KIDS COUNT NORTH DAKOTA

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New report shows North Dakota families with children struggling during COVID crisis; housing and health care greatest concerns

North Dakota is falling short on housing and health care for families, according to *Kids, Families and COVID-19: Pandemic Pain Points and a Roadmap for Recovery*, a 50-state report of recent household data developed by the Annie E. Casey Foundation analyzing how families are faring during the COVID-19 crisis.

"The data shows what we already suspected – North Dakota families are struggling to meet basic needs like health care or a place to live," said Xanna Burg, North Dakota KIDS COUNT Coordinator.

This KIDS COUNT report examined data from weekly surveys conducted by the U.S. Census Bureau that demonstrate how families across the country are challenged to meet basic needs during this global public health crisis while managing school, work and mental health. The Foundation finds that the concurrent health and economic crises are exacerbating trends that show vulnerable families are unable to fulfill basic needs. The report can be found at https://www.aecf.org/resources/kids-families-and-covid-19/.

Report findings for North Dakota include:

- **Housing:** Nearly one in six families are worried they won't be able to make their next rent or mortgage payment on time. Without needed housing support and protections, these families are at risk for eviction, foreclosure, or becoming even further behind on payments.
- **Health Care**: One in eight families with children are going without health insurance. While there are no current estimates for the share of children without health coverage, North Dakota did see an increase in uninsured children prior to the start of the pandemic.
- **Mental Health**: One in seven people in households with children reported feeling down, depressed, or hopeless in the last week.

Unfortunately, food security is likely a bigger concern than the data snapshot from this report indicates. The report findings for food security in North Dakota show that six percent of families with children sometimes or often did not have enough to eat. This data is a snapshot of families responding to the survey during four weeks in September and October. Data from weekly surveys can and does fluctuate over time based on who responds. Data from the same survey covering the last four months shows that 10 percent of families with children sometimes or often did not have enough to eat. This number is compounded by the fact that school closures may have impacted child hunger, where nearly a third of North Dakota children eat free or reduced-price lunches at school each day.

"When families cannot afford rent, health care, or food to eat, they are faced with impossible decisions on how to prioritize their children's most basic needs," said Burg. "North Dakota children and families need state and national policymakers to act now to ensure children have what they need to thrive during this challenging time."

The Annie E. Casey Foundation urges policymakers to put COVID-19 response at the top of policy agendas. The Foundation calls on elected officials and other decision makers to:

- **Put racial and ethnic equity first in policymaking** by using disaggregated data and engaging community stakeholders. This should ensure that the policymaking process is informed by the diverse perspectives of those hardest hit by the crisis and created in partnership with communities. This approach should underpin any concrete policy actions.
- **Prioritize the physical and mental health of all children** by guaranteeing that any vaccine will be available without cost as a factor and by retaining and strengthening the Affordable Care Act. To promote mental health, policymakers should work to reduce the student-to-school-counselor ratio in all school settings to levels recommended by mental health professionals.
- **Help families with children achieve financial stability and bolster their well-being** by expanding access to unemployment insurance and by expanding child care access. Additionally, policymakers should eliminate barriers to Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) and the Child Tax Credit (CTC). And beyond any temporary housing assistance programs aimed at heading off a foreclosure or eviction crisis, federal policymakers should expand the Section 8 Housing Choice Voucher program and increase the overall availability of public housing.
- **Ensure schools are better funded, more equitably funded and ready to meet the needs of students disparately affected by the pandemic** by boosting school funding to protect against the economic impact of the pandemic, build maintenance-of-equity requirements into relief packages and address disparities in technology access at home and in the classroom.

About North Dakota KIDS COUNT
North Dakota 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 North Dakota children and families. More information can be found at ndkidscount.org. North Dakota 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. The Montana Budget & Policy Center also leads the KIDS COUNT work in Montana and South Dakota. More information can be found at 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. *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.

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