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Texas Ranks 45th in Child Well-Being, Children Still Suffering from Mental Health Pandemic

*New data underscore the need to improve health coverage
and access to mental health services in Texas, Annie E. Casey Foundation finds*

AUSTIN — Texas continues to rank worst in the nation for children’s health insurance coverage, ranking 48th overall for children’s health and 45th for child well-being, 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 *Data Book* also finds that children in America are in the midst of a mental health crisis, struggling with anxiety and depression at unprecedented levels. The annual report focuses this year 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 report sheds light on health, economic and other challenges affecting American children as well as how those challenges are more likely to affect children of color.

As in previous years, Texas performed the worst in health insurance coverage for children compared to other states. Data show that children in Texas are more than twice as likely to be uninsured compared to the rest of the nation (11% vs. 5%). Texas also continues to rank in the bottom half of states for economic well-being, with 20% of Texas children living in poverty compared to 17% nationally.

“Our children deserve more from Texas lawmakers,” said Every Texan CEO Marisa Bono. “All Texas children, despite race, location or background, deserve to be healthy, safe, and supported. The numbers don’t lie, robust policy change is the only way to ensure our most vulnerable Texans – our children – have the resources and support they need to reach their full potential.”

The *Data Book* reports that children 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 swept across the United States. This increase represents 1.5 million more children who are struggling to make it through the day. In Texas, over half a million children ages 3-17 had anxiety or depression in 2020, a 23% increase from 2016. Black and Latino children experienced the largest increases in anxiety and depression among Texas children between 2016 and 2020.

In Texas, 10% of high school students reported attempting suicide, higher than the national average of 9%. Racial and ethnic disparities contribute to disproportionately troubling mental health and wellness conditions among children of color. Twelve percent of Black high school students and 10% of Latino students in Texas reported attempting suicide. Further, many LGBTQ young people encounter challenges as they seek mental health support. In Texas, 8% of students who identified as heterosexual reported attempted suicide, significantly lower than 22% for students who identified as gay, lesbian or bisexual.



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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.

"It's important that in this critical time, Texas policymakers consider the data and what it is telling us about Texas youth and their needs," said Coda Rayo-Garza, director of research and data for Every Texan.

Every Texan will release their annual *Texas Kids Count* book early next year.

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 than their peers to develop mental health conditions. 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 mental health care, 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. They can work with local health care providers and state and local governments to coordinate treatment and make additional federal resources available.
- **Bolster mental health care that accounts for young people's experiences and identities.** Effective mental health care is 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 geared toward early intervention, which can be especially important in the absence of a formal mental illness diagnosis.

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 Every Texan

At Every Texan, we believe social justice requires public policy. We strengthen public policy to expand opportunity and equity for Texas of all backgrounds. <https://everytexan.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.

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