

**Importance of ACE, ACE Assessment for the Future of Mental Health in Maine**  
**Mental Health Work Group**  
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**What is ACE?**

“Adverse Childhood Experience” are traumatic events that occur in childhood (from birth to age 17). ACE includes experiencing/witnessing violence, neglect, abuse, or the loss of a family member due to suicide or incarceration. ACE impacts at the level of DNA expression within our cells and interferes with normal development. In the brain ACE disrupts healthy motivation, self-control and the ability to work towards future positive goals.

**Why does ACE Matter?**

Animal studies and human research both demonstrate that elevations in ACE have a profound impact throughout the lifespan. ACE is linked to bad choices, risky health behaviors, chronic health conditions, low life potential, and early death. ACE is the factor associated with the greatest increase in risk for serious health and social problems, including obesity, addiction and criminal justice involvement. Many of our most challenging health care problems are contributed to in large part by individuals burdened by ACE, and ACE is an important factor for many who are disabled, contributing minimally to the workforce and community, or involved in our criminal justice system. These outcomes are both tragic and expensive. It has been estimated that 79% of those Mainers struggling with IV drug abuse stems from the burden of ACE in Maine.

**Where is Maine in terms of ACE?**

There is limited data in Maine with full scoring for ACE. For the data available, Maine ranked 30th among the US states with 22.5% of our children with ACE levels of 2 or higher. There is reason to be concerned that Maine may have a higher burden of children with higher levels of ACE particularly in impoverished and rural settings where families are less successful keeping children consistently safe and nurtured.

**What can Maine do?**

Maine can and must take steps to reduce ACE. Programs that help meet the needs of impoverished parents and families, supporting effective parenting skills are important. Safe and affordable housing and access to services, including childcare are also key. Maine can do much to improve health in the state and to reduce costly tragic outcomes by ensuring that all Maine women ages 15-45 have access to effective Long Acting Reversible Contraception (LARC), (shown to rapidly improve outcomes including HS graduation rates). We can only know we are winning with ACE if we keep score- it is very important for Maine to commit to collecting ACE data for Maine’s children statewide on an on-going basis.