estimated 20 percent to 25 percent of eligible families, however, do not claim the tax credit,<sup>7</sup> indicating the need for better outreach and education about this benefit.

The federal Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), the successor to food stamps, offers nutrition assistance to millions of low-income people. Still, only about half of eligible Coloradans participate in SNAP and fewer than half of eligible students take advantage of the federal School Breakfast Program, again underscoring the need for more aggressive outreach.

Another promising initiative is the Colorado Child Care Contribution Credit. It provides a tax credit of 50 percent and a state and federal tax deduction for any contribution made to an eligible child care organization or fund, including early childhood care centers, foster homes and youth shelters.<sup>8</sup> This tax credit encourages public support of important programs that foster healthy youth development.



BRIAN CLARK/COLORADO HEALTH INSTITUTE

MEND activity Leader Stephanie Luckey, right, and some of her fellow trainers lead a group of kids and their families in a high-energy dance party at the Southwest Family YMCA in Denver.

## Making a Difference

### MEND Foundation

The mission of the MEND Foundation is to inspire children, families and adults to lead fitter, healthier and happier lives.

MEND – which stands for mind, exercise, nutrition, do it! – is a free, family-based program that meets twice a week for 10 weeks. Sessions are run in partnership with YMCAs and other community-based organizations and include nutrition and behavior workshops for parents and children. Some of the more active sessions focus on making exercise fun, which is important for children who may not thrive in a traditional PE setting. At the conclusion of the 20 sessions, families are given a directory of community resources and a list of free or low-cost activities that will help them sustain the progress they and their children have made toward leading healthier lives.

[www.mendfoundation.org/](http://www.mendfoundation.org/)  
[www.coloradohealth.org/mend](http://www.coloradohealth.org/mend)

<sup>1</sup> Jeanne Brooks-Gunn and Greg Duncan. "The Effects of Poverty on Children" vol. 7 (1997):2.

<sup>2</sup> Colorado Health Access Survey (2013). Income and Health Status. <http://coloradohealthinstitute.org/data-repository/detail/demographics-1>.

<sup>3</sup> David Wood, "Effect of Child and Family Poverty on Child Health in the United States," *Pediatrics* 112, no. 3 (September 2003): 707-711.

<sup>4</sup> Rita Paul-Sen Gupta, Margaret L de Wit and David McKeown, "The Impact of Poverty on the Current and Future Health Status of Children," *Paediatrics and Child Health* 12, no. 8 (October 2007): 667-673.

<sup>5</sup> Wood, 707-711.

<sup>6</sup> The National EITC Outreach Partnership. The Earned Income Tax Credit – A Fact Sheet. <http://www.cbpp.org/eitc-partnership/eitcfactsheet.pdf>.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Colorado Department of Revenue Taxpayer Service Division. Child Care Contribution Credit. 2013. <http://www.colorado.gov/cms/forms/dor-tax/Income35.pdf>.

