



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

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COVID-19 Pandemic Exacerbates Inequities for Families of Color in Nebraska

Nebraska ranks high in child well-being but data show large disparities by race and ethnicity, Annie E. Casey Foundation Finds

OMAHA, NEBRASKA — Nebraskan families have fared better than those in other states during the COVID-19 pandemic; as a state, Nebraskan households with children reported lower rates of food insufficiency, housing insecurity and lack of health insurance than the national average. However, these rates for Nebraskan African American families were among the highest two in the nation, according to data compiled in the *2021 KIDS COUNT® Data Book*, 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.

During the pandemic, in 2020, 17% of adults in Nebraska with children in the household had little or no confidence in their ability to pay their next rent or mortgage payment. While this was among the lowest rates in the nation, Nebraska ranked the second highest in percentage of African American parents (46%) and fourth highest in percentage of multiracial households with children and households with children who identified as other (38%) to report housing insecurity. Similarly, during the pandemic in 2020, 11% of households with children reported sometimes or often not having enough food to eat in the past two weeks. While this rate is among the lowest in the nation, Nebraska had the second highest rate of food insecurity among African American parents (34%).

Alfonso Vaca-Lubischer, research coordinator at Voices for Children — Nebraska's member of the KIDS COUNT network — said that although Nebraska has fared better than other states in child well-being, particularly in economic stability, the consequences of the pandemic for families of color have been nothing short of devastating. "Families of color in Nebraska were already experiencing pandemic-like crises due to systemic inequities perpetuated by a culture of white supremacy," Alfonso commented. "The COVID-19 pandemic has made those challenges more acute across nearly every measure including unemployment, food insecurity, housing,

health and educational resources. As policymakers look for ways to help rebuild the state's economy and get Nebraskans families safely back on their feet, solutions should be targeted to those families who have experienced the most harm.”

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:

- **ECONOMIC WELL-BEING:** In 2019, 17% of U.S. children (12 million) lived in households with an income below the poverty line. In Nebraska, more than 51,000 children (11%) lived in poverty.
- **EDUCATION:** In 2017-19, 52% of young children in the U.S. (4.2 million) were not in school. 55% of young Nebraskan children (or 29,000) were not enrolled in school.
- **AFFORDABLE HEALTH CARE:** In 2019, 6% of Nebraskan children did not have health insurance, the same rate as the national average.
- **FAMILY AND COMMUNITY CONTEXT:** In 2015-19, 9% of U.S. children (6.7 million) lived in high poverty areas. 20,000 of Nebraska children (4%) lived in high poverty areas.

Survey data from the last year add to the story of Nebraska's children and families in this moment:

- During the pandemic, in 2020, 17% of households with children had little or no confidence in their ability to pay their next rent or mortgage payment. However, by March 2021, this figure had fallen to 12%, suggesting the beginnings of a recovery.

“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 post secondary 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 Voices for Children in Nebraska

Voices for Children in Nebraska is the independent voice building pathways to opportunity for all children and families through research, policy, and community engagement. Our policy priorities are guided by research, data and proven best practices that improve child well-being. We pay close attention to the impact of race, poverty, and geography, and seek to address existing disparities within these areas.

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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