

UT Dallas Assists with Report Revealing Childhood Crisis

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DALLAS, Nov. 28 -- The University of Texas at Dallas issued the following news release:

Nearly 30 percent of children in Dallas County are living in poverty, according to a Children's Medical Center report compiled by the Institute of Urban Policy Research at UT Dallas.

The report, *Beyond ABC 2011: Assessing Children's Health in Dallas County*, examines the quality of life of area children. Dr. **Timothy Bray**, head of the Institute and a faculty member in the School of Economic, Political and Policy Sciences, was one of several panelists who discussed the findings during a recent symposium moderated by KDFW Fox 4 news anchor, Clarice Tinsley, at Children's Medical Center.

"This is without a doubt the most pressing issue that our county faces," Bray said during the symposium. "It is the future of our youth, our children, our tomorrow. They are tomorrow's doctors, they are tomorrow's teachers, they are tomorrow's firefighters and police officers. And so if they're not healthy, they're not going to reach that goal."

The report's advisory board established 61 indicators for the Institute to evaluate. Bray and his team of researchers relied on data mainly from secondary sources, including Children's Medical Center, the U.S. Census Bureau and the Texas Department of State Health Statistics. Bray said narrowing in on the data that addressed the issues that matter most was the largest challenge.

"We've been very, very thankful to the advisory board (members) that we've had here in Dallas County who bring a lens of importance to this data," he said. "They can help us understand when a number doesn't mean what we think it means."

Bray said apathy among community members is an obstacle for turning the report's findings into action.

"These numbers aren't all that different," he said. "One of three children lives in poverty in Dallas County. One in three children has lived in poverty in Dallas County for a number of years. And the biggest question that we now have to face is what are we going to do about it?"

During the symposium, Tinsley asked why apathy exists. Bray said perhaps people don't see the problems first-hand or don't know what to do about them.

"We don't live in a neighborhood where children are going hungry," he said. "But we have neighborhoods where every child goes hungry. We have neighborhoods where every baby born is born to a teenage mom. And that's the power that the numbers hold - to begin to dig deeper, to say, 'Alright we know how many children are born to teen mothers, where can we direct those resources to stem the tide?'"

Bray said the report is an important first step to address the problem.

The Dallas County Beyond ABC Advisory Committee made the following recommendations in the report:

- Support national health reform to guarantee access to health care and medical coverage for all children from birth to age 21.

- Increase reimbursement rates to primary medical care providers who accept Medicaid or CHIP.

- Fund graduate medical education especially for pediatric training.

- Increase immunization efforts.

In addition to the *Beyond ABC* report, the Institute also compiled and interpreted the data for the North Texas edition, which was released in 2010. That edition covered five counties - Collin, Cooke, Denton, Fannin, and Grayson.

Bray said the institute is taking part in more data collection initiatives with area organizations, calling it a unique way for UT Dallas to get involved in the community.

"It's a win for the community in that it's bringing in more rigor to the data that the community is using for decision making, which leads to healthier communities," he said. "It's a win for the University because great university engagement and university involvement makes the university academic experience even richer."

Institute research associates Rubana Ahmed, Robert C. Chalwell Jr. and Danny Pacheco assisted with the report's data collection, under the supervision of senior research associate Anthony Galvan.

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