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WYOMING KIDS COUNT

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Wyoming's Child and Family Well-Being Data Highlights Struggles and Successes

Data Across 50 States Show Struggles but Hopes for Recovery Remain, Annie E. Casey Foundation Finds

LARAMIE— Wyoming ranked 17th nationally for the well-being of children and families across the nation, according to the **2021 KIDS COUNT® Data Book**, released today by the Annie E. Casey Foundation. The *Data Book* evaluates four domains using 16 key indicators — economic well-being; education; family and community; and health. This year's book also includes a 50-state report of recent household data that demonstrates how families have fared between the Great Recession and the COVID-19 crisis.

According to the indicator data, Wyoming ranked 17th overall compared with 22nd last year. State rankings were bolstered by high rankings in two domains, economic well-being (fourth) and family and community (fifth). Still, Samin Dadelahi, chief operating officer at the Wyoming Community Foundation, says that until Wyoming improves its health ranking (45th), the state is falling short.

"Year after year, Wyoming lands among the lowest ranking states for health," says Dadelahi. "The rural nature of our state can make access difficult but expanding Medicaid and addressing mental health issues should be a priority for those who care about Wyoming's children and families."

The pandemic exacerbated issues associated with child well-being and this year's *Data Book* highlights setbacks many families experienced during COVID-19. Unless policymakers act boldly, recovery from the coronavirus crisis could be prolonged and magnify problems, especially those surrounding health, which is a chronic issue in Wyoming.

Results of the U.S. Census Bureau's Household Pulse Survey from 2020 and 2021 included in the *Data Book* show the impacts of COVID-19. In 2020, 17% of adults living in households with children indicated they lacked health insurance. In March of 2021, that number had climbed to 22%. The national average for 2021 was half that number (11%).

"It is jarring to see the stark contrast between economic well-being (fourth) and health (45th) in Wyoming," says Dadelahi. "As a state, we have the capacity to make changes. Increasing access to health insurance is something we can and should do."

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The annual KIDS COUNT data and rankings represent the most recent information available (2019). Four domains were evaluated, based on the four indicators within each:

- **ECONOMIC WELL-BEING (Rank 4):** In 2019, Wyoming ranked number one in the nation by having the lowest percentage of children (19%) living in families where no parent has full-time year-round employment.
- **EDUCATION (Rank 22):** In 2019, Wyoming ranked third in the nation with 59% of fourth graders at or above proficient reading levels.
- **AFFORDABLE HEALTH CARE (Rank 45):** In 2019, 15,000 Wyoming children did not have health insurance. Five of the 10 lowest ranking states in health have not expanded Medicaid.
- **FAMILY AND COMMUNITY CONTEXT (Rank 5):** In 2019, 94% of children lived in families where the head of household had a high school diploma.

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

- During the pandemic, in 2020, 21% of adults in Wyoming with children felt down, depressed or hopeless. By March 2021, this figure had increased to 28% (national average 22%), suggesting that Wyomingites are still struggling with mental health issues in part due to the impacts of the pandemic.

"The pandemic and Wyoming's economic downturn have hit many families hard," says Dadelahi. "Utilizing American Rescue Plan dollars to make thoughtful policy decisions that support families and communities today and into the future, we have the opportunity to help Wyomingites land on their feet."

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.

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- **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 the Wyoming Community Foundation

The Wyoming Community Foundation (WYCF) supports charitable causes across the state by connecting donors to causes most important to them. WYCF granted nearly \$8 million in 2020. As the KIDS COUNT partner of the Annie E. Casey Foundation, WYCF shares research and data valuable to Wyoming's families and kids.

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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