

Children's Trust Fund

Wisconsin's Resource for Preventing Child Abuse

Child Abuse and Neglect Prevention Board
110 E. Main Street, Suite 810, Madison WI 53703
Phone: 608/266-6871 Fax: 608/266-3792

DATE: October 23, 2014

TO: Representative Joan Ballweg, Chair
Legislative Steering Committee on Supporting Healthy Early Brain Development

FROM: Jennifer Jones, Associate Director
Wisconsin's Children's Trust Fund

RE: Policy Priorities for Supporting Healthy Early Brain Development

CC: Michelle Jensen Goodwin, Executive Director, CTF
Rachel Letzing, Staff Attorney, Legislative Council
Melissa Roberts, Chair, Legislative Committee, CTF

Thank you for the opportunity to offer policy priorities to the Legislative Steering Committee for Supporting Healthy Early Brain Development.

In Wisconsin, 58 percent of adults reported having at least one Adverse Childhood Experience (ACE) with 14 percent experiencing 4 or more. The more ACEs an individual reports, the more likely they are to engage in high risk behaviors and experience negative physical and mental health outcomes in adulthood. In fact, the ACE researchers have concluded that ACEs are the primary cause of health and social problems, and the leading determinant of public health spending in our country.

The ACE Study was designed to understand how adverse childhood experiences influence human development in predictable ways. That is important because what is predictable is preventable. In fact, if we intentionally invested resources in the prevention of ACEs, we have the potential to shift the trajectory of the health and wellbeing of Wisconsin residents for generations to come. The Children's Trust Fund has created and invested in prevention programs that we believe have great promise in preventing the accumulation of ACEs and moderating their effects.

Based on the September 29, 2014 memo from Legislative Council, the following are the policy suggestions we would recommend the Steering Committee consider advancing:

1. Provide parental supports and tools for parents at risk of losing custody of their children with the goal of reducing out-of-home placement (page 6).
The Children's Trust Fund developed the Community Response Program (CRP) in 2006 and is currently funding 8 sites throughout Wisconsin. CRP is a promising practice working voluntarily with children and families who are reported to our child protective services system but are screened out. These families are provided with services and supports, including economic decision making to help alleviate the issues that are putting their children at risk for maltreatment. CRP could be expanded to every county in Wisconsin so that all children and families at risk for child maltreatment have access to services to prevent their involvement with the deep end child welfare system.
2. Design and pilot prevention and intervention strategies with children and parents involved in corrections (page 5).
Wisconsin's ACEs data found that of those individuals who reported growing up with a household member who was incarcerated, 63 percent identified experiencing at least 4 additional ACEs. In partnership with the Department of Corrections, CTF could design and pilot prevention strategies to help mitigate exposure to additional ACEs for children currently growing up with an incarcerated household member. At the same time, we could expand trauma-informed care efforts for all parents involved in the correctional system as they begin to reintegrate back with their families and into their communities.
3. Create a benefits package specific for individuals with ACEs and trauma (page 4).
Wisconsin's ACEs data found that 27 percent of those with an ACE score of 4 or more receive BadgerCare; this is about three times the rate of BadgerCare enrollment among people with no ACEs. Additionally, individuals on BadgerCare or without any health insurance are more than twice as likely to have experienced four or more ACEs. We could integrate the ACE questions into our BadgerCare process with the intent of developing a benefits package for those children and families who identify high ACE scores.
4. Increase public awareness of ACEs (page 3).
Several policy suggestions in the September 29 memo included educating schools, pediatricians, family doctors, hospitals, and parents on adverse childhood experiences and the greater likelihood of poor physical and mental health outcomes. The Children's Trust Fund has invested significantly in increasing awareness of ACEs among professionals working with children and families, as well as the general public. In partnership with Fostering Futures and SaintA, we could greatly expand our

capacity and broaden our reach to inform even greater numbers of people of ACEs, and the effects on early brain development.

5. Invest in research on resilience (page 3).

There is much more that we need to understand about resiliency and why some individuals and communities thrive in light of traumatic experiences. It's critical that we invest in data and research to help us continue to make significant strides in mitigating the negative outcomes associated with childhood adversity.

6. Enhance ACE-related data in Wisconsin (page 3).

The ACE Study and subsequent Wisconsin ACEs data has transformed the way we think about child abuse prevention. We have used this data to inform our policies, practices and prevention efforts statewide. Each year, the Children's Trust Fund must raise the funds necessary to include the ACEs module in the Wisconsin Behavioral Risk Factor Survey (BRFS). Most recently, CTF worked with several national experts to develop questions related to resiliency and wellbeing to include in the 2015 BRFS. These questions will enable us to better understand the factors that may help mitigate the negative outcomes associated with ACEs. Additionally, Wisconsin is at risk of losing half of the funding to support the entire BRFS, including the ACE module, which will greatly reduce our sample size and severely limit our ability to continue to survey Wisconsin residents on ACEs and resiliency.

We know the profound effects of childhood adversity on individuals, families, communities and our economy. We know that investing in early childhood has a cost-benefit that no other investment has demonstrated. Yet, we devote very little resources in preventing and mitigating adverse childhood experiences. We need to do more to create safe, stable, nurturing relationships and environments for all Wisconsin's children. It is investment in our next generation and in our State's economic strength.