

Colorado

Estimations of the scale, scope and cost of child sexual exploitation and abuse (CSEA) 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 CSEA 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 CSEA. 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.

Score
55/100

Rank
8/28

Background indicators

Population (m)	5.88
Median household income (USD)	82,254
Poverty rate (% below poverty level)	10
Educational attainment (% with a bachelor's degree or higher)	43
Female representation in state government (%)	49
Investment in education per pupil (USD):	12,255

State overview

Colorado has made important progress in addressing CSEA, securing the state’s eighth-place position in the index overall and ranking first on the Legal Protections and Criminal Provisions domain. To further enhance these efforts, however, more focus could be placed on building prevention capacity and by introducing regular training for frontline responders.

State spotlights

In 2023, Colorado established a **task force responsible for evaluating the training provided to judicial personnel on sexual assault and domestic violence**. The task force’s mandate includes evaluating current training standards, identifying best practice, and proposing related recommendations.⁸

In 2021, **Colorado eliminated the statute of limitations and other restrictions on bringing a civil claim of sexual misconduct**, including derivative claims and claims brought against a person or entity that is not the perpetrator of the sexual misconduct.⁹

In 2019, Colorado established the **child abuse response and evaluation network (CARE Network)** to enhance the standardization of service delivery in response to suspected child maltreatment. Supported by the Colorado Department of Public Health & Environment, the CARE Network helps train and support a web of designated providers to complete medical and behavioral health assessments for children under 13 years of age in potential cases of sexual abuse.^{10,11}

Priority areas for future focus

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:

- Mandating sex education and HIV/STI instruction in public schools;
- Mandating age-appropriate child sexual abuse prevention education for all students in grades K–12 using evidence-based programs, including instruction on abuse that can be experienced online;¹² and by
- Enacting required, regular training on child sexual abuse and teen dating violence for employees and volunteers of schools and other youth-serving organizations.¹³

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

- Amending the statutory definition of Children’s Advocacy Centers¹⁴ (CACs) to be in line with or tied to the National Children’s Alliance’s National Standards of Accreditation;
- Mandating the use of CACs and trained forensic interviewers for all cases of suspected child sexual abuse; and by
- Ensuring that CACs across the state are adequately and consistently funded.

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; and by
- Ensuring that children up to the age of 18 have access to measures protecting against re-traumatization during criminal proceedings.¹⁵

Support survivors’ access to justice and compensation by:

- Abolishing the criminal statute of limitations for all types of crimes of child sexual violence and abuse;¹⁶ and by
- Reforming the state’s eligibility requirements for crime victim compensation to address potential barriers to critical financial assistance for survivors of child sexual abuse (eg, to cover costs related to medical and therapeutic care).¹⁷

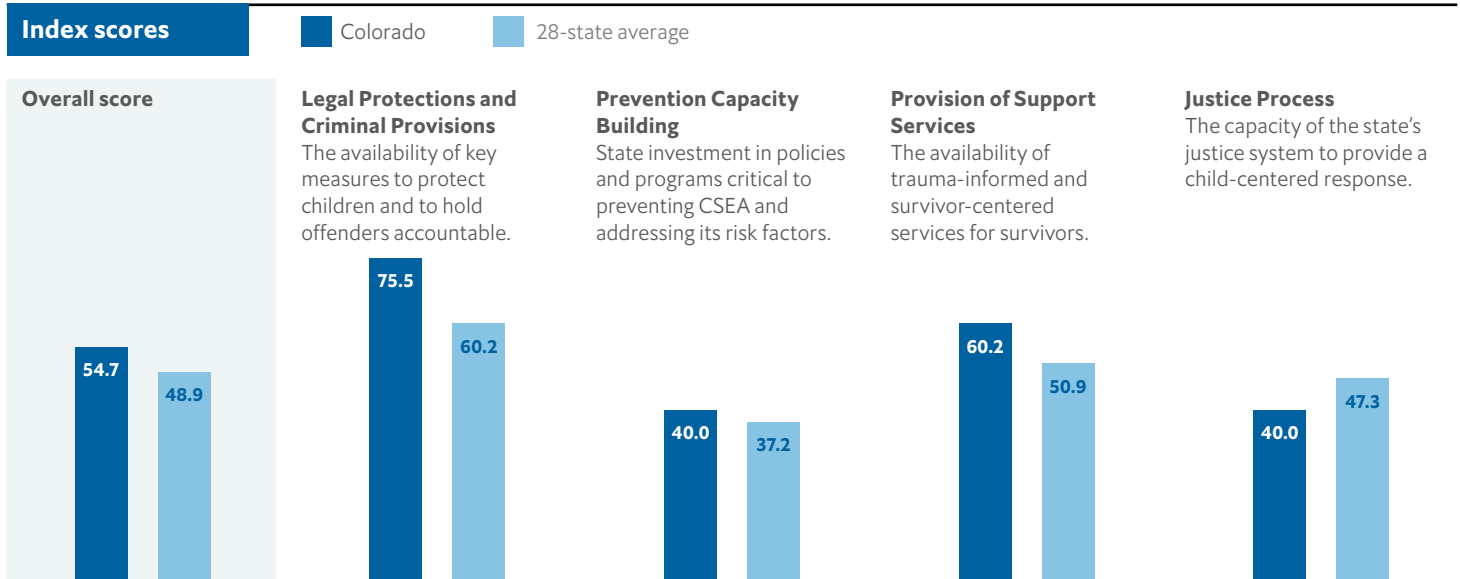
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The United States Out of the Shadows Index: Colorado

What leaders on the ground are saying

Access to more reliable funding is a top priority for leaders of the CAC movement in Colorado. As Ashley Jellison, Executive Director of Colorado Children's Alliance, explains, "Funding is a critical issue for all CACs in Colorado. Every year, the programs have grown to provide more services to their communities, and we have seen a steady increase in the number of kids seen at the centers. Since the pandemic, the cases coming to our centers are often more intense and time-consuming, and our centers must expend more resources than before on each child. Our main funding source will be cut by roughly 50% in the coming years, and our centers are already asking how they will be able to keep their doors open. We have worked very hard to bolster our response to child abuse in Colorado; our centers are very worried that that progress will be lost if we do not find additional funds."



Issues spotlights¹⁸

Creating protective environments		
Mandated sex education and HIV/STI instruction	Sex ed / HIV/STI instruction	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
Comprehensiveness of sex education and HIV/STI instruction (if/when provided) ¹⁹	Scale of comprehensiveness	6/7
Mandated sexual abuse prevention and awareness education	Yes / no	<input type="radio"/>
Mandated online sexual abuse prevention and awareness education	Yes / no	<input type="radio"/>
Required school dating violence policies	Yes / no	<input type="radio"/>
Required training on child sexual abuse (CSA) for educators	Yes / no	<input type="radio"/>
Required training on CSA for youth-serving organization employees	Yes / no	<input type="radio"/>
Educator code of ethics: appropriate teacher/student boundaries	Yes / no	<input type="radio"/>
Addressing risk and protective factors		
Statewide child sexual abuse prevention plan	Yes / no	<input type="radio"/>
Child marriage laws	18 without exception / required proof of age	<input type="checkbox"/> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Mandated parental leave	Yes / no	<input type="radio"/>
Non-discrimination statutory protections ²⁰	Protection for sexual orientation / gender identity	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Legislated minimum wage above the low-income threshold	Yes / no	<input checked="" type="radio"/>
Income-eligible children with access to early head start	%	8.1
Eligible children under age 3 served in evidence-based home-visiting programs	%	12.8
Regular collection of prevalence data on child sexual abuse	Yes / no	<input type="radio"/>

Building trauma-informed systems		
Statute defining CACs in line with national standards ²¹	Yes / no	<input type="radio"/>
Statute requiring the use of CACs in suspected CSA cases, where available	Yes / no	<input type="radio"/>
State funding for CACs: general revenue and special revenue	General revenue / special revenue	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Mandated training for child protective services investigators ²²	Child sexual abuse / trauma	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
Mandated training for law enforcement	Child sexual abuse / trauma	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
Mandated training for prosecutors	Child sexual abuse / trauma	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
Preventing retraumatization in court: testifying by alternative means in CSA cases	Younger children / all minors	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
Preventing retraumatization in court: hearsay exception in CSA cases	Younger children / all minors	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
Supporting justice and healing		
Medical care following sexual abuse: minors' authority to consent	Yes / no	<input checked="" type="radio"/>
Medical care following sexual abuse: right to an advocate	Yes / no	<input checked="" type="radio"/>
Rape kit reform	Some reform / full reform	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
Criminal statute of limitations: full elimination for all CSA crimes	Yes / no	<input type="radio"/>
Civil statute of limitations: full elimination for all CSA claims	Yes / no	<input checked="" type="radio"/>
Revival or window law for expired civil claims	Yes / no	<input checked="" type="radio"/>
Crime Victims Compensation eligibility: extended filing period for survivors of CSA ²³	Yes / no	<input type="radio"/>
Crime Victims Compensation eligibility: alternatives to police reports for survivors of CSA ²⁴	Yes / no	<input type="radio"/>

Figure 2 features a limited sample of the data included in the index. For the full set of indicators and a detailed explanation of the scoring, sources and weightings, visit the [Out of the Shadows Index website](#) to download the project’s white paper, methodology report and interactive model.

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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%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. House Bill 23-1108
9. Senate Bill 21-073
10. House Bill 19-1133
11. <https://www.kempecarenetwork.org/>
12. Each school district in Colorado is currently encouraged, but not required, to provide child sexual abuse and assault awareness and prevention education to students (CO Rev. Stat. Ann. § 22-32-109.1).
13. In Colorado, education on preventing, identifying, and responding to child sexual abuse counts towards professional development courses that educators are required to complete to maintain their professional license; however, such education is not specifically required in schools or for employees of other youth-serving organizations beyond schools (CO Rev. Stat. Ann. § 22-60.5-110).
14. Children’s Advocacy Centers (CACs) are organizations located throughout the US that help facilitate a multidisciplinary and child-centered response to CSEA. 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.
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. In Colorado, there is no statute of limitations for felony sex offenses against children; however, the statute of limitations for misdemeanor child sexual abuse is five years from the offense (CO Rev. Stat. Ann. § 16-5-401).
17. 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.
18. 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.
19. “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.
20. 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.
21. “National standards” refers to the National Children’s Alliance’s National Standards of Accreditation.
22. 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.
23. 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).
24. 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.