



UNDER EMBARGO Until June 14, 2023 at 12:01 a.m. ET

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Iowa retains high rank on child well-being, but inaccessible, unaffordable child care pushes state’s parents to the breaking point

The U.S. economy loses \$122 billion a year as child care challenges cause parents to miss, quit or scale back work, Annie E. Casey Foundation report finds

Des Moines, IA — Iowa ranks 6th among the states in 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.

But the lack of affordable and accessible child care in Iowa — as nationally — short-changes children and causes parents to frequently miss work or even quit their jobs, while those who can find care pay dearly for it. These child care challenges cost the American economy billions of dollars a year and stymie women professionally.

“This year’s edition of the *Data Book* highlights the areas where Iowa continues to do well by our children and their families — and the areas where we simply must do better,” said Anne Discher, executive director of Common Good Iowa, Iowa’s member of the KIDS COUNT network. “Child care is one of those areas where there is much more to do.”

The *Data Book* reports too many parents cannot secure child care that is compatible with their work schedules and commutes. In 2020–21, 14% of Iowa children ages birth to 5 had a family member who quit, changed or refused a job because of problems with child care, compared with 13% nationwide. U.S. women are five to eight times more likely than men to experience negative employment consequences related to caregiving.

Even if Iowa parents can find an opening at child care near their home, they often can’t pay for it, with costs that rival tuition at state universities and community colleges.

Cost of child care for toddlers by type, Iowa

	Annual cost	Cost as percent of median income, married couple	Cost as percent of median income, single mother
Center-based care	\$10,437	10%	33%
Home-based care	\$6,823	6%	21%

As families are burdened by the cost of care, child care workers — often parents themselves — are paid worse than 98% of professions. Median national pay for child care workers was just \$13.71 an hour in 2022, less than the wage for retail (\$14.26) and customer service workers (\$18.16). In Iowa, the median hourly wage for child care workers was even worse: \$10.99.

The failings of the child care market affect the current and future health of our economy, costing \$122 billion a year nationally, and \$1.1 billion a year in Iowa, in lost earnings, productivity and tax revenue,

according to one study. 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.

Each year, the *Data Book* presents national and state data from 16 indicators in four domains and ranks the states according to how children are faring overall. Here are Iowa's domain rankings:

- Economic well-being: 3
- Education: 9
- Health: 11
- Family and community: 9

Iowa ranks first — best — on two indicators: on-time high school graduation rate and the share of children living in households with high housing costs. Iowa's worst rankings: teen birth rate (23rd), share of 3- and 4-year-olds attending preschool (25th), and share of 10- to 17-year-olds who are overweight or obese (29th).

The well-being of our children is undergirded by policy choices we are making, said Discher. "If we made the choice, say, to invest in affordable, accessible child care, it would help our communities — and ultimately measures of child well-being — across the board. Kids would receive the positive early experiences they need to develop, parents would have the chance to pursue family-supporting careers and our economy would get the workers it needs to reach its full potential."

Turning a faltering child care system into 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:

- 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. Iowa should build on improvements it made to the state's Child Care Assistance program during the recent legislative session, by continuing to expand access, including making child care workers categorically eligible for assistance.
- 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.
- 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 COMMON GOOD IOWA

Common Good Iowa's team of policy advocates and analysts leverage reliable data, solid analysis and collaborative relationships to craft policy solutions to Iowa's most pressing problems. Our vision is a state where children and families are healthy and secure, workers thrive, and clean air and water contribute to a healthy future for all. Learn more at www.commongoodiowa.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.