

North Carolina

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
38/100

Rank
26/28

Background indicators

Population (m)	10.84
Median household income (USD)	61,972
Poverty rate (% below poverty level)	13
Educational attainment (% with a bachelor's degree or higher)	32
Female representation in state government (%)	29
Investment in education per pupil (USD):	10,655

State overview

While North Carolina has taken some important steps to address CSEA, increased investment is needed to guarantee a more comprehensive and holistic approach to this pressing issue. Specifically, greater focus could be placed on strengthening prevention efforts and promoting more victim-centered and trauma-informed response processes.

State spotlights

In June 2023, North Carolina passed the **Child Advocacy Centers/Share Information Bill**, thereby recognizing Children’s Advocacy Centers (CACs)⁸ and the multidisciplinary team model as a critical part of the response to child sexual abuse. The Bill clearly defines CACs and sets out criteria for centers to be eligible to receive state funds.⁹

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;
- 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;¹⁰ and by
- Adopting a clear and explicit statutory definition of sexual consent.¹¹

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:

- Mandating age-appropriate child sexual abuse prevention education for all students in grades K–12, including instruction about potential abuse that can be experienced online;¹²
- Requiring regular training on child sexual abuse and teen dating violence for employees and volunteers of youth-serving organizations beyond schools;¹³ and by
- Introducing stronger background check requirements. North Carolina is one of the only states in the index that does not mandate statewide background checks for employees of

schools. Instead, local school boards are given the discretion to adopt policies on whether and under what circumstances to conduct checks.¹⁴

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

- Mandating the use of CACs and trained forensic interviewers for all cases of suspected child sexual abuse;
- Ensuring that CACs across the state have access to adequate and consistent funding; and by
- Centralizing the child abuse reporting process.

Promote a victim-centered and trauma-informed response by:

- Requiring ongoing, statewide training for child protective service investigators, law enforcement and prosecutors on providing a trauma-informed response to child sexual abuse;
- 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.¹⁵

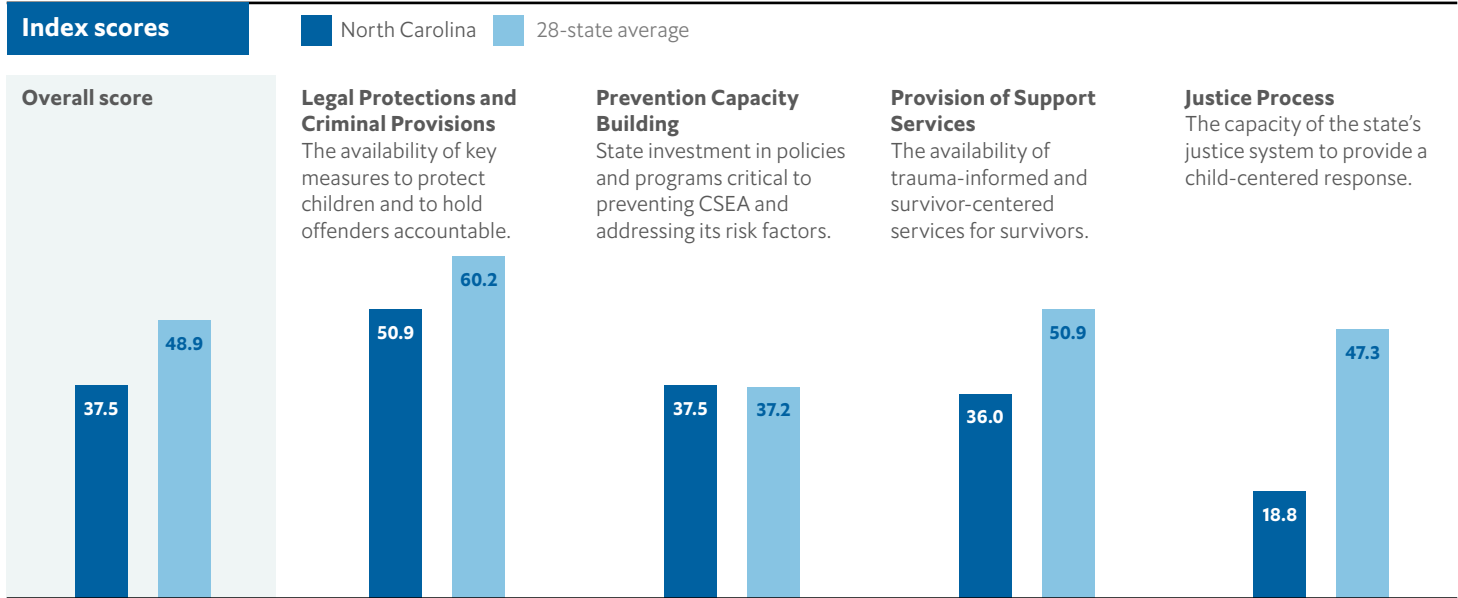
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The United States Out of the Shadows Index: North Carolina

What leaders on the ground are saying

Simplifying the process for reporting suspected cases of child abuse is a top priority for leaders of the CAC movement in North Carolina. As Deana Joy, Executive Director of Children’s Advocacy Centers of North Carolina, explains: “North Carolina does not have a centralized means of reporting, so cases risk not being reported or the report being delayed, putting children at risk. The reporting system we currently have is quite convoluted, which is a barrier in itself. If you have someone that’s already nervous about making a report and they happen to call the wrong phone number, the odds that they’re going to make a second phone call is slim to none. Creating a single phone number that links to the appropriate reporting parties aids in the protection of North Carolina’s children.”



Issues spotlights¹⁶

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) ¹⁷	Scale of comprehensiveness	3/7
Mandated sexual abuse prevention and awareness education	Yes / no	<input checked="" 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 checked="" 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 ¹⁸	Protection for sexual orientation / gender identity	<input type="checkbox"/>
Legislated minimum wage above the low-income threshold	Yes / no	<input type="checkbox"/>
Income-eligible children with access to early head start	%	6.5
Eligible children under age 3 served in evidence-based home-visiting programs	%	6.1
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 ¹⁹	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 checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Mandated training for child protective services investigators ²⁰	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 type="checkbox"/>
Medical care following sexual abuse: right to an advocate	Yes / no	<input type="checkbox"/>
Rape kit reform	Some reform / full reform	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Criminal statute of limitations: full elimination for all CSA crimes	Yes / no	<input 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 checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Crime Victims Compensation eligibility: extended filing period for survivors of CSA ²¹	Yes / no	<input type="checkbox"/>
Crime Victims Compensation eligibility: alternatives to police reports for survivors of CSA ²²	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. 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.
9. House Bill 674
10. NC Gen. Stat. § 14-27.32 establishes that a teacher, school administrator, student teacher, school safety officer, coach, or other school personnel who is at least four years older than the victim, shall not engage in vaginal intercourse or a sexual act with a victim who is a student. However, persons in positions of authority or trust outside of the school setting—such as scout leaders and religious figures—are not covered by this provision.
11. This definition should include reference to consent being “freely” or “voluntarily” given.
12. Each local school administrative unit is required to provide age-appropriate reproductive health and safety education commencing in the seventh grade, including education to teach awareness of sexual assault, sexual abuse, and risk reduction (NC Gen. Stat. § 115C-81.30). Such instruction is not, however, required for all K–6 students.
13. Currently, all school personnel who work with students in grades kindergarten through 12 are required to receive two hours of education and awareness training related to child sexual abuse and sex trafficking biannually (NC Gen. Stat. § 115C-375.20). No similar requirement exists, however, for employees of youth-serving organizations beyond schools.
14. NC Gen. Stat. § 115C-332
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.