



UNDER EMBARGO Until Monday, June 17 at 12:01 a.m. ET

Contact: John Wilson | john@kac.org | (785) 218-7288

As Kansas drops to 15th place among states in *KIDS COUNT* report, health results point to urgent need for Medicaid expansion

KAC president: 'Lawmakers must act to protect parents and children'

TOPEKA, Kansas — Kansas finished 15th among all states in well-being for children, according to the 30th edition of the *KIDS COUNT*[®] *Data Book*, released today by the Annie E. Casey Foundation. However, the state fell two spots from last year, and the 24th-place ranking in the health category underscores the necessity of Medicaid expansion.

The *2019 KIDS COUNT Data Book* — the most comprehensive annual report on child well-being in the United States — notes measurable progress since the first *Data Book*, which was published in 1990. Nevertheless, more than 13 million U.S. children (104,000 children in Kansas) live in poverty and serious racial and ethnic disparities persist.

This year, Kansas nearly ended an eight-year refusal — begun during the Brownback administration — to expanding Medicaid. The move would have brought affordable health insurance to 150,000 residents. While the state's children already can access coverage under Medicaid or CHIP, research shows that when adults obtain coverage, their children are more likely to get the care they need. Improving the health of parents, child care workers, and other adults in children's lives also impacts children's healthy development, which relies on strong relationships with adults. But health coverage also matters before birth: States that have expanded Medicaid have seen [greater declines in maternal and infant mortality rates](#).

The Kansas House of Representatives passed a bill expanding Medicaid during the session, and a majority of senators indicated they supported the measure as well. Unfortunately, Senate leadership blocked a vote by that chamber in the final hours of the session.

"Leadership is about priorities," said Kansas Action for Children President and CEO Annie McKay. "The legislature missed an opportunity to ensure the health of tens of thousands across the state.

"Lawmakers must act to protect parents and children. We must make sure they don't pass up that opportunity again."

The annual *KIDS COUNT Data Book* from the Annie E. Casey Foundation uses 16 indicators to rank each state across four domains — health, education, economic well-being and family and community — as an assessment of child well-being. Kansas ranks:

- 6th in economic well-being. The state has seen a 17 percent drop in the number of children in poverty from 2010 to 2017, but that’s less than the average national decline of 18 percent over that same span.
- 18th in education. Kansas has unfortunately seen no percentage change in the number of 3- and 4-year-olds attending school in 2015-17 compared to 2009-11. This year, KAC has been [focusing on the benefits of high-quality education](#) through screenings of the documentary “No Small Matter.” Thankfully, funding was increased for programs serving these children in the 2018 Kansas legislative session.
- 23rd in the family and community domain. The state has experienced a 46 percent decline in the teen birth rate from 2010 to 2017, which is slightly more than the 44 percent drop seen nationally over that time.
- 24th in health. This disappointing ranking includes a 4 percent increase in the number of low birth-weight babies from 2010 to 2017, which is greater than the national increase of 2 percent. [KAC has pointed out](#) before that expanding Medicaid “increase(s) the number of women who receive health care coverage before pregnancy, bolstering the health of the mother and child.”

“Our tasks should be clear,” said KAC Vice President of Advocacy John Wilson. “We must make sure that Kansas preserves and increases access to family-support programs. We are in a positive position, but progress could easily be undone. We call on the public and children’s advocates to be vigilant.”

The Casey Foundation points to areas of tremendous improvement in children’s lives — including access to health care, decreased rates of teen childbearing and increased rates of high school graduation — and draws a direct line to policies that support this success. Especially as the child population is expanding, there are steps that policymakers should take to help all children thrive. The Casey Foundation calls on elected officials and representatives to:

- *Expand the programs that make and keep kids healthy.* This means expanded Medicaid, as well as programs such as Temporary Aid to Needy Families (TANF) and the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP, also known as food stamps).
- *Address ethnic and racial inequities.* The national and state averages of child well-being can mask the disquieting reality that black and brown children still face a greater number of obstacles.

- *Count all kids.* Ensure the 2020 census counts all children, especially those under 5 years old and from hard-to-count areas.

“Above all,” Wilson said, “Kansas lawmakers must seize on the opportunity to do the right thing next session and expand Medicaid. Parents, caregivers and children will benefit. And all of Kansas will rise along with them.”

The *2019 KIDS COUNT Data Book* is the 30th edition of an annual data study that is based on U.S. Census and other publicly available data, representing all 50 states, the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico.

Release Information

The *2019 KIDS COUNT® Data Book* will be available June 17 at 12:01 a.m. EDT at www.aecf.org. Additional information is available at 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.kidscount.org.

About Kansas Action for Children

Kansas Action for Children is a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization committed to improving the lives of Kansas children and families by providing comprehensive data, advocating for sound public policy and collaborating with lawmakers. Through support from individuals and private foundations, KAC has worked for nearly 40 years to make our state the best place to live, work and raise a family. Visit www.kac.org to learn more.

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.

###