

# **Policy Agenda to Address Childhood Adversity in California**

*Developed by the California ACEs Policy Working Group*

## **Problem**

California's communities and systems are currently facing challenges to prevent and address the far-reaching impacts of childhood adversity, such as Adverse Childhood Experiences and childhood trauma, which can result in negative health, social, educational, and economic outcomes for children, youth, families and communities across the state.

## **Goal**

The goal of the California ACEs Policy Working Group is to raise awareness of the impact of childhood adversity, such as Adverse Childhood Experiences and childhood trauma, on children, youth, families, and communities, and address gaps and structural inequities in systems to prevent and appropriately respond to childhood adversity and build protective factors and resilience.

## **Objectives**

In order to achieve this goal, the Policy Working Group will advocate for public policies that:

- Increase awareness about the impacts of childhood adversity and the opportunities that build protective factors and resilience.
- Promote a trauma-informed workforce with demonstrated knowledge and skills to work with children, youth, families, and communities;
- Build systems and practices that promote early identification coupled with evidence-based interventions and promising practices to mitigate and/or prevent the negative consequences of childhood adversity; and

## **Strategies<sup>1</sup>**

**Raise public awareness:** Lead, partner, and participate in public education campaigns targeting key audiences in various sectors that drives action towards preventing and addressing childhood adversity.

**Develop a trauma-informed workforce:** Advocate that professional licensure and certification standards include competency on trauma-informed approaches and promote education on the negative effects of childhood adversity, the importance of building protective factors and resilience, and approaches to cultivate trauma-informed child- and family- serving organizations and workforce.

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<sup>1</sup> "Strategy" is defined as "the high-level, multi-year, multi-pronged mobilization of resources to achieve the goal and objectives."

**Recruit and train a diverse workforce:** Advocate for increased resources to recruit and train diverse direct services providers – particularly in communities who experience childhood adversity more severely and profoundly – on the negative effects of childhood adversity, the importance of building protective factors and resilience, and trauma-informed approaches.

**Increase access to interventions:** Advocate for increased funding for and access to evidence-based interventions or promising practices intended to prevent and/or mitigate the negative consequences of childhood adversity and cultivate resilience and protective factors, particularly in communities who experience childhood adversity more severely and profoundly.

**Promote early identification coupled with interventions:** Advocate for policies that promote early identification of exposure to, and the effects of, childhood adversity in a safe and effective manner coupled with access to evidence-based interventions and/or promising practices at the individual, family, community, and systems level.

**Partner in Efforts to Address Determinants of Childhood Adversity:** Partner with and participate in efforts to change policies, institutional practices, and programs that are linked to the broader determinants of childhood adversity, particularly for communities that experience childhood adversity more severely and profoundly.

**Cultivate trauma-informed systems:** Advocate for and cultivate child- and family- serving systems and organizations to integrate trauma-informed approaches into organizational policy and practice.

## **Principles<sup>2</sup>**

**Equity:** We are committed to achieving the highest level of well-being for children, youth, families, and communities with special attention to communities who experience childhood adversity more severely and profoundly, including those who experience socioeconomic disadvantage and historical and contemporary injustices, vulnerable communities, communities of color, and culturally, linguistically, and geographically isolated communities.

**Authentic engagement:** We are committed to an inclusive process in which we engage individuals and communities most directly impacted by childhood adversity as partners in order to increase empowerment and ownership in affecting change.

**Public health approach:** We are committed to exploring solutions based on a public health approach<sup>3</sup>, recognizing that preventing and responding to childhood adversity requires the concerted efforts of all sectors and the broader public.

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<sup>2</sup> "Principle" is defined as "the foundation of evaluating the rightfulness and wrongfulness of our actions and priorities." Principles guide our work, in all circumstances, irrespective of changes in goals, strategies, tactics, or environment.

**Goal driven:** We are committed to maintaining a disciplined focus on our goal and objectives while having the flexibility to respond to emerging issues and learnings.

**Wellness centered:** We embrace an expansive and holistic definition of wellness that encompasses physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual well-being. We are committed to supporting and promoting a broad range of policies, evidence-based interventions, and promising practices that contribute to the safety, health, happiness, resilience, and empowerment of individuals and communities and create environments in which all individuals can reach their full potential.

**Trauma-informed systems:** We are committed to strengthening policies, practices, and systems that embrace, reflect, and cultivate trauma-informed, resilience-building, and strength-based approaches at the organizational and systemic level.

### **Working Agreements<sup>4</sup>**

**Collaboration:** We prioritize strategic collaborations based on mutual support and alignment. We are committed to building transparent processes and cultivating trust among partners.

**Shared ownership:** We share ownership for the group's decisions and work products and respect the decision making process. We make decisions by consensus or, if consensus is not possible, by majority vote. We share the information and progress of the Policy Working Group with our individual organizations or agencies.

**Mutual respect:** We approach our work with mutual respect for each other and our partners. We create space for differing perspectives and approach our efforts with humility in recognition of life-long learning.

**Engaging those most impacted<sup>5</sup>:** We are committed to meeting children, youth and families most directly impacted by the negative consequences of childhood adversity where they are. We partner with direct service providers and family-serving organizations as critical links to engaging with those most impacted by childhood adversity.

**Using what works:** We identify and leverage existing tools, resources and campaigns to advance the goals and objectives across sectors and within individual sectors. We share tools, knowledge and resources across sectors to build on success.

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<sup>3</sup> For more on the public health approach, please visit:

<http://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/overview/publichealthapproach.html>

<sup>4</sup> "Working agreement" is defined as "a commitment we make to each other and to the group about how we will work together towards our common goal and purpose." Working agreements guide our behaviors as individuals and our process as a group.

<sup>5</sup> This working agreement is still under review by the CA ACEs Policy Working Group and has not been finalized.

**Using an equity lens:** We examine and evaluate all of our efforts with an equity lens to ensure that we are achieving the highest level of well-being for children, youth, families, and communities with special attention to communities who experience childhood adversity more severely and profoundly. We adapt our efforts to ensure that our work does not have the unintended consequence of widening disparities.

**Using a trauma-informed lens:** We examine and evaluate all of our efforts with a trauma-informed lens to ensure that we are building systems that embrace, reflect and cultivate trauma-informed approaches. We adapt our efforts to ensure that our work helps to prevent trauma from occurring in the first place and does not contribute to unintended consequences, such as re-traumatization.

### **California ACEs Policy Working Group members<sup>6</sup>**

- ACE Overcomers
- ACEs Connection
- Advancement Project
- California Department of Justice
- California Department of Public Health
- California Health and Human Services Agency
- California Office of Health Equity
- Californians for Safety and Justice
- Center for Youth Wellness
- Chadwick Center for Children and Families
- Cherokee Point Elementary School
- Children Now
- The Children's Clinic
- Children's Defense Fund – California
- First 5 Los Angeles
- Futures Without Violence
- Kaiser Permanente
- The Opportunity Institute
- PolicyLink
- Public Health Institute
- UCSF Healthy Environments and Response to Trauma in Schools (HEARTS) Program
- W. Haywood Burns Institute
- Zero to Three, Western Office

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<sup>6</sup> Participation in the CA ACEs Policy Working Group does not indicate endorsement of the Common Policy Agenda to Address to Childhood Adversity in California