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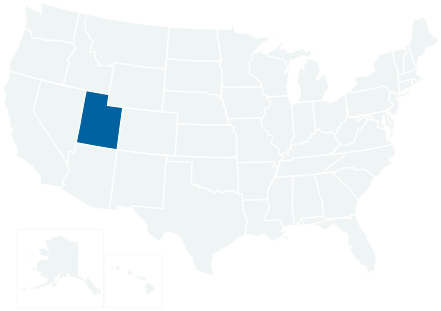

Utah

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
54.3/100	16/51

Background indicators

Population (m)	3.42
Median household income (USD)	79,449
Poverty rate (% below poverty level)	9
Educational attainment (% with a bachelor's degree or higher)	35
Female representation in state government (%)	25
Investment in education per pupil (USD):	9,095

State overview (2024)

Utah has made important progress to combat CSAE, securing the state's tenth-place position in the index overall and eighth place on the Justice Process domain. Notably, Utah's Children's Justice Center program promotes the use of child-friendly spaces for children to receive coordinated and specialized services during child sexual abuse investigations. There is, however, room for improvement when it comes to investing in prevention and statewide training for key responders.

State spotlights

Utah was one of the first states in the US to adopt the multidisciplinary model used by Children's Advocacy Centers (CACs)[8]—known as the Children's Justice Center (CJC) program in Utah—as best practice for responding to cases of severe child abuse. Unlike most states, where CACs often operate as independent non-profit organizations, Utah opted to embed the CJC program within the Utah Attorney General's Office.

In 2020, **Utah launched the SHINE public awareness campaign** to help end the stigma associated with child sexual abuse and encourage community members to support survivors. While the campaign was first introduced as a national initiative, Utah was one of the first states to roll out a large-scale SHINE campaign at the state level—with digital marketing, an original public service announcement, and billboards across the state.[9]

In 2017, **Utah piloted a screening tool assessing trauma and suicidality risk in children at participating CJCs**.[10] Evaluations of the pilot, now published in several academic journals, highlight that mental health screening and referral protocols in CJCs can be useful in identifying high-risk children with mental health needs.[11] As a result, screening is now required in CJCs across Utah, and increased state funding has been secured to bolster mental health and other support services for children and families at several CJCs in the state.

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 by
- Adopting a clear and explicit statutory definition of sexual consent.[12]

Boost prevention capacity through the development of a statewide child sexual abuse prevention plan or strategy, encompassing in-person and online abuse. Reforms should include:
- Enacting more comprehensive standards for sex education and HIV/STI instruction—requiring that such education include information about contraception and consent and be evidence-based, culturally appropriate and inclusive of *all* students;
- Mandating age-appropriate child sexual abuse prevention education for all students in grades K–12 using evidence-based programs,[13] including instruction on abuse that can be experienced online; and by
- Requiring regular training on child sexual abuse and teen dating violence for employees and volunteers of other youth-serving organizations beyond schools.[14]

Promote a trauma-informed response by:
- Mandating ongoing, statewide training for child protective service investigators, law enforcement and prosecutors on providing a trauma-informed response to child sexual abuse;
- Ensuring that children up to the age of 18 have access to measures protecting against re-traumatization during criminal proceedings;[15] and by
- Establishing survivors' right to have a victim advocate and support person present during a forensic medical examination.

Support survivors' access to justice by eliminating the criminal statute of limitations for all child sexual abuse crimes *and* the civil statute of limitations for child sexual abuse claims against all defendants.

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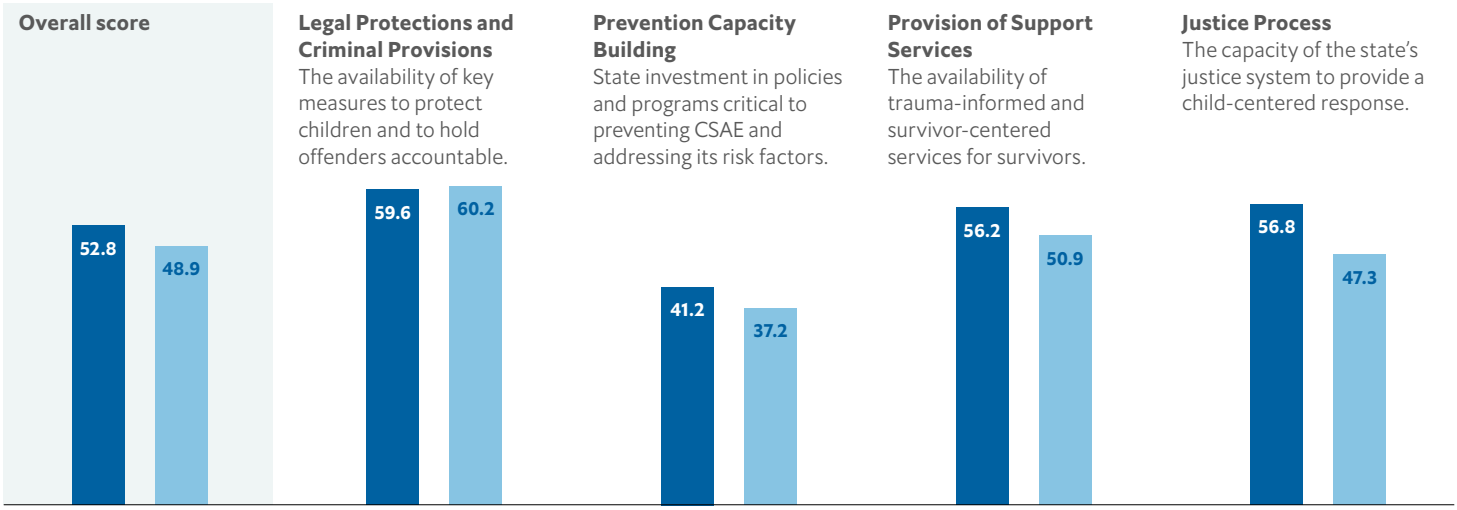
What leaders on the ground are saying

For leaders of the CJC movement in Utah, strengthening policy to facilitate the work of the CJCs is a top priority. As Tracey L. Tabet, Director of Utah Children's Justice Center Program, explains, "While funding is always a challenge for service providers generally, we are grateful that the Utah Legislature recently increased its funding to CJCs significantly. To maximize the impact of the State's financial investment, there is still critical work to be done in prevention, intervention, and criminal justice policy. When it comes to serving the interests of children, we want Utah's laws and policies to reflect best practices and prioritize safety. Utah's new statutory Victim Services Commission includes service providers, government administrators, and legislators charged with making policy and funding recommendations to improve our state's victim service response. This collaboration presents an opportunity to fill service gaps, implement evidence-based policies and practices, strengthen protections for victims, and honor their rights throughout the criminal justice process."

Index scores (2024)

Utah 28-state average



Issue spotlights[16] (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)[17]	Scale of comprehensiveness	1/7
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[18]	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	%	8.2
Eligible children under age 3 served in evidence-based home-visiting programs	%	4.1
Regular collection of prevalence data on child sexual abuse	Yes / no	○

Building trauma-informed systems		
Statute defining CACs in line with national standards[19]	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[20]	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[21]	Yes / no	●
Crime Victims Compensation eligibility: alternatives to police reports for survivors of CSA[22]	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. Children's Advocacy Centers—or Children's Justice Centers (CJCs) in Utah—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 to minimize the number of times a child has to be interviewed and offering critical therapeutic and other support to children and their families.
9. https://attorneygeneral.utah.gov/tag/shine-campaign/
10. This pilot was a result of collaboration between Utah's CJC Program leadership, Primary Children's Hospital and researchers at the University of Utah.
11. https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/36242552/
12. This definition should include reference to consent being "freely" or "voluntarily" given.
13. School districts in Utah are permitted, but not required, to provide instruction on child sexual abuse and human trafficking prevention and awareness to elementary school students using age-appropriate curriculum (UT Ann. Code § 53G-9-207).
14. School districts in Utah are required to provide, every other year, training and instruction on child sexual abuse and human trafficking prevention and awareness to school personnel in elementary and secondary schools (UT Ann. Code § 53G-9-207). No similar requirement exists, however, for employees of youth-serving organizations beyond schools.
15. Testimonial aids can help protect a child who has already been the subject of sexual abuse from incurring further trauma. This includes avenues by which child victims or witnesses of sexual abuse may testify by an alternative method outside of the courtroom, such as via closed-circuit television. Many states also have statutory exceptions for child hearsay—or the admissibility of certain out-of-court statements made by a child, such as those made to police or forensic interviewers—which have been widely established for use in cases involving sexual abuse.
16. 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.
17. "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.
18. 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.
19. "National standards" refers to the National Children's Alliance's National Standards of Accreditation.
20. 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.
21. 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).
22. 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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