



EVERY TEXAN

Formerly Center for Public Policy Priorities

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

Contact: Lisa Goodgame lisa@lisagoodgame.com, 512-828-9489

copy: Minnah Zaheer zaheer@everytexan.org & Lola Vinson vinson@everytexan.org

Texas Again Ranks Worst in the Nation for Children’s Health Coverage, Families Face Increased Health and Financial Challenges

Data Show Texas Struggles with Health Insurance and Equitable Economic Opportunity, But Change is Possible, per Annie E. Casey Foundation

AUSTIN, TEXAS — Texas continues to perform worse than any other state in children’s health insurance coverage, as confirmed by 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.

As in past years, the biggest gap between Texas and other states, and between Texas families of different race and ethnicities, is in health insurance coverage. Twice as many Texas households with children reported lacking health insurance as the rest of the nation (23% vs. 11%) per pandemic survey data collected in March 2021. Hispanic households with children were the most likely to report lacking health insurance (38% vs. 23% of all Texas households with children).

Texas and 12 other states (AL, AR, AZ, GA, KY, LA, MS, NM, NV, OK, SC, WV) all in the South or West, landed in the bottom 20 of child well-being rankings and also appeared among the worst-performing states in most or all of the pandemic indicators reviewed by this *Data Book*. Those data reflect a connection between the states that were struggling before the pandemic and the ones that have struggled during it.

“Forty-sixth in the nation is nothing to brag about — Texas kids deserve better than bottom of the barrel,” said Marisa Bono, CEO of Every Texan, Texas’ member of the KIDS COUNT network. “Policymakers have a responsibility to make common-sense policy choices that support our children and families, especially during crises. By extending unemployment insurance and accepting federal funds for Medicaid Expansion, Texas would help families recover from the pandemic and ensure all Texas children can thrive.”

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 areas — 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:** More than 1.4 million Texas children were in poverty in 2019 (19% with a family income below the federally defined poverty level of \$25,936). Although this was an improvement from 2010, when one in four children were in poverty (26%), high rates persisted among Black and Hispanic children, among whom one in four were still in poverty in 2019 (26%). The pandemic has only made things worse for Texas children, especially children of color. Their parents were more likely to lack secure employment entering the pandemic and were often the first to face unemployment once the pandemic began, due to structural inequities in access to education and employment opportunities.
- **EDUCATION:** The only area where Texas was doing better than the United States as a whole in 2019 was in the percentage of high school students graduating on time (only 10% of Texas students did not graduate on time in 2018-2019 compared to 14% nationally). But this is not necessarily a reflection of college and career readiness, as states can set different standards for graduating. In 2019, 70% of Texas fourth graders were not proficient in reading and 70% of eighth graders were not proficient in math.
- **AFFORDABLE HEALTH CARE:** Texas ranks worst by far in terms of the number of children without health insurance — at 50th in the nation, nearly one million children were without health insurance in 2019 (13%). Hispanic children were most likely to lack health insurance at 17%. One bill which could help by reducing unnecessary eligibility checks for Texas Children's Medicaid (HB290) passed this Legislative Session (as an amendment to HB 2658). The most significant step the Texas Legislature could have taken this Session is to accept federal funding for Medicaid expansion — Texas is one of only 12 states that has not done so. Leadership did not act, although bipartisan support was strong among the public and legislators this session.
- **FAMILY AND COMMUNITY CONTEXT:** Texas improved in terms of reducing the percentage of children living in high-poverty areas from 2008-2012 (19%) to 2015–2019 (12%). However, Texas still ranked 40th in the nation, with more than 860,000 children living in high poverty areas. Hispanic and Black children were the most likely to live in these areas (18% and 15%) due to systemic racism in housing such as residential segregation, redlining and loan discrimination.

The Foundation identified challenges faced by kids and families during the crisis, from food and housing insecurity to health concerns — and urged immediate action from Congress — in a

December report. Since then, the federal child tax credit has been increased as well as restructured to provide advance monthly payments to most families of \$250 to \$300 per child. “The COVID-19 crisis has brought many families to the breaking point, especially parents and caregivers who have lost jobs and income,” said **Lisa Hamilton, president and CEO of the Annie E. Casey Foundation**. “Making the expanded child tax credit permanent will continue providing critical financial support for families who are struggling to make ends meet and help reduce long-standing disparities that affect millions of families of color.”

Survey data from the last year add to the story of Texas’ children and families in this moment:

- Families of color are struggling due to inequitable opportunities in education and employment, and a historical exclusion from wealth-building policies, which left them economically insecure entering the pandemic. In March 2021, Black and Hispanic households with children were twice as likely as white households to report lacking confidence in being able to make their next rent or mortgage payment (29% and 27% respectively versus 14%). About one in five Black and Hispanic families reported not having enough food to eat in prior weeks compared to only one in 10 white families, per the U.S. Census Bureau’s Household Pulse Survey.
- Education undergirds future economic security, yet over one in five Asian and Hispanic households with children reported their school-aged kids did not always have internet and a device available for educational purposes (versus 16% of all Texas households with children). Black and multiracial households were the most likely to report that at least one person had to reduce or cancel higher education plans this fall (51% and 52% vs. 45% of all families).

“We can use public policy to build a more just and equitable future for every Texan. By fully funding our public health systems, ensuring workers have access to paid leave, reforming tax policies and more, we can make sure Texas’ hard-working families and their children are able to thrive — even in a pandemic.” said Luis Figueroa, legislative and policy director for Every Texan.

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 would benefit parents and children.

- **States, like Texas, 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 Every Texan

At Every Texan we believe social justice requires public policy. We strengthen public policy to expand opportunity and equity for Texas of all backgrounds. <https://everytexan.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.

###