



STATE OF TENNESSEE  
**TENNESSEE COMMISSION ON CHILDREN AND YOUTH**

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**Tennessee's Improvement in KIDS COUNT Ranking among Best in the Nation**

Tennessee is 36<sup>th</sup> this year in the annual *KIDS COUNT National Data Book* ranking on child well-being, better than its 39<sup>th</sup> ranking in 2013. The state is among the five states with the biggest improvements in overall rankings from 2013 to 2014. The *Data Book* rates states on four domains: Economic Well-Being, Education, Health, and Family and Community. Each domain is comprised of four measures. When the most recently available data were compared to those from 2005, Tennessee improved on 10 of the 16 measures; worsened on five and remained the same on one, paralleling national changes.

“Good public policies and wise investments in improving outcomes for children over the years have made a difference in the overall well-being of children in Tennessee,” said Linda O’Neal, executive director of the Tennessee Commission on Children and Youth (TCCY), the state KIDS COUNT affiliate.

O’Neal applauded Governor Haslam and the Tennessee General Assembly for maintaining funding for proven strategies that improve outcomes for children, including pre-kindergarten, Family Resource Centers, Coordinated School Health Programs and home visiting.

Tennessee’s highest domain ranking was on Health at 31<sup>st</sup>, with improvements on all four measures: low-birth weight babies, children without health insurance, child

and teen deaths per 100,000, and teens who abuse alcohol or drugs, where the state's proportion was the same as the national average. The state has a lower percentage of children without health insurance than the nation as a whole. However, there are still 85,000 uninsured children, one in every 16 in Tennessee. O'Neal said expansion of Medicaid/TennCare would significantly increase the number of children who have health insurance.

Improved public policies and better choices have also contributed to a drop in motor vehicle deaths in youth ages 15 to 24 and a resulting reduction in all child and teen deaths. Better compliance with existing good public policies, including no texting while driving, graduated driver licensing provisions, and use of bicycle helmets and life preservers would produce even better outcomes, according to O'Neal.

Education, where the state ranked 37<sup>th</sup> overall, is another area of improvement. More of the state's fourth graders are proficient readers, as measured by the National Assessment of Educational Progress, Proficiency for Tennessee fourth graders was the same as the nation as a whole (34 percent). Unfortunately, that still means two in three fourth-graders are not proficient readers. Although research supports the long-term role of quality early childhood education in improving children's futures, the state is near the bottom as only eight states have proportionally fewer 3- and 4-year-olds attending preschool than Tennessee.

Tennessee does better keeping students in high school and graduating on time than the national average. While many factors contribute to this success, good state policy has helped, including mandatory attendance until age 18 and school attendance requirements to get a driver's license. These policies also contribute to more children in Tennessee living in families where the household head has a high school diploma, compared to other states.

The unfortunate news in this report is more than one in three Tennessee children live in a single-parent family (37 percent); more than one in three in a household with a high housing cost burden (34 percent); one in three in a family where parents

lack secure employment (33 percent), and more than one in four lives in poverty (26 percent).

This year's *National Data Book* marks 25 years of reporting on child well-being in the states. The book includes a summary of changes in national child well-being since the first *National Data Book* was published in 1990. The Tennessee Commission on Children and Youth was selected as the Annie E. Casey Foundation's state partner in the second year of funding state efforts, strengthening the Commission's ability to meet the Tennessee Legislature's 1988 charge to publish an annual comprehensive report on the status of children and youth in Tennessee.

The report will be available on the Annie E. Casey [website](#) upon release. KIDS COUNT data and data from TCCY's publications are available at the KIDS COUNT Data Center. Consumers of the data center can create maps and graphs of child well-being data at the national, state, county and city level. To access information for Tennessee, go to <http://datacenter.kidscount.org/tn> or <http://mobile.kidscount.org>.

The Tennessee Commission on Children and Youth is a small state agency created by the Tennessee General Assembly. Its primary mission is to advocate for improvements in the quality of life for Tennessee children and families. Partial funding for TCCY's KIDS COUNT program is provided through a grant from the Annie E. Casey Foundation, the nation's largest philanthropy devoted exclusively to disadvantaged children.

For more information, contact (615) 741-2633, access TCCY's website at [www.tn.gov/tccy](http://www.tn.gov/tccy) or follow it on [www.facebook.com/TCCYonfb](https://www.facebook.com/TCCYonfb) and [www.twitter.com/@tccy](https://www.twitter.com/@tccy).

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