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### **New report shows more economic stability is needed for Montana families.**

Prior to the pandemic, Montana was making progress in many areas of child well-being, according to the *2021 KIDS COUNT Data Book* developed by the Annie E. Casey Foundation. Montana moved up in the health rankings with a decline in overweight or obese children and low birthweight births. However, thousands of families still struggle to afford housing, and many make poverty-level wages.

"One of my biggest concerns is that even though fewer children live in households with high housing costs compared to a decade ago, there are still 52,000 children living in households that may struggle to pay for housing," said Xanna Burg, KIDS COUNT Coordinator with the Montana Budget & Policy Center. "That's like every 1<sup>st</sup> through 5<sup>th</sup> grader in the state living in unaffordable housing."

Housing and other data used in the report rankings are from the year or two before the pandemic. It will take a few years to get a complete picture of the hardship families faced the past year, but the data shows that many families are struggling. Survey data from last year adds to the story, showing 15 percent of households with children were unsure they could pay their next rent or mortgage payment.

Unfortunately, Black, Indigenous, and other families of color reported even higher uncertainty for making housing payments last year. The reality for families of color has been shaped by generations of discriminatory policies and limited access to the economic resources that other families have had. To move Montana forward, now is the time to invest in solutions that ensure all children grow up in families with the support and resources needed to thrive.

Highlights from the report findings for Montana include:

- **Economic:** In 2019, 15 percent of children (33,000) lived in poverty, showing some progress over the previous four years.
- **Education:** High school graduation rates continue to improve with 87 percent of high schoolers graduating on time.
- **Health:** Health care coverage for children stalled again in 2019 after decades of progress. This leaves 15,000 Montana children without adequate access to health care.
- **Family and Community:** The teen birth rate continued to drop to a record low in 2019.

Montana KIDS COUNT recommends policymakers continue to support programs like SNAP and Healthy Montana Kids, which help families get the food and health care they need.

This KIDS COUNT report is an annual report detailing data for 16 different measures in four categories for all 50 states, D.C., and Puerto Rico. The Foundation recommends the federal child tax credit be made permanent, which lifts millions of kids above the poverty line nationwide. The report can be found at <https://www.aecf.org/databook>.

**About Montana KIDS COUNT**

Montana KIDS COUNT is a leading resource for data on child and family well-being in the state and is dedicated to providing current, relevant, and reliable data to shape the issues affecting Montana children and families. More information can be found at [montanakidscount.org/](http://montanakidscount.org/). Montana KIDS COUNT is a project of the Montana Budget & Policy Center, a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization providing in-depth research and analysis on budget, tax, and economic issues. More information can be found at [www.montanabudget.org](http://www.montanabudget.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](http://www.aecf.org). *KIDS COUNT*® is a registered trademark of the Annie E. Casey Foundation. Journalists interested in creating maps, graphs and rankings in stories about the *Kids Count* report can use the KIDS COUNT Data Center at [datacenter.kidscount.org](http://datacenter.kidscount.org).

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