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Iowa's Progress on Child and Family Well-Being Imperiled by Pandemic

Iowa's Challenges Not Unique Among 50 States, But Hopes for Recovery Remain, Annie E. Casey Foundation Finds

DES MOINES, IOWA — Iowa families continue to struggle to put food on the table and manage their mental health during the pandemic, according to the **2021 KIDS COUNT® Data Book**, 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.

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.

The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated existing economic inequities. In 2020, 30% of Black households with children, 18% of Latino households with children and 21% of households identifying as multiracial or some other race reported they sometimes or often did not have enough food to eat in the preceding two weeks, compared with 11% of all households with children. Black, Latino and multiracial households in Iowa were three times as likely as white households to worry about paying their coming rent or mortgage payment in 2020.

“Over generations, public policy has put up barriers to opportunity for families of color,” said Natalie Veldhouse, a policy advocate with Common Good Iowa, a member of the KIDS COUNT network. “We need to adopt public policies that reverse that pattern.” Such strategies include taking full advantage of the resources provided by federal American Rescue Plan to invest in children and communities hardest hit by the pandemic.”

The *Data Book* shows simply returning to a pre-pandemic level of support for children and families would shortchange millions of kids and fail to address persistent racial and ethnic disparities.

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

DRAFT

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:

- **ECONOMIC WELL-BEING:** In 2019, 92,000 Iowa children lived in households with an income below the poverty line.
- **EDUCATION:** In 2017–19, 44,000 young Iowa children were not in school.
- **AFFORDABLE HEALTH CARE:** In 2019, 22,000 Iowa children did not have health insurance.
- **FAMILY AND COMMUNITY CONTEXT:** In 2015–19, 20,000 Iowa children lived in high-poverty areas.

Survey data from the last year add to the story of Iowa’s children and families, who are facing a slow recovery:

- During the height of the pandemic, in 2020, an average of 6% of adults in Iowa with children in the household were uninsured. By March 2021, this figure had edged down slightly to 5%.
- The percentage of adults in households with children who felt down, depressed or hopeless, likewise budged slightly in 2021, moving from an average of 20% of adults in households with children during 2020 to 24% in March 2021.
- In March 2021, an average of 16% of households with children did not usually or always have the services and equipment needed to access the internet for school. That figure was unchanged from 2020 — and a third higher than for the United States as a whole.

“Many challenges remain for Iowa families, even as we move out of the pandemic,” said Anne Discher, executive director of Common Good Iowa. “We need our elected officials to take decisive action to help.”

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 should strengthen public schools and pathways to postsecondary education and training.

Release Information

DRAFT

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 Common Good Iowa

Common Good Iowa leverages reliable data, solid analysis and collaborative relationships to craft policy solutions that advance opportunity for every Iowan. The nonprofit, nonpartisan organization is built on a collective 50 years of experience of the Child and Family Policy Center and Iowa Policy Project. Learn more at www.commongoodiowa.org.

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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