

POLICY BRIEF

ALASKA CHILDREN'S TRUST



PHOTO BY ASH ADAMS

# Vibrant Economy, Strong Workforce, Thriving Families

A Guide to Trauma-Informed Policy Decision-Making





Alaska's future depends on how well we support our current workforce and foster the healthy development of the next generation.

## Our Common Goal

In Alaska, we have a long tradition of working together to build an economy that works for our unique state and is resilient in the face of difficulty. As Alaskans from all regions and all walks of life, we share a common goal of a prosperous future and vibrant economy. Alaska's future depends on how well we support our current workforce and foster the healthy development of the next generation.

The research is clear and compelling. Early experiences build the architecture of the brain. Safe, stable, nurturing relationships and environments for infants, children, and youth establish the foundation for healthy lives and a strong workforce.

Not all children have access to these supports, however. Many children experience adversity so severe and persistent that it produces toxic levels of stress, which can damage the brain's developing foundation and negatively affect the way children's bodies and even their genes develop.<sup>1</sup> Exposure to adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) and other sources of toxic stress can lead to life-long health and social problems, and can be passed on to the next generation.<sup>2,3</sup> This impacts our workforce, our managers, our business owners, our economy, and government spending.

## What are ACEs?

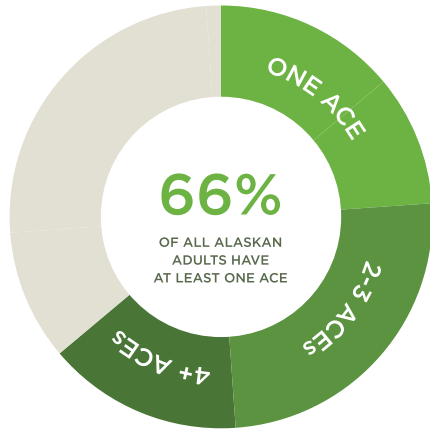
ACEs are adverse childhood experiences during the first 18 years of life.<sup>2</sup> Most studies of ACEs measure ten types of adverse experiences. Each experience counts as one, no matter how often it occurred, and the total number of adverse experiences is a person's ACE score.

In addition, other types of adversity, such as bullying, poverty, chronic loss and grief, historical events, discrimination, and community violence, can also lead to toxic stress.

<b>ABUSE/NEGLECT</b>		<b>10 MOST COMMON ACEs</b>
Emotional Abuse		
Physical Abuse		
Sexual Abuse		
Physical Neglect		
Emotional Neglect		
<b>HOUSEHOLD DYSFUNCTION</b>		
Domestic Violence		
Substance Abuse in Household		
Mental Illness in Household		
Parental Separation or Divorce		
Incarcerated Household Member		

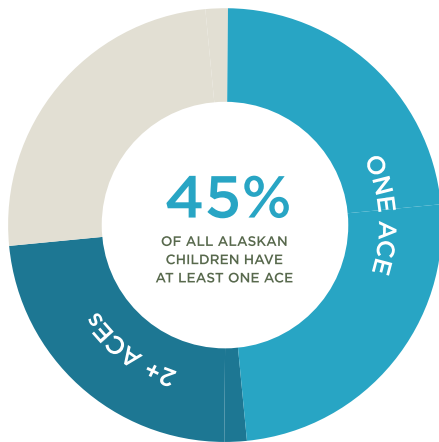
# ACE SCORES OF ALASKANS

The majority of Alaskans have experienced ACEs, and many carry a heavy burden of childhood adversity.



## ALASKA ADULTS BY ACE SCORE

66% of Alaska's adults have experienced at least one ACE.<sup>18</sup>  
20% of Alaska's adults have experienced four or more ACEs.<sup>18</sup>



## ALASKA CHILDREN (Age 0-17) BY ACE SCORE

45% of Alaska's children (ages 0-17) have experienced at least one ACE.<sup>19</sup>  
24% of Alaska children have experiences two or more ACEs.<sup>19</sup>

## How do ACEs affect Alaska's workforce?

The accumulation of ACEs in Alaska's children and the lasting effects of unresolved ACEs affect our workforce, businesses, Alaska's economy, and the state's future.

ACEs can impair early learning, school readiness, and academic achievement, and lead to problems for the workforce.<sup>6-14</sup>

Compared to individuals with no ACEs,

### PEOPLE WITH 4+ ACEs ARE:

**2.3X**  
AS LIKELY TO  
DROP OUT OF  
HIGH SCHOOL<sup>15</sup>

**2.3X**  
AS LIKELY  
TO BE  
UNEMPLOYED<sup>15</sup>

**>2X**  
AS LIKELY  
TO HAVE IMPAIRED  
WORK PERFORMANCE<sup>6,7</sup>

**1.6X**  
MORE LIKELY TO LIVE  
IN A HOUSEHOLD  
REPORTING POVERTY<sup>15</sup>

ACEs are linked with employee job problems, financial issues, and absenteeism and other factors—such as relationship problems, emotional distress, and substance abuse—known to reduce work performance.

## How can we avoid these costs?

We can bend the cost curve by preventing ACEs and toxic stress among children and supporting the majority of Alaskan adults who have experienced ACEs, through implementing trauma-informed practices. Alaskans from all sectors are working to do this, and government can play a key role by embracing policies that prioritize the well-being of the workforce and their families, reduce stress on and increase supports for caregivers, and assure children’s healthy development.

Investments in areas such as trauma-informed training for employers and institutions; family-friendly workplace policies; high-quality, affordable childcare; screening and early intervention in health care; and home visitation programs can yield a high return on investment in terms of increased educational and job outcomes and decreased costs from illness and social problems. As such, trauma-informed policies and approaches can slow the growth of government programs and services needed to respond to problems, and can support a strong workforce.

Our workforce is crucial for a vibrant economy and prosperous future for Alaska. Supporting families and the healthy development of children helps us achieve this common goal.

## What does child abuse and neglect cost us?

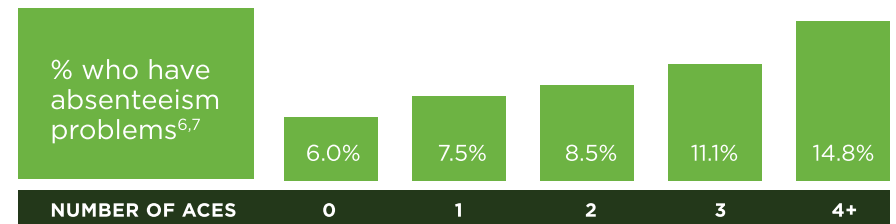
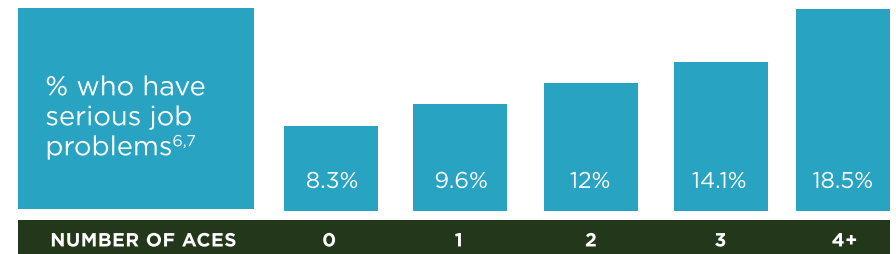
The estimated lifetime cost per victim of non-fatal child abuse and neglect is over \$240,000.<sup>16</sup> This includes an estimated \$167,000 of productivity losses. The estimated lifetime cost per victim of fatal child abuse and neglect is \$1.5 million.<sup>16</sup>

## WHAT DO ACEs COST US?

ACEs are associated with hundreds of millions per year in lost productivity and healthcare expenses in Alaska.

### Estimated Annual Costs Linked with ACEs for Selected Health Behaviors and Outcomes<sup>17</sup>

HEALTH BEHAVIOR OR OUTCOME	EST. ANNUAL COSTS LINKED W/ACES
Adult Medicaid (Age 20+)	\$382,443,774
Current Smoker	\$202,941,868
Non-Gestational Diabetes	\$116,816,441
Binge Drinking	\$69,289,462
Arthritis	\$60,087,964
Obesity	\$34,301,302
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$865,881,810</b>



## What Can Government Learn from Business?

Vigor Alaska, a shipyard in Ketchikan, introduced “soft skills” training as part of employee development in 2014.<sup>4</sup> Crews begin each day with stretching and socializing.

Through the Second Chance program, Vigor supports substance abuse counseling and AA meetings, and has collaborated with the local domestic violence shelter to support family wellness.

Managers are taught how common trauma is and how it affects employees, and are coached on how to provide critical feedback in a constructive manner and de-escalate conflicts.

Former General Manager Mike Pearson described, “If you create a workplace where there is trust, where you really develop the wholeness of human beings, your incident rate will drop, your absenteeism will decrease, and your profitability will increase. That translates into work that is of higher quality, that has meaning to it.”<sup>5</sup> Between 2016 and 2017, staff turnover was cut in half.<sup>4</sup> The Ketchikan shipyard increased opportunities for job advancement among its workers, and became the safest shipyard in the entire international company.



Between 2016 and 2017, staff turnover was cut in half, and Vigor’s Ketchikan location became the safest shipyard in the entire company.

## How do we create a prosperous future?

A prosperous future and vibrant economy for Alaska depends on how we all support the current and future workforce. The data on ACEs, toxic stress, and brain architecture provides us a framework for understanding what businesses, workers, and their families are struggling with. Implementation of trauma-informed practices show positive results for growing industry, promoting employee retention, and increasing productivity, while supporting strong and thriving families.

Government can play an essential role in these practices. When all sectors, including government, invest in reducing toxic stress and helping all children grow up in safe, stable, and nurturing relationships and environments, we create a vibrant economy, strong workforce, and thriving economy. Investment in healthy child development is an investment in our economy.

## What can you do?

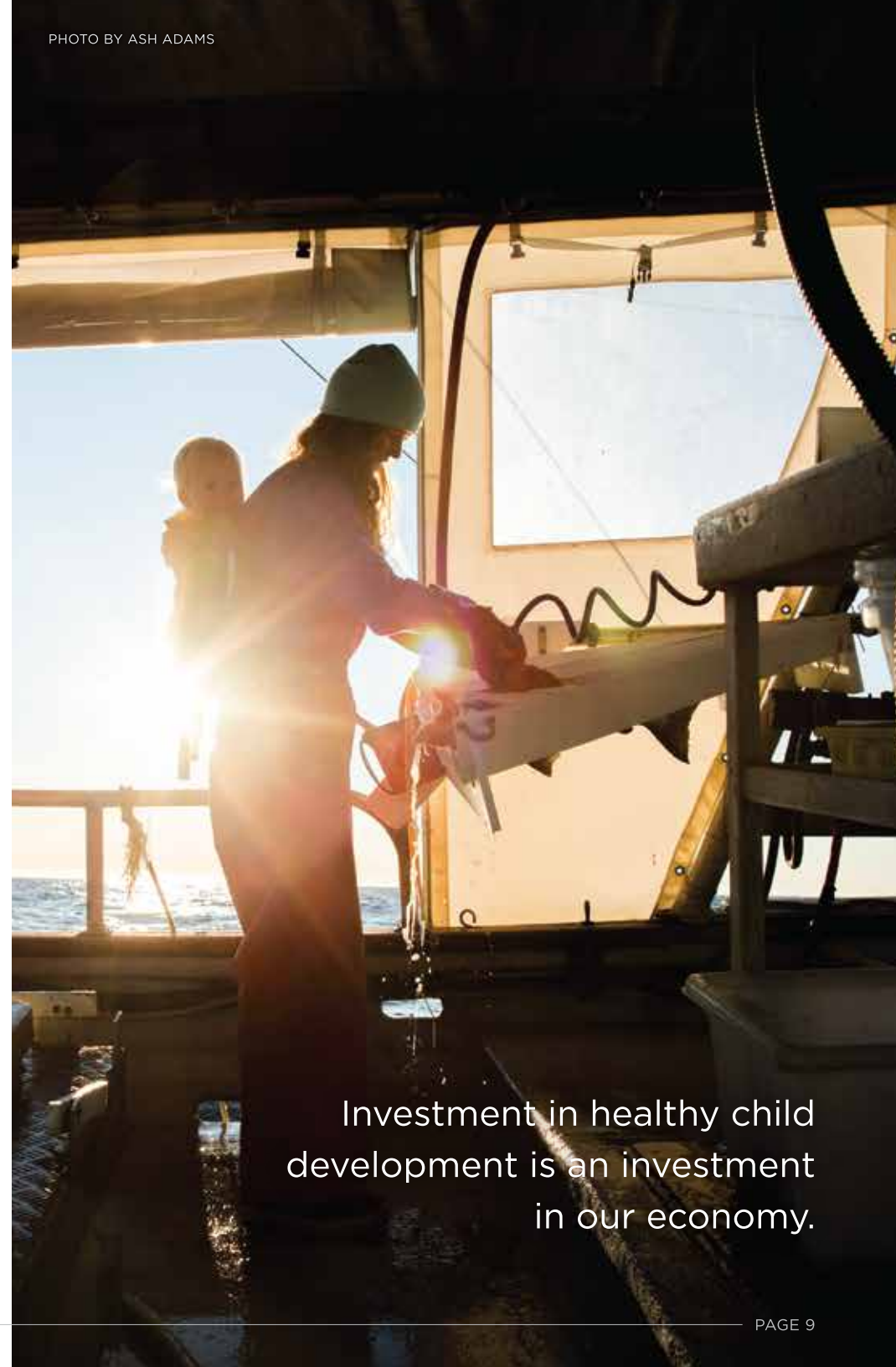
### BE A TRAUMA-INFORMED CHANGE LEADER

- Attend training on adverse childhood experiences (ACEs), toxic stress, healthy development, and trauma-informed approaches
- Require trauma-informed trainings for government departments and state grantees
- Include trauma-informed language in legislation

### USE A TRAUMA-INFORMED LENS FOR MAKING POLICY DECISIONS

With any budget or bill, ask yourself:

- How will this affect the current workforce?
- How will this affect the development of children, who are Alaska's future workforce?



Investment in healthy child development is an investment in our economy.

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18. Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS). 2013-2015. Alaska Department of Health and Social Services, DPH, Section of Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion. Percentage of adults 18 years of age and older who were exposed to 0, 1, 2-3, or 4+ Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) before age 18 based upon the ACEs domain questions on the Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS). Responses are assigned a score of 1 for exposure and 0 for lack of exposure to each domain, which are summed as the total ACEs count. There are 10 domains of ACEs organized into abuse (i.e., verbal, physical, and sexual), dysfunctional households (i.e., substance abuse, mental illness, domestic violence, separation/divorce, and incarceration among household members), and neglect (i.e., physical and emotional). The total ACEs count is the sum of the ACEs domains respondents reported to have experienced.
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## Resources for Businesses and Lawmakers

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## For more information & assistance

The Alaska Resilience Initiative, a program of the Alaska Children's Trust, provides trauma-informed resources, tools, and trainings, and is available for assistance at [akresilience.org](http://akresilience.org)

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For full citations, please read the online version of this publication:  
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Healthy children are the foundation  
of a healthy workforce.



Together we can prevent child abuse and neglect.

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