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California Progress on Child and Family Well-Being Imperiled by Pandemic

State ranks near-bottom on indicators of child well-being, Annie E. Casey Foundation finds

OAKLAND, CALIFORNIA — California kids were among those hardest hit by the pandemic, with California ranking among the bottom 20 states for most of the six pandemic period indicators in the **2021 KIDS COUNT® Data Book**. The *Data Book* is a 50-state report of recent household data developed by the Annie E. Casey Foundation analyzing how families have fared between the Great Recession and the COVID-19 crisis.

For example, 14% of California households with kids sometimes or often did not have enough to eat in March 2021, tying the state for sixth worst in the country. This figure was even higher for Black households (28%) and Latino households (22%), underscoring the pandemic's uneven impact on California's children of color.

This year's *Data Book* shows nearly a decade of progress could be erased by the COVID-19 pandemic unless policymakers act boldly to sustain the beginnings of a recovery from the coronavirus crisis.

While the data from surveys show that California families are slowly recovering from the effects of the pandemic, the figures from this year's *Data Book* illustrate that simply returning to a pre-pandemic level of support for children and families would fail to address persistent racial and ethnic disparities.

"California's policymakers must act now to make stronger investments in the programs that serve kids, especially Black, Latino and other children of color who have historically been underserved and continue to be disproportionately impacted by the devastating effects of the pandemic," said Ted Lempert, president of Children Now, California's member of the KIDS COUNT network.

Sixteen indicators measuring four domains — economic well-being, education, health and family and community context — are used by the Annie E. Casey Foundation in each year's *Data Book* to assess child well-being. The annual KIDS COUNT data and rankings represent the most recent information available but do not capture the impact of the past year:

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- **43rd in economic well-being:** In 2019, 16% of children lived in households with income below the poverty line. If the poverty line were adjusted to account for the high cost of living in California, the figure would be much worse. The pandemic brought on dire economic circumstances for many Californian families, some of whom were already living in poverty and others who found themselves struggling in new ways.
- **36th in education:** In 2017-19, 50% of 3- and 4-year-olds were not in an early education program. Early education is crucial for setting kids up for success in school and life and for providing support for parents who are working or going to school.
- **11th in affordable health care:** While California has been a leader in expanding coverage to all kids, there is a concerning uptick in the number of uninsured children in California — from 2018 to 2019, 35,000 more kids were found to lack health insurance, for a total of 334,000 kids without coverage. State leaders must tailor community outreach to take into account the state’s racial and ethnic diversity, and also ensure that health coverage translates to appropriate access to care.
- **36th in family and community context:** In 2019, California ranked at the very bottom for children in families where the household head lacked a high school diploma. Further, there are large racial/ethnic disparities: 33% of Latino, 22% of American Indians and 10% of Black household heads in California did not have a high school diploma, compared with 3% of white household heads.

“The COVID-19 pandemic is the most extraordinary crisis to hit families in decades,” said Lisa Hamilton, president and CEO of the Annie E. Casey Foundation. “Deliberate policy decisions can help them recover, and we’re already seeing the beginnings of that. Policymakers should use this moment to repair the damage the pandemic has caused — and to address long-standing inequities it has exacerbated.”

Investing in children, families and communities is a priority to ensure an equitable and expansive recovery. Several of the Annie E. Casey Foundation’s suggestions have already been enacted in the American Rescue Plan, and additional recommendations include:

- **Congress should make the expansion of the child tax credit permanent.** The child tax credit has long had bipartisan support, so lawmakers should find common cause and ensure the largest one-year drop ever in child poverty is not followed by a surge.
- **State and local governments should prioritize the recovery of hard-hit communities of color.**
- **States should expand income support that helps families care for their children.** Permanently extending unemployment insurance eligibility to contract, gig and other workers and expanding state tax credits would benefit parents and children.
- **States that have not done so should expand Medicaid under the Affordable Care Act.** The American Rescue Plan offers incentives to do so.

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- **States should strengthen public schools and pathways to postsecondary education and training.**

Release Information

The *2021 KIDS COUNT® Data Book* will be available June 21 at 12:01 a.m. EDT at www.aecf.org. Additional information is available at www.aecf.org/databook. 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.

About Children Now

Children Now is a non-partisan, whole-child research, policy development and advocacy organization dedicated to promoting children's health and education in California. The organization also leads The Children's Movement of California, a network of over 4,100 direct service, parent, youth, civil rights, faith-based and community groups dedicated to improving children's well-being.

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. KIDS COUNT® is a registered trademark of the Annie E. Casey Foundation.

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