

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

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Maine Ranks 12th in Child Well-Being  
but Children Still Suffering during Youth Mental Health Pandemic  
*More than one in six Maine children have anxiety or depression, as effects of coronavirus crisis linger,  
Annie E. Casey Foundation finds*

**AUGUSTA** — Maine ranks 12th overall in child well-being and fourth in the domain of family and community 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 America are in the midst of a mental health crisis, struggling with anxiety and depression at unprecedented levels. This year's 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 **2022 KIDS COUNT® 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.

"Children have their best chance of thriving when they have access to quality mental health care when they need it," said Stephanie Eglinton, executive director of Maine's Children's Alliance, Maine's KIDS COUNT Network grantee. "The [finding](#) in June 2022 by the United States Department of Justice that Maine is in violation of the Americans for Disabilities Act by not providing adequate community-based mental health services for children makes it imperative that Maine expand its recent investments into children's community-based mental health services."

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.

Maine's estimated 2020 rate of children with depression or anxiety was 17.5%, nearly 50% higher than the national rate. Parents of an estimated 36,000 Maine children ages 3-17 have been told by a health care provider that their child has depression or anxiety problems. Only Vermont, Massachusetts and New Hampshire have higher rates.

Racial and ethnic disparities contribute to 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 before the most recent national survey from the [National Center for Disease Control's Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System \(YRBSS\)](#).

The *Data Book* documents that 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; while 23% of gay, lesbian, or bisexual students attempted suicide.

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.

In Maine, significant actions were taken during the last legislative session and in the supplemental budget, to bolster the child and adult behavioral health systems. Given the increased need in the state as a result of the pandemic, and with that system already struggling prior to the pandemic to meet the mental and behavioral health needs of Mainers across the state, these investments were an important response at a critical time. The administration and policymakers should prioritize building upon those investments in the next budget and legislative sessions, and:

- **increase services in rural and remote parts of the state** to ensure all Mainers have access to critical behavioral and mental health care and to reduce waitlists for community-based children's mental health services;

- **increase rates for critical services** to ensure the viability of services across the system;
- **invest in workforce development** to build up the capacity of providing services with an adequate workforce to conduct the work;
- **bolster the crisis service system** so that children don't have to go to emergency rooms or become involved in the juvenile justice system to have their immediate mental health needs addressed.

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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 THE MAINE CHILDREN'S ALLIANCE**

The Maine Children's Alliance is a public policy, nonprofit advocating for sound public policies and best practices that improve the lives of all Maine children, youth, and families. <https://www.mekids.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.

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