

**For Immediate Release**

May 11, 2017

Contact: Laura Dresser

[ldresser@cows.org](mailto:ldresser@cows.org)

Work: 608-262-6944

Cell: 608-695-9065

## **Income and Benefits from Jobs Not Enough for Wisconsin Families to Thrive**

*New Report Highlights Why Better Policy is Necessary to Support Wisconsin's Families*

**Madison, WI**— In Wisconsin, policy makers seem to increasingly assume that work, and work alone, can provide a decent standard of living. However, working families continue to face a slew of challenges – low wages, inadequate benefits, insufficient hours – generated by the very jobs that are supposed to be the answer. In their latest report, [\*When Work is Not Enough: Toward Better Policy to Support Wisconsin's Working Families\*](#), COWS highlights the disconnect between state policies and the realities of Wisconsin families working in jobs at or near the poverty line.

“While work is part of the solution to lifting families out of poverty, it’s certainly not the sole factor,” stated Laura Dresser, COWS Associate Director, “Jobs with low wages, unpredictable schedules or shoddy benefit packages weigh heavily on working families that are struggling to get ahead.”

In Wisconsin, almost 1 in 10 working families (8.1 percent) earn less than the official US poverty threshold. That threshold is so low that living standards at even two times the poverty line are meager. More than one in four of Wisconsin working families (more than 163,000 Wisconsin families) make less than twice the official poverty threshold.

But the problems of income are directly related to the quality of jobs. More than one-in-four workers in Wisconsin (27.5 percent) hold poverty-wage jobs, defined as jobs paying less than \$11.56 per hour. And while 80 percent of workers in better paying jobs get health insurance through their employers, **just half of workers in poverty-wage jobs have employer-provided health insurance.** Indeed, observing that work often failed to support families sufficiently was a key reason that the state invested serious resources in child care subsidies and health insurance for working families two decades ago. But commitment to these programs is declining and barriers to accessing them are on the rise.

Wisconsin programs to support work create unrealistic barriers to the supports in child care or health insurance that families need, and even more are being proposed. For example, many employers in the service sectors post schedules and cancel shifts with little notice. Yet in order to receive the child care subsidy, workers must provide advance notice of schedules. The result is that many workers in these jobs can simply not access this benefit.

“The problem is not a lack of commitment to work among Wisconsin residents, but the persistent structural barriers to stable, decently-paid work,” stated Dresser, “Inadequate investments in support for these workers and misaligned program structures do not accommodate the realities of low-wage work, nor do they help hard working families thrive. To support work, we do not need to erect new barriers to these programs, rather the

state should work on greater investment in and access to health insurance, medical care, food, and child care for Wisconsin's hard working families."

View full report here: <http://www.cows.org/when-work-is-not-enough-toward-better-policy-to-support-wisconsins-working-families>

For additional reports about Wisconsin's workforce, see also:

*The State of Working Wisconsin 2016*

<http://www.cows.org/state-of-working-wisconsin-2016>

*Wisconsin Fast Forward: How Skills Training is Working and Extending the Opportunity to Low-wage Workers*

<http://www.cows.org/wisconsin-fast-forward-how-skills-training-is-working-and-extending-the-opportunity-to-low-wage-workers>

*Wisconsin Career Pathways: Postsecondary Education for Low-income, Low-skill Adults*

<http://www.cows.org/wisconsin-career-pathways>

###

*Based at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, COWS is a national think-and-do tank that promotes "high road" solutions to social problems. These treat shared growth and opportunity, environmental sustainability, and resilient democratic institutions as necessary and achievable complements in human development.*

*COWS is nonpartisan but values-based. We seek a world of equal opportunity and security for all.*