

# Utah Ranks Seventh Overall in Child Well-Being, but Falls Near the Bottom

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Written by: Terry Haven

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Utah ranked seventh among states for overall child well-being, according to the 30th edition of the *KIDS COUNT Data Book*, released today by the Annie E. Casey Foundation. Among the four domains, Utah ranked highest in family and community, landing in the number one spot, and lowest in health, ranking 21st among all the states. The 2019 *KIDS COUNT Data Book* is the most comprehensive annual report on child well-being in the United States and notes measurable progress since the first *Data Book*, which was published in 1990. Nevertheless, almost 100,000 Utah children live in poverty and serious racial and ethnic disparities persist.

It's important to realize that Utah is now home to almost 300,000 more children since 1990. Even in the areas where we saw improvement, Utah still has more children lacking opportunities afforded to other children. For example, while there has been an 8 percent improvement in child poverty in the state, Utah now has almost 25,000 more children living below the federal poverty level than in 1990.

Utah is also seeing a more diverse child population than in 1990. While 90 percent of

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Utah's kids were non-Hispanic white in 1990, 76 percent were in 2017.

"With this boom in the youth population, greater investments must be made to expand programs that help lift Utah's families out of poverty," said Terry Haven, Deputy Director of Voices for Utah Children.

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. Utah improved its ranking in one domain, fell in ranking in two domains and stayed the same in one domain. Utah ranks:

- 4th in economic well-being. Utah rose in ranking from seventh to fourth in economic well-being. However, 24 percent of Utah kids live in households with high housing cost burdens and almost 100,000 Utah children still live in poverty.
- 13th in education. Utah fell in ranking from 12<sup>th</sup> to 13<sup>th</sup>. The good news is that Utah has made improvements in the percentage of 3- and 4-year-olds who are in preschool, even though we still lag behind the U.S. in this area.
- 1st in the family and community domain. Utah remained number one in this domain, improving or staying the same in all four indicators. However, Utah did see an increase in the number of children in single-parent families from 2016 to 2017, from 166,000 to 173,000, even though the percentage remained the same.
- 21<sup>st</sup> in health. Utah fell from 19<sup>th</sup> to 21<sup>st</sup> in ranking, and the health domain remains the state's worse ranking. Utah lags behind the rest of the nation with regard to the percentage of children who still lack health insurance.

The KIDS COUNT Data Book shows how essential accurate data are to sound policymaking. Because data are compared across the country, policymakers are able to understand what it will take to make improvements in child well-being. For example, to improve uninsured rates to the same level as the national average of 5 percent, the state needs to reduce the number of uninsured children in Utah by

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almost 20,000. Similarly, if Utah wants to be the best in the nation in the number of children living in poverty, the state will need to help improve the lives of 6,500 children. This means we must continue to ensure that all kids have the resources, supports and opportunities to thrive.

“The KIDS COUNT rankings are a good way to determine which states are near the top, which are in the middle and which states are near the bottom in terms of overall child well-being,” says Haven. “We use this data to examine trends within our state, to determine if we are improving, and to gauge if the policy changes we make are helping or hindering our children. The data call on lawmakers to take note and implement or protect sound policies.”

The data book can be found at <https://www.aecf.org/resources/2019-kids-count-data-book/>.