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New Hampshire's Progress on Child Well Being Imperiled by Pandemic

New Hampshire ranks 2nd in overall child well-being, yet data finds that families with children continue to struggle with health, poverty, housing affordability, and education.

CONCORD, NH – New national data released this week shows that New Hampshire ranks once again among the country's leaders in child well-being. The 2021 KIDS COUNT® Data Book, released by the Annie E. Casey Foundation, shows that New Hampshire ranks second in the United States for overall well-being. The Data Book draws on the most recent information available, but does not capture the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, which has left Granite State children and families struggling with unprecedented disruption to school and work, as well as mental health challenges that threaten to undermine nearly a decade of progress toward equal access to high quality early development opportunities, unless policy makers act boldly to sustain the beginnings of a recovery, according to the report.

“Left unaddressed, the negative impacts of these crises cannot be overstated,” said **Rebecca Woitkowski, Kids Count Policy Coordinator at New Futures**. “When children experience trauma, they are put at risk for future health problems, including substance misuse, mental health concerns, and even early death. There is much work needed to support a statewide system of care for all children and access to family support services, like home visiting and other services offered at family resource centers, to promote equity and keep the Granite State's youngest residents healthy and thriving.”

The 2021 Data Book shows simply returning to a pre-pandemic level of support for children and families would shortchange Granite State kids and fail to address persistent racial and ethnic disparities.

The report covers sixteen indicators across 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.

According to the report, New Hampshire ranks:

- **Sixth in economic well-being.** New Hampshire had the lowest rate of child poverty at 7 percent, with nearly 18,000 children living below the federal poverty line, defined as income below \$25,926 for a family of two adults and two children. This is an improvement from 2018 where 27,000 children, or 11 percent of children. However, that number doesn't consider the higher cost of living in New Hampshire that causes a financial strain on many more uncounted families. As an example, in

2019, New Hampshire ranked 17th with 24 percent of children living in households that spend more than 30 percent of their income on housing.

- **Fifth in education.** New Hampshire ranked fifth in education, but 62 percent of 4th graders scored below proficient reading levels. Reading proficiency by the end of third grade is a critical marker in a child’s educational development. Further, 46 percent of children ages 3 and 4, or nearly 12,000 children, were not attending school in 2017-19.
- **Third in 3rd in overall health.** New Hampshire lost one spot in overall health ranking since 2018. One critical area the State lost ground in was health insurance coverage for children. In 2019, 4 percent of Granite State children were not covered and 3,000 more children lacked health insurance that they need in 2019 compared to 2018. There is growing evidence that when children, particularly those eligible for public health care insurance, have health insurance coverage, they are not only more likely to get care but also more likely to have improved outcomes—in health, of course, and in other important areas of life as well.
- **First in family and community context.** New Hampshire moved up from second in 2018. The improvement was reflected by positive trends in the number of children living in single-parent families from 30 percent in 2018 to 28 percent in 2019, and the number of children living in high-poverty areas from 2 percent in 2018 to less than 1 percent in 2019.

[Survey data from the last year](#) add to the story of New Hampshire’s children and families in this moment:

- 15 percent of New Hampshire households with children reported having slight or no confidence in paying rent or mortgage.
- 10 percent of Granite State households with children reported they sometimes or often do not have enough food to eat. Nationally, that number is at 14 percent, with higher rates for Black and Latino households with children.
- 21 percent of Granite State adults over the age of 18 living with children report feeling down, depressed, or hopeless in the previous week. This indicates a widespread need for mental health supports for those caring for children, in the midst of ongoing uncertainty, isolation and profound grief associated with the Coronavirus.

“We know that across our state, not all children have access to services which will reduce the negative impacts of this troubling” Woitkowski said. “Now more than ever, equitable health and economic supports are needed to help Granite State families thrive. Supporting a system of Family Resource Centers and access to home visiting are some first steps our lawmakers should take to keep New Hampshire a great state to live, work and raise a family.”

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.

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 New Futures

New Futures is a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization that advocates, educates, and collaborates to improve the health and wellness of all New Hampshire residents. Learn more at www.New-Futures.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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