

## Kansas Action for Children

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

Contact: Jessica Herrera Russell | [jessica@kac.org](mailto:jessica@kac.org) | 605-929-5159

### **Kansas Families More Economically Secure, but Still Struggling to Meet Health Needs**

*Despite historically low unemployment rates in Kansas, data show families of more than 38,000 Kansas kids are struggling to access affordable health care coverage and services, Annie E. Casey Foundation finds*

**TOPEKA** — While Kansas ranks in the top 10 for economic security, the state's lower rankings in other key areas – like health – find the Sunflower State ranking 17th overall when it comes to children's overall 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.

The *Data Book* 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.

Kansas ranked 24th in health indicators, demonstrating that although Kansas families may be more financially secure compared to those in other states, the number of jobs available isn't necessarily translating into access to affordable health care coverage or services.

Since 2012, Kansas has seen only a 3 percent decrease in kids without health insurance, and more than 38,000 Kansas kids still go without. And even with coverage, health care services are not guaranteed, due in part to sparse or no health services in a families' area or unaffordability.

"Even though there are fewer families living in poverty than a decade ago, Kansas is continuing to see more rural hospitals close and health care costs soar to the detriment of our youngest residents," said John Wilson, President and CEO of Kansas Action for Children, the state's member of the KIDS COUNT network. "And to top it off, Kansas remains in the bottom half of states in child and teen deaths. It's beyond time that Kansas uses its economic power to improve the health of the next generation."

These health indicators, too, shine a light on what the U.S. surgeon general describes as a youth mental health pandemic. 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. Racial and ethnic disparities contribute to disproportionately troubling health and wellness conditions among children of color, such as the large gap in mental health indicators.

Kansas ranked 17th overall eighth in economic well-being, 24th in health, 24th in education, and 23rd in family and community context.

Sixteen indicators measuring four domains — economic well-being, health, education and family and community context — are used by the Casey Foundation in each year's *Data Book* to assess child well-being. The annual KIDS COUNT data and rankings represent the most recent information available. Key Kansas statistics include the following.

## AFFORDABLE HEALTH CARE:

- In 2020, 38,000 children did not have health insurance. More kids would gain coverage if Kansas increased eligibility for programs like Medicaid and the Children’s Health Insurance Program (CHIP).
- Child and teen deaths have not improved, with 233 individuals per 100,000 children ages 1 to 19 dying prematurely.

## ECONOMIC WELL-BEING:

- Fewer families are living in poverty, but 97,000 Kansas kids still lived in households with an income below the poverty line.
- Kansas now ranks in the top five states having the fewest number of children living in families where no parent has full-time year-round employment.

## EDUCATION:

- In 2016-2020, 43,000 young children were not in school. These 3- and 4-year-olds didn’t access the long-lasting benefits of early education.
- Since 2013, Kansas has increasingly lagged behind the rest of the nation on student success, with the percentage of below-average proficiencies (math and reading) increasing. Kansas now ranks 28th in the nation in fourth grade reading proficiency (previously 13th in 2013) and 25th in eighth grade math proficiency, a significant rank decrease compared to being 10th in 2013.

## FAMILY AND COMMUNITY CONTEXT:

- In 2016-2020, 36,000 children throughout Kansas lived in high poverty areas.

“Kansas must do better for our children and set them up for successful, healthy futures,” said Wilson. “There has been little progress in the last decade to improve children’s health, and we have fallen behind drastically in educational outcomes. The Kansas Legislature must pass measures that ensure kids have adequate health coverage and a robust educational experience, while also helping parents put food on their tables for every meal. We’ll be looking to lawmakers in January to prioritize the needs of Kansas families, so kids have a firm foundation on which to thrive.”

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.

## 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 KANSAS ACTION FOR CHILDREN**

Kansas Action for Children (KAC) is a nonprofit advocacy organization working to make Kansas a place where every child has the opportunity to grow up healthy and thrive. We engage in bipartisan advocacy, partnerships, and information-sharing on key issues, including early learning and education, health, and economic security for families. We work with policymakers, local organizations, and fellow advocates to inform sound policy, foster collaboration, and promote an equitable tax system. For more than 40 years, KAC has been a resource to leaders and advocates who are working to ensure a brighter future for every child.

### **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.

###