



2023

MAINE KIDS COUNT®

The Maine KIDS COUNT Data Book® is a project
of the Maine Children's Alliance



Maine Children's Alliance

Advocating for the well-being of all Maine families.

Introduction

The Maine KIDS COUNT Data Book is a comprehensive portrait of the physical, social, economic, and educational well-being of Maine children. Our goal in publishing the Data Book is to provide parents, educators, advocates, and policymakers with the tools to make data-informed decisions to support Maine children and families.

While we seek to include the best available data, data is not always available, nor does it fully capture the challenges Maine families face. For instance, child care is one of our state's most pressing challenges, yet reliable data to present the full picture of child care supply and demand does not exist in Maine. Additionally, the way data is collected, who has access to it, and who is left out continues to have harmful impacts on historically excluded communities. As we work to improve child well-being in Maine, we must continue to advocate for better and more inclusive data collection.

Child Poverty 34,000 Children

Living in poverty creates many challenges to child and family well-being. In 2021, nearly 34,000 Maine children, 13.8 percent, lived in households below the federal poverty level. Maine's child poverty rate began falling in 2012, reaching a low point in 2020 of 12.8 percent. Although significant disparities persist by race and geography, the most recent data showed that the poverty rate for Black children in Maine declined by over 40 percent. Federal pandemic relief demonstrated the power of cash support and tax credits to reduce child poverty. Maine-based solutions include reforming the state child tax credit to reach the families most in need, supporting the development of affordable family housing, and reducing barriers to public anti-poverty programs. To learn more, [see page 27](#).



Child Welfare 4,263 Children

To improve outcomes for Maine's children, it is critical that we work to prevent child abuse and neglect and reduce the number of children who come into state custody. In 2020, Maine's rate of child maltreatment was the highest in the nation at 19.0 per 1,000 children and more than twice the national rate of 8.4. In 2021, 4,263 children experienced substantiated child maltreatment. We must do more to support child safety and family stability through investments and services that help to prevent and lessen harm, including economic and concrete supports like child care, housing and food assistance, and health care coverage. To learn more, [see page 22](#).



Teen Mental Health 2,654 Youth

Teen mental health is a growing crisis in the state and the nation. Maine youth were already struggling with high rates of anxiety and depression when the pandemic brought academic disruption and social isolation. In 2021, nearly half of Maine high school females reported feeling sad and hopeless. According to a 2020-2021 parent survey, close to one in four children ages 12-17 experienced anxiety problems. In 2022, there were 2,654 visits to the emergency room by Maine youth under age 19 for suicidal thoughts or suicidal attempts. Youth experiencing mental health crises need timely and appropriate treatment. As a preventative measure, we must ensure young children get the developmental and mental health supports they need. To learn more, [see page 15](#).



Early Intervention

118 Babies

Because healthy child development is based on a strong foundation, babies experiencing delays need intervention as early as possible. We know from neuroscience that early intervention produces more favorable outcomes than later remediation. Yet, in Maine, just 118 babies under age one were identified and received the early intervention services they needed in 2022. Our state must commit to finding and identifying more children earlier to ensure their future success. To learn more, [see page 48](#).



Public Preschool

6,269 Preschoolers

Early care and education programs, such as public preschool, produce both short- and long-term positive effects on children's development. Participation in public preschool in Maine has returned to pre-pandemic levels with 6,269 four-year-olds (47 percent) attending a public preschool program this school year. Yet, access to preschool varies widely by county. Access to public preschool should be available regardless of where a child lives, in part by encouraging more partnerships with Head Start and private child care programs. Additional state funding should support full-day and full-week programming to meet the needs of working families. To learn more, [see page 40](#).



High School Graduation

11,961 Graduates

The pandemic challenged Maine students in a variety of ways. In 2021, 86.1 percent of students graduated high school, the lowest rate since 2016.

The rate stayed the same in 2022, with 11,961 graduates. Most of the population groups who already faced systemic discrimination and other barriers had the greatest declines in graduation rates. Maine needs to advance strategies like personalized education plans to meet students where they are, and invest in a robust, well compensated teacher workforce. We also need more school and community programs that help all students and families feel valued and connected. To learn more, [see page 42](#).

