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**PRESS RELEASE**

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**NEW HAMPSHIRE RANKS SECOND BEST STATE FOR OVERALL CHILD WELL-BEING  
BUT CHILDREN ARE STILL SUFFERING FROM THE MENTAL HEALTH PANDEMIC**

*Data across 50 states show 7.3 million kids with anxiety or depression, as effects of coronavirus crisis linger, Annie E. Casey Foundation Finds*

**CONCORD** --- New Hampshire once again rates among the country's leaders in overall child well-being, according to a new national report. However, children in the Granite State and across America are continuing to struggle with anxiety and depression at unprecedented levels, the report concludes.

The **2022 KIDS COUNT® Data Book**, released this week by the Annie E. Casey Foundation, rates New Hampshire second in the United States in overall child well-being, a measure that considers a variety of data points on issues including economic well-being, education, health, and family and community.

For the first time, the annual *Data Book* 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.

“Over the last several years, COVID-19 has exposed and intensified the mental health challenges facing our children like never before,” said **Rebecca Woitkowski, Kids Count Policy Director for New Futures**, New Hampshire's leading health policy and advocacy organization.

“Left unaddressed, the impacts of this crisis will follow our children and families for years,” Woitkowski said. “When children experience this kind of trauma, they are put at risk for future health problems, including substance misuse, mental health concerns, and even early death.”

Each year, the *KIDS COUNT 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.

This year's *Data Book* reports that children in New Hampshire and 40 other 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. In the Granite State, that figure increased

nearly 5% between 2016-2020, rising from 14.4% of children ages 3-17 who reported experiencing anxiety or depression in 2016 to 18.4% in 2020.

Some of the report's key takeaways include:

- **New Hampshire ranked 4<sup>th</sup> in economic well-being.** Even with this high ranking, the number of children in poverty doesn't necessarily consider that New Hampshire's cost of living is 20% above the national average, putting even more children and families living at near-poor levels. Growing up in poverty or at near-poor levels can both adversely impact children's life trajectories.
- **New Hampshire ranked 4<sup>th</sup> in education, but 7<sup>th</sup> in the nation for the number of 3- and 4-year-olds not attending school.** Too many Granite State children are not receiving early education, which research has demonstrated is critical for development and long-term success.
- **New Hampshire ranked 2<sup>nd</sup> in health, but 7<sup>th</sup> in the nation for child and teen deaths per 100,000 children and youths ages 1 to 19.** Nationally, data shows an increase in the child and teen death rate, with 2020 having the highest rates since 2008. This rise reflects a large increase in homicides and drug overdoses.
- **New Hampshire ranked 2<sup>nd</sup> in family and community.** The number of Granite State children living in single-parent families continues to rise, reaching 29% -- up from 27% in 2009-2012.

Across the country, racial and ethnic disparities also contributed 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.

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.

## 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 New Futures

*New Futures is a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization that advocates, educates and collaborates to improve the health and wellness of all New Hampshire residents. Learn more at [new-futures.org](http://new-futures.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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