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New Census Data Shows Drop in Uninsured Children, Rise in Poverty

New Jersey followed national trends with a drop in uninsured children and a rise in child poverty, according to new U.S. Census Bureau data released today.

The number of uninsured New Jersey children fell to 129,835 in 2009 from 147,720 in 2008, according to the Census Bureau's American Community Survey.

"With more parents out of work and poverty increasing, the drop in uninsured children suggests that efforts to enroll more children in NJ FamilyCare are resulting in fewer uninsured children," said Cecilia Zalkind, Advocates for Children of New Jersey.

"We know that when children have health coverage, they're more likely to get preventive care. The collective effort to enroll children in the state's health insurance program is really returning dividends."

At the same time, New Jersey's child poverty rate jumped from 12 percent in 2008 to 13 percent in 2009, translating to nearly 20,000 additional children in poverty. That means more than 272,000 New Jersey children are growing up in families that cannot afford to provide the basics – food, clothing and shelter.

"We have to do better for these children," said Cecilia Zalkind, ACNJ executive director. "As statewide and national debates center on education, we have to remember that poverty is the single greatest barrier to children succeeding in school, going on to college and landing good jobs."

"Now is the time to increase our investment in these children," Zalkind said. "That means providing supports for their families in the form of jobs, health insurance, tax credits and other avenues to pull people out of poverty. It means investing in programs that work for low-income children, programs like high-quality preschool."

"The fact is that New Jersey has cut many of these essential programs to make up for budget shortfalls," Zalkind said. "This approach is sure to strand more children in lives of poverty – something that will cost our state for years to come."