



UNDER EMBARGO Until August 8, 2022 at 12:01 a.m. ET

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Number of Alaska Children and Youth Suffering From Anxiety or Depression Skyrocketed 51.9% During Pandemic, Study Finds

Alaska ranks 41st nationwide for child well-being despite some headway in indicators, Annie E. Casey Foundation reveals

ANCHORAGE, AK — Between 2016 and 2020 there was a sharp uptick in the number of Alaskan children and teens ages 3-17 with anxiety or depression, according to the *2022 KIDS COUNT® Data Book*, a 50-state report of household data developed by the Annie E. Casey Foundation to analyze child and family well-being. In 2020, more than 12,000 Alaskan children and youth had anxiety or depression, compared to just more than 8,000 in 2016, a 51.9% increase. Children and youth across America are in the midst of a mental health crisis, struggling with anxiety and depression at unprecedented levels. While Alaska's rate is less than the nationwide average by 3 percentage points, our 51.9% increase is far higher than that of other states, showing an alarming upward trend.

The 2022 KIDS COUNT data report also sheds light on Alaska's rankings compared to other states in economic well-being of children and families (44th), education (49th), health (44th), and family and community (22nd). Overall, Alaska remains in the bottom 10 nationwide, ranking 41st for overall child well-being. Many of Alaska's child well-being indicators have remained stagnant or moved in a negative direction, especially relating to the mental health of Alaska's youth.

"We've seen the numbers continue to rise over the years for suicidal ideation and mental health needs in our state for children and teens – and for many Alaskans, the numbers are just confirmation of what we see in plain sight. We know the impact the pandemic has had on our youth, but what many people don't realize is that these trends started long before the pandemic. They are sadly now exponentially more pronounced," said Trevor Storrs, President & CEO of Alaska Children's Trust, Alaska's KIDS COUNT® network affiliate.

In response to the new data, Alaska Children's Trust (ACT) calls for policymakers and practitioners to respond by developing policies and programs to ease mental health burdens on children, youth, and their families. ACT urges Alaskans to:

- **Continue to prioritize meeting kids' basic needs.** The latest budget cycle was a trend in the right direction for Alaska's children and youth, providing extra supports for families through additional funds for K-12 education, pre-K, afterschool, and childcare. However, meaningful policy change is still required to see outcomes improve for children and youth. Youth who grow up in poverty are two to three times more likely to develop mental health conditions than their peers. Children need a solid foundation of nutritious food, stable housing, and safe neighborhoods — and their families need financial stability — to foster positive mental health and wellness.

- **Ensure every child has access to mental health education and knows resources are available to them.** In 2019, 22% of Alaska high school students had planned a suicide attempt in the past 12 months. It's time to increase access to mental health education and let children and youth know that they are a top priority. "This past legislative session, we had a chance to make a difference for children and youth by passing a bill to provide optional, age-appropriate mental health education in statewide public schools, yet it again failed to pass. I'm hopeful that next session, that chance will come again. We need to make sure children and youth have the information and tools they need to overcome anxiety and depression. It's up to us to offer additional supports to parents, reduce stigma surrounding mental health, and build protections for our children in their darkest moments," encouraged Storrs.
- **Bolster mental health care that takes into account young people's experiences and identities.** Ensure new and existing programs are trauma-informed — designed to promote healing and emotional security — and are culturally relevant to the child and youth's life. Care should be informed by the latest evidence and research and geared toward early intervention and prevention.

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RELEASE INFORMATION

The *2022 KIDS COUNT® Data Book* will be available 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 <http://datacenter.kidscount.org>.

ABOUT ALASKA CHILDREN'S TRUST

Alaska Children's Trust (ACT) is the statewide lead organization focused on the prevention of child abuse and neglect. For over thirty years, we have invested resources across Alaska to ensure children live in safe, stable, and nurturing environments.

ABOUT THE ANNIE E. CASEY FOUNDATION

The Annie E. Casey Foundation creates a brighter future for the nation's young children, youth and young adults 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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