

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

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## **New Report Ranks Illinois 23rd in Child Well-Being, and Illinois' Youth are Facing a Mental Health Crisis During the COVID-19 Pandemic**

*Data from the Annie E. Casey Foundation support the need to increase access to cultural and age-appropriate mental health providers in Illinois where almost 213,000 kids are struggling with anxiety or depression*

**CHICAGO**—Illinois ranks 23rd in child well-being, 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. However, children in our state and across the nation are in the midst of a mental health crisis, struggling with anxiety and depression at unprecedented levels. This year's edition of the annual resource 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.

Illinois ranks 23rd among the states in the 2022 Data Book. (The state ranked 21st in 2021, although due to COVID-related data availability issues, the rankings are not directly comparable.) Across the four key areas measured for this year's *Data Book*, Illinois ranked 25th in economic well-being, 12th in education, 23rd in health, and 24th in family and community. Sixteen percent of Illinois children overall are living in poverty. For households with children, 28% of households have high housing cost burdens. And 95,000 (3%) children lacked health insurance.

"The 2022 *Data Book* underscores the critical need for Illinois lawmakers to enact strong policies and programs that center equity so that all Illinois children and families can thrive, regardless of racial/ethnic identity," said Dr. Katelyn Jones, vice president of policy, research, and evaluation at YWCA Metropolitan Chicago, Illinois' member of the KIDS COUNT network. "Illinois has a history of being a leader in early education, yet our current rankings indicate there is more to be done to increase economic, educational and healthcare equity. Our state has the opportunity to lead an equitable recovery that will support children and families across Illinois now and set them up for success over the next decade."

The *Data Book* reports that children across America, and in more than 40 states and the District of Columbia, were more likely to experience anxiety and 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 Illinois, 8.9% of children experienced anxiety or depression, impacting close to 213,000 children. Illinois has seen a reduction in children experiencing anxiety or depression over the last four years, with 10.7% (260,000) children affected in 2016 — a 16.8% reduction from 2016 to 2020. Despite this reduction and Illinois' most recent rate being slightly lower than the national rate, thousands of children are still in crisis,

and these current data are subject to increase as stress from the pandemic and current economy continues to shift.

Nationally, racial and ethnic disparities contribute to disproportionately troubling mental health and wellness conditions among 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 previous to the pandemic hitting. 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.

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.

“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.”

The Annie E. Casey Foundation calls 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.

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#### **RELEASE INFORMATION**

The *2022 KIDS COUNT® Data Book* will be available at [www.aecf.org](http://www.aecf.org). Additional information is available at [www.aecf.org/databook](http://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 YWCA Metropolitan Chicago**



Founded in 1876, YWCA Metropolitan Chicago is a social enterprise committed to eliminating racism, empowering women, and promoting peace, justice, freedom, and dignity for all. As a leading association among a national network of more than 200 YWCAs, YWCA Metropolitan Chicago impacts tens of thousands of women and families annually through comprehensive human services provided across the region. YWCA Metropolitan Chicago is a leading service provider in the areas of sexual violence support services, early childhood and child care provider services, family support services, youth STEM programming, and economic empowerment services. Located in the third-largest American city with the third-highest percentage of women in the U.S., YWCA Metropolitan Chicago serves as a national incubator for innovative programming, outreach, and engagement strategies. Contributing to our diverse and balanced economy, YWCA Metropolitan Chicago is working at the individual and systems levels to create an inclusive marketplace where everyone thrives. The organization is also an active member of many national, state, county, and city-level coalitions, representing the interests of and advocating for policies that positively affect women 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](http://www.aecf.org). KIDS COUNT® is a registered trademark of the Annie E. Casey Foundation.

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