



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

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### **New Publication Ranks Wyoming 14<sup>th</sup> for Child Well-Being**

*Data show access to health insurance, as well as youth experiencing mental health issues pose health concerns to children and families across the state, Annie E. Casey Foundation finds*

LARAMIE — There are bright spots for Wyoming in the **2022 KIDS COUNT® Data Book**, a 50-state report developed by the Annie E. Casey Foundation and released today that looks at child and family well-being. The reviews four domains: health, education, economy, and family and community and has Wyoming ranked 14<sup>th</sup> overall.

The data show that the state is performing better than most of the nation in the percentage of kids ages 10-17 who are obese in the state. According to the *Data Book*, Wyoming's children are second least likely to obese. Wyoming also saw a decrease in child and teen deaths. Unfortunately, Wyoming's high percentage of children without health insurance (rank 46) has gone unchanged, dropping Wyoming's overall health ranking to 33<sup>rd</sup> in the nation.

In addition to health, Wyoming ranked sixth for family and community, seventh for economic well-being and 19<sup>th</sup> for education. Education data shows that 63% of eighth graders scored below proficient in math, and 59% of fourth graders were below proficient in reading. Both figures are better than the national averages of 67% and 66%, respectively.

"Wyoming's overall ranking was strong, but there are still areas where we can work together as a community to make improvements for kids and families," said Micah Richardson, director of programs at the Wyoming Community Foundation, Wyoming's member of the KIDS COUNT network. "Access to affordable healthcare for our Wyoming friends and neighbors continues to be a struggle and the ripple effect is impacting so many of our vulnerable families." Expanding Medicaid would bring relief to many who are struggling, she says.

The *Data Book*, for the first time, is highlighting mental health as a major issue impacting children and families. Children in America and in Wyoming are in the midst of a mental health crisis and children are struggling with anxiety and depression at unprecedented levels.

The *Data Book* reports that in more than 40 states, Wyoming included, children were more likely to encounter anxiety or depression during the first year of the COVID-19 crisis than previously. The national figure jumped 26%, from 5.8 million children ages 3-17, to 7.3 million between 2016 and 2020. Wyoming saw an increase of 18.6% of children experiencing anxiety or depression with numbers rising from 11.8% to 14%. Mental health struggles make each day that much more difficult for our young people.

“Wyoming has the highest number of deaths by suicide per 100,000 in the nation,” says Richardson. “The rising numbers of children in our state experiencing anxiety and depression should be a red flag to act on this important issue.”

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 will be important to continue to evaluate changes to data as we move through the pandemic to help us make data-driven, thoughtful decisions that best support our fellow Wyomingites,” says Richardson.

The 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.

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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 the Wyoming Community Foundation

The Wyoming Community Foundation (WYCF) is a grantmaking organization established in 1989 which connects people who care with causes that matter to build a better Wyoming. In 2021 WYCF granted nearly \$7.5 million to nonprofits working for the good of communities. WYCF has been the Kids Count member network for Wyoming since 2014.

## 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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