



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

Contact: Damita Curry | dcurry@azchildren.org | 480.263.0983

ARIZONA RANKS 44TH IN CHILD WELL-BEING CHILDREN ARE STILL SUFFERING FROM MENTAL HEALTH PANDEMIC

Data across 50 states show 7.3 million kids with anxiety or depression, as effects of coronavirus crisis linger, Annie E. Casey Foundation Finds

PHOENIX, ARIZONA — Children in Arizona and across the country are in a mental health crisis as they struggle with anxiety and depression at unprecedented levels. The **2022 KIDS COUNT® Data Book**, a 50-state report of recent household data released today by the Annie E. Casey Foundation analyzing how children and families are faring, focuses on youth mental health, concurring with a recent assessment by the U.S. surgeon general that conditions amount to a youth “mental health pandemic.”

The report sheds light on the health, economic and other challenges affecting American children as well as how those challenges are more likely to affect children of color. Nine percent of high schoolers overall but 12% of Black students, 13% of students of two or more races and 26% of American Indian or Native Alaskan high schoolers attempted suicide in the year before the pandemic. Further, many LGBTQ young people are encountering challenges as they seek mental health support. Among heterosexual high school students of all races and ethnicities, 6% attempted suicide; the share was 23% for gay, lesbian, or bisexual students.

“Racial and ethnic disparities contribute to disproportionately troubling mental health and wellness conditions among children of color,” explains David Lujan, President and CEO of Children’s Action Alliance, Arizona’s member of the KIDS COUNT network. Lujan continues, “We need to ensure programs are in place and our youth get the services needed now and in the future.”

The *Data Book* reports that children across America, and in more than 40 states and the District of Columbia, were more likely to encounter anxiety or depression during the first year of the COVID-19 crisis than previously, with the national figure jumping 26%, from 9.4% of children ages 3-17 (5.8 million kids) to 11.8% (7.3 million) between 2016 and 2020, the year COVID-19 swept across the United States. This increase represents 1.5 million more children who are struggling to make it through the day. In Arizona, the numbers slightly improved between 2016 and 2020, from 11.7% (159,000) to 10.8% (150,000).

Each year, the *Data Book* presents national and state data from 16 indicators in four domains — economic well-being, education, health, and family and community factors — and ranks the states according to how children are faring overall. The data in this year’s report are a mix of pre-pandemic and more recent figures and are the latest available.

In Arizona, the child and teen death rates, children living in families where no parent has full-time work, children without health insurance and high school students not graduating on time are higher than the national average. Poverty continues to drop though the state remains above average at 20%, higher than the national average of 17%. Also, the number of low-birth-weight babies continues to decrease, outpacing the national average.

The Annie E. Casey Foundation and Children's Action Alliance call for lawmakers to heed the surgeon general's warning on the alarming rates of youth mental health and respond by developing programs and policies to ease mental health burdens on children and their families. They urge policymakers to:

- **Prioritize meeting kids' basic needs.** 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 the mental health care they need, when and where they need it.** Schools should increase the presence of social workers, psychologists and other mental health professionals on staff and strive to meet the 250-to-1 ratio of students to counselors recommended by the American School Counselor Association. Currently, Arizona ranks last in the nation with a 716-to-1 ratio. Lawmakers must work with local health care providers and local and state governments to make additional federal resources available and coordinate treatment.
- **Bolster mental health care that considers young people's experiences and identities.** It should be trauma-informed — designed to promote a child's healing and emotional security — and culturally relevant to the child's life. It should be informed by the latest evidence and research and should be geared toward early intervention, which can be especially important in the absence of a formal diagnosis of mental illness.

###

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 Children's Action Alliance

Children's Action Alliance (CAA), a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization, strives to create an Arizona where all children and families thrive. CAA advocates for the well-being of more than 1.6 million Arizona children and their families at the state capitol and in the community. CAA works with elected officials, community partners, and coalitions to protect Arizona's ability to meet the education, health care, and human services needs of vulnerable children and families.

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.

###