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Maine Ranks 16th in Latest National Rankings for Child Well-Being

New report shows federal and local policies are leading to improvements for U.S. children, but positive results for Maine continue to trail behind other New England states

AUGUSTA, Maine — Maine children are experiencing modest improvements in key areas of child well-being that influence their ability to lead healthier, safer lives, but the *2018 KIDS COUNT[®] Data Book*, released today by [the Annie E. Casey Foundation](#), shows that there is still room for improvement compared to other states in New England. While fewer Maine children are living in poverty, too many still face health and economic challenges that could be prevented with stronger policies, according to the report.

For nearly 30 years, the *KIDS COUNT Data Book* has provided a comprehensive look at child well-being in the United States. This year, Maine ranked 16th nationally for overall child well-being. Of the other New England states, New Hampshire ranks first in the country, followed by Massachusetts (2), Connecticut (7), Vermont (8) and Rhode Island (19). The *Data Book* uses 16 indicators to rank each state across four domains that represent what children need most to thrive — health, education, economic well-being and family and community. In the four domains, Maine ranked:

- **25th in economic well-being.** The economic well-being domain examines data related to child poverty, family employment, housing costs and whether older teens are in school or working. The current data show that 30 percent of children in Maine are in families where no parent has full-time, year-round employment, an improvement from 34 percent in 2010. In addition, slightly fewer Maine children were living in poverty in 2016 (17 percent) than in 2010 (18 percent).
- **19th in education.** High school students graduating on time continues to be a bright spot, and Maine currently ranks 13th on this indicator. However, Maine continues to lag behind the national rate (52 percent) for children ages 3 and 4 not enrolled in early education programs. Maine ranks 27th on this indicator, with 56 percent of its 3- and 4- year-olds not enrolled in early education programs.
- **Sixth in family and community.** At 5 percent, Maine leads the nation (tied with Montana, New Hampshire and Wyoming) with one of the lowest percentages of children in families where the head of household lacks a high school diploma. Mirroring a national shift, teen birth rates in Maine are also at a record low, at only 15 births per 1,000 for females ages 10-17.
- **22nd in health.** In contrast with the national trend of improvement in this area, Maine has experienced an overall increase in the percentage of children without health insurance since 2010: 5 percent of Maine children now lack coverage, compared to the national average of 4 percent.

Overall, Maine's health indicators showed mixed results. The percentage of Maine teens ages 12-17 who abused alcohol or drugs in the past year was equal to the national average of 5 percent. Additionally, at 7.1 percent, Maine is ranked 14th for babies born with low birthweight, reflecting a slight increase since 2010, when 6.3 percent of babies were born with low birthweight. While Maine saw improvement in the child and teen death rate, the state continues to lag in national trends in child health insurance coverage. The percentage of children nationally without health insurance coverage has dropped from 8 percent in 2010 to 4 percent in 2016. But in Maine, that number has increased, from 4 percent not covered in 2010 to 5 percent not covered in 2016, above the national average.

Many states are seeing vast improvements in the percentage of children living without health insurance, largely because of the Affordable Care Act.

"More needs to be done to improve access to care, which is why Maine Children's Alliance (MCA) is continuing to support and insist on Medicaid expansion, to increase coverage and its benefits to eligible parents for the health and well-being of children and families," said MCA's executive director, Claire Berkowitz. "When parents have coverage, their kids are more likely to have coverage."

In economic indicators, Maine has seen some improvement. Twenty-seven percent of Maine children live in households with a high housing cost burden (where more than 30 percent of income is consumed by housing costs), down from 30 percent in 2010. In 2016 there were 4,000 Maine teens (6 percent) not in school and not working, a decrease from 2010 when 5,000 teens (7 percent) were not in school and not working.

Meanwhile, compared to the nation, Maine saw more young children not in preschool (52 percent vs. 56 percent), slightly more fourth-graders not reading at grade level (65 percent vs. 64 percent), and more eighth-graders not proficient in math (67 percent vs. 64 percent). However, 87 percent of high school students graduated on time in 2015-16, a step above the national average of 84 percent.

While the report points to the progress and increasingly healthy development of many children nationwide, the potential inaccuracies of the 2020 census pose a direct threat to the supportive programs and services that have been main drivers of that progress. The potential undercount of 1 million children under age 5 would have long-lasting implications for federally funded programs, infrastructure and political representation.

"In Maine, as well as in other states, young children under 5 are the most likely to be overlooked in the census compared to any other age group," said Helen Hemminger, MCA's research and KIDS Count associate. "These children are more likely to live in poverty, to be homeless, to be moving among various relatives or to live in blended families."

The undercount for this age group has gotten worse since 1980 and nationally was 4.6 percent in 2010. The undercount matters for apportionment of federal dollars, and matters acutely in Maine. Maine has historically received more per capita from the federal government than all but a handful of states.

In Maine, the census tracts most likely to be undercounted are the poorest urban neighborhoods of Lewiston and Portland, as well as isolated communities in Washington and Hancock counties, including people in those two counties living in unorganized territories, American Indian reservations and island communities.

“We will count on children of all races and ethnicities to build America’s future, so the country must count *all* children in this upcoming census, so we can direct funding to meet their needs,” said Casey Foundation President and CEO Patrick McCarthy. “It’s not too late to ensure we conduct a census that leads to proper funding, representation and programs for the continued healthy development of kids. But it’s up to policymakers, communities and the nation to make sure that every kid is counted and matters.”

Release Information

The *2018 KIDS COUNT® Data Book* will be available June 27th at 12:01 a.m. EDT at www.aecf.org. Additional information is available at www.aecf.org/databook, which also contains the most recent national, state and local data on hundreds of indicators of child well-being. Journalists interested in creating maps, graphs and rankings in stories about the *Data Book* can use the KIDS COUNT® Data Center at datacenter.kidscount.org.

About the Maine Children’s Alliance

The Maine Children’s Alliance is a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization that advocates for sound public policies and promotes best practices for Maine children, youth and families. Learn more at www.mekids.org.

About the Annie E. Casey Foundation

The Annie E. Casey Foundation creates a brighter future for the nation’s children 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.