

Report: Data show depth to which N.M. families with children are struggling

Written by By Sharon Kayne Communications Director NM Voices for Children
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Food Insecurity, Depression Among the Biggest Problems

ALBUQUERQUE, — New Mexico performs well on access to health care, but is falling short on food security and mental wellness, according to the recent household data in *Kids, Families and COVID-19: Pandemic Pain Points and a Roadmap for Recovery*, a 50-state report developed by the Annie E. Casey Foundation analyzing how families are faring during the COVID-19 crisis.

This KIDS COUNT report examines 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 the 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. Disparities are also seen for families of color in all of the data points relative to how non-Hispanic white and Asian families are faring.

“When kids aren’t getting enough to eat, every aspect of their lives is threatened – their ability to learn, their physical and emotional health, their development,” James Jimenez, executive director for New Mexico Voices for Children, a member of the KIDS COUNT network, said. “With food insecurity so high, it’s no wonder that parents are feeling stressed and hopeless. While the state passed significant relief measures in the recent special legislative session that will definitely help, it’s clear that Congress needs to step up and pass more relief for those who are hardest hit by the pandemic and in January the governor and Legislature must commit to long-term solutions to these solvable problems.”

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The U.S. Census data used in the report shows that 20% of New Mexico households with children sometimes or often do not have enough to eat. Only one other state – Mississippi – has as high a rate, while the national average for food insecurity is 14%. New Mexico also has the highest rate – 27% – of adults living in households with children who feel down, depressed or hopeless. Mississippi and Pennsylvania also have a rate of 27% in this category, while the national average is 21%.

Besides food insecurity and mental health concerns, the report looks at whether families believe they will be able to make their next rent or mortgage payment and whether they have health insurance. New Mexico does as well or better than the nation as a whole on these two indicators, with 18% of adults with children having slight or no confidence in paying rent or mortgage – which is the same as the national rate – and 11% who currently do not have health insurance – which is better than the national rate of 12%.

The Foundation report includes several policy recommendations, including: putting racial and ethnic equity first by engaging community stakeholders to determine what is most needed; guaranteeing that any vaccine will be available without cost as a factor; leveraging federal behavioral health programs through increased federal investment and state participation; expanding a variety of safety-net programs, including unemployment insurance, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, and housing assistance; and boosting funding for schools.

The Annie E. Casey Foundation's report, *Kids, Families and COVID-19: Pandemic Pain Points and a Roadmap for Recovery*, is available online at <https://www.aecf.org/>.

NM Voices for Children is including this and other data on how the pandemic is impacting families in its annual *New Mexico KIDS COUNT Data Book*, which will be released in January, just prior to the start of the 2021 legislative session.

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