

Children's mental health for a resilient Iowa

ACEs:

Adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) are traumatic events that can dramatically upset a child's sense of safety and well-being.

CHILD MENTAL HEALTH & WELL-BEING IS IMPORTANT TO IOWA'S PROSPERITY AND INNOVATION

Children with strong mental health are equipped to develop important skills that begin in early childhood. Children are the future drivers of our state's economic development. When we ensure the healthy development of the next generation, Iowa benefits from a productive workforce and responsible citizenship. Early intervention through a two-generation approach (serving the child and the family) has shown significant long-term improvements in children's mental health and well-being and better equips parents to raise healthy, successful children.

Brain research shows that children's mental health affects how they socialize, how they learn, and how well they meet their potential. All children, even infants, have mental health. Children's mental health is like a table. Having a level table makes it easier to use and more functional, but the table is also impacted by the levelness of the floor. Some children's brains develop on a level floor, and some on a more uneven floor. A level floor signifies the presence of healthy, supportive relationships and access to things like good nutrition and health care. An uneven floor signifies exposure to Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) or repeated/extended exposure to trauma such as natural disasters, diagnosis of a significant medical issue in a family member, abuse or violence, parental substance abuse and/or mental illness. Early access to support services and community resources impacts healthy brain development and mental health, and helps level the table and the floor for all Iowa children.

Children's Mental Health Facts

80,000 children in Iowa have a diagnosed Serious Emotional Disturbance (SED)

1 in 5 children ages 13-18 have or will have a serious mental illness

There are only **31** child psychiatrists in Iowa, mainly located in Iowa City and Des Moines

Approximately **50%** of children age 14 and older with a mental illness drop out of high school

70% of youth in the juvenile justice system have a mental illness

In Iowa, **suicide** is the 2nd leading cause of death in youth & young adults ages 15-34 (higher than the national average)

Legislative Recommendations

IOWA'S CHILDREN DESERVE A COMPREHENSIVE MENTAL HEALTH SYSTEM

- 1. Support the Development of a Statewide Children's Mental Health System** including a multi-tiered system of prevention and care for children's mental health; expansion of existing best practices such as the Pediatric Integrated Health Homes and System of Care; implementation of the Children's Mental Health and Well-Being Workgroup Crisis Planning and Well-Being Learning Lab Prevention Grants; and establish loan forgiveness programs which address the shortage of mental health professionals in Iowa.
- 2. Enhance school-based mental health services** by expanding the number of schools offering mental health services and increasing youth mental health awareness training for educators in Iowa.
- 3. Protect and Expand Funding for Children's Mental Health** by restoring the \$10.9 million reduction to the Children's Mental Health Waiver fund; and ensuring Medicaid reimbursement rates adequately reflect the cost to provide service, and are paid in a timely manner.



OUR VISION FOR CHILDREN'S MENTAL HEALTH AND WELL-BEING IN IOWA

Imagine if Iowa had a comprehensive children's mental health system which ensured access for all children in Iowa. Families would be able to:

- Obtain mental health and well-being education at each prenatal and well-child visit to anticipate their child's development and become more aware of the early signs of developmental delays or mental health issues.
- Understand exactly who to contact for help if disruptions in their child's development or mental health caused concern.
- Receive guidance from day cares, schools, health care providers and other concerned people who would know where to refer families to for assessment and treatment services for their child.
- Access an immediate response to connect their child with treatment and support services which meets their child's unique mental health needs and level of care rather than assuming one size of treatment fits all.
- Rest assured insurance would cover the cost of the necessary treatment and services for their child's mental health issue.
- Accept services without fear of stigma or assumption that they were somehow at fault for their child's mental health issue.
- Easily find experienced, culturally appropriate, pediatric mental health providers in rural and urban communities across Iowa.

Many Iowans are surprised to learn that Iowa does not have a comprehensive children's mental health system. Services that one child is able to access in one part of the state, may not be the same services that another child in a different part of the state is able to access. Iowans expect more for our children.

If a child fell on the playground and hurt his arm, families and caring adults have a clear understanding where to go to seek help and what typically will be done to diagnose and treat the child's injury. Iowans should have similar understanding and expectation for caring for a child's mental health issue.

What are Adverse Childhood Experiences?

Stress operates along a continuum. In small or moderate doses, stress can be beneficial. However, stressful experiences in childhood that are powerful, frequent, prolonged, and in unpredictable doses can be detrimental to a child's development and lifelong health.

Adverse Childhood Experiences, or ACEs are incidents that dramatically upset the safe, nurturing environments children need to thrive. Traumatic incidents are now commonly acknowledged by the scientific community to be a major determinant of health outcomes and a major public health issue.

ACEs can be a powerful determinant in our future health and well-being, but they do not have to be. Resilience is the ability to adapt, cope and thrive despite difficult times. Strengthening the protective factors for individuals, families and communities can help build a Resilient Iowa.

10 types of ACEs studied in Iowa

ABUSE

- 1 Physical
- 2 Emotional
- 3 Sexual

HOUSEHOLD DYSFUNCTION

- 4 Substance abuse in home
- 5 Family member with mental illness
- 6 Incarcerated family member
- 7 Separation/divorce
- 8 Domestic violence

NEGLECT

- 9 Emotional
- 10 Physical

For more information, please visit www.IowaAces360.org

