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## **New Maryland Data Show the Pandemic’s Toll on the Mental Health and Well-Being of Children and Families**

*There is an urgent need to address youth mental health as one in eight young people in Maryland deal with anxiety or depression, Annie E. Casey Foundation report finds*

**Baltimore** —Maryland ranks near the middle of the pack among states (19<sup>th</sup>) in child well-being as Maryland families deal with persistent economic challenges, 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 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.

The report also shows children in Maryland, as well as children throughout the United States, are in the midst of a mental health crisis, struggling with anxiety and depression at unprecedented levels. This is the first time this annual resource has focused 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 links between economic well-being and health are well established. It’s not surprising that the lingering effects of the pandemic include a greater number of young people facing mental health challenges. It’s critical that Maryland policymakers increase access to mental health care while continuing critical support for families who are having a hard time making ends meet,” said Benjamin Orr, president and CEO of the Maryland Center on Economic Policy (MDCEP), Maryland’s member of the KIDS COUNT network. One critical policy step to advance family economic security the next legislative session will be making permanent the 2021 expansion of the state Earned Income Tax Credit and strengthening the modest state Child Tax Credit.

**The Data Book reports that children across Maryland were more likely to encounter anxiety or depression during the first year of the COVID-19 crisis than previously,** with state figures jumping by 36%, from 9.4% of children ages 3-17 (105,000 young people) to 12.8% (143,000 young people) between 2016 and 2020. This increase represents 38,000 more children who are struggling to make it through the day. Maryland children experienced anxiety or depression at slightly higher rates than the national average in 2020, the report found.

Racial and ethnic disparities contribute to disproportionately troubling mental health and wellness conditions among children of color. Nationally 9% 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 most recent federal survey. 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.

Financial and economic instability leads to greater stress and anxiety for families and children. When a child is living in poverty or in a household facing financial difficulties, they are never immune from the stress of their environment. Uninsured or under-insured children are also less likely to have access to mental health services, preventing them from securing the help they need in times of crisis. The report finds that in Maryland in 2016-2020:

- 153,000 or 12% of children lived in households with income below the poverty line with Maryland ranking fourth nationally.
- 315,000 or 23% of children lived with parents who lack secure employment with Maryland ranking 10<sup>th</sup> nationally.
- 414,000 or 31% of children lived in households with high housing cost burdens with Maryland ranking 39<sup>th</sup> nationally.
- 49,000 or 3% of children did not have health insurance with Maryland ranking fourth nationally.
- 42,000 or 3% of children lived in high poverty areas with Maryland ranking eighth nationally.

“While Maryland compares favorably to other states on many measures of economic security because of past policy decisions, the reality is that hundreds of thousands of Marylanders are still struggling to get by. In particular, Maryland’s housing costs are unaffordable for many families,” said Nonso Umunna, MDCEP’s KIDS COUNT director. “Unstable housing is also a major cause of stress and anxiety. Maryland policymakers must continue to take steps to ensure everyone can have a safe, affordable place to live.”

The Maryland General Assembly passed several important new protections for renters in the 2022 legislative session aimed at reducing evictions. However, addressing housing needs as costs continue to rise demands significant new funding for housing assistance, changes to local zoning rules, and continued support for eviction prevention programs.

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 Maryland Center on Economic Policy**

The Maryland Center on Economic Policy advances innovative policy ideas to foster broad prosperity and help our state be the standard-bearer for responsible public policy. We engage in research, analysis, strategic communications, public education, and grassroots alliances promoting robust debate and greater public awareness of the policy choices Maryland residents face together. For more information, visit [www.mdeconomy.org](http://www.mdeconomy.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](http://www.aecf.org). KIDS COUNT® is a registered trademark of the Annie E. Casey Foundation.