

## **2025 KIDS COUNT Data Book State Press Release**

**New Mexico Voices for Children**

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### **New Mexico Kids Still Hurting:**

#### **National Data Highlights Urgent Need for Continued Investment in NM's Families and Children**

**ALBUQUERQUE**— The Annie E. Casey Foundation released its annual *KIDS COUNT Data Book*, a report that measures how children and families across the country are faring. New Mexico is once again ranked 50<sup>th</sup> for overall child well-being. In recent years, New Mexico made historic investments in early childhood education and passed a state Child Tax Credit. The data from this year's report shows that New Mexico's policymakers must keep investing in our children's health, education, and economic security.

"New Mexico has the tools, the vision, and the collective will to lead, and has, but many children and families are still hurting," said Gabrielle Uballez, Executive Director of NM Voices for Children. "Just as our state leaders have made progress on early childhood education, tax fairness, and expanded Medicaid, we need visionary leadership in housing, K–12 education, economic mobility, and protection of mixed-status families to ensure that all children thrive."

In 2022, New Mexico was the first state to make child care free for most families. New Mexico is a nationwide leader in progressive tax policies and preschool accessibility. These investments take time to show up in the data.

National trends of increased cost of living, housing unaffordability, and threats to health care access have affected and will continue to affect the well-being of children and families. At the same time, federal budget cut proposals will reduce funding for programs that improve the lives of families and children in New Mexico. State leaders took a proactive approach to respond to federal cuts in real time, but they also missed bold opportunities to uplift children in the state's latest legislative session.

"In New Mexico, the majority of children depend on social safety net programs," said Gabrielle Uballez, Executive Director of NM Voices for Children. "With critical federal programs potentially facing cuts, it's even more imperative that state policymakers step up with bold, strategic investments to protect and strengthen the safety net for New Mexico's children and families."

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. As it is a national ranking of the 50 states, geographic disparities and relative measurement to improvements in other states impact the ranking.

Among the indicators, New Mexico ranked 33rd in children living in households that spend 30% or more of their income on housing, 32nd in children without health insurance, 35th in teens who are overweight

or obese, and 37th in young children not enrolled in school. The state ranks 50th in fourth grade reading, eighth grade math proficiency, and high school students not graduating on time. New Mexico ranked 48th in teens who are neither working nor enrolled in school, and 49th in children in poverty, and children whose parents lack secure employment.

New Mexico continued to lose ground on affordable housing, an indicator where our state traditionally outperformed the nation. The state's rate of children in households with a high housing cost burden is 29%, still just below the national average of 30%, and lawmakers must act urgently to expand housing access and affordability.

In New Mexico, the rate of children and teens who are overweight or obese improved in both the long term (decreased 3% since 2016–17) and short term (decreased 13% since 2020–21), and this led to a better national ranking (up to 35th from 44th). Teen birth rates also continued to decrease, down 10% compared to 2022. Over the last decade, teen birth rates in New Mexico are down 58%.

In its 36th year of publication, the *KIDS COUNT® Data Book* provides statewide numbers to help policymakers see where progress is being made, where greater support is needed, and which strategies are making a difference. NM Voices for Children encourages lawmakers and officials in New Mexico to continue to make decisions that help kids and young people in our state.

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#### **RELEASE INFORMATION**

The 2025 *KIDS COUNT Data Book* will be 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 [datacenter.aecf.org](http://datacenter.aecf.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](http://www.aecf.org). KIDS COUNT is a registered trademark of the Annie E. Casey Foundation.

New Mexicans are a people of strength, resilience, and deep-rooted pride—shaped by our commitment to community and our dedication to the well-being of families.

That's why it's painful to reconcile our values with the news in this week's release of the Annie E. Casey Foundation's annual *KIDS COUNT® Data Book*, which ranks states on child well-being. Once again, New Mexico is ranked 50th. It's disheartening. And it leads many to turn to us at New Mexico Voices for Children and ask, "How is this possible?"

Two things are true: progress takes time—and our children can't afford to wait.

So there is no single answer, and no silver bullet. But if we look beyond the overall ranking to the individual indicators, we can see both where we've made gains and where we must do more.

As in years past, this year's data reflects conditions from 2023—before the full impact of many recent policy changes has had time to take hold. These include expanded child care assistance, increased PreK funding, and other investments aimed at lifting families out of poverty. These efforts matter, and in time, they will move the needle. But today, too many children are still waiting for the resources they need to thrive. As long as we lack a comprehensive set of bold, targeted policies across all 16 KIDS COUNT indicators, it will remain difficult to climb the rankings.

This legislative session, we and our partners fought hard for such policies. And while we made progress in some areas, several crucial proposals—despite broad public support—failed to pass.

This year, we championed Paid Family and Medical Leave, which would allow New Mexicans to care for loved ones or themselves without losing income or risking their jobs. It died in the legislature. We advocated for a fairer tax system—one that included a modest increase on the billions in profits made by the oil and gas industry in our state. That revenue would have gone directly to help families struggling with the rising costs of food, housing, and other basic needs. It was vetoed. We stood with Native leaders to support Indigenous-led education, aimed at preserving Native sovereignty, languages, and cultures within the education system. It was left unsigned.

This must change.

Despite these setbacks, we have made real and measurable progress. New Mexico continues to lead in several key areas: free child care for most families, free school meals for all students, historic investments in early childhood education, our state Child Tax Credit to help working families meet basic needs, and expanded healthcare access for more New Mexico families. These are hard-won victories that are already making a difference in people's lives.

Many of these gains and family-centered policies have been won over the past seven years, thanks to the leadership of our current governor and legislators. However, if we are to keep momentum, we must also recognize that meaningful progress has spanned across different administrations, such as the 2013 Medicaid expansion, which has provided government health insurance to tens of thousands more New Mexicans. And we must remember the lessons of past transitions. For instance, previous administrations have made decisions that disrupted critical services, such as behavioral health care, which we are still rebuilding. As we approach

an election year and a new governor sets their agenda, we must remain focused, loud, and strong in advocating to put for an agenda that puts children first.

Because too many families face unaffordable housing, limited access to health care, and difficult choices between gas and groceries. And looming federal proposals threaten to make things worse—deep cuts to Medicaid, SNAP, and education programs that millions of New Mexicans rely on. Here, three in four children rely on Medicaid, and more than one-third of SNAP recipients are children. For immigrant families, the fear of deportation continues to block access to vital services.

But there is reason for hope. New Mexico has the tools, the vision, and the collective will to lead. Just as we have made progress on early childhood education, tax fairness, and expanding Medicaid, we must do the same in housing, behavioral health, K–12 education, and economic mobility, and protection of mixed-status families to ensure that all children—regardless of zip code, background, or immigration status—can thrive.

That means finally passing paid family medical leave. It means making housing more affordable. It means investing in behavioral health support. It means advancing culturally relevant education. It means raising the minimum wage so that hard work truly provides a living wage—because New Mexico's families deserve to both share in the wealth of our state through strong public goods and to participate in work that provides real economic mobility. And once these laws are passed and the budget is signed, it means ensuring the swift, effective implementation of these programs and policies so that families feel the impact of our advocacy in their everyday lives.

New Mexico's future depends on how we care for our children and families today. We must not lose sight of the fact that this work is about more than rankings. This meansIt's about building a state where every child has a real shot at a bright, healthy, and secure future—regardless of their zip code, race, or immigration status.We must not lose sight of the fact that this work is about more than rankings.