

COLORADO CHILDREN'S CAMPAIGN

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Colorado Ranks 15th in Child Well-Being, but Inaccessible Child Care Is a Continuing Barrier to Stability and Health for Families

Data across 50 states show economy loses \$122 billion a year as child care challenges cause parents to miss, quit, or scale back work, Annie E. Casey Foundation finds

DENVER, CO — Colorado ranks 15th in the nation in overall child well-being, according to the **2023 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. However, our country's lack of affordable and accessible child care short-changes children and causes parents in Colorado to frequently miss work or even quit their jobs, while those who can find care are forced to make inequitable sacrifices. These child care challenges cost the American economy billions of dollars a year and stymie women professionally.

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.

In 2022, Colorado saw improvements in teen obesity, school attendance of three- and four-year olds, and the percentage of children in families where a household head holds a high school diploma. But there were concerning changes in the state's poverty rate and parents' job security: Between 2019-21, the percentage of Colorado children living in poverty increased by 9%, an increase that represents approximately 10,000 children. Over the same period, the percentage of children living in families where no parent had full-time, year-round employment increased by 7%.

These trends intersect with a child care landscape in which, even before the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, capacity, affordability, and the accessibility of culturally- and trauma-informed options were too limited.

"Child care providers keep our state's economy afloat and are an essential part of our communities," said **Melissa Mares, Director of Early Childhood Initiatives at the Colorado Children's Campaign**, the state's member of the KIDS COUNT network. "Yet families are facing care disruptions and providers are struggling to recruit and retain staff. We must do more to create a system in which our youngest children — and their caregivers — are supported and cared for."

The *Data Book* reports too many parents cannot secure child care that is compatible with work schedules and commutes. In 2020-21, 14% of children birth to age 5 in Colorado lived in families in which someone quit, changed, or refused a job because of problems with child care. This is higher than the national rate (13%). Women are five to eight times more likely than men to experience negative employment consequences related to caregiving.

Even if parents can find a child care opening near their home, they often can't pay for it. Colorado's average annual cost of center-based child care for a toddler was \$16,333, 14% of the median income for a married couple and 41% of the median income for a single mother in the state. Colorado is among the states with the most significant care cost burdens for married couples seeking both center-based care (14%) and home-based care (10%). These challenges disproportionately affect the financial well-being of women, single parents, parents in poverty, families of color, and immigrant families.

While the cost of care burdens families, child care workers are paid worse than 98% of professions. Median national pay for child care workers was \$28,520 per year or \$13.71 an hour in 2022, less than the wage for



retail (\$14.26) and customer service (\$18.16) workers. In Colorado, the hourly median wage for child care workers in 2022 was \$16.74, up from \$14.59 in 2021.

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The failings of the child care market also affect the current and future health of the American economy, costing \$122 billion a year in lost earnings, productivity and tax revenue, according to one study. All of these challenges put parents under tremendous stress to meet the dual responsibilities of providing for their families and ensuring their children are safe and nurtured.

"A good child care system is essential for kids to thrive and our economy to prosper. But our current approach fails kids, parents, and child care workers by every measure," said **Lisa Hamilton, president and CEO of the Annie E. Casey Foundation**. "Without safe child care they can afford and get to, working parents face impossible choices, affecting not only their families, but their employers as well."

Transitioning from a faltering child care system to creating a flourishing one will take new thinking and investing at the local, state, and national levels. An executive order issued by President Biden in April is aimed at expanding access, lowering costs, and raising wages. It could prove to be a helpful framework, but more is needed, including:

1. Federal, state, and local governments should invest more in child care. State and local governments should maximize remaining pandemic recovery act dollars to fund needed child care services and capacity.
2. Colorado should make substantial, long-term investments in order to raise compensation and improve benefits for the early care and education workforce, across all care settings, with a specific focus on providers who serve high-priority populations and infant-toddler child care providers.
3. Public and private leaders should work together to improve the infrastructure for home-based child care, beginning by lowering the barriers to entry for potential providers by increasing access to start-up and expansion capital.
4. To help young parents, Congress should expand the federal Child Care Access Means Parents in School (CCAMPIS) program, which serves student parents.

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RELEASE INFORMATION

The *2023 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 datacenter.aecf.org.

About the Colorado Children's Campaign

The Colorado Children's Campaign is a nonprofit, nonpartisan advocacy organization committed since 1985 to realizing every chance for every child in Colorado. We advocate for the development and implementation of data-driven public policies that improve child well-being in health, education and early childhood. We do this by providing Coloradans with trusted data and research and organizing an extensive statewide network of dedicated child advocates. For more information, please visit www.coloradokids.org.

ABOUT THE ANNIE E. CASEY FOUNDATION

The Annie E. Casey Foundation creates a brighter future for the nation's young people 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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