

Iowa

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
50/100

Rank
12/28

Background indicators

Population (m)	3.21
Median household income (USD)	65,600
Poverty rate (% below poverty level)	11
Educational attainment (% with a bachelor's degree or higher)	30
Female representation in state government (%)	29
Investment in education per pupil (USD):	12,695

State overview

Iowa has demonstrated notable progress in several key efforts to tackle CSEA, securing the state’s ranking of 12th on the index overall. To further enhance these efforts, more emphasis could be placed on prevention capacity building and better facilitating survivors’ access to justice and compensation.

State spotlights

In 2021, Iowa **eliminated the criminal statute of limitations for all child sexual abuse offences**, including sexual abuse, incest, sexual exploitation and human trafficking.⁸

Iowa explicitly **permits victims of sexual abuse who are minors to receive immediate or short-term medical or mental health services without the consent or notification of their parents or guardians**, thereby addressing a potential barrier to help-seeking in some cases.⁹

Priority areas for future focus

Strengthen the legal framework against sexual violence by:

- Setting 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.¹⁰

Boost prevention capacity through the development of a statewide child sexual abuse prevention plan or strategy, including online CSEA. Reforms should include:

- 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; and by
- Establishing required, 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:

- Mandating the use of Children’s Advocacy Centers¹¹ (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.

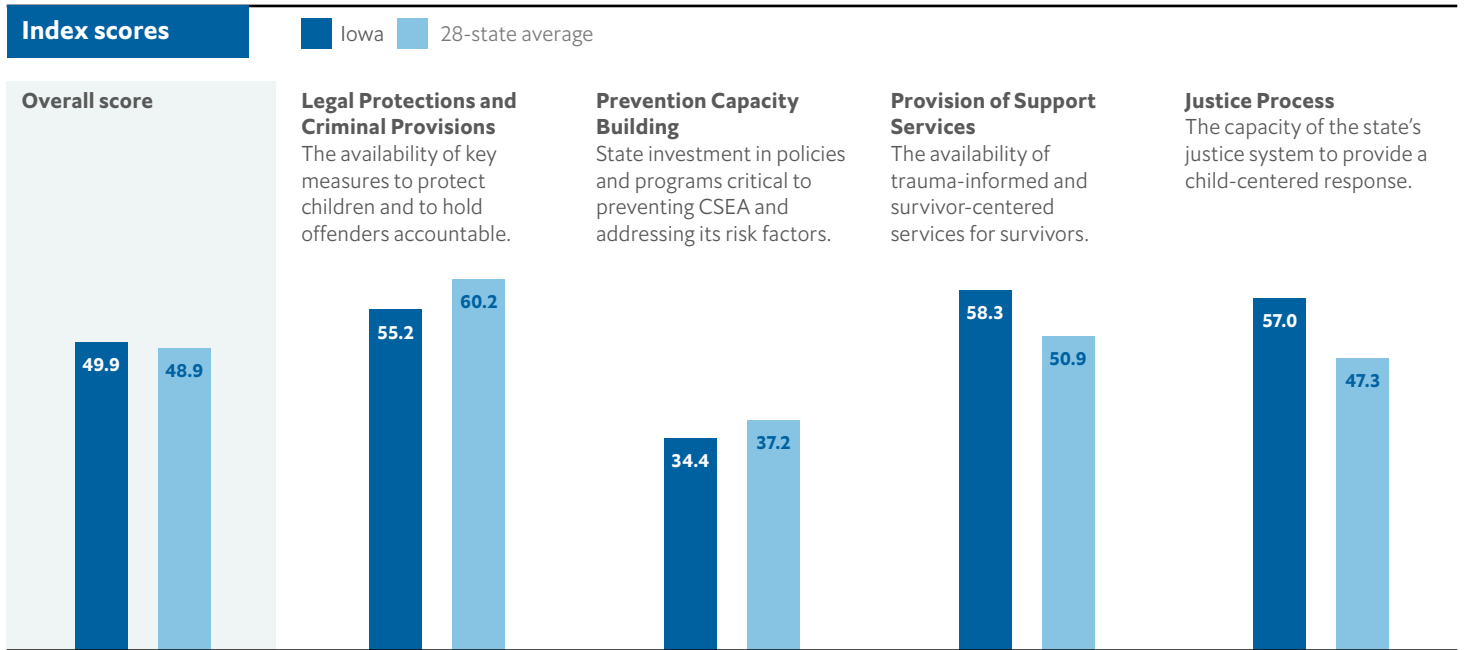
Support survivors’ access to justice and compensation by:

- Eliminating the civil statute of limitations for child sexual abuse and establishing a “revival window” to allow survivors to file civil claims that were previously barred by the statute of limitations; 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).¹²

SUPPORTED BY



The United States Out of the Shadows Index: Iowa



Issues spotlights¹³

Creating protective environments		
Mandated sex education and HIV/STI instruction	Sex ed / HIV/STI instruction	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Comprehensiveness of sex education and HIV/STI instruction (if/when provided) ¹⁴	Scale of comprehensiveness	3/7
Mandated sexual abuse prevention and awareness education	Yes / no	<input type="checkbox"/>
Mandated online sexual abuse prevention and awareness education	Yes / no	<input type="checkbox"/>
Required school dating violence policies	Yes / no	<input type="checkbox"/>
Required training on child sexual abuse (CSA) for educators	Yes / no	<input type="checkbox"/>
Required training on CSA for youth-serving organization employees	Yes / no	<input type="checkbox"/>
Educator code of ethics: appropriate teacher/student boundaries	Yes / no	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Addressing risk and protective factors		
Statewide child sexual abuse prevention plan	Yes / no	<input type="checkbox"/>
Child marriage laws	18 without exception / required proof of age	<input type="checkbox"/>
Mandated parental leave	Yes / no	<input type="checkbox"/>
Non-discrimination statutory protections ¹⁵	Protection for sexual orientation / gender identity	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Legislated minimum wage above the low-income threshold	Yes / no	<input type="checkbox"/>
Income-eligible children with access to early head start	%	9.9
Eligible children under age 3 served in evidence-based home-visiting programs	%	35.1
Regular collection of prevalence data on child sexual abuse	Yes / no	<input type="checkbox"/>
Building trauma-informed systems		
Statute defining CACs in line with national standards ¹⁶	Yes / no	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Statute requiring the use of CACs in suspected CSA cases, where available	Yes / no	<input type="checkbox"/>
State funding for CACs: general revenue and special revenue	General revenue / special revenue	<input type="checkbox"/>
Mandated training for child protective services investigators ¹⁷	Child sexual abuse / trauma	<input type="checkbox"/>
Mandated training for law enforcement	Child sexual abuse / trauma	<input type="checkbox"/>
Mandated training for prosecutors	Child sexual abuse / trauma	<input type="checkbox"/>
Preventing retraumatization in court: testifying by alternative means in CSA cases	Younger children / all minors	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Preventing retraumatization in court: hearsay exception in CSA cases	Younger children / all minors	<input type="checkbox"/>
Supporting justice and healing		
Medical care following sexual abuse: minors' authority to consent	Yes / no	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Medical care following sexual abuse: right to an advocate	Yes / no	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Rape kit reform	Some reform / full reform	<input type="checkbox"/>
Criminal statute of limitations: full elimination for all CSA crimes	Yes / no	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Civil statute of limitations: full elimination for all CSA claims	Yes / no	<input type="checkbox"/>
Revival or window law for expired civil claims	Yes / no	<input type="checkbox"/>
Crime Victims Compensation eligibility: extended filing period for survivors of CSA ¹⁸	Yes / no	<input type="checkbox"/>
Crime Victims Compensation eligibility: alternatives to police reports for survivors of CSA ¹⁹	Yes / no	<input type="checkbox"/>

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. IA Senate File 562
9. IA Code § 915.35
10. This definition should include reference to consent being “freely” or “voluntarily” given.
11. 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.
12. 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.
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.