



STATE OF TENNESSEE  
**TENNESSEE COMMISSION ON CHILDREN AND YOUTH**

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***Tennessee Maintains 36<sup>th</sup> Ranking in KIDS COUNT® Child Well-Being Report***

**Nashville** — The Annie E. Casey Foundation 2015 *KIDS COUNT® Data Book* released today shows Tennessee ranks 36<sup>th</sup> in the country for child well-being, the same as in 2014.

The *KIDS COUNT Data Book* ranks child well-being across four domains with Tennessee ranking 38<sup>th</sup> in Economic Well-Being, 36<sup>th</sup> in Education, 30<sup>th</sup> in Health, and 37<sup>th</sup> in Family and Community. The state improved or remained the same on 11 of 16 measures, while conditions worsened on five indicators.

A bright spot for the state was its ranking of 20<sup>th</sup> in the Education indicator of high school students graduating on time.

“Good public policies improve outcomes for Tennessee children,” said Linda O’Neal, executive director of the state’s KIDS COUNT® affiliate, the Tennessee Commission on Children and Youth. “Requiring children to stay in school until age 18 improves high school graduation rates and the percent of children who live in families where the household head has a high school diploma, both indicators where Tennessee scored better than the national average.”

There is also good news related to Health, where the state achieved its highest domain ranking at 30<sup>th</sup>. Tennessee is tied with 15 other states for the lowest percentage of teens who abuse alcohol or drugs, a tribute to prevention efforts across the state, yet too many adolescents in the state are still struggling with addiction issues.

While the percentage of the state's children who do not have health insurance is better than the national level, 85,000 children were still uninsured. Between 2008 and 2013, the number of children in Tennessee without health insurance coverage decreased by 1 percent, but nationally the number decreased by 3 percent in the same period. As other states implement expansion of Medicaid coverage, Tennessee children will fall behind. Adopting Insure Tennessee or some other alternative is essential for increasing health insurance coverage for many Tennessee children and their families.

Research shows that adults without health care coverage are less likely to have a regular family doctor or other health care provider. Their children are also less likely to have coverage, even when it is available, in part because these families are essentially outside the health insurance system and may be unaware of programs like TENNderCare, Tennessee's federally funded State Child Health Insurance Program (SCHIP).

Nationally, the rate of births to teens is the lowest on record. Though Tennessee has experienced substantial improvement, it still ranks in the bottom 10 on this indicator (42<sup>nd</sup>).

Tennessee has also made progress in reducing the percent of babies born with low birthweight, but again continues to rank in the bottom 10 (44<sup>th</sup>). Low-birthweight risk factors, often linked with low income and lack of health care access, include mothers with chronic health conditions, inadequate prenatal care and overweight or low maternal weight. Other risk factors include older or teen mothers, multiple births, and alcohol, tobacco, and prescription and illicit drug use during pregnancy. The Department of Health and communities across Tennessee are implementing good public policies and strategies to reduce the number of low-birthweight babies.

Although Tennessee continues to rank in the lower half of all states overall, it ranks better than all Southeastern states except Kentucky and North Carolina, 34<sup>th</sup> and 35<sup>th</sup> respectively. Tennessee's lowest ranking is in Economic Well-Being, with the Southeastern states generally ranking worse in the percent of children in poverty.

"The stark reality is too many African American and Latino children live on the edge of poverty. Today, as the economy recovers for some, we see a widening gap that leaves children of color struggling for opportunities to

improve their lives,” O’Neal said. “Substantially improving outcomes for Tennessee children requires a two-generation approach to reducing poverty. We must support parents by improving education, employability, and parenting skills while at the same time support high-quality early learning opportunities for their children.”

The Tennessee Commission on Children and Youth is an independent state agency created by the Tennessee General Assembly. Its primary mission is to advocate for improvements in the quality of life for Tennessee children and families. TCCY is a state KIDS COUNT® affiliate, and partial funding is provided through a grant from the Annie E. Casey Foundation, the nation's largest philanthropy devoted exclusively to disadvantaged children.

The *2015 KIDS COUNT National Data Book* is available July 21 at 12:01 a.m. EDT at [www.aecf.org](http://www.aecf.org). Statewide and county-by-county data on Tennessee child well-being indicators are available at <http://datacenter.kidscount.org>. KIDS COUNT® is a registered trademark of the Annie E. Casey Foundation.

For more information, contact (615) 741-2633 or a TCCY regional coordinator.

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