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Wellness Indicators Show Maryland's Teens Are Making Healthier Choices

Despite positive advances Maryland drops in nationwide rankings in 2016 KIDS COUNT Data Book

BALTIMORE – Maryland's Generation Z teenagers – the rising cohort that follows the Millennials – showed improvement in several health indicators, but these advances were not enough to prevent the state from falling to 16th from 11th place in the nationwide rankings, according to the 2016 *KIDS COUNT*® *Data Book* from the [Annie. E. Casey Foundation](#).

The 2016 *Data Book*, which focuses on key trends in child well-being in the post-recession years, measures child well-being in four domains: economic well-being, education, health, as well as family and community. Each state is then ranked based on these indicators.

The most prominent area of improvement for Maryland's teens was in the health domain. Comparing data roughly between 2008 and 2014, Maryland's teen birth rate fell 45 percent; children without health insurance dropped to 3 percent and low birthweight babies decreased to 8.6 percent.

"There continues to be a concerted effort to ensure that teens get the support they need to prevent unplanned pregnancies," said Nonso Ummuna, research director at Advocates for Children and Youth. "*B 'More for Babies* is also doing a phenomenal job in working with expectant mothers to ensure that their unborn babies remain healthy through proper screening and prenatal services."

Another critical element to ensuring that Maryland's children are healthy is through insurance coverage. In 2014, there were 43,000 children without health insurance which represents a 40 percent decrease in the percentage of kids lacking insurance since 2008. According to most recent U.S. Census Bureau report, a total of 1,292,940 children now have health insurance in Maryland. "We made significant progress and do not have far to go before all children will be covered," said Ummuna.

Even with significant gains in improved health outcomes, drug and alcohol abuse among teens was at 6 percent. "What we are seeing is that there has been no significant rise in the number of teens who are abusing drugs but the problem still persists," said Ummuna. "Instead other states have been able to reduce teen drug abuse and it is imperative that we find solutions to address this problem."

Another area of concern is education. The report shows that fourth-grade reading and eighth-grade mathematical proficiency worsened to 63 and 65 percent, respectively; that is, the majority of kids in both disciplines did not meet basic standards. "We have to determine the reason for the decreased performance and spoke of the need for adequate funding, Ummuna said." "There are so many things that affect the way a child learns. However, we have to ensure that there is adequate funding to address the needs of every student so that our children can better their academic performance."

Maryland has come a long way since the recession. Although the unemployment figures have improved in that there is a 19 percent decrease in the percent of children living in homes where a parent is not working a permanent full-time job, there are still concentrated

pockets of poverty. “Although Maryland has improved, it is still alarming that 332,000 children still live in economic insecurity because a parent does not have gainful employment,” Umunna said.

Apart from measuring child well-being, the report also offers a number of recommendations based on shared values of opportunity, responsibility and security.

- **OPPORTUNITY:** Increase opportunity by expanding access to high-quality Pre-K and early childhood services so that all children are prepared to succeed in school. In addition, expand access to higher education and training so that every low-income child has a fair chance to develop his or her potential.
- **RESPONSIBILITY:** Increase the Earned Income Tax Credit for low-income workers who do not have dependent children. This strategy will bolster workers, who may in fact be helping to support children who do not live with them and who are struggling to get by on low wages.
- **SECURITY:** Policies can ensure American families have a measure of security, particularly low-income parents of young children, by providing paid family leave that helps them balance their obligations at home and in the workplace.

The 2016 Data Book will be available June 21 at 12:01 a.m. EDT at www.aecf.org. Additional information is available at <http://datacenter.kidscount.org>, which also contains the most recent national, state and local data on hundreds of indicators of child well-being. The Data Center allows users to create rankings, maps and graphs for use in publications and on websites, and to view real-time information on mobile devices.

Advocates for Children and Youth is a statewide nonprofit that betters the lives of children through policy change and program improvement.

The Annie E. Casey Foundation creates a brighter future for the nation’s children by developing solutions to strengthen families, build paths to economic opportunity and transform struggling communities into safer and healthier places to live, work and grow. For more information, visit www.aecf.org. KIDS COUNT® is a registered trademark of the Annie E. Casey Foundation.

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