



ADVERSE CHILDHOOD EXPERIENCES

The Intersection of ACEs &
Increased Risk Factors for Youth

We Can Create Positive Childhood Experiences

The science of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) reveals opportunities to improve the lives of all children and adults.¹

Adverse childhood experiences, or ACEs, are potentially traumatic events in childhood (0-17 years), such as neglect and experiencing or witnessing violence.² The presence of support and resources can promote resilience and modify the relationship between risks, such as ACEs, and negative outcomes. Childhood experiences have a direct correlation to youth tobacco and alcohol use. Certain protective factors lessen the long-term risks of ACEs, and counter-ACEs led to a reduction in youth alcohol and tobacco use.³

Protective Factors to reduce ACEs¹

Education and therapy to lessen long-term harms

ACEs education | therapy
family-centered treatment for SUD

Strengthen families' financial stability

paid time off | child tax credits
flexible work schedules

Help kids have a good start with early learning programs

early learning programs | affordable
preschools and childcare

Teach healthy relationship skills

how to handle conflict | peer pressure
healthy dating relationships

Connect youth with activities and caring adults

school or community mentoring programs or
after school activities

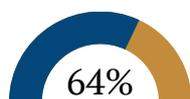
Promote social norms that protect against violence

positive parenting practices | prevention
efforts with men & boys

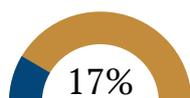
Understanding Adverse Childhood Experiences

ACEs include aspects of a child’s environment that can undermine their sense of safety, stability, and bonding, such as living in a household with substance misuse or mental health problems.⁴ ACEs can negatively affect physical, mental, emotional, and behavioral development. ACEs can also have lasting effects on health, well-being, and prosperity well into adulthood.²

According to data collected from adults in all 50 states and the District of Columbia between 2011 and 2020:¹



64% reported experiencing at least one type of ACEs¹



17% reported experiencing 4 or more types of ACEs¹

The consequences of ACEs can be passed down from one generation to the next if children don’t have protective buffers like positive childhood experiences or a caring adult in their lives. Also, when families experience historical and systemic racism or living in poverty for generations, the effects of ACEs can add up over time.¹

Multiple studies show that people who identified as members of these groups as adults reported experiencing significantly more ACEs:¹

Non-Hispanic American Indian or Alaska Native people and multiracial people¹

People making less than \$15,000 per year¹

People with less than a high school education¹

Lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgendered people¹

People who are unemployed or unable to work¹

The Intersection of ACEs and Substance Use

A growing body of work in ACEs focuses on their intersection with substance use disorders (SUDs). ACEs are positively correlated with substance use and SUD risk in adulthood. A recent scoping review indicated that those in treatment for SUDs had a higher prevalence of ACEs than those in the general population and found an association between ACEs and the development of SUDs. ACEs and SUDs have also been found to have an intergenerational effect — exposure to parental substance use is an ACE that is associated with increased risk for substance use. Studies show that a higher number of these experiences are associated with poor mental and physical health outcomes, chronic medical conditions, employment difficulties, and lower educational attainment in adulthood.⁴

People with 4 or more ACEs are:⁵

- 12x** more at risk for suicide
- 7x** more likely to develop alcohol use disorder
- 2-4x** higher risk of using alcohol or other drugs
- 2-4x** more likely to begin substance use at a young age

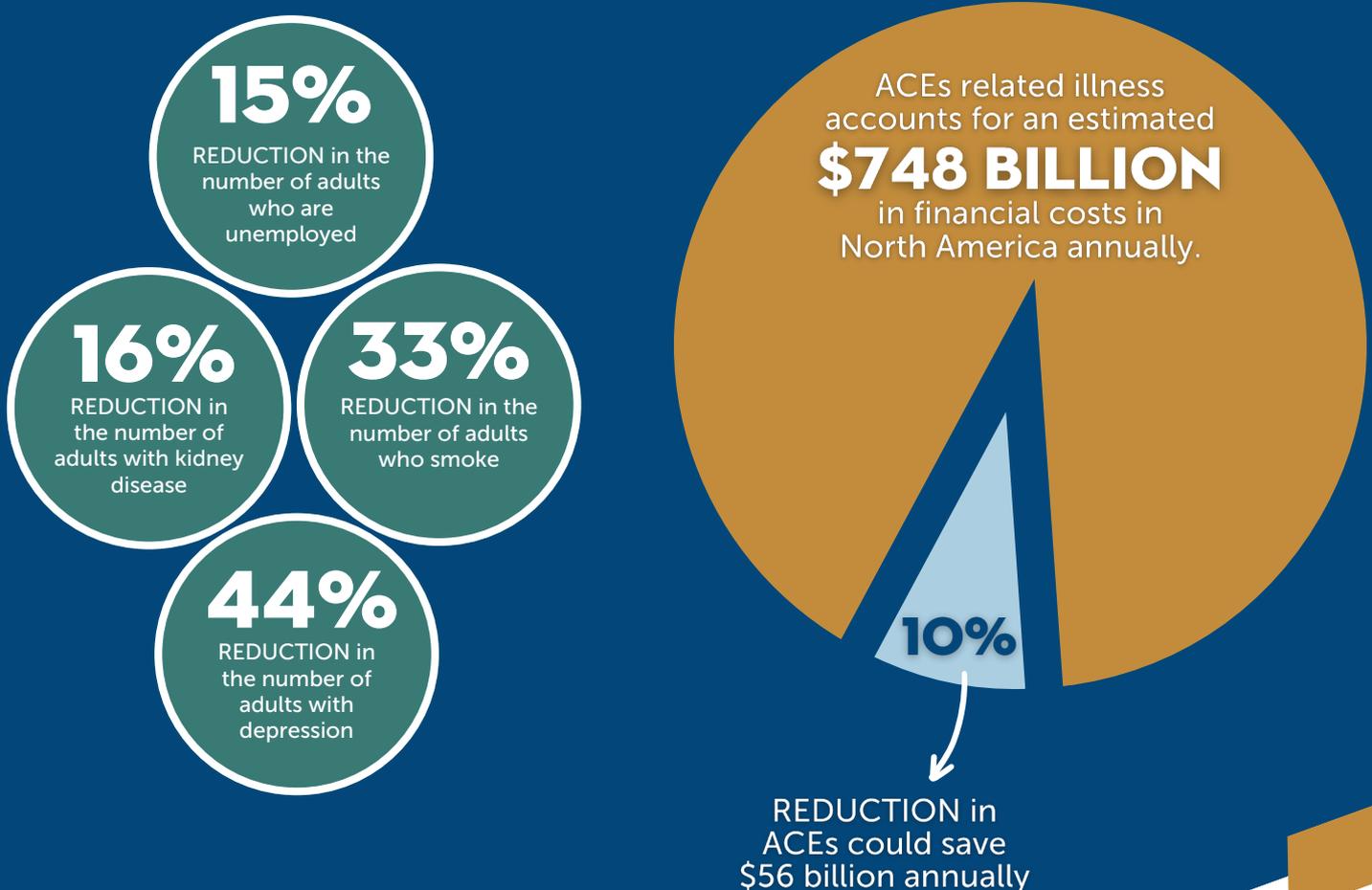
People with 5 or more ACEs are:⁵

- 3x** higher risk for misuse of prescription pain medications
- 7-10x** more likely to use illicit substances
- 7-10x** more likely to inject illicit substances
- 7-10x** greater risk for illicit substance use addiction

Healthy Childhoods have benefits throughout life

Benevolent childhood experiences (BCEs) represent positive experiences before age 18, that do not depend on higher socioeconomic status in the family. BCEs can not only provide a foundation for creating better family health in adulthood but are also linked to various adult mental health outcomes, such as stress, depression, forgiveness, family closeness, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), loneliness, and later life cognition. Furthermore, BCEs were associated with ideal cardiovascular health in midlife and showed a better prognosis in patients with personality disorders.⁶

WHAT IF WE COULD PREVENT ACES?¹



GET IN TOUCH

At Preventions First's Youth Prevention Resource Center, we apply a holistic approach in all that we do, ensuring that youth voices are represented and respected. We invest significant resources to respond to the needs of our youth and support healthy decision-making, for those who work with youth and the youth themselves.



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