



children's defense fund ohio

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Ohio families struggle with food security during COVID crisis; mental health care and housing also areas of concern

Ohio Children's Budget Coalitions policy agenda will use data from findings in new Annie E. Casey Foundation report

COLUMBUS, OHIO — A greater percentage of Ohio families sometimes or often do not have enough food to eat than families nationally, according to a new policy report from the Annie E. Casey Foundation, a decades-long advocate for young people in America.

[Kids, Families and COVID-19: Pandemic Pain Points and the Urgent Need to Respond](#) shows in detail how children and families are suffering from the unprecedented disruptions posed by this crisis, and leading child advocates in Ohio are using data from this report to inform their efforts to meet the needs of the “whole child” in Ohio’s state policy and budget decisions.

“Our budget is a moral document that is a reflection of our priorities as a state,” said Tracy Nájera, executive director of Children’s Defense Fund-Ohio, which convened the 18-member Ohio Children’s Budget Coalition (OCBC). “This national report provides data on the realities families are facing and reinforces the needs to put children first during the budget cycle.”

The data highlight four pain points caused by the pandemic: a lack of food security, not being able to make rent or mortgage payments, not having health insurance, and feelings of depression or hopelessness.

Key findings include:

- [14 percent of Ohio families with children reported in October](#) that there was sometimes or always not enough to eat in their household. Sadly, this is not new for many families. [13 percent responded that they did not have enough food to eat](#) prior to the pandemic either.
- [Nearly one in six Ohio families with children \(15 percent\)](#) said they had only slight confidence or no confidence at all that they would be able to make their next rent or mortgage payment on time.
- [One in fourteen](#) Ohio families with children (7 percent) lack health insurance.
- [A fifth of Ohio respondents with children in their households \(23 percent\)](#) reported that they had felt down, depressed or hopeless in the previous week, indicating a widespread need for access to mental health care.

Even before the pandemic hit, more than 466,000 Ohio children lived in poverty and [131,000 lacked health insurance](#). Now the COVID-19 crisis appears to have widened disparities across races and ethnicities, according to the report, which includes recent data from all 50 states and the District of Columbia. For example, more [Black \(35](#)

[percent\) adults in households with children](#) weren't confident that they could pay next month's rent or mortgage, nearly three times the rate of white families (12 percent).

The coalition's budget recommendations align with those of the report in addressing the pain points in a series of issues briefs designed to influence policymakers as they develop the 2022-23 biennial budget.

Key recommendations

- **Race Equity.** Put racial and ethnic equity first in recovery policymaking by using disaggregated data and engaging community stakeholders to ensure that the policymaking process is informed by diverse perspectives.
- **Nutrition.** Increase summer food access and bring \$4.35 million additional federal dollars to Ohio to support partners operating summer food service through the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) and Seamless Summer Option (SSO).
- **Infant and Maternal Health.** Keep more mothers of newborns insured by expanding the current 12-month continuous care waiver to include pregnant women with high-risk pregnancies, chronic conditions, and mental health diagnosis.
- **Whole Child Social Emotional Health and Wellness.** Promote mental health by expanding telehealth resources through a one-time \$20 million competitive innovation fund to spur investments by community behavioral health providers.
- **Economic Well-Being.** Help families with children achieve financial stability and bolster their well-being by eliminating barriers to accessing Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF); allocating \$25 million to Housing Now for Homeless Families and \$5 million for ODH program that serves homeless youth and pregnant women

"Putting the whole child first means giving families access to quality health care, mental health services, education, food, and safe housing," added Najera. "Putting child-centered policies at the core of the budget is our opportunity to respond to the pandemic in ways that give children in Ohio every chance to succeed."

The full report can be found here: [Full Report](#)

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The Children's Defense Fund Leave No Child Behind® mission is to ensure every child a Healthy Start, a Head Start, a Fair Start, a Safe Start, and a Moral Start in life and successful passage to adulthood with the help of caring families and communities.