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KIDS COUNT in Delaware “Data to Action” Series: *June 2022* *Wrap Up & Review*

INTRODUCTION

This brief was written based on a webinar hosted by KIDS COUNT in Delaware, supported by Highmark Health. This webinar served as a “Wrap Up & Review” of the full Data to Action series. Specifically, panelists flowed through the following:

- Featured organizations
- What to watch
- Opportunities moving forward

The wrap-up and review webinar began with an overview of some of the groups that have shared their voice, experience, and expertise throughout the year-long series. Next came the main takeaways that have stood out as particularly relevant to making Delaware as child-centered as possible. “What to watch” included legislative

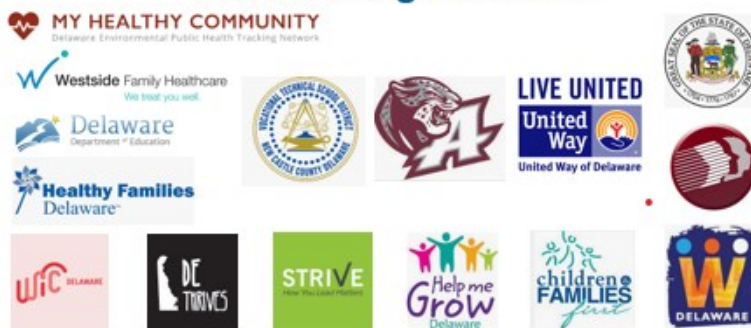
change and explored COVID-19 recovery supports that continue to be necessary. Finally, panelists highlighted future partnerships, areas of interest, and ways to engage in future conversations.

Graduate Student Researcher Tatiana Galdamez and Assistant Policy Scientist Becky McColl walked the audience through the points of advocacy.



Wrap Up & Review

Featured Organizations



FEATURED ORGANIZATIONS

Throughout the five webinars in the Data to Action series, panelists spanned focus areas that surround a child's life: social-emotional learning, education, physical health, mental health, and economic security. Living through the COVID-19 pandemic, and how to help kids thrive in spite of the challenges it has brought, was the common thread throughout the entire year.

The Data to Action webinar series began with a focus on Delaware's My Healthy Community

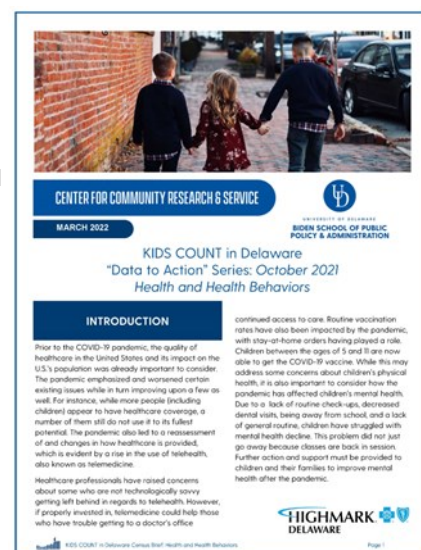


Database¹. The intent of starting with a reliable statewide tool was to use this “deep data dive” to set the scene for understanding COVID-19 in Delaware and each child's experience with it. A core belief of KIDS COUNT in

Delaware is that data should inform action (thus our series “Data to Action” name). Tabatha Offutt-Powell shared about Delaware's public health tracking network. In this way, the Data to Action series began with one of the most frequently updated sources relevant to kids in Delaware.

The second through fifth webinars explored Health & Health Behaviors, Educational Involvement & Achievement, Economic Security, and Family & Community, with a specific focus on birth outcomes respectively.

The Health and Health Behaviors session featured Dr. Karla Testa, a clinician at Westside Family Healthcare². This unique window into direct healthcare before, compared to during, the pandemic allowed audience members to understand the importance of children catching up on their routine vaccinations during well-visits as well as children getting the COVID-19 vaccination when they become eligible. Additional conversation included child BMI changes during early months of the pandemic, specifically considering activity levels and food security data.



Wrap Up & Review



as well as the status of community supports to schools by STRIVE Leadership's Caroline Letner. The panelists shared messages not only about content-based learning impacts of COVID-19 but the critical social-emotional challenges students are facing.

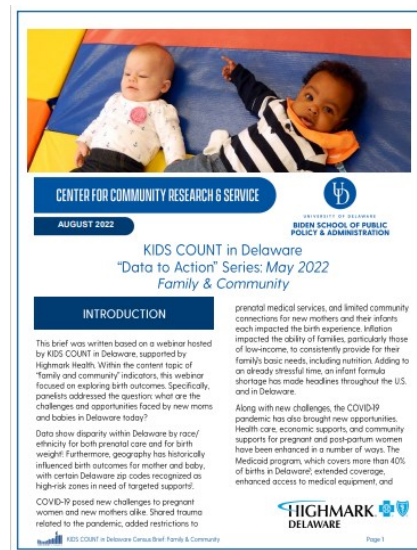
For the economic well-being webinar, the focus was connecting economic well-being to the basic needs of a child. Donna Snyder-White from the United Way and Maria Shroyer from WIC described those specific needs, specifically how their respective organizational programming has adapted based on families' needs during the pandemic. The Office of Women's Advancement & Advocacy (Melanie Ross Levin, Kim Lowman) reminded us through data that what happens to children economically is linked directly to their caretakers' economic standing. Since these



caretakers are often women, it's especially important to embrace multi-generational solutions to challenges that existed pre-pandemic and that were exacerbated by COVID. Senator Nicole Poore

shared about the SEED+ program and Inspire scholarship, both of which are attempts to address the high cost of tuition for post-secondary education.

For the Family & Community session, the webinar focused specifically on births and birth outcomes. Speakers included Dara Hall from Delaware's Division of Medicaid and Medical Assistance, Tara Oliver from Children and Families First, and Paulina Gyan from Delaware's Division of Public Health. Pandemic related challenges addressed included barriers to social supports, inflation, and an infant formula shortage that continues to be addressed. New opportunities were also highlighted. Panelists shared several Medicaid enhancements for the members (more than 40% of Delaware births) covered by the program such as a post-partum food box program, extended coverage, & enhanced access to medical equipment. Home visiting services were highlighted as a program which connects families with needed services to promote better birth outcomes, set as a resource within 211/Help Me Grow for connecting needs to community resources.

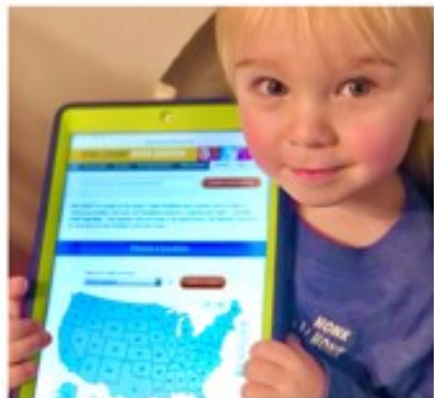


STRIVE hosted KIDS COUNT in Delaware on their podcast, "How You Lead Matters."

Listen [here](#).¹³

Wrap Up & Review

Main takeaways...



HEALTH

EDUCATION

ECONOMIC SECURITY

FAMILY & COMMUNITY

OPPORTUNITIES MOVING FORWARD

Data as a Victim of the Pandemic

In order to reflect on the takeaways of the Data to Action series, it's imperative to highlight that data has been a victim of the pandemic. Child well-being data inherently reflect the past. There is a lag in the data KIDS COUNT in Delaware traditionally reports because the entities who publish data need time to collect it, clean it, and prepare it for public use. This data lag has challenging implications in a rapidly changing environment like COVID-19. It also means that actual conditions on the ground, related to some indicators, may look very different than the most recently available data indicate. Compounding the timeliness of data are questions of data quality. In some cases, challenges associated with data collection during a public health crisis mean that data from 2020 and 2021 are available but not comparable to pre-pandemic data. Some data from 2020 are simply unavailable because they were not collected. The question becomes—how do we as data users reflect current conditions? One of the ways KIDS COUNT in Delaware is trying to fill in those gaps is by using data collected by experimental and emerging

sources. These type of data indicate real-time impacts COVID-19 has had on children and families. However, the drawback to experimental and emerging sources is that data is limited in not having a comparable pre-pandemic baseline.

KIDS COUNT is a national and state-by-state effort of the Annie E. Casey Foundation to track the well-being of children in the United States. KIDS COUNT in Delaware, a project of the University of Delaware Center for Community Research & Service, is a collaborative effort of over forty organizations to enrich local and state discussion concerning ways to secure better lives for all children by providing policy makers and citizens with benchmarks of child well-being.

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Wrap Up & Review

Health & Health Behaviors

Delaware saw various wins and opportunities on the health front this year. During the wrap-up webinar, panelists pointed to the introduction of the “Cover All Delaware Children Act⁴” which will ensure medical coverage for all children. Additionally, implementation of 2021’s HB100⁵ will greatly increase mental health services in schools. This increase will hopefully meet a need, as the negative mental health impacts of COVID-19 were expressed repeatedly throughout the Data to Action webinar series. Telehealth expansion has opened more doors for access to support, but connection to this service is needed for success.

As Delaware’s My Healthy Community Platform stood as the most up-to-date data source for COVID-19 data, there is potential for emphasis of this sort on other indicators as well. Our panelist Tabatha Offutt-Powell specifically mentioned the overlaying of the Social Vulnerability Index across various areas of health and economics for Delaware’s residents.

One such indicator may be “use of telehealth.” Telehealth has greatly increased in use during the COVID-19 pandemic, and the Health and Health behaviors webinar explored prospects and drawbacks of use. It’s important to note that for Delaware’s children, though telehealth increases accessibility to clinicians, many aspects of child health require face-to-face communications. Developmental milestones must be checked, and immunizations must be administered. It’s recommended for the state to pay particular attention the American Academy of Pediatrics’ Schedule of Periodicity⁶, to ensure that any child who fell behind on required screenings is caught up in due time.

Educational Involvement & Achievement

The education webinar showed that there is need to support students and teachers in innovative ways. Children and adults have experienced a shared trauma from COVID-19. In this year’s legislative session, movements were made to ensure mental health supports to middle schools through the state, to create and carry forth mental health education for students in Kindergarten thru 12th grades, and to require health plans to cover annual behavioral well-checks. The American School Counselor Association recommends a 250-to-1 ratio of students to counselors⁷; this should be the goal in each of Delaware’s schools. All of this future care must consider the experiences felt within the past years of the pandemic, and focus on building resiliency.

STRIVE Leadership offered a description of how they help kids overcome challenges and become leaders. Their social emotional development curriculum occurs at the intersection of team sports and personal development. Training such as this is exactly what our students need to continue pushing forward, supported academically, physically, mentally, and emotionally.

A Special Thanks...

Highmark Blue Cross Blue Shield of Delaware sponsored the creation of this brief and the accompanying webinar series. This is one of six artifacts to be published as products of the partnership.



Wrap Up & Review

Economic Security

This year's legislative session saw a SEED Expansion Bill⁸ and the Healthy Delaware Families Act⁹ signed. Both will work to support children and families in unique ways. SEED+ supports Delaware's workforce by allowing a new set of Delawareans access to education for career development. Specifically, eligibility has expanded to all Delawareans with a GED and those with non-violent felonies. Structurally, learners can now receive SEED+ scholarships for 10 semesters, providing additional time to complete degree work, a change that parents going to school while simultaneously working to support their families.

In a similar vein, the Healthy Delaware Families Act was passed, which provides up to 12 weeks of leave and benefits to covered employees for certain parental, family caregiving, and medical reasons.

The Advanced Child Tax Credit¹⁰ was a success during this fiscal year as it directly helped to lift children out of poverty. Though this benefit was not made permanent, it has shown the ability for cash assistance initiatives¹¹ to lift children out of poverty.

"Economic security is multifaceted, and includes educational support, food security, healthcare coverage and resources, paid family leave, familial support, and wage equity."

-Tatiana Galdamez, Graduate Research Assistant

Family and Community

Pertaining to birth outcomes, various programs were highlighted that work to support new babies and their parents. Throughout COVID-19 and continuing currently, Delaware's Division of Medicaid and Medical Assistance ran a food box delivery program to support new moms¹².

With Delaware under Emergency Order as a result of the pandemic, all people who had a baby would be covered for a full year after birth (Medicaid has been consistent for recipients since COVID-19). With new legislation, this coverage will be permanent: all people who are pregnant will have that continued coverage¹³. This is a prominent achievement Delaware's youngest population! Our state's home visiting program continues robust services in a similar way.

The Doula Movement in Delaware is gaining speed; Medicaid expansion is working to cover doula care for those with eligibility¹⁴. Doulas give physical and emotional support to birthing persons and their partners during pregnancy, childbirth and the postpartum period.

Currently, Delaware and the nation are working to battle formula shortages for new babies. This has opened the conversation across the state for how to ensure the basic needs of newborns, and new moms, are met. Increasing access to breastfeeding has the potential to help some new moms; legislation is being rolled out to connect more people who have given birth to breast pumps under Medicaid guidance.

CONCLUSION

Through the Data to Action webinar series, the audience was reminded that data must remain the foundation for conversation. KIDS COUNT in Delaware is thankful to have had the opportunity to feature a multitude speakers across six webinars, elevating their work, views, and recommendations in order to keep the voices of kids at the center. These community members are truly the experts they are seeing, living, and doing this work everyday. This series provided a space for those "on the ground" to bring to the forefront the most

prominent issues for Delaware’s children, down to the month, week, day, and even minute!

The big questions that were pondered (and remain to be) are as follows:

- Do the data reflect the experience community members, stakeholders, and service providers are having?
- How has the COVID-19 pandemic affected our society at each level?

It was shown throughout the series that Delaware is working to put kids first. Each panelist shared upcoming legislation, movements, and/or continued programming that is tailored to the current needs of Delaware’s kids.

At the federal level, much of the COVID relief funds were direct towards children’s causes. There is concern that a funding cliff has been hit, and that this level of investment may not continue. The progress made to help kids through the pandemic will only be kept if these advancements in funding remain.

We thank our gracious panelists, without whom this series would not have been possible.

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