



UNDER EMBARGO Until Monday, June 21, 2021 at 12:01 a.m. ET

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KIDS COUNT data show Kansas kids were sicker, lacked insurance, even before COVID-19 pandemic

*Data across 50 states outline family struggles, but hopes for recovery remain,
Annie E. Casey Foundation finds*

TOPEKA, KANSAS — Kansas trailed 24 other states on health care indicators immediately before the COVID-19 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.

Kansas is one of only 12 states without an expanded Medicaid program, and children are bearing the brunt of that poor decision. In 28 other states, more children are insured than in Kansas. The state also sees more deaths from age 1 to 19 than 28 other states.

“Even before the pandemic, the health of many Kansas was being jeopardized,” said John Wilson, president of Kansas Action for Children, the state’s member of the KIDS COUNT network. “Rural hospitals have closed, routine care is unaffordable, and kids and families have struggled because of inaction by lawmakers. Inequity is growing in our healthcare system, with Black and brown Kansans both getting sicker and delayed in accessing COVID-19 vaccines. State policymakers simply can’t afford to delay expanding Medicaid any longer.”

Overall, Kansas finished 18th among all states. It was 11th in economic well-being, 23rd in education, 25th in health, and 24th in family and community context.

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 *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:

- **AFFORDABLE HEALTH CARE:** In 2019, 43,000 children did not have health insurance. We know if Kansas expanded its Medicaid program, more of these kids would be covered.
- **ECONOMIC WELL-BEING:** In 2019, 101,000 Kansas kids lived in households with an income below the poverty line. That's more than the population of Lawrence.
- **EDUCATION:** In 2019, 41,000 young children were not in school. These 3- and 4-year-olds didn't access the long-lasting benefits of early education.
- **FAMILY AND COMMUNITY CONTEXT:** In 2019, 37,000 children throughout Kansas lived in high poverty areas.

In 2020, of course, the world turned upside down. And families across the country — and in Kansas — felt the consequences.

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

“We must build a brighter future for Kansas kids,” Wilson said. “While health care access is a crisis, the needs are great across the board. Parents and caregivers must be able to meet their families’ basic needs. And lawmakers should help them make that happen.”

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 Kansas Action for Children

Kansas Action for Children is a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization committed to improving the lives of Kansas children and families by providing comprehensive data, advocating for sound public policy and collaborating with lawmakers. Through support from individuals and private foundations, KAC has worked for nearly 40 years to make our state the best place to live, work and raise a family. Visit www.kac.org to learn more.

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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