



MAY 2015

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Safe, Healthy, and Ready to Learn:

Policy Recommendations to Ensure Children Thrive in Supportive Communities Free from Violence and Trauma

PREPARED IN PARTNERSHIP WITH



The Center for Health and Health Care in Schools



WE ALSO APPRECIATE THE PARTNERSHIP, REVIEW, AND CONTRIBUTIONS OF THE FOLLOWING:

AMERICAN ACADEMY OF PEDIATRICS | ANTI-DEFAMATION LEAGUE | NATIONAL CHILD TRAUMATIC STRESS NETWORK

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Dr. Martin Luther King, at the crossroads of this nation's civil rights movement more than 50 years ago, talked about the "fierce urgency of now." Today, more than ever, every child deserves equality of access and opportunity that will prepare him or her to compete in the changing economies and realities of the 21st century. Yet, for too many children, exposure to violence and trauma can deny them both access and opportunity. Forty-six million children in the United States will be exposed to violence, crime, abuse, or psychological trauma in a given year.ⁱ Two out of every three children in this country. They are our sons, daughters, grandsons, granddaughters, nieces, and nephews. They are our future.

There is an undeniable urgency of now to shine the light on these children and, even more importantly, prevent our children from exposure to violence. We owe it to them to give them the opportunity to live up to their full potential. We should not wait, we cannot wait, and we must not wait.

In partnership with leaders from throughout the health, education, justice, and child development fields, Futures Without Violence (FUTURES), with the support of The California Endowment, Blue Shield of California Foundation, and the Lisa and John Pritzker Family Fund, has spent the last year working to develop public policy solutions to prevent and address childhood exposure to violence and trauma. We examined research, consulted with experts across the country, and convened a multi-disciplinary working group to develop a comprehensive set of recommendations designed to combat this silent epidemic.

Children's exposure to violence, trauma, and "toxic stress" can have a permanent negative effect on the chemical and physical structures of their brain, causing cognitive impairments such as trouble with attention, concentration, and memory.ⁱⁱ Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) research documents the short- and long-term connections between exposure to violence and other adversity and poor health and educational outcomes, such as increased absenteeism in school and changes in school performance.ⁱⁱⁱ Individuals who have experienced six or more ACEs die, on average, 20 years earlier than those who have none.^{iv} We know that the effects of this trauma are playing out in numerous ways every day.

The good news is that we know what works to prevent harm and heal children. Our collective task is to identify and elevate the effective policies, programs, and practices that are working and advance them at the federal, state, and local level. This report is designed to do just that.

FUTURES is especially grateful to the thoughtful work and commitment of our policy working group, which made the report possible. The group is unique in its diverse membership and in the willingness of its participants to cross boundaries and recognize the interconnectedness of multiple issues. From reforming school discipline practices and creating positive school climates to combating child abuse and promoting children's physical, emotional and mental health, the group worked to examine and lift up core strategies to meet the needs of the whole child, to address trauma in children's lives, and to create conditions to allow our children to thrive and succeed.

FOOTNOTES

ⁱ Listenbee, R. et al., "Report of the Attorney General's National Task Force on Children Exposed to Violence." U.S. Department of Justice. 2012. pp. 3. Web. <<http://www.justice.gov/defendingchildhood/cev-rpt-full.pdf>>.

ⁱⁱ "Teaching Through Trauma: How Poverty Affects Kids' Brains." Southern California Public Radio. 2 June 2014. Web. <<http://www.scpr.org/blogs/education/2014/06/02/16743/poverty-has-been-found-to-affect-kids-brains-can-o/>>.

ⁱⁱⁱ "The Effects of Trauma on Schools and Learning." The National Child Traumatic Stress Network. Web. <<http://www.nctsn.org/resources/audiences/school-personnel/effects-of-trauma#q7>>.

^{iv} Department of Health and Human Services's Letter to State Directors. 2013. Web. <http://www.oacbha.org/docs/TIC_October_2013.pdf>.



GOALS

The working group developed a set of recommendations that will support each of these seven goals:

1. **Invest early in parents and young children**
2. **Help schools promote positive school climates, be trauma sensitive, and raise achievement**
3. **Train educators, health care workers, and other child-serving professionals about preventing and responding to youth violence and trauma**
4. **Prevent violence and trauma**
5. **Improve intra- and inter-governmental coordination and alignment**
6. **Increase the availability of trauma-informed services for children and families**
7. **Increase public awareness and knowledge of childhood violence and trauma**

school, involved in positive social networks, and out of the juvenile justice system. Such investments should increase opportunity and close achievement gaps, promote health, resilience, and social and emotional learning, and engage the school personnel necessary to effectuate a positive learning environment. We recommend using the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act to support the creation of positive school climates; supporting full-service community schools that include school-based health centers; adopting inclusive disciplinary policies that involve the community; reconsidering school safety strategies and to prioritize investing resources in students' emotional health and social connections; providing assistance to school districts in their efforts to prevent and appropriately respond to incidents of bullying; and having the United States Department of Education design and disseminate a practice guide that offers school-wide strategies and best practices for creating trauma sensitive schools.

#3

Train educators, health care workers, and other child-serving professionals about preventing and responding to youth violence and trauma

States and other accrediting bodies should support training and certification of child- and youth-serving professionals to effectively respond to children's exposure to violence with a coordinated and trauma-informed approach. Our report urges that school personnel should be trained on implementing effective academic and behavioral practices, such as Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports and social and emotional learning, and providing pediatricians and staff in community health settings the tools they need to serve traumatized youth.

#4

Prevent violence and trauma

Federal, state, and local governments and tribes should increase incentives and expand violence prevention efforts to reduce children's exposure to violence. Research and strategies should be interwoven among the fields of community violence, child abuse, school violence, sexual assault, and domestic violence. Specific policy recommendations are as follows: expanding funding for domestic violence prevention and response services within the Family Violence Prevention and Services Act; providing greater technical assistance to health care providers so they can effectively deliver universal education to parents and caregivers about the impact of exposure to violence on youth and deliver more integrated care to children who may already be exposed to violence; expanding targeted prevention programs focused on healthy relationships among youth developed jointly by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the Office on Violence Against Women; engaging men and boys in prevention; and supporting resilient and healthy communities.

SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

The following summarizes the key recommendations for each goal:

#1

Invest early in parents and young children

The federal government should support states, local jurisdictions, and tribes in providing parents, legal guardians, and other caregivers the resources necessary to help their children thrive. A multi-generational approach to comprehensive and evidence-based services and trauma-informed care promotes positive caretaking, reduces inequities, enhances family cohesion, and interrupts the cycle of intergenerational trauma. We recommend expanding the federal Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting Program (MIECHV) and implementing a two generation approach to addressing ACEs, child abuse, and domestic violence. We also suggest modifying Medicaid and child welfare financing formulas to extend services to parents to address their own experience of trauma.

#2

Help schools promote positive school climates, be trauma sensitive, and raise achievement

The federal government should provide significant resources and incentives for states and local jurisdictions to create connected communities and positive school climates that are trauma-sensitive to keep students healthy and in



#5

Improve intra- and inter-governmental coordination and alignment

Federal, state, and local governments and tribes should better coordinate

youth violence prevention and early intervention approaches among themselves and with non-governmental organizations, particularly as it relates to school/community and public/private sector coordination. We recommend the creation of a White House task force to identify specific youth violence and trauma prevention goals, make recommendations on how federal agency resources can be used to meet those goals, and provide guidance to state and local partners. In addition, the federal government should include incentives in relevant federal grant applications for states and localities to demonstrate collaboration in service delivery.

intervention that provide for child well-being, family stability, and community health. The federal government should provide specific support and attention to youth in the juvenile justice system, in foster care, and to those who are homeless.

#7

Increase public awareness and knowledge of childhood violence and trauma

Federal, state, and local governments and tribes should support public education and engagement campaigns to increase awareness of the adverse effects of childhood exposure to violence and trauma. The campaigns should describe action people can take to prevent harm, and promote effective solutions. We recommend that the federal government, in coordination with the states, conduct a mass media campaign that highlights the impact of ACEs and helps to reduce the stigma attached to those who seek professional help.

#6

Increase the availability of trauma-informed services for children and families

It is time to incentivize and fund states, localities, and tribes to scale up the availability of trauma-informed services for children and their families exposed to violence. These services should support the implementation of two-generation, trauma-informed approaches, coordinate efforts among schools, homes, and communities, and ensure gender-specific and culturally competent practices. We recommend permitting federal entitlement programs to support child trauma assessment and intervention, such as home-based services and crisis

We know that meaningful change will not happen overnight, and we recognize that budgets are tight at all levels of government. However, inaction is not an option – not when tens of millions of children are affected by violence and trauma each year. We know what works. We know that these investments will save money and will prevent many children from suffering. This report provides a blueprint for what needs to be done. It is now up to all of us, as policymakers, educators, advocates, and parents, to take action to ensure that our children’s future is bright. 

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