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North Dakota Among Top 10 States in Country for Child Well-Being

State ranks first in economic well-being, but North Dakota children continue to face education and health obstacles

FARGO, N.D., June 13, 2017—With improvements in families' economic well-being, North Dakota ranks ninth in the nation for overall child well-being and first in the nation for the economic well-being of children and their families, according to the Annie E. Casey Foundation's 2017 *KIDS COUNT*[®] *Data Book*, an annual assessment of children's well-being in the United States.

North Dakota's child population is growing and thriving in many ways. The past few years have brought some positive developments for the state's children and families. The state's economic growth has boosted the economic well-being of children, reducing child poverty to 12 percent. Most children live in two-parent homes where parents have completed high school and have full-time, year-round work. Yet, despite these strengths, North Dakota struggles to improve child health and education.

North Dakota has fallen 10 spots in the overall health ranking, down to 27th place this year. The uninsured rate for children rose to 8 percent in 2015, meaning that approximately 13,000 North Dakota children have no form of health insurance coverage.

Education also remains an area where more work needs to be done. Most fourth graders (63 percent) are not reading proficiently, 61 percent of eighth graders are not proficient in math, and 64 percent of 3- and 4-year olds are not enrolled in pre-kindergarten programs.

"Trends are shaped by many forces, but these data provide us an opportunity to better understand the challenges facing children and families in our state and to strategically invest in their futures," said Karen Olson, program director for North Dakota KIDS COUNT.

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. North Dakota ranks:

- **First in economic well-being.** Moving up from second into first place, North Dakota now leads the nation in the economic well-being of children. Among states, North Dakota has the lowest percentage of children in families with a high housing cost burden (17 percent); the lowest percentage of children without secure parental employment (20 percent), tying with Utah; the second lowest child poverty rate (12 percent); and only 5 percent of teens not attending school and not working compared to 7 percent nationally.
- **Fifth in the family and community domain.** When compared with the national average, children in North Dakota fare well in terms of family and community indicators. Five percent of North Dakota children live in families where the head of household lacks a high school

diploma and 26 percent of children live in a single-parent family. The national averages are 14 percent and 35 percent, respectively. In addition, North Dakota saw declines in the teen birth rate and in the percentage of children living in high-poverty neighborhoods.

- **25th in education.** Despite minor improvements in some of the education measures, 64 percent of North Dakota 3- and 4-year olds are not enrolled in prekindergarten programs. Research indicates that high-quality early learning programs for 3- and 4-year olds can improve school readiness.
- **27th in health.** Three of the four health indicators saw some positive movement. The percentage of teens abusing alcohol and drugs dropped from 7 percent to 5 percent from 2010 to 2015. The child and teen death rate in North Dakota is at 28 per 100,000, slightly higher than the national average.

“As policymakers search for ideas to expand the economy and bring more economic opportunity to families, it will be important to identify and not abandon targeted public investments that are helping more people lift themselves out of poverty,” Olson said. “In addition, using these data to inform policy decisions is essential in shaping the next generation of healthier and better-educated citizens.”

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 North Dakota KIDS COUNT

The North Dakota KIDS COUNT program is a project of the Annie E. Casey Foundation and supported by the Center for Social Research at North Dakota State University. Our mission is to provide the information necessary to inform discussions and decisions to improve the health and well-being of children in North Dakota. You can see more at <http://www.ndkidscount.org> or search for @ndkidscount on Facebook.

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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