



Arizona Advisory Committee to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights

Civil Rights and Disparities in Pediatric Healthcare Access for Racial and Ethnic Minority Families in Arizona

Access to and quality of pediatric healthcare remain critical issues in Arizona, yet national and state-specific data on these topics are difficult to obtain and often fragmented and lack disaggregation by subpopulations. Despite these data challenges, the Arizona Advisory Committee to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights gathered testimony from witnesses who detailed significant disparities in healthcare access and quality for racial and ethnic minority groups. These disparities very likely impact health outcomes within these communities. This [report](#) by the Arizona Advisory Committee explores these issues, shedding light on the systemic inequities that contribute to unequal healthcare experiences and outcomes.¹

Which communities lack access to pediatric healthcare?

Certain communities in Arizona face significant barriers to pediatric healthcare access. Latino families are less likely to have access to affordable employer-sponsored health insurance and are disproportionately enrolled in Arizona's Medicaid and CHIP programs. Native American children also face considerable disparities, with 18.4% lacking health insurance—more than double the state average of 8.4%. Apache County, which has the highest concentration of Native American children, reports the highest uninsured rate for children in the state at 22%.

Rural areas, particularly those outside the Phoenix metropolitan region, face unique healthcare challenges. Arizona's vast rural and frontier landscapes contribute to a low population density of 56.3 people per square mile, significantly below the national average of 87.4. Geographic isolation, long travel distances, unpaved roads, and border patrol checkpoints exacerbate barriers to care, especially for those on tribal reservations. For example, children with conditions like juvenile arthritis may need to travel up to 246 miles for specialized care. These challenges affect all children,

Key points:

- Arizona experienced 13.9% growth from 2010–2019; projected to grow by 30% by 2055. Nearly half (46%) of residents identify as racial or ethnic minorities.
- Despite recent efforts to expand Medicaid eligibility for low-income children, Arizona continues to face a persistent issue of uninsured children.
- Arizona has struggled with a long-standing shortage of healthcare providers, which impacts all counties but is particularly severe in rural and underserved areas.
- Rural residents often face long travel distances—up to 246 miles—to access specialized healthcare services, exacerbating disparities for those in remote areas.
- Culturally competent care is essential to building trust, improving communication, and ensuring equitable treatment for Arizona's diverse population.

regardless of insurance type, with caregivers of children insured through CHIP experiencing the highest levels of difficulty obtaining specialty care, securing referrals, and navigating the healthcare system. These issues stem from a long-standing shortage of healthcare providers, a problem Arizona has faced for over two decades.

Arizona's rapid population growth and diversity further underscores the urgency of addressing healthcare access gaps. Between 2010 and 2019, the state experienced a 13.9% population increase, ranking eighth in the nation, with a 1.78% growth rate in 2020 alone—the second highest in the country. By 2055, Arizona's population is projected to grow by an additional 30%. Home to approximately 7.4 million residents, Arizona boasts the nation's fifth-largest city and its fifth-largest frontier area, a 389-mile international border with

¹ Full and complete citations can be found in the report.

Mexico, and 22 sovereign Native American communities. Nearly half (46%) of the state's residents identify as part of a racial or ethnic minority group.

Recent legislative efforts aim to address these gaps. In 2023, Arizona expanded Medicaid eligibility for low-income children, increasing coverage from 200% to 225% of the federal poverty level. However, the effectiveness of this policy remains uncertain. As of May 2024, enrollment in the state's Medicaid program had dropped by 2.5 million compared to the previous year, raising concerns about whether those losing coverage are successfully transitioning to alternative insurance plans. The persistent issue of uninsured children highlights the ongoing challenges in ensuring equitable pediatric healthcare access across Arizona.

What are the potential causes or factors that contribute to racial and/or ethnic disparities in healthcare access?

Testimony highlighted several socioeconomic, systemic, and geographic factors that contribute to racial and ethnic disparities in healthcare access in Arizona. Socioeconomic barriers, such as income inequality, limit the ability of many minority families to afford healthcare services. Geographic challenges also play a significant role, as Native American and rural populations often live in isolated areas with limited healthcare infrastructure, requiring long travel distances to access care, especially specialized services.

Arizona has faced a severe shortage of healthcare professionals, particularly in rural and underserved areas, where the demand is highest among minority communities. Native American communities face even greater challenges, as more than half of Arizona's counties include reservation lands, and 12 federally designated medically underserved areas are located on tribal lands. Shortages of primary care physicians, pediatricians, OB-GYNs, dentists, and psychiatrists further exacerbate disparities in care.

Language differences and a lack of culturally competent care discourage families from seeking or effectively utilizing healthcare services, while historical and systemic inequities have fostered mistrust of healthcare systems among racial and ethnic minorities

Recommendations (selected):

The U.S. Congress should:

- Lift the cap on Medicare-funded residency positions as it would enhance access to care and help medical facilities meet the needs of the communities they serve.
- Increase funding for the National Health Services Loan Repayment program and the Conrad 30 waiver program to incentivize healthcare professionals to work in underserved areas.

The Arizona Legislature should:

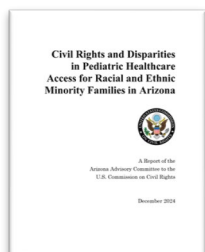
- Mandate that the parents of all children born in the state receive, at the time of birth, written notification of the eligibility criteria for health insurance provided by state and instructions for how and by when to enroll in the program and renew coverage.
- Increase funding for outreach and awareness regarding the newly enacted KidsCare program to ensure families know how to enroll.
- Research and recommend ways to increase access to medical professionals throughout the state and especially in rural communities.

The Arizona Governor:

- Emphasize the importance of improving and increasing access to pediatric healthcare for children from racial and ethnic minority communities.
- Communicate with state agencies to develop initiatives to advance access to pediatric healthcare for racial and ethnic minority communities.

The Arizona Department of Health Services should:

- Increase education and outreach regarding the expanded eligibility for low-income children to access KidsCare.
- Ensure programs are culturally responsive to the specific needs of underserved communities.
- Assist in funding KidsCare to the extent it will increase access to pediatric healthcare for racial and ethnic minorities in Arizona.



Policy Brief

The U.S. Commission on Civil Rights (Commission) is an independent, bipartisan agency established by Congress and directed to study and collect information relating to discrimination or a denial of equal protection of the laws under the Constitution because of race, color, religion, sex, age, disability, national origin, or in the administration of justice. This product is part of the Arizona Advisory Committee's study, Civil Rights and Disparities in Pediatric Healthcare Access for Racial and Ethnic Minority Families in Arizona. This policy-oriented summary of the published report is intended to aid stakeholders seeking solutions to this complex issue. You can find the full report here: <https://www.usccr.gov/files/2024-12/az-sac-access-to-pediatric-health-care-report.pdf>.