

The state of poverty and opportunity in COLORADO

Nationwide, millions of families facing economic hardship and poverty are doing all they can to make ends meet despite today's challenging economy. Many of the 103 million Americans living on less than \$44,700 a year are struggling to pay their rent, keep current with utility payments, cover the cost of health care, and put food on the table.

In Colorado, families are dealing with these challenges and more on a daily basis. Of the total number of residents in Colorado in 2010, 13.4 percent lived below the official poverty line, 8.9 percent were unemployed.

To reduce poverty in Colorado, we need to pursue a comprehensive strategy that creates good jobs, strengthens families, and promotes economic security. Here's how Colorado is currently faring in these important categories.

Creating good jobs

Increasing the number of workers in good jobs that pay family-supporting wages, and offer benefits and traditional workplace policies such as paid sick leave is one of the fastest ways to reduce poverty. Ensuring that more students graduate from high school and that adults have the skills needed for the modern workforce is also a critical piece of the jobs puzzle. Improving wages for all workers and ensuring that women are paid comparably to men will also lower the number of families in Colorado who face economic risk.

Below are four measures for improvement for the men, women, and families of Colorado:

- Percentage of employees with paid sick leave: 59
- High school graduation rate: 75.4 percent
- Percentage of young adults ages 25 to 34 with an associate's degree or higher: 41
- For every dollar earned by a man, a woman doing the same job earns 78.9 cents

When these measures improve in Colorado, we will know that opportunity is replacing poverty in Colorado.

Strengthening families and communities

Increasing the health and stability of poor families is an essential element of a successful strategy to reduce poverty. To do so requires an increasing number of low-income families gaining access to quality health care. It also means that parents, particularly single parents, have assistance with basic housing and food expenses so they can provide for their families. Policies should also help families stay connected and help at-risk youth find safe, stable places to live. Reducing teen parenting also helps alleviate poverty.

Below are three measures for improvement in Colorado to help strengthen struggling families:

- Percentage of the state population living without health insurance: 15.9
- Number of births by teenagers (per 1,000): 42.5
- Number of children living in foster care: 6,980

When these measures improve we will know Colorado is on the right track.

Promoting economic security

Economically secure families are less likely to fall into poverty when they cannot work or work is unavailable, unstable, or pays so little that they cannot make ends meet. That means eligible families must be able to turn to programs such as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program and to unemployment insurance when needed. Economic security also means providing opportunities for families to build their own assets to weather unforeseen crises and save for the future, which requires access to basic financial services such as a checking account.

Below are three measures for improvement to help more families in Colorado build economic security:

- Percentage of households that are struggling with hunger: 13.4*
- Percentage of unemployed workers receiving unemployment insurance: 59.87
- Percentage of unbanked—people without checking or savings accounts: 6.9

*State food insecurity rate

When these measures move in the right direction, we'll know that there is greater economic security and opportunity for families facing tough times in Colorado.

Clearly, families, children, and workers in Colorado are struggling, which affects all of us. More families in poverty means fewer consumers in the state economy and fewer skilled workers for the jobs and industries of the future.

In the past we have significantly cut poverty when a strong economy in combination with strong public policies and private initiatives worked together to lift up millions of Americans. We need your voice to advocate to our elected officials to enact legislation that moves these indicators in the right direction and rebuilds the middle class.

Half in Ten urges you to stand up and take action today:

- Contact your members of Congress and ask them to pass legislation to create more good jobs.
- Host a local event with other advocates to highlight the issue of poverty and opportunity in your community and to discuss policy solutions and action steps.

For more advocacy resources, please visit <http://halfinten.org/indicators>.

Source: Restoring Shared Prosperity: Strategies to Cut Poverty and Expand Economic Growth, 2011