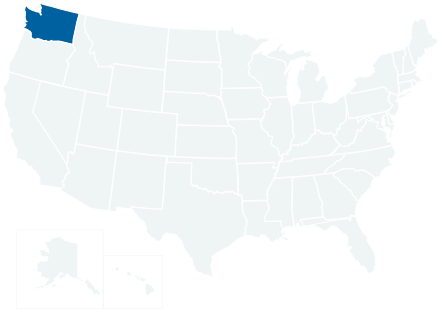
ECONOMIST IMPACT



Washington

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
64/100	1/51

Background indicators

Population (m)	7.81
Median household income (USD)	84,247
Poverty rate (% below poverty level)	10
Educational attainment (% with a bachelor's degree or higher)	37
Female representation in state government (%)	46
Investment in education per pupil (USD):	15,570

State overview (2025)

Washington has made significant progress to address CSAE, securing its position as the top-ranking state in the index overall and first on the Provision of Support Services domain. Notably, Washington has established several bodies that are responsible for reviewing and improving the state's response to CSAE. There are, however, opportunities for improvement, especially with regard to investing in prevention measures and capacity building.

State spotlights

Washington mandates comprehensive sex education in public schools—requiring that sex education and STI/HIV instruction include information on contraception and consent and be medically and scientifically accurate and inclusive of all students.[8]

Washington mandates ongoing, specialized training for persons responsible for investigating child sexual abuse—including child protective services investigators, law enforcement officers and prosecutors—which covers techniques for minimizing trauma and recognizing the needs of vulnerable populations, such as those with developmental disabilities.[9]

Washington has established several bodies—including the Sexual Assault Coordinated Community Response Task Force and the Commercially Sexually Exploited Children Statewide Coordinating Committee—which are charged with **reviewing best practices for managing sexual assault investigations** and making related recommendations.

Priority areas for future focus

Strengthen the legal framework against sexual abuse by establishing a minimum marriage age of 18 without exception and requiring all marriage license applicants to provide official proof of their age.

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

- Mandating age-appropriate child sexual abuse prevention education for all students in grades K–12 using evidence-based programs,[10] 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 schools and other youth-serving organizations.

Guarantee children's access to services of the highest standards by:

- Amending the statutory definition of a Children's Advocacy Center (CAC)[11] to be in line with or tied to the National Children's Alliance's *National Standards of Accreditation*; and by
- Ensuring CACs across the state have access to adequate and consistent funding.

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 child sexual abuse claims against all defendants; and by
- Ensuring that children up to the age of 18 have access to measures protecting against re-traumatization during criminal proceedings.[12]

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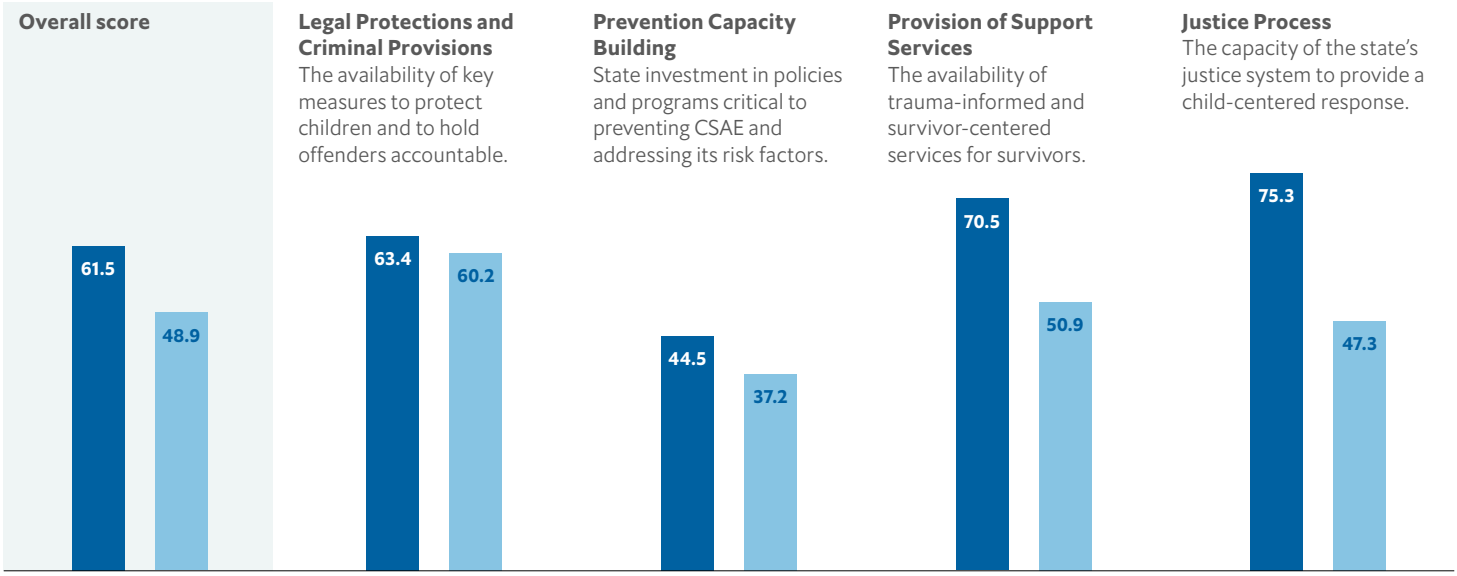
The United States Out of the Shadows Index: Washington

Index scores (2024)

Washington 28-state average



Issue spotlights[13] (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)[14]	Scale of comprehensiveness	6/7
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[15]	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	%	10.9
Eligible children under age 3 served in evidence-based home-visiting programs	%	7.2
Regular collection of prevalence data on child sexual abuse	Yes / no	○

Building trauma-informed systems		
Statute defining CACs in line with national standards[16]	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[17]	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[18]	Yes / no	●
Crime Victims Compensation eligibility: alternatives to police reports for survivors of CSA[19]	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://lawfilesext.leg.wa.gov/biennium/2019-20/Pdf/Bills/Session%20Laws/Senate/5395-S.SL.pdf
9. WA Rev. Code Ann. § 43.101.224
10. In Washington, the superintendent of public instruction is required to collect and disseminate to public schools information on and curricula for the coordinated program for the prevention of sexual abuse of students in kindergarten through 12th grade (WA Rev. Code Ann. §§ 28A.300.150 and 28A.300.160). There is no requirement, however, that such instruction be provided to students.
11. 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 to minimize the number of times a child has to be interviewed and offering critical therapeutic and other support to children and their families.
12. 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.
13. 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.
14. "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.
15. 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.
16. "National standards" refers to the National Children's Alliance's National Standards of Accreditation.
17. 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.
18. 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).
19. 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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