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Wisconsin's Children of Color More Likely to Face Mental Health Issues

Compounding Racial Disparities Highlight Need for Comprehensive Reform in New Report

Anxiety and depression are rising among Wisconsin's youth, especially children of color, according to a new report released today.

The *2022 KIDS COUNT® Data Book*, released today by the Annie E. Casey Foundation, highlights 16 indicators of well-being for children and families, and also shows that mental health needs among our state's youth continue to be deeply concerning. However, this youth mental health crisis is not felt equally: 26% of Black children, 60% of Native American children, and 22% of Latina and Latino children were diagnosed with or reported to have anxiety or depression in Wisconsin. This is in contrast to 15% of white children, using the most recent data available from 2019-2020.

Though these disparities are deeply concerning, they are not surprising given the significant [stress Black and Brown families were experiencing](#) during the early days of the pandemic, and given Wisconsin's history. Broadly, Wisconsin has had the regrettable distinction of ranking among [the worst states in the nation for racial inequality](#). According to the [Wisconsin Department of Health](#), "communities of color have experienced higher rates of COVID-19 cases, hospitalizations and deaths since the pandemic began."

"This shouldn't shock anyone. Kids of color are already dealing with a slew of other disparate life and health impacts. Add the stresses brought on by COVID-19, including worse outcomes for communities of color, and anxiety and depression will naturally follow," said Michele Mackey, Kids Forward CEO. "But it doesn't have to be this way. There are common sense solutions to addressing and improving the mental health of our youth."

Kids Forward and the Annie E. Casey Foundation call for lawmakers to ease mental health burdens on children and their families by prioritizing kids' basic needs; guaranteeing every child has access to the mental health care they need; and ensuring those supports are trauma informed and culturally relevant.

Specifically in Wisconsin, Kids Forward urges policymakers to:

1. Address mental health for kids by addressing social determinants of health, and economic and racial inequities. A key lever to address this is to increase the Earned Income Tax Credit as a percentage of the federal credit from 4 percent to 16 percent for parents with one qualifying child and from 11 percent to 25 percent for parents with two qualifying children beginning with tax year 2021. The earned income tax credit has been shown to be effective in reducing childhood poverty and children's behavioral health issues, including anxiety and depression.

2. Increase stable statewide investments in schools; most kids access mental health treatment there. One-time funding and grant-based funding streams are not sufficient.
3. Expand Medicaid to increase children's access to mental health and reinvest the \$1.6 billion savings into improving Wisconsin's children's mental health system.
4. Increase Medicaid payment for mental health treatment to improve recruitment and retention of mental health professionals.
5. As part of the Quality Care for Quality Kids allocation, provide funding for training and technical assistance to early child care educators with the goal of reducing instances of children being removed from care settings due to behavioral challenges. Prioritize lead abatement funding (paint and pipes) in early childcare settings. 30% are in home-based childcare settings ([source](#)). Lead poisoning often leads to behavioral challenges, learning disorders, and adverse health.
6. Increase access to contraception and abortion, which are critical to ensuring youth can choose the timing of when they want to start a family, and critical for supporting positive family outcomes.

The *2022 KIDS COUNT® Data Book* is an annual 50-state report of recent household data developed by the Annie E. Casey Foundation, which analyzes how children and families are faring across the country. Each year, the Data Book presents national and state data in four domains — economic well-being, education, health, and family and community factors. The data in this year's report are a mix of pre-pandemic and more recent figures, and are the latest available.

“While this data is troubling enough, it's also important to note that access to mental health care, and therefore the ability to quantify the diagnoses, is also impacted by systemic racism,” noted Mackey. “These numbers could be underreporting the racial disparities.”

View the full 2022 Data Book and all related resources at <https://kidsforward.org/category/wiskids-count/>.

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ABOUT KIDS FORWARD

Kids Forward advocates for effective, long-lasting solutions that break down barriers to success for children and families in Wisconsin, notably children and families of color and those furthest from opportunity. Using research and a community-informed approach, Kids Forward works to help every kid, every family, and every community thrive.

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.