



UNDER EMBARGO Until June 10, 2024 at 12:01 a.m. ET

Contact: Damita Curry | dcurry@azchildren.org | 480.263.0983

ARIZONA RANKS 42nd IN CHILD WELL-BEING AS RISING COSTS, INCLUDING HOUSING AND CHILD CARE, ARE CAUSING FAMILIES STRESS

PHOENIX, AZ — Arizona ranks 42nd in child well-being, according to the **2024 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. Rising costs create stress for families in Arizona and nationwide.

Each year, the *Data Book* ranks the states according to how children are faring, presenting national and state data from 16 indicators in four domains — Arizona ranks 33rd in economic well-being, 44th in education, 34th in health, and 41st in family and community. Arizona's overall rank of 42nd reflects some areas of improvement and other areas in which policymakers can bolster policies to support child well-being.

“Nearly half of parents in Arizona are going to bed very stressed about rising costs. That is too many moms and dads worrying about how they’ll provide for their children, pay rent, or afford child care,” said President and CEO of Children’s Action Alliance (CAA), January Contreras. CAA is the Arizona member of the KIDS COUNT network. “When parents are stressed, the children feel that too, affecting everything from mental health to school performance and attendance. Smart solutions and investments into families and schools can help.”

The **2024 KIDS COUNT® Data Book** notes that roughly 40% of children in the United States have experienced at least one adverse childhood experience (ACE). That number is slightly higher in Arizona at 43% and notable when considering the impact of ACEs on school attendance, learning, and overall well-being. Children living in households with parents experiencing stress and depression can have a higher risk of experiencing ACEs, especially when their parents face [specific risk factors](#) including financial hardship and/or lack of access to affordable child care.

RISING COSTS CAUSE HIGH LEVELS OF STRESS FOR FAMILIES

[Nationally](#), 44.5% of households reported in April 2024 that increased prices are causing elevated levels of stress. In Arizona, that percentage is even higher with just under half (47.4%) of all households reporting that price increases in the two months prior to being surveyed cause them to be very stressed, the highest level available in the survey.

The cost of housing is one example of a rising cost in Arizona. [Data from the Maricopa Association of Governments](#) confirms that, in the Phoenix-Mesa-Chandler Metropolitan Statistical Area, availability of apartment units with rent under \$1,000 have dropped from over 90% in 2010 to only 6% as of June 2023 – a stunning change of circumstances for families.

The *2024 KIDS COUNT*® Data Book reports that in 2022, 30% of children in the country lived in households with a high housing cost burden, and the same is nearly true for Arizona children at a rate of 29%. The share is even greater among children who are Black, Latino or Native American.

Why does this matter: A high housing cost burden exists when a household spends more than 30% of monthly income on rent, mortgage payments, and/or related expenses, making it more likely that the family is unable to meet all of their basic needs.

The cost of child care is another example. When child care is available, it is often at a cost that stretches family budgets in difficult ways. In Arizona, the [average annual cost](#) (\$12,662) for center-based child care for one toddler consumes 13% of the median income of a married couple (\$100,027) and 36% of the median income for a single-parent family (\$34,991). Consider that prices are substantially higher for younger children, and many families have more than one child in need of child care, which means the reality for many families is that they are spending an even greater share of income on child care at a time when other costs have risen in significant ways.

Why does this matter: When parents cannot afford child care, there are missed opportunities for parents, children, and the economy. A [recent survey](#) of Arizona working parents found that child care problems led 42 percent to reduce their regular work hours. “And about one-third had their pay or hours reduced, or changed from full-time to part-time work. Reduced parent income, along with parental stress, can have harmful short- and long-term impacts on children.”

“Children may not come to school ready to learn, or come to school at all, if they are experiencing instability,” said Lisa Hamilton, president and CEO of the Annie E. Casey Foundation. “To meet educational milestones, kids of all ages and grades must have what they need to learn each day, from enough food and sleep to a safe way to get to school to support such as tutoring and mental health services.”

Supporting families and children as they struggle with unaffordable costs of housing and child care is an urgent issue in need of solutions. Children’s Action Alliance recommends federal, state, and local governments:

- **Advance policies that strengthen household financial security**, including child care subsidies, affordable housing, temporary financial assistance, and food assistance. When it comes to children, the [CDC reports](#) that prevention of ACEs can be supported by policies that increase economic stability, decrease parental stress, and improve parents’ ability to meet children’s basic needs and obtain high-quality child care.”
- **Invest in child care now to lower costs and reduce the disruption that will be caused by the looming child care funding cliff.**
 - The Arizona Legislature and Governor Katie Hobbs should dedicate state general funds to child care to support Arizona’s children, parents, providers, and economy, beginning with the investment proposed in Governor Hobbs’ [Executive Budget](#). Investment of

significant public funding is an urgent priority for child care accessibility as [child care providers already operate on thin margins](#) and childcare workers receive very [low wages](#).

- The federal government should continue to increase funding for the nation's child care infrastructure including child care and Head Start, and take actions to increase affordability such as their recent [proposed regulation](#).

Supporting students in need of mental health services and trauma-informed support is a critical need that Arizona has begun to address and must continue to do so. Children's Action Alliance recommends that policymakers:

- **Invest in public schools and community schools to become trauma informed and to provide wraparound support to kids and families.** Investment is needed for schools to better support student learning, attendance, and well-being through [trauma-informed school](#) strategies. Schools can improve student outcomes with investments in tutoring, mental health support, nutritional assistance, and other services, including multi-cultural and multi-lingual parent engagement.
- **Continue to build pathways for students to access mental health services through school.** In 2020, the Arizona Legislature passed Jake's Law which created the [Children's Behavioral Health Fund](#) to allow uninsured and underinsured children to receive services through schools and AHCCCS health plans. More actions such as these are needed, including more [school counselors](#) and on-site services and [continued expansion](#) of authority for schools to directly bill AHCCCS for all Medicaid covered health services.

###

RELEASE INFORMATION

The 2024 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 CHILDREN'S ACTION ALLIANCE

Children's Action Alliance (CAA), a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization, strives to create an Arizona where all children and families thrive. CAA advocates for the well-being of more than 1.6 million Arizona children and their families at the state capitol and in the community. CAA works with elected officials, community partners, and coalitions to protect Arizona's ability to meet the education, health care, and human services needs of vulnerable children and families. For more information visit azchildren.org and follow CAA on [LinkedIn](#) and [Facebook](#).

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.

###