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Washington Has Made Historic Progress in Connecting Kids to Health Coverage; Federal Proposals Must Not Send Kids' Health Backward

2017 KIDS COUNT® Data Book Ranks Washington Fifth Among States in Child Health, but 24th and 28th in Economic Well-Being and Education

WASHINGTON, June 13, 2017 — Thanks to progress in health coverage, Washington state ranks fifth nationally in kids' health, but it has much room for improvement in terms of kids' economic well-being and education, according to the *2017 KIDS COUNT Data Book®* released today by the Annie E. Casey Foundation.

Progress in kids' health must be protected against the federal proposals that threaten to hurt the health of Washington's kids and families. And strategic investments are needed in our state toward key programs that advance the economic security and educational outcomes of Washington's kids.

In the domain of child health, the state's 10-year-old Cover All Kids law plus the federal Affordable Care Act have succeeded in reducing the number of uninsured Washington children from 6 percent in 2010 to 3 percent today — our lowest rate of uninsured children on record. The state has made tremendous progress in connecting more Black, Latino and Asian Pacific American children with the coverage they need to thrive. Coverage gaps among [children of different races and ethnicities have narrowed](#), according to U.S. Census data gathered and presented on the KIDS COUNT Data Center. Smart federal investments—such as Medicaid and the Children's Health Insurance Program—and affordable state-level coverage through Apple Health for Kids have clearly been paying off.

In two domains, however, Washington ranks particularly poorly: economic well-being and education. In terms of economic well-being, our state's overall ranking is 28th. One way to improve this ranking is for lawmakers to fully restore investments to the basic grant for families

participating in WorkFirst, Washington's assistance and job training program for families with children that are striving to move out of poverty. The grant – federally funded through Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) – helps families meet their basic needs for food, shelter and clothing. Yet it was cut by 15 percent in 2011 and hasn't been restored to full funding. Each month, TANF offers economic stability for 31,000 Washington households.

Washington ranks 24th in education, in part because of low graduation rates and the high share of young children not in preschool. To better ensure all kids get off to a good start in their schooling, lawmakers should invest in early learning, which is proven to positively affect long-term academic achievement. In particular, they can reduce disparities in educational opportunity by expanding the Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program, our state's quality preschool program serving families living in poverty. Twenty-three thousand eligible children are currently unserved because the program lacks adequate funding.

Further, lawmakers must protect services that serve Washington's kids, like health care and food assistance, from the cuts proposed by President Trump and Congress.

"Every child in Washington ought to have a great start in life," says Paola Maranan, executive director of the Children's Alliance, a statewide organization advocating for racially equitable policy solutions that move all of Washington's 1.6 million children toward health, educational opportunity and overall well-being. "This data ought to prompt Washington state lawmakers to invest in education and economic security, starting in the earliest years."

The annual *KIDS COUNT Data Book* uses 16 indicators to rank each state across four domains—health, education, economic well-being and family and community—that represent what children need most to thrive. Washington ranks:

- **24th in economic well-being.** Although we don't rank highly compared to other states, our state has nevertheless seen steady improvement from previous years in economic well-being. The number of children living in poverty dropped to a five-year low between 2010 and 2015, and the state saw a 23 percent decline in the percentage of families that spend 30 percent or more of their income on housing.
- **28th in education.** Twenty-two percent of Washington high school students did not graduate on time in 2014-2015, significantly worse than the national average of 17 percent. And 60 percent of 3- and 4-year-olds are not enrolled in preschool compared to 53 percent nationally.
- **17th in the family and community domain.** The teen birth rate fell 33 percent between 2010 and 2015, down to 18 per 1,000 women aged 15-19. Six percent of children live in high-poverty neighborhoods, more than half the national average of 14 percent.
- **Fifth in health.** Between 2010 and 2015, the percentage of children without health insurance fell 50 percent, due in large part to sound public policies and investments. However, the child and teen death rate rose 5 percent over the same time period.

The *2017 Data Book* shows that smart public policies in many areas, including early learning and health care, are working. With regard to early learning, for example, the state’s 2015 Early Start Act is increasing the quality and cultural relevance of licensed child care for families across the state; the Cover All Kids law created Apple Health for Kids with comprehensive, routine health coverage with uniform eligibility criteria.

Yet too many children, especially kids of color and children growing up in poverty, are still facing formidable barriers to a healthy future—barriers that only grow higher when services that support kids’ well-being are cut.

“Kids need policymakers to design, implement and invest in the public policies that enable them to thrive,” said Misha Werschkul, executive director of the Washington State Budget & Policy Center, which conducts research and analysis to advance the well-being of Washington communities through just, equitable public policy. “In our state, lawmakers must craft a budget that invests in and protects services that improve kids’ lives, like quality early learning and Apple Health. It is essential to the health and well-being of future generations.”

Release Information

The *2017 KIDS COUNT Data Book* will be available June 13 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 KIDS COUNT in Washington

KIDS COUNT in Washington is a partnership of the Children’s Alliance with the Washington State Budget & Policy Center, pursuing measurable improvements in child outcomes through equitable public policy measures. The two organizations offer policymakers and the public the knowledge they need to remove the barriers kids face to brighter, freer, more equal futures.

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.

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