



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

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**Wyoming Ranks
27th in Child Well-Being, but Inaccessible and Unaffordable Child Care Creating Hardships for Families**

National Data 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

LARAMIE, WYOMING — The **2023 KIDS COUNT® Data Book**, a 50-state report of recent household data developed by the Annie E. Casey Foundation, ranks Wyoming 27th in the nation for child well-being. The annual report ranked Wyoming 19th in economic well-being, 14th in education, 46th in health, and 12th in family and community factors. Overall, Wyoming ranked in the top quarter of the United States. However, the publication notes that like the rest of the nation, Wyoming is experiencing hardships due to lack of affordable and accessible child care.

When parents can't access consistent childcare, they are more likely to miss work or even quit their jobs. Often those who can find care are paying dearly for it. Child care challenges cost the American economy billions of dollars a year and stymie Wyoming moms and dads who are working to help their families make ends meet.

Micah Richardson, director of programs at the Wyoming Community Foundation, Wyoming's member of the KIDS COUNT network, said the state's health ranking should be discussed as well. Wyoming is tied with Colorado for first in having the lowest percentage (24%) of children who are obese, but the state also ranks in the bottom five for children who are uninsured. Only Texas ranks lower.

"There are too many families falling through the cracks because the state hasn't expanded Medicaid," says Richardson. "Families who are working to make ends meet are being hamstrung by both the high cost of child care and the high cost of medical care."

The *Data Book* reports too many parents cannot secure child care that is compatible with work schedules. In addition, the *Data Book* reports that in 2020–21, 10% of children birth to 5 in Wyoming lived in families in which someone quit, changed, or refused a job because of problems with child care. And women are five to eight times more likely than men to experience negative employment consequences related to caregiving.

Even if parents can find an opening at a child care facility in their town, they often can't pay for it. Wyoming's average annual cost of center-based child care for toddlers in was \$7,864 – 8% of median income for a married couple and 25% of a single mother's income.

Richardson points out that the state's average childcare cost is higher than one year of tuition at the University of Wyoming.

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

wages for retail (\$14.26) and customer service (\$18.16) workers. In Wyoming, median hourly pay was almost two dollars lower than the national average at just \$11.98 in 2022.

“The pandemic allowed us to truly understand the importance of child care to our families and communities,” said Richardson. “We must ensure child care workers earn a wage that allows them to care for their own families.”

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.

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. A new framework which was issued in April aimed at expanding access, lowering costs, and raising wages could be helpful, 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. Congress should reauthorize and strengthen the Child Care and Development Block Grant Act.
- Public and private leaders should work together to improve the infrastructure for home-based child care, beginning by -increasing access to start-up and expansion capital for potential providers
- To help young parents, Congress should expand the federal Child Care Access Means Parents in School (CCAMPIS) program, which serves student parents.

In 2023 a number of child care related bills were considered by the Wyoming Legislature and discussion will continue as an interim topic this summer as well. “Child care is an economic and community issue in every one of our Wyoming towns,” says Director of the Wyoming Women’s Foundation, Rebekah Hazelton. “Our lawmakers have the ability to strengthen our communities and create more safe places for our children by addressing the issue. We look forward to working with our legislators on Wyoming-specific solutions for working parents and children.”

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.

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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 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. WYCF works to support Wyoming communities in good times and in bad and granted over \$8 million to nonprofits in 2022. WYCF has been the Kids Count network member for Wyoming since 2014.

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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