Ohio’s APPALACHIAN CHILDREN at a Crossroads:
A Roadmap for Action

Children’s Defense Fund-Ohio began our investigation into Appalachian Ohio with our 2001 report, which provided a first-ever comprehensive look into the well-being of the region’s children. Now, fifteen years later, we’ve found that the region continues to suffer many of the same challenges, outlined in the data snapshot below.

450,000 CHILDREN in Appalachian Ohio

ECONOMIC STABILITY

- **Unemployment**
  - 2000: 5.5%
  - vs.
  - 2013: 6.7%

- **Child Poverty**
  - 2000: 17.8%
  - vs.
  - 2013: 26.7%

EARLY CHILDHOOD CARE

- **Appalachian counties have**
  - NO Early Head Start services

- **There are**
  - 38,795 early education/licensed child care spaces but
  - 146,121 children under age 6 to serve

ELEMENTARY & SECONDARY ED

- **280,875** Appalachian students attend public school

- **3rd Grade:**
  - 97.3% met or exceeded required reading score

- **By Grades 4-8:**
  - Students fall behind Ohio peers in reading and math

- **Bachelor's Degrees or higher completed**
  - Appalachia 15.9%
  - Statewide 25.2%

BIRTH AND BABIES

- **Babies Born Exposed to Drugs**
  - 2004-2008: 2.3
  - vs.
  - 2009-2013: 15.4

- **Infant Mortality**
  - 7.6 Per 1,000 live births

  Ohio and Appalachia exceed the national average, have similar rates

  - **Good News:**
    - Teen Birth Rate: **40%** since 2000

HEALTH & NUTRITION

- **Ohio has**
  - 6 children’s hospitals.
  - **NONE** are in Appalachia.

- **28 of 32** counties are dental and mental health shortage areas

  Appalachian children are more likely to have untreated tooth decay than Ohio children statewide

  - **1.5 X's**

  - Over **1/4th** of Appalachian children face FOOD INSECURITY

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ECONOMIC STABILITY

Promising solutions to allow children and families to gain economic stability are grounded in local partnerships.

1. Ohio’s 32 Appalachian Counties should join the Rural Impact County Challenge (RICC) to reduce poverty.
2. Implement two-generation strategies to launch thriving families.

BIRTH AND BABIES

Babies born in our Appalachian communities face challenges of low birthweight and exposure to drugs, leading many not to reach their first birthday. Our goal is for Appalachian Ohio babies to survive and thrive and begin childhood safe and strong.

1. Reduce infant mortality rates through improving prenatal care systems and supports.
2. Reduce infant mortality rates through lowering the rates of maternal and household smoking.
3. Focus on the neonatal abstinence syndrome crisis in Appalachian Ohio.

EARLY CHILDHOOD CARE AND EDUCATION

Children in Appalachian Ohio need high-quality and affordable early childhood care and education to set them on a course for success in school and in life.

1. Early learning and public school systems must work in unison.
2. Build an early childhood education hub.
3. Improve financial sustainability of early childhood education and invest in its workforce development.

PRIMARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION

Improving educational outcomes for students in Ohio’s Appalachian region involves multiple strategies and collaborations.

1. Strengthen connections between early childhood programs and the school districts to support children’s readiness for learning.
2. Use multiple data points such as growth and achievement data to understand the performance and progress context.
3. Focus on place-based strategies that provide value to students and their future.
4. Pursue collaborative solutions through collective action.

CHILD HEALTH

Of the numerous health challenges in Appalachia, a lack of access to health care is a recurring theme at the root of the problem.

1. Assist providers and health systems as Patient Centered Medical Home transformation continues.
2. Integrate use of community health workers into health care systems.
3. Expand the reach of health care at existing facilities.
4. Modernize the dental care workforce to expand access in Appalachian Ohio.
5. Overcome barriers to telehealth and utilize its services more widely.

FOOD INSECURITY/NUTRITION

Food insecurity is a serious problem across Appalachia; our babies, toddlers, preschoolers and school-aged children are going hungry.

1. Increase participation in Summer Food Service programs.
2. Ease cost burden for summer feeding sites.
3. Encourage public-private partnerships to overcome food deserts.
4. Expand food education programs.


RECOMMENDATIONS

Children are the future of Appalachian Ohio. We need to act now to ensure that they grow and develop into productive adults who will be the region’s future community and business leaders, workers, teachers, health care providers, and parents. To accomplish this, businesses, policymakers, community groups, educators, faith leaders, and families must unite and work together as partners in creating change for children.