

# 2015 Progress Report

## The Status of Children in Oregon





# Children First for Oregon

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# What will it take?

Children are at the core of what we do. For nearly 25 years Children First for Oregon has produced resources on the well-being of kids in our state. These data-driven reports, analyses, and recommendations are intended to inform policy makers and urge them to create strong children’s policies in our state.

Yet, with a few positive and notable exceptions, for all these years the data has largely said the same thing: Oregon’s children continue to struggle. We have failed to make significant gains in the areas of economic security, education, and health for our kids. We simply have not done enough to improve child well-being in this state.

## **This must end.**

Oregon has a long history of a pioneer spirit – both in people and public policies. Our state was the first to issue minimum wage decrees. We were the first state to open our coastlines to the public. The first to pass a bottle bill. We are trail blazers. So much so, in fact, that a pioneer peers down from atop of our state capitol building. He reminds us to be bold, strong, and forge new paths – even if the challenges seem insurmountable.

Now is the time to be pioneers again. To be courageous for our kids. To unite on their behalf. We must embrace that pioneering spirit and make meaningful long-term change for kids.

This progress report tells the story of what it means to be a kid in Oregon. It also highlights concrete policy solutions that will recapture Oregon’s pioneer spirit. These policies have been tested and proven elsewhere and are ready to be implemented – some this year and some over the next few years.

To make true progress we need to work together as advocates and Oregonians, hold lawmakers accountable, and build power for our kids. By uniting around these solutions with the urgency and determination shown by so many great pioneers before us, we can and we will make Oregon the best place to be a kid.



# Progress for Kids, Progress for Oregon

**P**rogress for the state of Oregon can only come when every child has the opportunity to succeed. But the data is not promising. Fewer of our students graduate from high school and more of our children are in foster care than in nearly any other state. Our child abuse rate has declined only 2% in the last decade, despite falling by 25% nationally. Child poverty is higher now than it was at the end of the Great Recession in 2009.

The good news is, we know how to do better. Research clearly shows that kids learn better when they have full stomachs. Child abuse declines as economic security rises. The policies to make real, lasting progress for our children are not a mystery.

Commonsense solutions have been tested and proven in other states. Raising the minimum wage, instituting Universal Pre-Kindergarten, and fully funding home visiting programs for parents of young children would significantly benefit our children and the economic prosperity of our state. With middle-class jobs becoming increasingly hard to come by, a \$15 minimum wage would help the families of 350,000 Oregon children meet basic needs like child care, food, and health care. Universal Pre-K makes

students more prepared for school and more likely to earn higher wages. Home visiting provides resources for mothers and fathers to become nurturing parents, reducing child abuse and neglect and increasing child cognitive development.

Oregonians have proven time and again that when we commit to improving the lives of children, we can make significant progress. In 2009, Oregon expanded the program that provides health insurance to low-income children, and since then Oregon's child uninsurance rate has been cut in half – the biggest reduction in the country. Just as we have promised health insurance to children who need it, we can create a better, prosperous future for our children. Within this report we highlight options before us now that would do exactly that. This legislative session we can – and must – take the next steps towards becoming a state where every child can thrive.



# Economic Security



HIGHER MINIMUM WAGE

FAMILY WAGE JOBS

LOWER CHILD POVERTY

# 26%

of mothers  
with young  
children work  
in low-wage  
jobs

## The Recession That Won't Recede

Nearly six years after the Great Recession, thousands of children and families are being left behind by the economic recovery. Family incomes are lower and child poverty rates are higher than when the recession ended. Job growth has increased each year, but many are working even harder and making even less. Eight out of every ten jobs lost during the recession were those that supported the middle class, but only 40% of those jobs have come back. Meanwhile, low-wage jobs are at an all-time high.

## We All Pay for Low Wages

Low wages are not just a problem for individual workers. So many Oregon workers are paid so little that the federal and state government spends \$1.7 billion in taxpayer money each year on programs like food stamps and other income supports. Oregon's minimum wage is the second highest in the country at \$9.25, but even working full-time at minimum wage is not enough to lift a family of three out of poverty. In fact, a higher minimum wage is needed even more in Oregon, where **26% of Oregon mothers with young children work in low-wage jobs**, the second-highest rate in the nation.

## Poverty is High Because Wages are Low

More than half of poor children in Oregon live in a family where at least one adult works full-time. Despite job growth, **the child poverty rate has actually increased by more than 10% since the end of the recession – and by more than 25% since before it.** Employment alone is not enough – to end child poverty, parents must have living wage jobs. Raising the minimum wage to \$15 an hour ensures that no child whose parent works full-time will live in poverty.

## Higher Wages Help Children Succeed

Basic needs like food, child care, and health care should be available to all children – but low wages stretch family budgets thin. By putting stress on children, limiting opportunities to high quality child care and health care, and making it more difficult for families to afford nutritious food throughout the whole month, poverty affects children's cognitive development and creates barriers to success. An increase in the minimum wage to \$15 would mean a raise for the parents of 350,000 children – nearly 40% of all kids in the state. Higher wages would create more prosperous families and more opportunities for kids later in life.

*See page 14 for sources.*

child poverty:

↑ 10%

since 2009,

↑ 25%

since 2007

### RIGHT NEXT STEPS

**As a first step towards putting all working families on the path towards economic security, lawmakers should:**

- Raise the minimum wage for Oregon workers to \$15 an hour;
- Enact Earned Sick Days; and
- Remove questions about criminal history from job applications (“Ban the Box”).

# Education



EARLY LEARNING

GRADE LEVEL READING

HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION

49<sup>th</sup>  
in graduation

65%  
without access  
to Head Start

## The Path to Graduation Begins in Preschool

Oregon has committed to a 100% graduation rate by 2025 yet, last year, **Oregon had the second-lowest graduation rate in the country.** Early learning programs have been proven to prepare children for Kindergarten, close achievement gaps, and boost lifetime earnings for participants. But only 40% of Oregon preschool age children are in school, and only one-third of Oregon fourth-graders read proficiently.

## Head Start is Just a Start

Oregon Head Start is the state's only public pre-Kindergarten program. Open to three to five year-olds living in poverty, the goal is to prepare children for academic success. However, the program is limited in reach. There are 28 programs in the state with room for only 12,360 kids – **leaving 65% of eligible children without access.**



## Quality Preschool for All Oregon Children

Universal Pre-Kindergarten is different. It recognizes that all young learners can benefit from high-quality learning environments. Universal Pre-K invests in children's futures by guaranteeing a place for any child, regardless of income. Numerous studies have shown that these investments pay off for both the children and the state, by helping children become more prepared for school and **earn as much as 19% more in their careers.**

## Schools Support More Than Education

School is more than a place to learn – for many, it is a lifeline. In a state where nearly one out of six families struggle to put food on the table, free and reduced-price lunches ensure every child has enough to eat during the day. School-Based Health Centers provide well-child exams and vision and dental screenings, a vital service for students who might otherwise go without health care. Schools enrich children's lives with nurturing adult relationships outside of the home. By giving them an opportunity to enter school even earlier, **Universal Pre-K sets children up for healthy, successful lives.**

children  
go on to  
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in their  
careers

*See page 14 for sources.*

### RIGHT NEXT STEPS

**As a first step towards creating high-quality early learning opportunities for all Oregon children, lawmakers should:**

- Expand preschool access to children below 200% of the federal poverty level;
- Fund full-day Kindergarten for all public school students; and
- Provide access to school lunches for more than 30,000 kids by eliminating reduced-price co-pay.

# Health & Safety



HOME VISITING

REDUCED ABUSE AND  
NEGLECT

OPPORTUNITIES FOR  
SUCCESS

child  
abuse and  
neglect:

↓ 2%

in Oregon

compared to

↓ 25%

nationwide

## Hurting Kids Hurts Oregon

Oregon has a child abuse and neglect rate nearly one-third above the national average. Our foster care rate is one of the highest in the nation. On average, a child in foster care will stay for nearly a year and a half, the fifth longest in the nation. These statistics have not noticeably improved in the last decade. In fact, since 2003 **Oregon's child abuse rate has declined by only 2% – despite falling by 25% nationwide.**

## Oregon Leaves Struggling Families Without Help

Home visiting programs have been developed as a preventive solution to the problem of abuse and neglect. If parents choose to participate, they are visited regularly by trained professionals who help them build positive, nurturing relationships with their children. Oregon has a total of 11 home visiting programs that serve nearly 40,000 children under the age of 4. However, **evidence-based home visiting programs in Oregon reach only 15% of children in the most need.**

## Teaching Parents the Most Important Job

Extensive research has shown that evidence-based home visiting programs have a positive effect on child well-being. A comprehensive study of home visiting programs found that these programs reduced child injury rates and improved the quality of parenting. Furthermore, evidence-based **home visiting programs have been shown to decrease child abuse and neglect by as much as 48%**. Abuse and neglect are by far the leading cause of children entering foster care in Oregon – any attempt to keep families together first requires keeping children safe.

## More Than Keeping Kids Safe

Beyond child abuse and neglect, home visiting has been shown to increase cognitive development among participating children, which makes them more likely to be prepared for Kindergarten, read at grade level, and graduate from high school. It has also been shown to decrease infant mortality by up to 60% by improving maternal health and connecting parents to health and economic resources. Finally, both mothers and their children who are visited are less likely to be incarcerated later in life. In all, **every dollar spent on home visiting saves at least two dollars in future spending.**

home  
visiting  
saves  
**\$2**  
for every  
**\$1**  
spent

*See page 14 for sources.*

### RIGHT NEXT STEPS

**As a first step towards supporting parents and keeping children safe, lawmakers should:**

- Expand evidence-based home visiting programs;
- Increase emergency assistance for victims of domestic violence and sexual assault; and
- Broaden access to domestic violence advocates co-located in Department of Human Services offices.

# Data Table

INDICATOR	2012 (OREGON)	2013 (OREGON)	2013 (US)	OREGON RANK (BEST = 1)
Cohort Graduation Rate	68%	69%	81%	49
4th Grade Reading Proficiency	30%	33%	34%	33
Early Education Enrollment	40%	41%	47%	38
Food Insecurity Rate	14%*	15%**	15%**	36
Median Family Income	\$60,320	\$61,767	\$64,030	27
Child Poverty Rate	23.0%	21.6%	22.2%	28
Child Insurance Rate	93.6%	94.2%	92.9%	27
Adequate Prenatal Care	77%	75%	64%	11
Foster Care Rate	1.5%	1.4%	0.9%	43
Abuse and Neglect Victimization Rate	11.1	12.0	9.1	36

\* Data is for 2008–2010.

\*\* Data is for 2011–2013.

See page 14 for sources.



## How you can get involved

As the 2015 Progress Report shows, there are many tough challenges facing kids in Oregon. In order to solve these challenges, we propose proven public policies and shared investments that will benefit the health, education and economic security of all of our children. These policies have been developed by policy experts and advocates who share a deep-rooted commitment to improve our future by focusing on our children. Oregonians repeatedly rank children as a top priority and they overwhelmingly support these solutions.

We know the problems. We know the solutions. Oregon has proven it possesses the pioneer spirit required to take bold action. Oregonians deeply value our state's children. Now is the time to achieve progress for kids.

That is the goal of United for Kids: to make Oregon the best place to be a kid by connecting and amplifying the collective voice of pro-child Oregonians and organizations. Thanks to United for Kids, advocates, lawmakers, service providers, labor groups, businesses, faith communities, community organizations, and voters are uniting to prioritize children. Together, we bridge the gap between public concern for kids and meaningful support of pro-child policies and investments.

Join us if you believe, as we do, that kids should be a top public policy priority. Visit [www. ORUnitedForKids.org](http://www.ORUnitedForKids.org) and sign up. You will receive timely updates and information on critical issues and have the opportunity to join specific issue campaigns. You are the advocate Oregon's kids have been waiting for. Join today and help make a difference.

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Oregon's children rely on elected officials and voters to make them a top priority in public policy decisions. Children First for Oregon was founded in 1991 to improve the lives of Oregon's children by galvanizing public support and informing decision makers about what kids need to thrive. Whether it is speaking up for children's health care, family economic stability, affordable child care or foster children's rights, Children First has been Oregon's voice for kids for nearly 25 years.



United for Kids has one simple goal: to make Oregon the best place to be a kid. To do that, Oregon's children need a strong and unified voice advocating for them. United for Kids connects and amplifies the collective voice of pro-child Oregonians and organizations to promote public policy change and shared investments that benefit children's health, safety, economic security, and education.

Oregonians care deeply about the well-being of our children. Across our state, there is a widespread commitment to improve our future, starting with the lives of our children. United for Kids closes the gap between public concern for kids and meaningful support of pro-child policies in Oregon. To join, visit [www.ORUnitedforKids.org](http://www.ORUnitedforKids.org).

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