

State Family Homelessness Rankings

Examining Practices and Policies to Prevent and Reduce Family Homelessness

The first national plan for ending homelessness was released in 2010 and set the goals of ending chronic and veteran homelessness by 2015 and ending homelessness among families, children, and youth by 2020. Since the plan's release, the national spotlight has focused more on the former goal than the latter.¹ Subsequently, homelessness decreased among veterans and chronically homeless single adults. However, between 2009 and 2014, the number of family members who access shelter—over 190,000 on a single night—did not.²

Although federal funding and leadership is required, state and local investments are also essential to alleviate family homelessness. Crucial federal legislation safeguards the educational rights of homeless students, but it is ultimately up to state and local educators to identify and serve homeless children. Federal funding for low-income housing has plummeted since the 1980s, so state and local governments must contend with creating and preserving affordable housing. Within the scope of federal guidelines, states shape how safety net programs are administered and can reduce access barriers for homeless families seeking assistance. These are only a few examples of the critical roles states play in ending family homelessness.

To assess and raise awareness of the services and policies necessary to address family homelessness, the Institute for Children, Poverty, and Homelessness (ICPH) has developed the State Family Homelessness Rankings, based on a unique set of indicators to compare states' efforts and to reveal how well states are doing in meeting homeless families' and children's needs.

ICPH created the State Family Homelessness Rankings by first examining existing cross-state and -country indices of family and child well-being, including the Annie E. Casey Foundation's *KIDS COUNT Data Book*, the Foundation for Child Development's *Child Well-being Index*, the National Center on Family Homelessness' *America's Youngest Outcasts*, and, at the international level, indices developed by the United Nations Development Programme.³ Common to many of these indices are measures of poverty. While poverty is a multifaceted cause of homelessness and homelessness exacerbates its effects, poverty measures alone are too broad in scope to address the immediate goal of ending family homelessness. In examining poverty, it is also easy to blame macroeconomic forces or place the responsibility to act on individual families themselves. With this in mind, ICPH aimed to develop indicators that are connected to the larger issue of poverty but directly relate to an action that can be taken at the state level to prevent or reduce family homelessness. A state's ranking can therefore be improved upon with effective policies and collaboration.

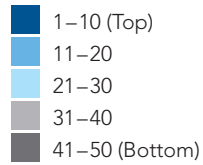
State Education Ranking

Children are the invisible victims of homelessness. Children experiencing housing instability are at greater risk for poor academic outcomes than stably housed children, but they often are not identified and are left disconnected from the services necessary for them to thrive. For these vulnerable children, access to high-quality educational resources and support is perhaps the surest way to prevent intergenerational poverty and homelessness. The five education indicators provide **a measure of how well homeless children of all ages are being identified and connected to services**, from early education for the youngest homeless children to financial assistance for youth attending college.

State Policy Ranking

State and local policies must support homeless families' paths to self-sufficiency rather than impede them. The first two policy indicators reflect **the need for affordable housing**, including the lack of available rental units for families with extremely low incomes and the low purchasing power of the minimum wage. The remaining indicators reflect policies each state has in place to improve the lives of homeless families and to prevent episodes of homelessness. They target three key issues related to family homelessness: **lack of accessible child care, discrimination against survivors of domestic violence, and food insecurity**.

Table 1
State Family Homelessness Rankings



The State Family Homelessness Rankings compare each state across ten indicators, which are analyzed and grouped thematically, creating two separate rankings: the State Education Ranking and the State Policy Ranking.⁴

States are graded from 1 to 50 (top to bottom) on the two rankings, with 1 representing the highest-scoring state on a given measure and 50 representing the lowest. By ranking states, ICPH hopes to not simply differentiate between those with robust and weak policies but also to encourage state and local leaders to discover what other states are doing well—and how they are doing it. While what is working in one state may not work in another, states atop the rankings provide examples of promising practices (Table 1).

State	State Education Ranking	State Policy Ranking
Alabama (AL)	27	25
Alaska (AK)	1	42
Arizona (AZ)	40	41
Arkansas (AR)	29	17
California (CA)	36	24
Colorado (CO)	3	32
Connecticut (CT)	49	45
Delaware (DE)	22	22
Florida (FL)	42	35
Georgia (GA)	43	46
Hawaii (HI)	50	50
Idaho (ID)	4	31
Illinois (IL)	17	36
Indiana (IN)	38	30
Iowa (IA)	25	21
Kansas (KS)	14	40
Kentucky (KY)	20	3
Louisiana (LA)	30	47
Maine (ME)	13	23
Maryland (MD)	24	33
Massachusetts (MA)	34	1
Michigan (MI)	32	49
Minnesota (MN)	31	19
Mississippi (MS)	41	29
Missouri (MO)	16	39
Montana (MT)	10	6
Nebraska (NE)	28	13
Nevada (NV)	12	44
New Hampshire (NH)	6	27
New Jersey (NJ)	46	43
New Mexico (NM)	21	37
New York (NY)	26	7
North Carolina (NC)	37	18
North Dakota (ND)	11	5
Ohio (OH)	45	11
Oklahoma (OK)	9	15
Oregon (OR)	2	8
Pennsylvania (PA)	47	12
Rhode Island (RI)	48	9
South Carolina (SC)	39	26
South Dakota (SD)	15	10
Tennessee (TN)	44	38
Texas (TX)	23	28
Utah (UT)	8	14
Vermont (VT)	7	20
Virginia (VA)	35	34
Washington (WA)	18	2
West Virginia (WV)	19	4
Wisconsin (WI)	5	16
Wyoming (WY)	33	48