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

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New Report: Virginia Ranked 13th in Child Well-Being; Room to Grow for Health Outcomes

2021 KIDS COUNT Data Book show improvements for child well-being but growing gap for Latino families in health coverage

RICHMOND, Va. — Today, Voices for Virginia’s Children and the Annie E. Casey Foundation released new data that rank Virginia 13th nationally for child well-being across all domains but reflect room to grow and make improvements in the health domain. The **2021 KIDS COUNT® Data Book**, a 50-state report of recent household data developed by the Annie E. Casey Foundation, analyzes how families have fared between the Great Recession and the COVID-19 crisis.

Virginia is currently ranked 24th nationally in the health domain, showing no decline, stagnation or only minimal improvement from the previous year in categories such as low birthweight, children who are overweight or obese and lacking health insurance.

“While Virginia has made significant strides with Medicaid expansion and increasing health care access to hundreds of thousands of families in the commonwealth, there are still glaring gaps in access,” said Lauren Snellings, research director for Voices for Virginia’s Children, Virginia’s member of the KIDS COUNT network. “Being able to see a doctor and receive high-quality primary and prenatal care is critical in a child’s ability to grow and thrive. The data point to where we need to focus on new policy approaches to reduce the financial, geographic and informational barriers to access health coverage.”

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. Virginia moved up one spot in the national rankings from the previous year, with improvements in areas such as children in poverty and high poverty areas, families with no full-time employment and high housing cost burden.

The annual *Data Book* and rankings represent the most recent information available from 2019 but does not capture the impact of the past year from the pandemic. Therefore, the [KIDS COUNT Data Center](#) includes relevant and timely updates to better understand how the pandemic has impacted children and families by including Household Pulse Survey data from the U.S. Census Bureau. By looking at specific times during the pandemic in 2020 and the current recovery in 2021, the survey data are useful to see how families are doing and if there are disproportionate impacts on Black and Latino families.

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For example, while it is useful to see that in 2019 Virginia is a strong state overall in providing health insurance coverage with only 5% children uninsured, looking at the data by race in recent surveys reveal a different story.

The Household Pulse Survey from March 2021 shows that 16% of Latino adults with children in the household reported being uninsured compared with 8% of all households in Virginia. Children are more likely to seek health care when their parents are insured, putting children in mixed-immigration status households or undocumented children at risk of not obtaining health coverage.

This follows similar trends highlighted in the December 2020 report [*Kids, Families and COVID-19: Pandemic Pain Points and the Urgent Need to Respond*](#) that showed 11% of Virginia's families with children did not have health insurance. Nearly one in four adults with kids at home did not get medical care at all during the pandemic.

“Policymakers can make use of this recent data, and information disaggregated by race, to continue to point to areas where recovery from the pandemic has exacerbated inequities,” said Amy Strite, CEO of Voices for Virginia’s Children. “Survey data from the last year add to the story of Virginia’s children and families in this moment. 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.

“Instead of trying to go back to pre-pandemic levels, Virginia needs leaders to tackle these racial and ethnic inequities through significant investments and smart policy interventions,” Strite added.

Access to health insurance has been a necessary safety net for families during the pandemic. More than 88,500 children have been enrolled in health insurance since the start of the pandemic. Children and families were able to achieve more stability and health care access because Virginia increased eligibility for parents during Medicaid expansion and invested in resources to help promote health insurance enrollment, including intentional outreach and eligibility navigators.

“While there are bright spots of health insurance access there is also a glaring gap in coverage for Latino families, many of which families could live in mixed immigration status households,” said Snellings. “While policies for insurance coverage have recently changed, such as allowing green card holders to obtain coverage, there are still gaps for undocumented children and parents in mixed-immigration households.”

“These data are useful in seeing how communities are doing across Virginia, but this is only one side of the story,” Snellings added. “At Voices, we’re also sharing this information with localities and listening to people on the ground to shape future policy recommendations.”

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Investing in children, families and communities is a priority to ensure an equitable and expansive recovery. This summer elected officials at the local, state and national level will make decisions including acting on President Biden's proposals and how to spend American Rescue Plan funds equitably. As lawmakers meet in Congress and return to Richmond for a Special Session, advocates ask to keep these recommendations in mind:

- **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.
- **Virginia should extend health insurance coverage to undocumented children and ensure children now benefiting from coverage can stay enrolled.** This summer Virginia's leaders will study options for extending health insurance coverage to more children, including children in mixed-immigration status households.
- **State and local governments should prioritize the recovery of hard-hit communities of color.** Decision-makers should value the voices and experiences of those impacted most by the pandemic and ensure that barriers such as language access and navigating complicated public benefits systems are removed.
- **States and local governments should prioritize using recovery funds to strengthen school infrastructure and career pathways.** With flexible local and state funds, leaders should prioritize areas of capital improvements, broadband access and workforce development initiatives.

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.

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About Voices for Virginia's Children

Founded in 1994, Voices for Virginia's Children is the Commonwealth's only independent, multi-issue child policy and advocacy organization. We are home to the KIDS COUNT data center for Virginia, which includes more than 200 state- and locality-level indicators on child well-being over time. Using data and independent policy research, we advocate for sound policy solutions and mobilize support to meet the needs of Virginia's children. Learn more at vakids.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.