

## TRENDS IN THE WELL-BEING OF AMERICA'S CHILDREN AND YOUTH: 1996

### FOREWORD

This is the first annual report from HHS on trends in the well-being of our nation's children and youth. It presents the most recent, most reliable national trends in five key domains of the lives of children and youth: Population, Family and Neighborhood; Economic Security; Health Conditions and Health Care; Social Development, Behavioral Health, and Teen Fertility; and Education and Achievement. This year we have highlighted population and family issues, including an essay by Donald J. Hernandez of the Census Bureau on population trends related to children and youth.

This report shows that the well-being of our nation's children and youth has improved in some ways over the past few decades. But it has deteriorated in many other ways. To take stock of our gains, to understand where we can improve, and to prepare our response, it is crucial that we have accurate and comprehensive trend information. We hope you will find this volume a ready guide to the changing condition of our nation's children and youth.

I would like to highlight a few of the trends outlined in this report. First, there is some good news:

- The rate of full immunization for two year olds has increased.
- The infant mortality rate continues to decline.
- Teen birth rates for those aged fifteen through nineteen declined from 1991 to 1993, although the teen birth rate is still higher than twenty years ago.
- Mathematics and science proficiency has increased.
- The proportion of children who watch six or more hours of television per day has decreased.
- Regular seat belt use among children over the age of four has improved.

But there are also many less positive trends:

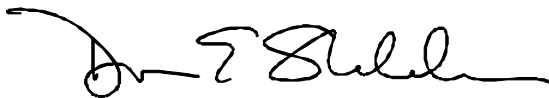
- The mortality rate for minority youth has increased.

- The proportion of children living in single-parent households has increased.
- The poverty rate for children and youth has increased, and the rate of children living in extreme poverty has increased more dramatically.
- The percentage of high school seniors who report smoking cigarettes every day has recently increased after a steady decline.
- For many indicators of well-being, minority children and youth fare much worse than white children and youth.

This report displays a substantial body of information about the condition of our children and youth. In working with Child Trends, Inc. to assemble this information, HHS staff collaborated closely with other Federal departments: the Department of Education, the Department of Labor, the Department of Commerce, and other government agencies.

However, this report also shows how little we know about many important issues in the lives of children and youth. We must continue to expand and improve our measures of key factors in children's lives.

Our children and youth are truly the nation's most valuable resource. I hope that this report and its successors can help the nation establish its priorities for the protection and nurturing of that resource.



Donna E. Shalala  
Secretary  
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services  
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