

# STATE OF BABIES YEARBOOK 2022

## Executive Summary







## America's Babies Are Being Left Behind

*The State of Babies Yearbook: 2022* continues to show the longstanding disparities and gaps in child and family well-being that, predictably, the pandemic has only exacerbated. Economic insecurity and barriers to resources in marginalized and overburdened communities remain at the root of the many persistent inequities. Since the pandemic's onset, the nation's families with babies have continued to struggle, particularly families of color and those with low income, and these hardships continue to take an emotional toll on both parents and children.


Without action, we cannot expect these patterns to change. We mustered temporary responses to the pandemic's effects, but the nation still has not established robust long-term policies that would promote significant changes to child and family well-being. Efforts to prioritize and enact a bold family agenda have failed, and a growing number of families have been left behind as the challenges of meeting their economic needs and accessing critical supports such as child care escalate. Most disturbingly, the enhanced, fully refundable Child Tax Credit was allowed to lapse and the House-passed Build Back Better Act has fallen by the wayside. These failures to act have already thrown many children back or deeper into poverty and are impeding a much-needed comprehensive child care program with an entitlement for families needing assistance and a national paid leave program. During this unprecedented window of opportunity as Congress is working on social spending, now is the time to make bold investments in babies and families.

To meet this moment, the *State of Babies Yearbook: 2022* places new emphasis on preparing policy-makers, advocates, and other key partners to review and apply the data, featuring new sections with specific guidance and suggestions for data use. This edition also tackles the need and strategies for building new champions, advisors, and strategists. While the indicators themselves may be familiar, what creates urgency is our context—our nation's long neglect of the policies that build strong families and ensure healthy development; the nation's need for an equitable recovery from COVID-19; and our nation's long-term strategy for health, economic security, and quality of life in an interconnected and changing world.

***All babies require safe, stable, nurturing relationships and environments to thrive. Families deserve the supports they need to ensure their babies reach their full potential.*** Each day more than 10,000 babies are born in America, with many entering a world in which they and their families face immediate challenges.

The 2022 *Yearbook* data expose an inadequate system of supports that consistently fails millions of babies and families. As the *Yearbook* shows, this pattern remains virtually unchanged from previous editions. And where there may be fluctuations and sometimes modest improvements reflected in the data, the underlying weaknesses are the same. The data also make clear that when families are not prioritized—and are instead left to navigate threadbare systems—they are forced to fend for themselves both before and during times of crisis.

***Even more critical than the apparent geographic differences are the disparate experiences among babies of different races, ethnicities, and income levels, with inequities starting even before birth. Due in large part to systemic racism and low wage structures, these disparities persist even in states that appear to be doing well for their babies.*** Most notably, national and state data on maternal mortality, infant mortality and other birth outcomes, food insecurity, and material hardship all suggest that many of our nation's babies are at risk of being left behind. As this *Yearbook* highlights, the nation must improve its approach to prenatal-to-3 policies and prioritize them as prudent investments that benefit the entire country.



*In the absence of a national agenda that equitably prioritizes health, development, and basic economic security, there is tremendous variation across states in how and the extent to which babies and families are prioritized.*







## The State of Babies Yearbook: 2022 in Context

**The challenges faced by families with babies in America are well-known and longstanding. Our systems have failed to address them.**

The release of the 2022 *Yearbook* occurs at a time when the nation is grappling for the third consecutive year with the health, economic, social, and emotional impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic revealed the fragility and insufficiency of the many systems that should ensure the stability of our nation's families, particularly those with young children during their critical first 3 years.

**A nation that tolerates grave disparities and does not prize equity cannot be strong in the long term.**

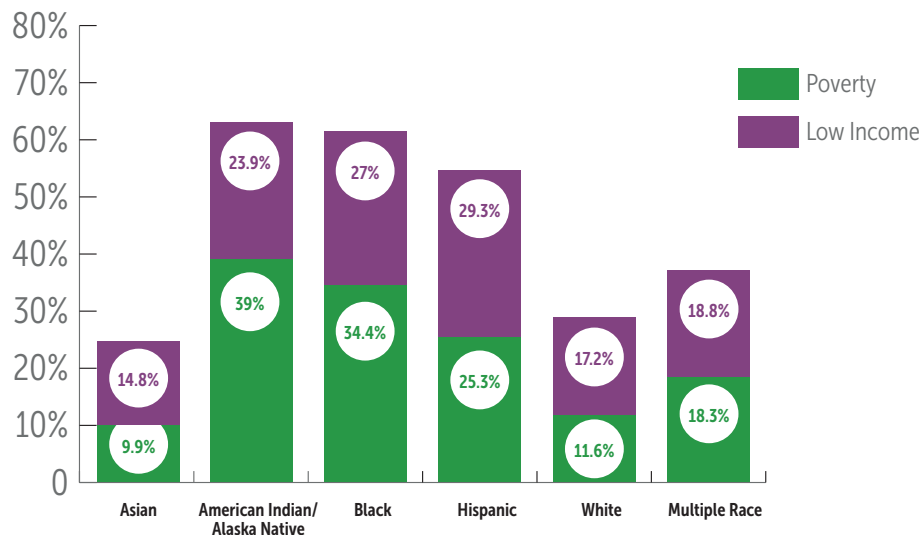
The immediate effects of the pandemic—shutting down critical social structures such as child care, school systems, and key segments of the economy—disrupted the lives of all families. However, the impacts were and continue to be most devastating among babies in families with low income or in poverty, as well as babies of color (particularly Black, American Indian/Alaska Native, and Hispanic<sup>1</sup> babies) who were already disproportionately more likely to experience economic insecurity due to historic and ongoing systemic racism. The persistence of inequities in these communities are reflected throughout the 2022 *Yearbook's* findings.



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<sup>1</sup> Throughout the *State of Babies Yearbook*, we use the term “Hispanic” or “Latinx” in presenting data, in keeping with the ethnicity classification used in the data source.

## ●●● INTERSECTIONALITY OF RACE/ETHNICITY AND INCOME Figure 3.



### We can't afford to allow this window of opportunity to close for current and future generations of babies.

ZERO TO THREE's federal policy agenda, [Recovery Begins With Babies and Families](#), was provided to the new Administration and the 117th Congress as well as other policymakers and advocates. At the time of this *Yearbook's* publication, there have been unprecedented efforts at the federal level through the proposed reconciliation bill to address many of the challenges reported in the *Yearbook's* pre-pandemic findings on indicators in our Good Health, Strong Families, and Positive Early Learning Experiences policy framework domains. These include:

- An enhanced, fully refundable Child Tax Credit that would address the economic insecurity two in five babies experience, as well as this cohort's increased likelihood of experiences that can undermine development
- A comprehensive child care program that would ensure more than nine in ten babies are eligible for child care assistance in quality settings with well-compensated early educators
- A permanent paid family and medical leave program that would establish equity among parents, ensure parents have time off with their newborns, and allow family members to care for each other
- Health policies such as expanded Medicaid coverage and the Black Maternal Health Momnibus Act of 2021 that would address disparities and promote better outcomes, particularly for Black and American Indian/Alaska Native mothers and infants



Together, *Yearbook* data and the supplemental real-time findings of the Rapid Assessment of Pandemic Impact on Development (RAPID) Survey Project<sup>2</sup> point to the need for bold policy action. Our ability to achieve equitable opportunities to thrive is dependent on policies being revived and new supports initiated as originally outlined in the Build Back Better Act. Where federal efforts have stalled, states can move forward, as some already have, with policies and practices that benefit their families with babies. Yet, while it is important for states to enact strong policies and state implementation is paramount, babies and families cannot wait for either geographic or programmatic incrementalism in the broad structural policies that support families' health and economic well-being. **Achieving equity for all babies and families requires immediate national action.**

Analyses of the pre-COVID data presented in the *Yearbook* and the findings of the multidisciplinary body of research being conducted amid the ongoing pandemic, together with the voices of families themselves, express the urgency of this moment for babies and families. This moment provides incredible impetus to finally create the comprehensive family policy our nation has lacked. Due in great part to nationwide efforts to address the pandemic's effects, such as targeted initiatives and increased funding for states within the 2021 American Rescue Plan (ARP) and the 2022 reconciliation bill, this *Yearbook's* release occurs at a time when an unprecedented culmination of events requires meaningful and lasting change to our nation's systems—if we can muster the political will to carry these efforts to fruition. This is a potentially transformational time in which the long-standing gaps in investments for all babies and families can be reassessed and addressed with policies, programs, and practices that value and address their needs.

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<sup>2</sup> Center for Translational Neuroscience. (2021). *Rapid Assessment of Pandemic Impact on Development—Early Childhood Household Survey Project*. University of Oregon [data set]. <https://ctn.uoregon.edu/projects/rapid-assessment-pandemic-impact-development-rapid-early-childhood>

# Key Findings

Grounded in the science of early childhood development, ZERO TO THREE’s policy framework promotes support for infants and toddlers’ healthy development in three domains: Good Health, Strong Families, and Positive Early Learning Experiences. *The State of Babies Yearbook: 2022* uses this framework to provide national and state-by-state views of how America’s babies and their families are faring, based on more than 60 indicators of what all babies need to thrive. This *Yearbook* edition also presents a view of how babies and families in Puerto Rico are faring, wherever the data are available. Major findings in these domains include:

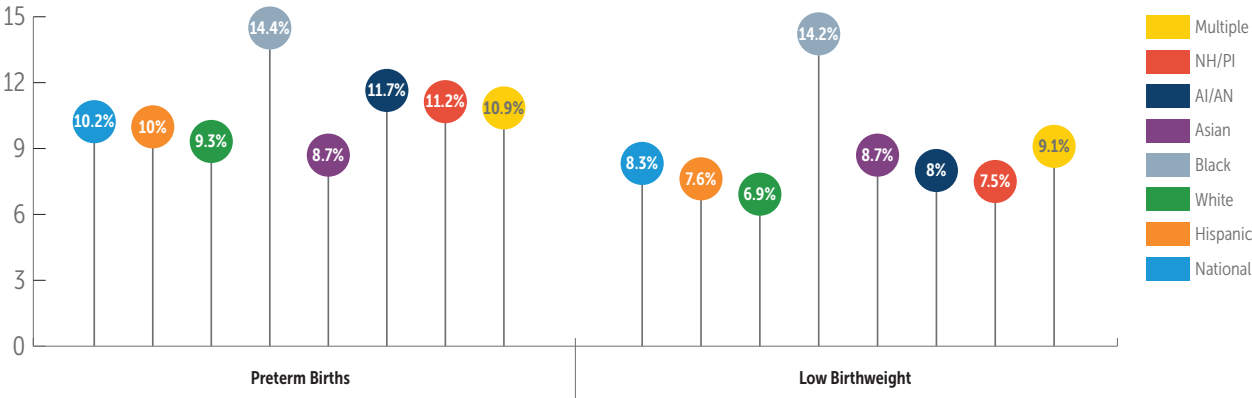


## GOOD HEALTH

Although there has been minimal progress or an absence of change at national and state levels on most health indicators, the evidence of gross disparities persists beneath the averages—particularly for American Indian/Alaska Native and Black babies—in maternal health and birth outcomes such as receipt of prenatal care, infant mortality, low birthweight, and prematurity. Most alarming, 2022 *Yearbook* data show a marked increase in the nation’s maternal mortality rate. The persistence of these findings from past editions underscores the need for a robust response in national and state policies.

The incidence of babies missing important preventive care visits mid-pandemic declined to a small degree in 2021. However, decreased access to preventive health care continued to be a key concern, particularly among American Indian/Alaska Native, Black, and Latinx babies and babies in families with low income. Increased and interrelated levels of emotional distress among parents and children also remained a concern. Strong national policies should center on expanding health insurance coverage, embedding child development and family support in primary pediatric care, and building capacity in infant and early childhood mental health (IECMH).

**NEGATIVE BIRTH OUTCOMES BY RACE AND ETHNICITY** Figure 6.





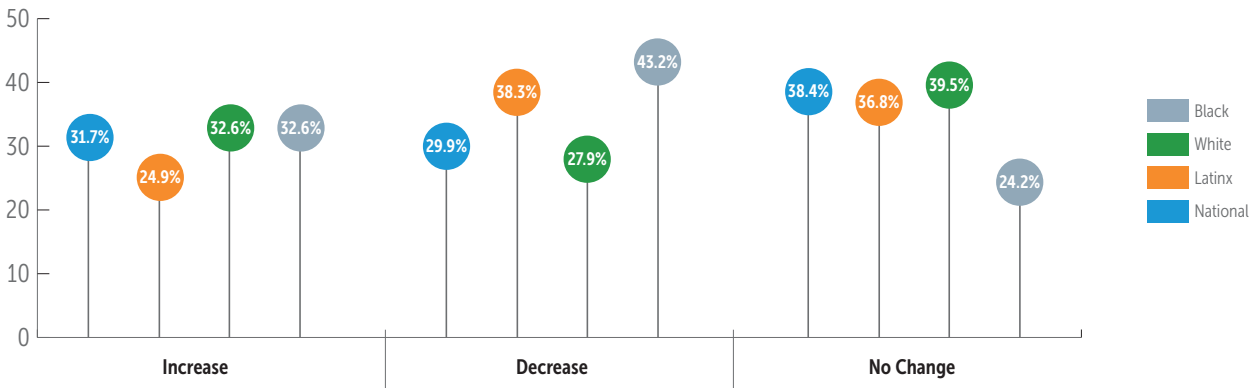
## STRONG FAMILIES

Although the *Yearbook's* pre-pandemic findings for family resilience in the face of challenges continue to be positive and are virtually unchanged from previous editions, findings related to basic needs indicate an increase in families experiencing material hardship—particularly food insecurity. At the same time, a decline was seen in families in poverty receiving assistance through Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) benefits. These and other indicators of family well-being show that families with low income struggle with basic needs (e.g., food insecurity, housing, and basic income supports) and their babies are more likely to be exposed to adverse childhood experiences (ACEs).

RAPID Survey data on the experiences of families during the pandemic in 2021 indicate that while overall fewer families with babies experienced a drop in income as families began to return to work, Black, Latinx, and low-income households continued to experience decreased income at high and virtually unchanged rates from the previous year. These indicators of ongoing material hardship continue to contribute to higher levels of emotional distress for parents and their babies.

## HOUSEHOLD INCOME CHANGE DURING COVID BY RACE AND ETHNICITY

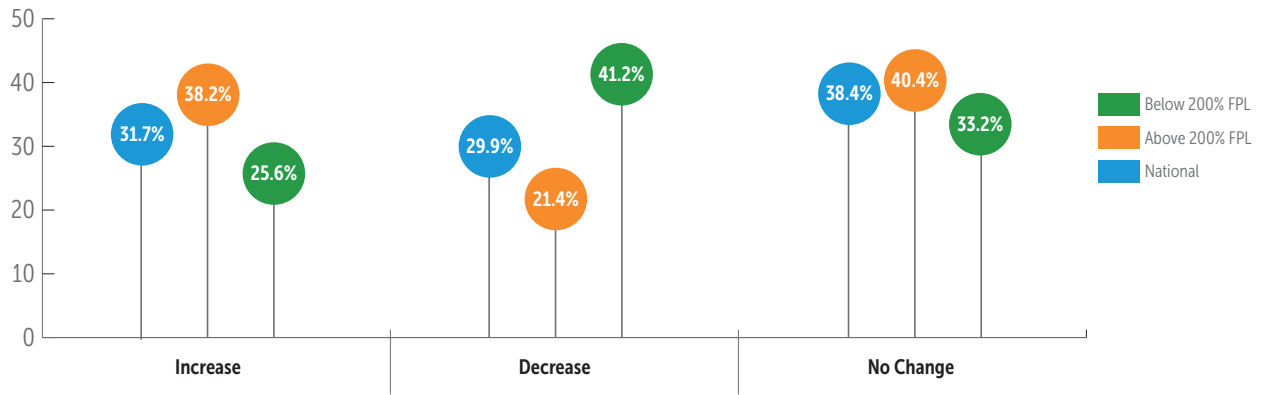
Figure 14





Strong national policies must build on the successes of the American Rescue Plan, such as the enhanced, fully refundable child tax credit, and create permanent measures that promote economic security and ensure families with young children can take paid time off. Supports proposed in the House-passed Build Back Better Act would strengthen and bring stability to families in periods of crisis and calm.

**HOUSEHOLD INCOME CHANGE DURING COVID BY INCOME LEVEL** Figure 15



NOTE: Figure data based on the full sample of 3,869 families from the RAPID-EC survey between January 5 and December 14, 2021. Changes in income were self-reported by survey respondents.

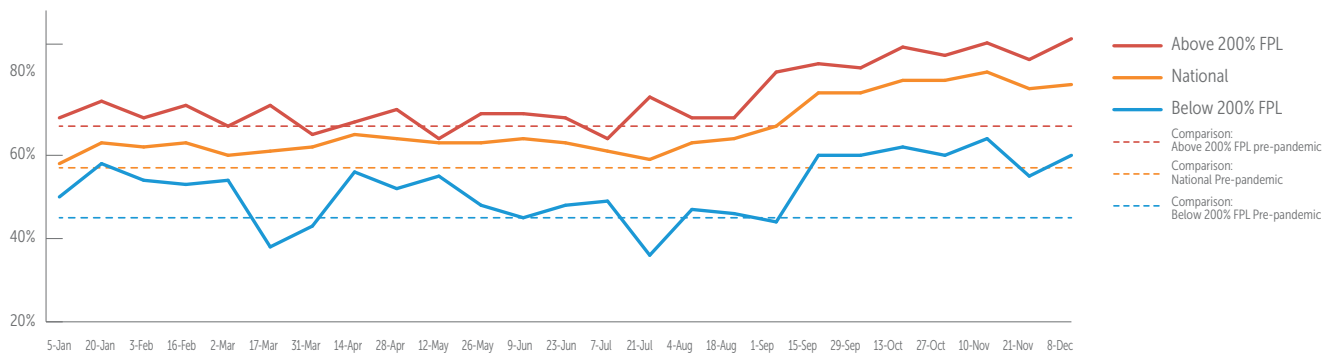




## POSITIVE EARLY LEARNING EXPERIENCES

From being read to every day to securing a place in Early Head Start (EHS) or receiving assistance for quality child care, babies need a greater investment in their foundational development. The pandemic rendered the fragile structure for child care and parental support even more unstable and made access to quality care more challenging for families. Although RAPID Survey findings over the course of 2021 show that household use of non-parental child care substantially increased overall for the nation’s families, this was not the case for families with low income. The return to its use remained strikingly lower among families with low income.

### NON-PARENTAL CHILD CARE USE DURING COVID-19 Figure 20.



Note: FPL = Federal Poverty Level. Figure includes data collected between January 5 and December 14, 2021. Caregivers reported whether they had used non-parental child care in the last week.

Stabilization funding for child care put in place through the American Rescue Plan provided temporary relief at a robust level, particularly for families with low income, that could lay the foundation for a stronger system. Low wages for child care providers increased their own experiences of material hardship. Job losses, an exodus from the child care workforce, and increased costs of care contributed to reduced availability in 2021 that left parents with fewer options. However, the nation’s child care system remains in crisis without durable policies and investments to build on that foundation.

We must turn our sights to building a child care system that is recognized as a vital component of the economic infrastructure and is accessible for all, expanding Early Head Start to provide comprehensive services to all eligible infants and toddlers and more pregnant women, and expanding early intervention services to reach more children to prevent and address developmental delays and disabilities. As a nation, we continue to ignore the need to ensure our babies have quality early learning experiences that nourish their early development.



# Ensuring all babies have a strong foundation to GROW

**The state in which a baby is born and lives during their first 3 years can make a difference in whether they have a strong start in life.**

All states have room to grow in how they support parents in nurturing the development of their young children. Although some states are more advanced than others, subgroup data makes clear that even states with the most positive environments for families with young children need to look inward and examine the equity of opportunity for every baby.

Our objective for each edition of the *Yearbook* is to ensure the data provided help policymakers and advocates spur action and track policies over time to support young children and their families. For the 2022 *Yearbook*, we continued to explore using available data to provide the most comprehensive view of babies and their families, and we have made further enhancements to achieve that goal. Most importantly, in this fourth year we have acted on our plan to achieve a more stable set of indicators by assessing their performance (individually and collectively) in the past three years and refining the state ranking process. We continue to use a transparent ranking process to group states into one of four tiers to provide a quick snapshot of how they fare on selected indicators and domains.





These tiers represent four groupings of states that are approximately equal in size and ordered from the highest to lowest performing. The overall rankings of states' performance for the 2022 *Yearbook* are as follows:



## STATE OF BABIES YEARBOOK 2022: OVERALL RANKINGS

<p><b>Working Effectively</b></p> <p><b>G R O W</b></p>	<p>Colorado</p> <p>Connecticut</p> <p>District of Columbia</p>	<p>Maine</p> <p>Maryland</p> <p>Massachusetts</p> <p>Minnesota</p>	<p>New Jersey</p> <p>Oregon</p> <p>Rhode Island</p>	<p>Vermont</p> <p>Washington</p>
<p><b>Improving Outcomes</b></p> <p><b>G R O W</b></p>	<p>Alaska</p> <p>California</p> <p>Delaware</p> <p>Hawaii</p>	<p>Illinois</p> <p>Iowa</p> <p>Missouri</p> <p>Montana</p>	<p>New Hampshire</p> <p>New York</p> <p>Pennsylvania</p>	<p>Virginia</p> <p>Wisconsin</p>
<p><b>Reaching Forward</b></p> <p><b>G R O W</b></p>	<p>Indiana</p> <p>Kansas</p> <p>Michigan</p> <p>Nebraska</p>	<p>New Mexico</p> <p>North Carolina</p> <p>North Dakota</p> <p>Ohio</p>	<p>Oklahoma</p> <p>South Dakota</p> <p>Tennessee</p>	<p>Utah</p> <p>West Virginia</p>
<p><b>Getting Started</b></p> <p><b>G R O W</b></p>	<p>Alabama</p> <p>Arizona</p> <p>Arkansas</p> <p>Florida</p>	<p>Georgia</p> <p>Idaho</p> <p>Kentucky</p> <p>Louisiana</p>	<p>Mississippi</p> <p>Nevada</p> <p>South Carolina</p>	<p>Texas</p> <p>Wyoming</p>

Additional enhancements have been made to the [State of Babies website](#) to expand the information available to visitors to the site and provide a broader context for the data presented there. We hope state policymakers and advocates will use this opportunity to look beyond the averages to really “see” their babies and focus on the children and families behind the numbers using the more extensive data in their profiles available on the website. Specifically, states and communities can look at the subgroup data together to forge a common understanding to start the conversations and actions that can promote equitable access to the ingredients all babies need to thrive.