



UNDER EMBARGO

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IDAHO FAMILIES MORE ECONOMICALLY SECURE, BUT STILL STRUGGLING TO MEET HEALTH NEEDS

As effects of coronavirus crisis linger, more Idaho children struggle with anxiety or depression, Annie E. Casey Foundation finds

Boise, Idaho — Idaho ranks in the top third nationwide for economic well-being and family and community indicators, but the state's low rankings in key areas – like health – result in an overall child well-being ranking of 18th, according to the **2022 KIDS COUNT® Data Book**, a 50-state report of recent household data developed by the Annie E. Casey Foundation analyzing how children and families are faring. The annual report focuses this year on youth mental health, concurring with a recent assessment by the U.S. surgeon general that conditions amount to a youth mental health pandemic.

"Idaho youth have struggled with mental health for years. The rising numbers of children in our state experiencing anxiety and depression should be a red flag for leaders to act on this important issue," said Christine Tiddens, director of Idaho Voices for Children. "We are talking about 48,000 children ages 3 to 17 that have depression or anxiety. That's an increase of 10% since 2016."

Children in America are in the midst of a mental health crisis, struggling with anxiety and depression at unprecedented levels. The *Data Book* reports that children across America 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. **The report found that 12.6% of Idaho children ages 3-17 had anxiety or depression in 2020, a 10.5% increase from 2016.**

Racial and ethnic disparities exist in mental health and wellness among youth of color. Almost 10% of Idaho high schoolers overall, but 13% of Latino students attempted suicide in 2019 as compared to 8% of White students. Further, many LGBTQ+ young people encounter challenges seeking mental health support. Nationally, among heterosexual high school students of all races and ethnicities, 6% attempted suicide; the share was 23% for gay, lesbian, or bisexual students. Data specific to LGBTQ+ youth in Idaho is not available.

"Mental health is just as important as physical health in a child's ability to thrive," said Lisa Hamilton, president and CEO of the Annie E. Casey Foundation. "As our nation continues to navigate the fallout from the COVID crisis, policymakers must do more to ensure all kids have access to the care and support they need to cope and live full lives."

2022 KIDS COUNT DATA BOOK EXAMINES IDAHO'S CHILD WELL-BEING

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. Highlights from the report findings for Idaho include:

- ▶ **ECONOMIC WELL-BEING:** Idaho ranked 14th in the nation on the *Data Book* economic well-being domain. About 63,000 Idaho children (14%) lived in households with an income below the poverty line, and 103,000 Idaho children (23%) lived in households that spent more than 30% of their income on housing.
- ▶ **EDUCATION:** Idaho ranked 36th in the nation on the *Data Book* education domain. Almost two-thirds (64%) of 3- and 4-year-old Idaho children did not attend a preschool.
- ▶ **HEALTH:** Idaho ranked 19th in the nation on the *Data Book* health domain. Almost 1,500 Idaho babies (7%) were born with a low birth-weight in 2020. More than 30% of Idaho children ages 10-17 were overweight or obese.
- ▶ **FAMILY AND COMMUNITY:** Idaho ranked 9th in the nation on the *Data Book* family and community domain. The teen birth rate dropped to a record low in 2020 and has seen a 55% decrease since 2010.

“Idaho ultimately saw improvement across 11 of 16 indicators in this year’s *Data Book*. These positive shifts show that what we do as advocates, community members and leaders matters,” said Christine Tiddens. “We know what it takes to have healthy, thriving children, and our state has the economic power to make significant investments in our next generation.”

There has been little progress in the last decade to improve children’s mental health. Idaho Voices for Children is partnering with the Annie E. Casey Foundation and states across the country to call for lawmakers to heed the surgeon general’s warning 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, and they can 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 takes into account 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.

It is essential that Idaho policymakers consider the data and what it is telling us about the needs of our youth. Idaho Voices for Children looks forward to working with the Idaho Legislature in January to ensure children are a top priority in policy discussions.

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 IDAHO VOICES FOR CHILDREN

Idaho Voices for Children works to develop and promote a statewide public policy agenda that advocates for children on issues of health, education, safety, well-being and family economic security. Learn more at idahovoices.org.

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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