ECONOMIST IMPACT

Florida

Estimations of the scale, scope and cost of child sexual abuse and exploitation (CSAE) in the United States are alarming.[1] The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reports that approximately one in four girls and one in 20 boys will experience sexual abuse during childhood in US,[2] while the estimated lifetime cost per child sexual abuse victim is $282,734 million.[3,4] The good news is that CSAE is preventable. A range of interventions have been identified to help prevent child abuse and sexual violence from occurring in the first place and to minimize the impacts on survivors and their families.[5,6,7]

Economist Impact's Out of the Shadows Index, supported by World Childhood Foundation USA, was designed to shine a spotlight on state action—and inaction—to address CSAE. The assessment includes more than 170 metrics aggregated into 22 indicators and grouped into four categories to gauge the extent to which states have introduced essential measures to prevent and respond to this pressing issue. It aims to be a tool to highlight areas for prioritization, drive change, and benchmark progress.

The following state profile was created as part of the second iteration of the Out of the Shadows Index (2024). For full findings and insights from the 2025 index, visit www.childhood-usa.org

2025 results

Score	Rank
50/100	21/51

Background indicators

Population (m)	22.61
Median household income (USD)	63,062
Poverty rate (% below poverty level)	13
Educational attainment (% with a bachelor's degree or higher)	31
Female representation in state government (%)	41
Investment in education per pupil (USD):	10,401

State overview (2024)

Florida has made important progress in addressing CSAE, securing ninth position in the index overall and fourth in the Provision of Support Services domain. To further enhance these efforts, more focus should be placed on building prevention capacity and promoting survivors' access to justice and compensation mechanisms.

State spotlights

Florida has undertaken several reviews to **understand and improve the response to CSAE in the state**, such as the work of the Child Forensic Interview Protocol Committee.[8]

Don't Miss the Signs, created by Lauren's Kids with support from the Florida Department of Children and Families, is a **comprehensive public awareness campaign to educate Floridians about the signs of child abuse**, including sexual abuse.[9]

Florida has taken steps to increase the availability of medical providers trained in the evaluation and diagnosis of child sexual abuse. Each of Florida's Child Protection Teams, which are established in statute and cover 100% of the state, is assigned a board-certified pediatrician—the pediatric subspecialty responsible for diagnosis and treatment in cases of suspected abuse of infants, children and adolescents.[10]

Priority areas for future focus

Strengthen the legal framework against sexual violence by:

- Establishing a minimum marriage age of 18 without exception and requiring all marriage license applicants to provide official proof of their age; and
- Enacting a law that specifically criminalizes sexual misconduct by persons in positions of trust or authority, prohibiting adults from engaging in sexual activity with minors up to the age of 18 in such cases.[11]

Boost prevention capacity through the development of a statewide child sexual abuse prevention plan or strategy, encompassing in-person and online abuse. Actions should include:

- Enhancing the comprehensiveness of sex education, requiring that sex education and HIV/STI instruction include information on consent and be evidence-based, culturally appropriate and inclusive of *all* students;
- Requiring that instruction provided to students on the prevention of child sexual abuse, exploitation and human trafficking include information about the risks of online or online-facilitated abuse; and by
- Enacting required, regular training on child sexual abuse for employees and volunteers of schools and other youth-serving organizations.

Guarantee children have access to services of the highest standards by:

- Mandating the use of Children's Advocacy Centers (CACs)[12] for all cases of suspected child sexual abuse; and by
- Ensuring that CACs across the state are adequately and consistently funded.

Support survivors' access to justice and compensation by:

- Eliminating the criminal statute of limitations for all child sexual abuse crimes and the civil statute of limitations for all child sexual abuse claims; and by
- Reforming the state's eligibility requirements for crime victim compensation to address potential barriers to financial assistance for survivors of child sexual abuse (eg, to cover costs related to medical and therapeutic care).[13]

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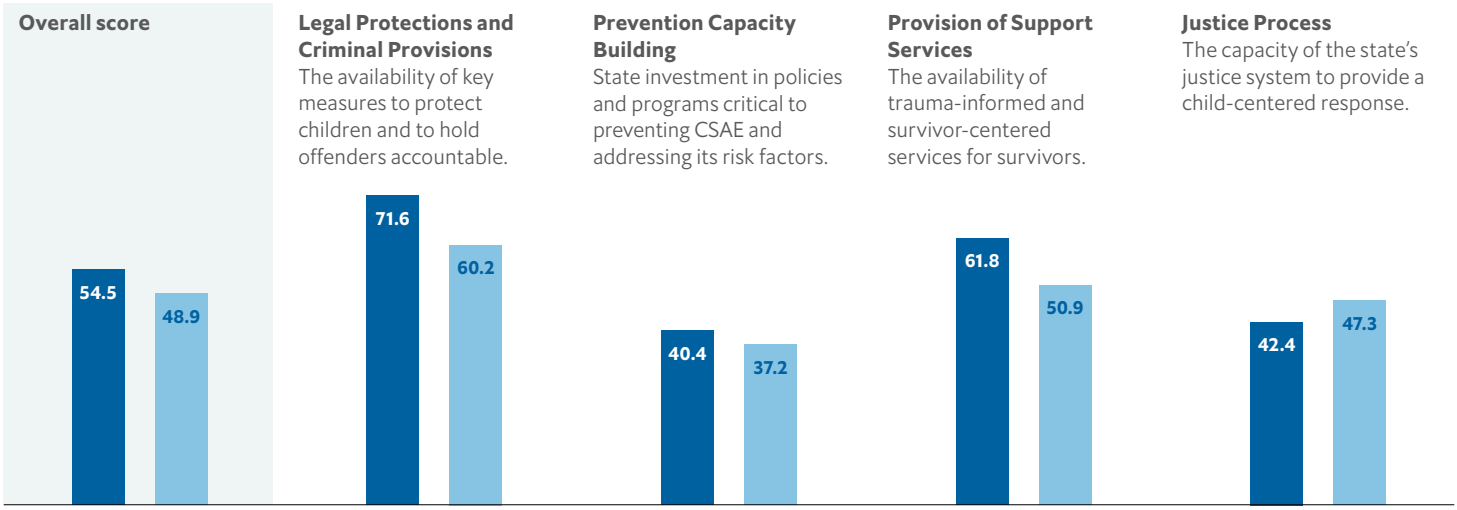
What leaders on the ground are saying

Luzed L. Cruz, Executive Director of Florida Network of Children's Advocacy Centers (FNCAC), highlights that: "The CAC Movement in Florida continues to expand, grow, and develop. Over the last ten years four new centers and countless satellite offices have been established throughout the state. Yet, access to reliable funding remains a priority for many in our membership. This is especially true as many of those that have been reliant on federal funds over the last four–five years are finding those funds, which were once reliable, are becoming less secure. The focus is now on maintaining service levels for children and families." Access to adequate training is another issue of significance for leaders of the CAC movement in Florida. As Ms. Cruz explains, "The FNCAC's role in supporting CACs has also become greater as turnover rates continue to outpace pre-pandemic days. The training requirements for CAC staff and the MDT [multidisciplinary team] partners are what, many times, set us apart from other organizations. We support our members by providing training scholarships, virtual trainings, and/or even trainings at no-cost throughout the state. We've gotten creative and our CACs have too."

Index scores (2024)

Florida 28-state average



Issue spotlights[14] (2024)

Creating protective environments		
Mandated sex education and HIV/STI instruction	Sex ed / HIV/STI instruction	◐
Comprehensiveness of sex education and HIV/STI instruction (if/when provided)[15]	Scale of comprehensiveness	0/7
Mandated sexual abuse prevention and awareness education	Yes / no	●
Mandated online sexual abuse prevention and awareness education	Yes / no	○
Required school dating violence policies	Yes / no	●
Required training on child sexual abuse (CSA) for educators	Yes / no	○
Required training on CSA for youth-serving organization employees	Yes / no	○
Educator code of ethics: appropriate teacher/student boundaries	Yes / no	○
Addressing risk and protective factors		
Statewide child sexual abuse prevention plan	Yes / no	○
Child marriage laws	18 without exception / required proof of age	◐
Mandated parental leave	Yes / no	○
Non-discrimination statutory protections[16]	Protection for sexual orientation / gender identity	◐
Legislated minimum wage above the low-income threshold	Yes / no	○
Income-eligible children with access to early head start	%	6.2
Eligible children under age 3 served in evidence-based home-visiting programs	%	7.9
Regular collection of prevalence data on child sexual abuse	Yes / no	○

Building trauma-informed systems		
Statute defining CACs in line with national standards[17]	Yes / no	●
Statute requiring the use of CACs in suspected CSA cases, where available	Yes / no	○
State funding for CACs: general revenue and special revenue	General revenue / special revenue	◐
Mandated training for child protective services investigators[18]	Child sexual abuse / trauma	◐
Mandated training for law enforcement	Child sexual abuse / trauma	◐
Mandated training for prosecutors	Child sexual abuse / trauma	◐
Preventing retraumatization in court: testifying by alternative means in CSA cases	Younger children / all minors	◐
Preventing retraumatization in court: hearsay exception in CSA cases	Younger children / all minors	◐
Supporting justice and healing		
Medical care following sexual abuse: minors' authority to consent	Yes / no	○
Medical care following sexual abuse: right to an advocate	Yes / no	●
Rape kit reform	Some reform / full reform	◐
Criminal statute of limitations: full elimination for all CSA crimes	Yes / no	○
Civil statute of limitations: full elimination for all CSA claims	Yes / no	○
Revival or window law for expired civil claims	Yes / no	○
Crime Victims Compensation eligibility: extended filing period for survivors of CSA[19]	Yes / no	●
Crime Victims Compensation eligibility: alternatives to police reports for survivors of CSA[20]	Yes / no	○

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Endnotes:

1. The index and profile may refer to specific forms of child maltreatment or sexual violence (eg, child sexual abuse or child sexual exploitation) to distinguish between findings or areas of research.
2. https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/childsexualabuse/fastfact.html#:~:text=Many%20children%20wait%20to%20report,States%20experience%20child%20sexual%20abuse
3. $282,734 is the average lifetime cost for female victims of non-fatal child sexual abuse (CSA). For male victims, it is approximately $74,691 (although this lower estimate is likely influenced by the insufficient data available on productivity losses). The lifetime cost for victims of fatal CSA per female and male victim was estimated, on average, to be $1,128,334 and $1,482,933, respectively. All estimates pertain to the year 2015.
4. https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/29533869/#:~:text=Estimating%2020%20new%20cases%20of,%241%2C482%2C933%2C%20respectively%2C%20and%20the%20average
5. https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/pdf/CAN-Prevention-Resource_508.pdf
6. https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/pdf/SV-Prevention-Resource_508.pdf
7. https://www.togetherforgirls.org/en/resources/what-works-to-prevent-sexual-violence-against-children-evidence-review
8. https://www.floridahealth.gov/provider-and-partner-resources/child-forensic-interview-advisory-committee/index.html
9. https://laurenskids.org/advocacy/public-awareness/#:~:text=Lauren's%20Kids%20created%20the%20Don,obligation%20to%20report%20suspected%20abuse
10. FL Stat. Ann. §39.303
11. Currently, Florida's laws apply only to authority figures working in the school setting. FL Stat. Ann. § 800.101 establishes that an authority figure—defined as a person 18 years of age or older who is employed by, volunteering at, or under contract with a school—shall not solicit or engage in: sexual conduct; a relationship of a romantic nature; or lewd conduct with a student.
12. Children's Advocacy Centers (CACs) are organizations located throughout the US that help facilitate a multidisciplinary and child-centered response to CSAE. These centers bring together several of the key actors—law enforcement, child protective services investigators, medical and mental health professionals, forensic interviewers, victim advocates, and more—under one roof, helping minimize the number of times a child has to be interviewed and offering critical therapeutic and other support to children and their families.
13. Key barriers to accessing victim compensation include set timeframes for when an application can be filed and/or requiring a police report as a condition for eligibility.
14. The research for the 2024 index was conducted between March and September 2023. As such, the findings reflect the most recent available data at the time the research was completed.
15. "Comprehensiveness" is assessed based on the following standards: whether the state has a law or statewide rules, regulations or standards with the force of law requiring that sex education and HIV/STI instruction be evidence-based, medically accurate, culturally appropriate and inclusive of all students, and whether related courses are required to include information about contraception and consent.
16. This figure indicates whether statewide laws or policies explicitly prohibit discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and/or gender identity in all of the following areas: employment, housing, and education.
17. "National standards" refers to the National Children's Alliance's National Standards of Accreditation.
18. These indicators consider whether the state mandates specialized training for child protective services investigators, law enforcement, and prosecutors on CSA and/or trauma at regular intervals (eg, every two years). A separate indicator assesses basic training requirements for mandated reporters in the state more broadly.
19. This indicator considers whether state law establishing eligibility for the state's Crime Victim Compensation Programs provides an explicit time frame exception that is applicable to survivors of CSA (eg, minor victims of crime have up to the age of 21 to file a claim).
20. This indicator assesses whether state law establishing eligibility for the state's Crime Victim Compensation Programs provides alternatives to making a police report for survivors of CSA (such as reports made to child protective services, a sexual assault counselor, or a CAC employee; a restraining or civil protection order granted to the victim; or records from a sexual assault forensic examination). Limited, time bound, or vague exceptions to this requirement were not considered.

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