



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

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## **North Dakota Ranks High in Children's Well-Being Overall, but Children Still Suffering from Mental Health Pandemic**

While North Dakota ranks high in some areas of children's well-being, many children and families are being left behind, especially kids and families of color. The **2022 KIDS COUNT® Data Book**, a 50-state report of recent household data developed by the Annie E. Casey Foundation, ranks North Dakota second in the nation for children's economic well-being. However, one data point does not tell the whole story. Thousands of North Dakota children live in poverty, and many other areas of well-being, like mental health, show great need for attention.

One area of significant concern is that children are struggling with anxiety and depression at unprecedented levels. The annual resource focuses this year on youth mental health, concurring with a recent assessment by U.S. surgeon general that conditions amount to a youth mental health pandemic. Data from the report show an alarming number of North Dakota youth experience mental health challenges. In 2020, 11 percent of North Dakota children experienced depression or anxiety. Unfortunately, disparities exist for youth of color, Latinx, American Indian and youth who identify with more than one race experience depression or anxiety at higher rates. These disparities result from generations of racism and discriminatory policies that create barriers to accessing health care and other economic opportunities for families of color.

"The story largely remains the same from last year. North Dakota's high ranking shows that some families are doing better. Still, if we rank North Dakota based on the well-being of children of color, North Dakota would fall toward the bottom," said Xanna Burg, Director of KIDS COUNT with North Dakota KIDS COUNT. "The mental health crisis is one example of the disparities that exist. The higher rates of depression and anxiety for youth of color today are directly tied to a system built over generations that make it harder for families of color to access health care, economic opportunities, and high-quality education."

Further, many LGBTQ+ young people encounter challenges seeking mental health support. Nationally, among heterosexual high school students of all races and ethnicities, 6 percent attempted suicide; the share was 23 percent for gay, lesbian, or bisexual students. Another survey shows 33 percent of LGBTQ+ youth in North Dakota attempted suicide.

Additional highlights from the report findings for North Dakota include:

- **Economic:** About 31,000 North Dakota children lived in households that paid more than 30 percent of their income on housing.

- **Education:** Two-thirds of fourth graders did not read at grade level, the same as a decade ago.
- **Health:** More children are going without health insurance in North Dakota than a decade ago, leaving 14,000 North Dakota children without adequate access to health care.
- **Family and Community:** The teen birth rate dropped to a record low in 2020.

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 considers 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 North Dakota KIDS COUNT**

North Dakota KIDS COUNT is a leading resource for data on child and family well-being in the state and is dedicated to providing current, relevant, and reliable data to shape the issues affecting North Dakota children and families. More information can be found at [ndkidscount.org](http://ndkidscount.org). North Dakota KIDS COUNT is a project of the Montana Budget & Policy Center, a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization providing in-depth research and analysis on budget, tax, and economic issues. The Montana Budget & Policy Center also leads the KIDS COUNT work in Montana and South Dakota. More information can be found at [www.montanabudget.org](http://www.montanabudget.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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