

California ranks 33rd in Child Well-Being

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The Golden State ranks 33rd in child well-being, according to the new Kids Count Data Book from the Annie E. Casey Foundation.

In the report, California scored just 37th in education and 45th in economic well-being.

Kelly Hardy, senior managing director of health and research with the nonprofit Children Now, said a big part of the problem is that too many families spend more than 30% of their income on housing.

"California is once again dead last in cost of housing," said Hardy. "It's no surprise to anyone who lives here, but it really does have an impact on families and their ability to meet kids' needs."

The report also looked at kids' mental health - and found a 70% increase in youth depression and anxiety in California between 2016 and 2020 - the second-largest jump in the nation.

On the plus side, California is seventh in the nation for getting kids insured, at 97%. Experts credit lawmakers' vote in 2015 to open up Medi-Cal to undocumented children.

The report links poverty to a decline in mental health. Leslie Boissiere, vice president for external affairs at the Annie E. Casey Foundation, said she's disappointed that Congress let the pandemic-era extended child tax credit expire.

"It's incredibly important that decision-makers seize the opportunity and the lessons learned during the COVID-19 period, when more resources were provided to families so that we can make sure that every child has their basic needs met," said Boissiere, "that fewer children live in poverty, and that the overall well-being of children in this country increases."