

Pennsylvania

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
58/100

Rank
4/28

Background indicators

Population (m)	12.96
Median household income (USD)	68,957
Poverty rate (% below poverty level)	12
Educational attainment (% with a bachelor's degree or higher)	33
Female representation in state government (%)	32
Investment in education per pupil (USD):	17,884

State overview

Pennsylvania has made important progress to combat CSEA, securing the state’s fourth-place position in the index overall and fifth place on the Justice Process domain. In particular, Pennsylvania has taken recent action to build public awareness of child sexual exploitation and expand access to mental health services for survivors of childhood sexual abuse. There is, however, room for improvement when it comes to strengthening prevention measures across the state and investing in other key response measures.

State spotlights

In 2022, **The Pennsylvania Office of Victim Advocate launched a statewide campaign focusing on raising awareness of and preventing the sexual exploitation of children.**⁸ The campaign includes messaging to help dispel myths associated with child sexual exploitation, as well as toolkits to assist caregivers, youth and service providers in recognizing the signs of exploitation and exposing the predatory nature of offenders.

In 2019, **Pennsylvania enacted legislation to help expand access to mental health services for survivors of childhood sexual abuse.** Act 87 of 2019 establishes that survivors of such abuse are eligible for up to \$10,000 in counseling services, and sets out a special claims process that is not contingent on a victim’s report of the assault to police or other authorities.⁹

Since 2015, **the Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency has been working with the Child Solutions Maltreatment Network at The Pennsylvania State University to implement and evaluate a comprehensive child sexual abuse prevention strategy.** While the initiative began in a select number of counties, funding was recently awarded to an additional ten counties with the long-term goal of continuing to scale up the effort across the Commonwealth.¹⁰

Since 2014 **Pennsylvania has doubled its number of Children’s Advocacy Centers (CACs)**¹¹, from 20 to 41.

Priority areas for future focus

Strengthen the legal framework against sexual violence by:

- 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:

- Mandating comprehensive sex education in all public schools—including information about contraception and consent—that is 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 sexual misconduct for employees and volunteers of youth-serving organizations beyond schools.¹⁴

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

- Amending the statutory definition of CACs to be in line with or tied to the National Children’s Alliance’s *National Standards of Accreditation*; and
- Ensuring CACs across the state have access to adequate and consistent funding.

Promote a victim-centered and 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;¹⁵ and 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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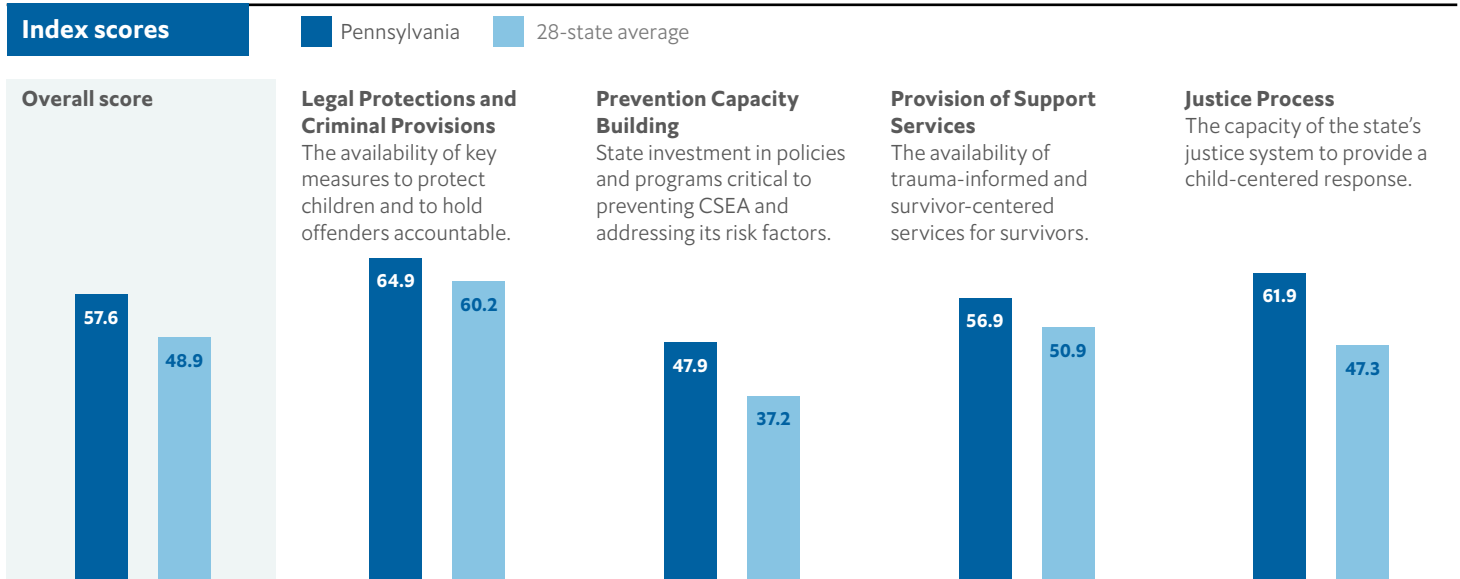


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The United States Out of the Shadows Index: Pennsylvania

What leaders on the ground are saying

For leaders of the CAC movement in Pennsylvania, increasing awareness of the pivotal role CACs play in the response to child sexual abuse is a top priority. As Chris Kirchner, Executive Director of Children’s Advocacy Centers of Pennsylvania, explains, “We need to increase support and buy-in for the CAC approach, strengthening collaboration among the multi-disciplinary team, and ensuring that every child in PA has access to a CAC.” Funding was identified as a challenge hindering the expansion of critical CAC services. “Funding is an issue for virtually all CACs in Pennsylvania, with limited reliable funding streams available to all CACs. We still have geographic areas not fully covered by CACs,” explains Abbie Newman, Chief Executive Officer of External and Global Affairs at the Mission Kids Child Advocacy Center.



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	0/7
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 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 checked="" 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	%	9.5
Eligible children under age 3 served in evidence-based home-visiting programs	%	10.1
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 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 checked="" 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 type="checkbox"/>
Crime Victims Compensation eligibility: extended filing period for survivors of CSA ²¹	Yes / no	<input checked="" 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%202020%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. The campaign was developed by the Pennsylvania Office of Victim Advocate in collaboration with Mission Kids Child Advocacy Center and Villanova Law Institute to Address Commercial Sexual Exploitation: <https://pcv.pccd.pa.gov/HT/Pages/Sexual-Exploitation-of-Children.aspx>
9. <https://www.legis.state.pa.us/cfdocs/legis/li/uconsCheck.cfm?yr=2019&sessInd=0&act=87>
10. <https://www.pccd.pa.gov/Justice-Research/Pages/%E2%80%8BChild%20Sexual%20Abuse%20Prevention%20Projects.aspx>
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. This definition should include reference to consent being “freely” or “voluntarily” given.
13. Each school entity in Pennsylvania may, but is not required to, develop an age-appropriate child exploitation awareness education program and incorporate such a program into the school entity’s existing curriculum for students in kindergarten through grade eight (Public School Code of 1949, 24 PA Stat. § 15-1527).
14. School entities and independent contractors of school entities are required to provide their employees who have direct contact with children training on child abuse recognition and reporting, including recognizing of the signs of abuse and sexual misconduct (Public School Code of 1949, 24 PA Stat. § 1205.6). No similar requirement exists, however, for employees of youth-serving organizations beyond schools.
15. Such training should go beyond standard mandated reporter training to include instruction on identifying child sexual abuse, providing a trauma-informed response, and addressing the needs of special populations such as children with disabilities.
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.