

NORTH CAROLINA Child Health REPORT CARD 2023



40%
of children live in
poor or low-income
households

The North Carolina Child Health Report Card, issued bi-annually by the North Carolina Institute of Medicine (NCIOM) and NC Child, tracks key indicators of child health and well-being in four areas: Healthy Births, Access to Care, Secure Homes and Neighborhoods, and Health Risk Factors. The report provides data on drivers of health such as health care access and graduation rates, and risk factors such as asthma, teen births, infant mortality, poverty, and child deaths.

Most of the data reported in the 2023 Child Health Report Card represent conditions facing children and families in 2021. The report card provides a vivid illustration of how the pandemic exacerbated several troubling trends facing our children, particularly in this year's special focus area of mental health. More than one in 10 children ages 3-17 in North Carolina had a diagnosis of depression or anxiety in 2020 - a 49% increase since 2016.

One of the most remarkable changes in the data is in the area of health coverage, which increased significantly in 2021 for both parents and children, largely due to coverage protections put in place under the federal Public Health Emergency.

Health insurance coverage increased by nearly 9% for women aged 18-44, and the rate of women receiving early prenatal care went up by 8%. Children's health insurance coverage increased slightly. However, these gains are at risk as the coverage protections under the federal Public Health Emergency come to an end in 2023.

Despite ongoing challenges in mental health, education outcomes, healthy eating & active living, and housing & economic security, the state is making progress in other areas, including substance use, preconception health, and maternal health support.

For the full 2023 Child Health Report Card and downloadable data sources, please visit www.nciom.org or www.ncchild.org.

SUMMARY OF GRADES

- A** Insurance Coverage
- B** Environmental Health; Health Services Utilization & Immunization; Preconception and Maternal Health & Support
- C** Teen Births; Breastfeeding; Oral Health
- D** Child Abuse & Neglect; Education; Healthy Eating & Active Living; Tobacco, Alcohol, and Substance Use
- F** Birth Outcomes; Mental Health; School Health; Housing and Economic Security



INFANT
MORTALITY
rate per 1,000
live births

White	4.8
Hispanic	5.8
Black	12.8



Special Issue: Children's Mental Health

Long before pandemic school closures across the nation, clinicians were already seeing alarming trends across many indicators of child and adolescent mental health. We have tracked many of those indicators in past North Carolina Child Health Report Cards.

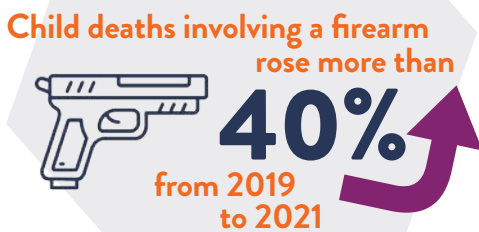
- Suicide became the leading cause of death for children ages 10-14 in 2019. In 2020, an unprecedented 67 children ages 0-18 died by suicide in North Carolina. One in five North Carolina high school students reported seriously considering attempting suicide in 2021, up from 16% in 2017. One in 10 reported actually making an attempt.
- Diagnoses of mental health concerns are also on the rise: More than one in 10 children ages 3-17 in North Carolina had a diagnosis of depression or anxiety in 2020 - a 49% increase from 2016.
- There are significant disparities in children's experiences of poor mental health. For example, students who experience higher rates of discrimination also report worse mental health. LGBTQ+ students are more than three times more likely to consider or attempt suicide than their heterosexual peers.¹

These numbers are startling. From health care to education to law enforcement, it is incumbent on practitioners to learn more about children's mental health, what is driving rising rates of mental health concerns such as depression and anxiety, and develop more ways to support the children they serve.

In October 2021, clinicians declared a "National Emergency in Child and Adolescent Mental Health" in a strongly-worded statement from the American Academy of Pediatrics, American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, and Children's Hospital Association. They recommended a number of changes, from clinical practice to public policy, to address this crisis head-on.



Homicide and suicide are the only causes of child death that are increasing in North Carolina.



Stakeholders can safeguard children's mental health by:

- Removing barriers to mental health care
- Enhancing the availability of mental health care and crisis intervention in public schools, particularly in rural areas where specialty care is less available
- Making it harder for children and youth to get access to lethal means of self-harm (e.g., safe storage of firearms and prescription drugs).

While the data on youth mental health are deeply troubling, there are bright spots as well. The sudden jump in attention to mental health issues since the pandemic means that the issue has landed squarely on the agenda for many parents, clinicians, and policy-makers. Increased attention can also mean decreased stigma, allowing our children and families to seek out the help they need with less fear of retribution.

Every child deserves a chance to thrive. The mental health crisis is daunting, but adults have a duty to rise to the moment for our children and youth.

