



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

Media Contact: David Hamby | dhamby@okpolicy.org | 918-810-0182

KIDS COUNT Report Shows Oklahoma Ranks 40th for Child Well-Being, Still Lags Nation

Data from 2020 show nearly 1 in 8 Oklahoma children reported anxiety or depression, according to new Annie E. Casey Foundation report

Oklahoma ranks 40th nationally in child well-being and in the bottom half of nearly all the health and well-being metrics included in state rankings for 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 2022 report also showed children in America are in the midst of a mental health crisis, struggling with anxiety and depression at unprecedented levels. The *Data Book* showed that 1 in 8 Oklahoma children between ages 3 to 17 have anxiety or depression in 2020, up 15 percent from the 2016 results.

Because of the growing number of children experiencing mental health concerns, the *Data Book* is focused on youth mental health, concurring with a recent assessment by U.S. surgeon general that conditions amount to a youth mental health pandemic.

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.

In this year's *Data Book*, Oklahoma ranks 40th overall for child well-being, with its individual rankings in major categories:

- 32nd in economic well-being,
- 41st in family and community context,
- 45th in education, and
- 42nd in health.

Oklahoma continues to rank in the bottom half of states in 15 of the 16 primary metrics used for the survey. The only metric where Oklahoma ranked in the top half of states was its percentage of households spending more than 30 percent of their income on housing, where Oklahoma ranked 19th. However, this issue continues to be a problem that impacts 1 in 4 Oklahoma families and will likely increase with the current housing and rental market.

“Oklahoma continues to lag behind states that are making meaningful investments in the health, education, and overall well-being of their children. The net result is that far too many children in our communities live in poverty, have unhealthy lives, and are behind the educational outcomes of their peers in other parts of the country,” said Gabrielle Jacobi, OK Policy’s Child Well-Being Policy Analyst and KIDS COUNT Coordinator. “The increase in anxiety and depression among Oklahoma children is especially troubling and signals a need to make investments in their well-being.”

To further explore these and other data about child well-being in Oklahoma, OK Policy has developed an interactive dashboard at OKPolicy.org/KIDSCOUNT that allows residents to examine various indicators across all 77 counties that demonstrate the factors that influence overall well-being in the state.

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 percent from 9.4 percent of children ages 3-17 (5.8 million children) to 11.8 percent (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.

Racial and ethnic disparities contribute to disproportionately troubling mental health and wellness conditions among children of color. The national numbers show that nearly 10 percent of high schoolers overall — but 12 percent of Black students, 13 percent of students of two or more races, and 26 percent 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 percent attempted suicide; the share was 23 percent 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.

The 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. Additional information is available at 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 OKLAHOMA POLICY INSTITUTE

The Oklahoma Policy Institute seeks to create a more equitable Oklahoma through its nonpartisan policy research, analysis, and advocacy. OK Policy curates critical conversations through data-driven research and outreach regarding state policy so that every Oklahoman has equitable opportunities to thrive. OK Policy is the KIDS COUNT affiliate for Oklahoma. Learn more at OKPolicy.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. KIDS COUNT® is a registered trademark of the Annie E. Casey Foundation.

###