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Study: N.C. kids lacking health care

11% without it in '04, better than 13% in '98

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Too many N.C. children lack health care and affordable child care, according to a report being released today by a leading child advocacy group.

More than 11 percent of children in North Carolina lack health insurance, according to the 2006 Children's Index, a compilation of child-centered statistics gathered by Action for Children North Carolina.

Action for Children, formerly known as the N.C. Child Advocacy Institute, compiles the index every two years as a tool to help the public and policymakers understand the problems facing N.C. children.

The Raleigh-based advocacy group noted that the problem of getting health insurance coverage for all children has eased slightly in recent years -- especially since state and federal officials launched N.C. Health Choice, an insurance program for low-income working families, in 1998.

The percentage of children without health insurance fell from 13 percent in 1998 to 11 percent in 2004. Still, one of every nine children lacks coverage.

"Working families are struggling here," said Barbara Bradley, executive director of Action for Children. "That's a big problem."

Another cause for concern, according to Action for Children, is affordable child care. The index shows that at the end of last year, more than 37,000 qualified children were on a waiting list for subsidies to help working families pay for child care. A survey of N.C. parents found that, for one in six low-income families, problems with child care caused someone in the family to change, quit or not take a job.

"Unless we've got children prepared and ready, the economy in North Carolina is going to suffer," Bradley said. • For more information: www.ncchild.org