



## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

# The Economic Impact of Adverse Childhood Experiences in Kentucky

*Cultivating a Commonwealth Where All Kids and Families Can Flourish*

Thriving children are not separate from thriving communities – they are the result of them. The conditions in which families live, work, and grow can contribute to adversity and trauma as well as their resilience. This report was developed to understand how adversity in childhood impacts Kentucky's economy and identify strategies to build resilience and prevent the long term effects of adversity. By examining the relationship between Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) in childhood and health outcomes, we can better understand the cost of adversity on our economy and workforce.

### Key Takeaways

- Experiencing adversity in childhood can increase the likelihood of health challenges and economic hardship later in life, especially when support is lacking.
- Adversity in childhood is common and it carries real costs for the health and vitality of Kentucky.
  - Between 2015-2020, 62% of Kentucky adults reported having at least one ACE in their childhood.
  - 19% of Kentucky adults reported experiencing 4 or more ACEs.
  - The total annual economic burden of ACEs in Kentucky is \$295 million.
- We can buffer the impacts of adversity, support families, and build pathways to lifelong health, resilience, and community strength by implementing proven policies and practices that support strong foundations for families.

### Investing Wisely Works

The Commonwealth's economic success will be determined by how adults foster the health and development of our children. If we want Kentucky to thrive, we need to pay serious attention to how children grow and learn and invest wisely as they are the future workforce, leaders, and parents. Fortunately, there is now strong evidence to help us meet the challenge of creating conditions in our communities that support positive childhood experiences (PCEs) and development. By supporting public policies and human service programs that support every family and every child in every community according to their needs, we can ensure the well-being of children and our collective civic, social, and economic future.



## Key Strategies for Preventing Adversity and Advancing Resilience

**Ensuring a Strong Start for Children** through nurturing relationships, quality early education, and supportive environments to help prevent ACEs by building a foundation of safety, stability, and resilience.

- This includes expanding access to child care, increasing utilization of home-visiting programs, using family impact statements to assess policy effects, and embedding trauma-informed approaches in settings serving children who have experienced adversity.

**Strengthening Economic Supports for Families** can prevent ACEs by reducing financial hardship, stress, and instability that can contribute to unsafe or unhealthy environments for children.

- This includes policies and budget investments that reduce poverty and promote family stability. Family-first programs such as SNAP, WIC, Medicaid, TANF, Paid Family Medical Leave, and access to safe, affordable housing eases financial strain on working families.

**Connecting Youth to Caring Adults and Positive Activities** helps prevent ACEs by fostering supportive relationships, increasing positive experiences, and providing safe, structured environments for children.

- This includes investing in programs like Head Start, Pre-K, after school programs, and school-based mental health services, as well as creating policies that ensure adult to student ratios allow for positive relationship building.

**Advancing Social Norms and Teaching Skills that Protect Against Violence and Adversity** plays a powerful role in reducing ACEs by shaping environments where children and families feel safe, supported, and valued.

- This may include normalizing help-seeking behaviors, teaching social-emotional skills and healthy parenting strategies, expanding research and awareness of available resources, and promoting the development of cross-sector strategies such as local schools and health departments working together.

**Promoting Timely Interventions that Lessen Immediate and Long-Term Harms** for children and families affected by ACEs can reduce the impact of trauma, build resilience, and disrupt the cycle of adversity.

- This may include increasing access to healthcare, reducing the impact of parental incarceration by expanding community-based alternatives, strengthening data capturing measures to assess existing adversity to inform interventions, increasing access to youth substance use recovery and cessation programs, and promoting policies that center children and consider long-term harms.



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