



PRESS RELEASE

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New Mexico drops in national KIDS COUNT ranking State now 48th in nation in child well-being

ALBUQUERQUE—New Mexico dropped to a ranking of 48th in child well-being in the 2008 national KIDS COUNT Data Report, released today by the Annie E. Casey Foundation. Last year the state ranked 47th. The annual report ranks the 50 states based on ten indicators of child well-being such as child poverty rates, teen birth and dropout rates, and infant mortality rates, using the most recent U.S. Census Bureau data available.

"It's always disappointing to see New Mexico so close to the bottom," said Lisa Adams-Shafer, KIDS COUNT Program Manager for New Mexico Voices for Children, which co-releases the annual report. "Sadly, our child death rates have continued to worsen."

The state's death rate for children between 1 and 14 years of age increased by 55 percent between 2000 and 2005, ranking us 48th in this measure. In contrast, the national average decreased 9 percent over the same time period. According to state Department of Health statistics, the majority of child deaths are the result of automobile accidents. "This could indicate the lack of use of child safety seats, or improper use," Adams-Shafer said.

As in past years, Louisiana and Mississippi ranked lower than New Mexico. Alabama, which ranked 48th last year, moved up to 47th. New Hampshire ranked 1st this year.

"There are some bright spots," Adams-Shafer said. We continue to do very well in terms of infant mortality rates, and we continue to outpace the national average in improvement in high school drop out rates," she added. New Mexico ranks 16th in infant mortality rates, but 47th in the percentage of teens who are not high school dropouts – despite a 38 percent improvement between 2000 and 2006. And despite our low infant mortality rates, our percentage of low-weight babies rose by 6 percent between 2000 and 2005.

Because of the lag in data, the effects of recent state initiatives such as the pre-K program, raising the minimum wage, and the creation of the Working Families Tax Credit, will not show up for a few more years. "These kinds of programs are a great start, but it will take a lot more to move New Mexico out of the bottom ten," said Adams-Shafer. "Dramatically improving child well-being will take a concerted effort that addresses multiple issues, starting

with child poverty. We need to expand and improve early care and education programs and cover all kids with health insurance," she added. Optimal outcomes for child well-being are outlined in [Children's Charter](#), which was launched by NM Voices late last year.

Besides the ten indicators, the data book also looks at demographics, such as the percentage of children without health insurance, and focuses on one pressing issue. This year, the report focuses on juvenile justice – an issue on which New Mexico does relatively well.

"Our rate of youth ages 10 to 15 in custody is less than half the national average," said Adams-Shafer. "The KIDS COUNT essay links this, in part, to changes that began in the Bernalillo County juvenile justice system." The data book essay cites changes in Medicaid rules that allowed the creation of an outpatient clinic for mental health treatment as a model of good public policy.

The 2008 KIDS COUNT data book is available online at:
<http://www.kidscount.org/datacenter/databook.jsp>

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New Mexico Voices for Children is a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization advocating for policies to improve the health and well-being of New Mexico's children, families and communities.

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