

# Addressing Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) through shared risk and protective factors

## ADDENDUM TO THE PREVENTING INJURY AND VIOLENCE IN MINNESOTA 2020-2030 STATE PLAN

Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) profoundly impact individuals' health and wellbeing, influencing both immediate and long-term outcomes. Integrating the prevention of ACEs into injury and violence prevention plans can enhance their effectiveness. Here's how addressing each of the five shared risk and protective factors can also prevent and mitigate the impact of ACEs:

- **Health Equity:** Due to systemic barriers like poverty and discrimination (i.e., systemic racism), ACEs disproportionately affect certain communities, and this contributes to disparities in health outcomes. Historical policies, such as redlining and discriminatory lending practices, have led to concentrated poverty and limited access to quality housing for communities of color. Addressing health equity is crucial to preventing ACEs as it requires tackling the root causes of these systemic barriers. By implementing structural interventions that address these underlying inequities, we can create environments that promote safety, stability, and supportive relationships, thereby reducing the prevalence of ACEs. Policies that improve housing stability, access to mental health services, and economic opportunities can mitigate the conditions that create ACEs, which can lead to improved population health. Integrating a health equity approach into prevention efforts not only addresses the disparities in ACEs but also fosters a more resilient and supportive community environment, benefiting overall public health.
- **Community Connectedness:** The strength and quality of social networks significantly influence a child's resilience and vulnerability to trauma. Communities with high levels of connectedness—characterized by strong social support networks, cohesive social structures, and engaged community organizations—provide a buffer against the impact of ACEs by fostering environments where children and families feel supported and valued. Addressing community connectedness involves enhancing relationships through supportive networks that offer resources, guidance, and a sense of belonging. Community programs that build positive relationships, cultural affirmation, and collaborative support systems can mitigate the risks associated with ACEs by promoting healthy coping mechanisms, reducing isolation, and enhancing access to protective resources. In 2020, the Injury and Violence Prevention Section at MDH and Men As Peacemakers collaborated to identify strategies that enhance injury and violence prevention within communities during compounding crises (e.g., COVID-19 pandemic). This collaboration highlighted the importance of community connectedness in building community resilience when uncertainties arise. Strengthening community connectedness not only helps in the prevention of ACEs but it also builds a foundation for resilience and well-being, making it a critical strategy in reducing childhood trauma and mitigating its long-term effects.

- **Economic Justice:** Economic instability and poverty create environments that significantly increase the risk of ACEs. Children growing up in economically disadvantaged conditions often face heightened exposure to stressors such as housing instability, food insecurity, and parental financial strain. Economic justice aims to address these inequities by ensuring fair access to resources, opportunities, and protections that support economic stability and growth for families. By promoting economic justice through equitable access to well-paying jobs, secure housing, and comprehensive social safety nets, the financial pressures and systemic barriers that exacerbate the risk of ACEs can be reduced. Promoting economic justice not only helps to alleviate the immediate economic hardships that contribute to ACEs, but it also fosters long-term financial resilience and stability for families, thereby reducing childhood trauma and its associated health impacts.
- **Built Environment:** The quality and characteristics of the physical spaces where children live and play can influence their exposure to ACEs. Poorly designed or neglected built environments—marked by unsafe housing, inadequate recreational areas, and exposure to environmental hazards—can increase the risk of exposure to trauma and violence. Conversely, a well-designed built environment that includes safe, accessible green spaces, well-maintained housing, and community resources fosters resilience and supports healthy development. Investing in the built environment to ensure safe and supportive spaces for children can mitigate some of the factors that lead to ACEs. By enhancing urban planning, improving housing quality, and creating safe recreational spaces, we can reduce stressors that contribute to childhood trauma and promote a healthier, more supportive environment that helps prevent the occurrence of ACEs and their long-term effects on health.
- **Social and Emotional Learning:** The development of social and emotional skills is profoundly influenced by the early experiences of trauma and adversity. Children who experience ACEs, such as abuse, neglect, or household dysfunction, often struggle with emotional regulation, self-awareness, and relationship-building. These early traumas can impair a child’s ability to manage stress, form healthy relationships, and make responsible decisions, increasing the likelihood of continued vulnerability to further adversity. Prioritizing social emotional learning (SEL) can help children develop critical skills such as self-management, social awareness, and resilience, which act as buffers against the negative impacts of ACEs. Additionally, promoting SEL can interrupt the cycle of trauma by equipping both children and adults with skills necessary to manage their emotions and interactions more effectively. Thus, addressing and integrating SEL into educational and community frameworks can prevent ACEs by creating environments where children are better prepared to handle adversity and build healthier, more supportive relationships.

Incorporating a focus on ACEs within each of these shared risk and protective factors enhances the comprehensive nature of injury and violence prevention, ensuring that interventions address the root causes of injury and violence while also preventing the adverse effects of childhood trauma.

## ADDRESSING ACES IN INJURY AND VIOLENCE PREVENTION

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