

UNDER EMBARGO until Tuesday, June 13, 2017, 12:01 a.m. EDT

CONTACT: Jennifer Calder; 406-243-2725; [Jennifer.calder@business.umt.edu](mailto:Jennifer.calder@business.umt.edu)

BACKUP CONTACT: Thale Dillon; 406-243-5113; [thale.dillon@business.umt.edu](mailto:thale.dillon@business.umt.edu)

**Montana Ranked 26<sup>th</sup> Overall in Latest National Rankings for Child Well-Being**  
*Montana children's health ranks in the bottom four; needs policies to support improvement*

**MISSOULA, Mont., June 13, 2017** — As the national economy continues to recover from the Great Recession, Montana's investments in its children have led to gains in some areas of child well-being, including education and family. However, the state has regressed notably in health and in other areas, according to the *2017 KIDS COUNT<sup>®</sup> Data Book*, released today by the Annie E. Casey Foundation.

The annual *KIDS COUNT Data Book* uses 16 indicators to rank each state across four domains — health, education, economic well-being, and family and community — representing what children need most to thrive. Montana ranks:

- **14<sup>th</sup> in the family and community domain.** Montana saw a 29 percent drop in the teen birth rate and a 25 percent decline in children living in families where the head of household did not have a high school diploma between 2010 and 2015, when the most recent information was collected.
- **17<sup>th</sup> in education.** Only 14 percent of Montana high schoolers are not graduating on time, compared to 17 percent nationally. However, the percentage of eighth graders below proficiency in math, and the percentage of children ages 3 and 4 not attending preschool are both higher in 2015 than in 2009.
- **18<sup>th</sup> in economic well-being.** Nearly one in five Montana children live in poverty. We have the second highest child poverty rate compared to other states in Rocky Mountain West.
- **47<sup>th</sup> in health.** 2015 saw an uptick in the state's child and teen death rate and we are once again last in the nation. Motor vehicle fatalities, firearm related suicides and homicides with firearms are driving this disheartening trend. On a positive note, the percentage of Montana teens who abuse drugs or alcohol continues to decline.

“As a state, we can make choices to improve the well-being of children,” says Montana KIDS COUNT Director Thale Dillon. “It is important that we do not back away from targeted investments that are proven to make Montana's children healthier and more likely to grow into productive citizens.”

In recent years, policies have helped drive positive outcomes for children and families nationwide and in Montana.

Only 5 percent of U.S. children are without health insurance, a historic low, due to the combination of key provisions of the Affordable Care Act and expansions to Medicaid and the Children's Health Insurance Program. In Montana, the 2008 expansion of Healthy Montana Kids public health insurance has led to steady gains in the number of children who have coverage.

While we're trending in the right direction, 8 percent of, or 17,000, Montana children are still without health insurance.

National policies such as the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) and the Child Tax Credit have helped improve economic well-being — fewer children overall live in poverty, more parents are able to work and more families are able to bear the cost of housing. Seeking to boost these gains and reward Montana's working families, the 2017 legislature passed a state EITC that will go into effect in 2019.

The 2017 legislature also appropriated funds to target youth suicide prevention programs. Rep. Jonathan Windy Boy's (D-Box Elder) suicide prevention bill, signed into law by Gov. Steve Bullock, will provide \$1 million over the next two years for programs targeted to reduce suicide among Native American youth and veterans and will support school-based suicide prevention programs. Educating parents, teachers, and others about the signs of suicide, reducing the stigma around seeking help, how to respond to concerns, and the safe storage of firearms are all proven to prevent suicide. In addition, these programs will increase access to mental health services. If there is one takeaway, it is that prevention is possible.

"One of the greatest strengths of our state is the expectation that we help our neighbors — our children's health and well-being depend upon the people of our state coming together," says Dillon. "Targeted public investments alongside a robust private sector ensure that opportunity is available for all."

### **Release Information**

The *2017 KIDS COUNT Data Book* will be available June 13 at 12:01 a.m. EDT at [www.aecf.org](http://www.aecf.org). Additional information is available at [www.aecf.org/databook](http://www.aecf.org/databook), which also contains the most recent national, state and local data on hundreds of indicators of child well-being. Journalists interested in creating maps, graphs and rankings in stories about the *Data Book* can use the KIDS COUNT Data Center at [datacenter.kidscount.org](http://datacenter.kidscount.org).

### **About Montana KIDS COUNT**

Montana KIDS COUNT's mission is to improve child and family well-being in our state by disseminating data and research that will advance awareness of challenges and opportunities. We make this information available to child advocates, policymakers and Montana citizens to encourage informed and responsible decision-making, as good data make for better policies. Montana KIDS COUNT is a national and state-by-state project of the Annie E. Casey Foundation to track the state of children in the United States.

### **About the Annie E. Casey Foundation**

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](http://www.aecf.org). KIDS COUNT is a registered trademark of the Annie E. Casey Foundation.

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