

Wisconsin Council on Children and Families: Medicaid provides more access to health coverage for rural communities than Wisconsin's metro areas

Posted on Thursday, Jun 8, 2017

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(Madison, WI)—Adults and children in small towns and rural areas in Wisconsin rely on Medicaid and BadgerCare more than those in metropolitan areas, according to a new report released today by the Georgetown University Center for Children and Families and the University of North Carolina NC Rural Health Research Project.

The report, "Medicaid in Small Town America: A Lifeline for Children, Families and Communities," finds that 34 percent of children in rural areas and small towns in Wisconsin receive health coverage through Medicaid and BadgerCare, compared to 31 percent of kids in metropolitan areas.

Medicaid participation is also higher in Wisconsin's rural areas for adults, but the

difference is

narrower than it is for children. The new study reports that 14 percent of adults in Wisconsin's small towns and rural areas are covered by Medicaid, compared to 13 percent in metro areas. One-fourth of Wisconsinites live outside metropolitan areas.

"Medicaid provides critical access to life-saving treatment and protection from rising health care costs to many children and families living in small towns and rural America," said Joan Alker, Executive Director of the Georgetown University Center for Children and Families. "Cuts to Medicaid and other health care programs would take those protections away from many and risk financial ruin, denial of health care, or both."

Because of changes made by the Affordable Care Act, the number of uninsured Wisconsinites

has dropped sharply across the state in recent years, but especially in Wisconsin's small towns and rural areas. Between 2008/09 and 2014/15, the percentage of uninsured adults dropped from 15 to 9 percent in Wisconsin's non-metro areas, and the rate of uninsured children in rural areas dropped from 6 percent to 5 percent.

"When children and families have health insurance, whole communities are stronger," said Sashi Gregory, the Health Policy Analyst at the Wisconsin Council on Children and Families.

"Reliable access to health coverage means fewer visits to the ER, less uncompensated care, and a larger and healthier workforce. We must not turn our backs on the substantial progress we've made in strengthening Wisconsin by getting our children and families the health coverage they need to succeed."

The report primarily relies on data from the Census Bureau's American Community Survey

(ACS). The full report along with interactive maps showing a county-by-county breakdown on health care coverage data are available at: www.ccf.georgetown.edu.