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LONG TERM HEALTH OF WISCONSIN ADULTS COMPROMISED BY ADVERSE CHILDHOOD EXPERIENCES

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MADISON, WI – The Wisconsin Child Abuse and Neglect Prevention Board and Children’s Hospital of Wisconsin Community Services have released the report “The Influence of Adverse Childhood Experiences on the Health of Wisconsin Citizens in Adulthood”, the third in a series of briefs examining the impact of adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) in Wisconsin. This document takes a more comprehensive look at the relationship between ACEs and various aspects of poor mental and physical health.

The findings reinforce the relationship between ACEs and health threats in adulthood, including depression, increased health risk behaviors, higher incidence of poor general health, and the occurrence of chronic health conditions.

“The 2011-2013 data, highlighted in the newest report, show strong links between ACEs reported by Wisconsin adults and later behaviors that increase the potential for disease or injury, threats to an individual’s daily health, and severe health problems,” according to Principal Investigator Dr. Kristen Slack, University of Wisconsin School of Social Work and Institute for Research on Poverty. “Furthermore, the effects are cumulative. The more ACEs experienced in childhood; the higher the likelihood of negative impact on health in adulthood.”

For the purposes of this study, ACEs are defined as physical abuse; emotional abuse; sexual abuse; alcohol or drug abuse in the household; an incarcerated household member; a household member with mental health problems; violence between adults in the home; and parental separation or divorce. If adverse childhood experiences detrimentally impact a child, those effects tend to stay with that child into adulthood, significantly increasing his or her risk of health and social problems throughout life. This is especially true when the adverse experiences occur in combination with one another.

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“While this study calls attention to the serious, long-term implication of exposure to adverse experiences in childhood, there is much that we can do to prevent and mitigate these negative consequences,” states Michelle Jensen, Child Abuse and Neglect Prevention Board Executive Director. “By building protective factors which strengthen the ability of families to support the healthy development of children, we can reduce the impact of ACEs.”

“At Children’s Hospital of Wisconsin we serve children who are actively experiencing trauma due to medical emergencies, child abuse and neglect, and disrupted family placements. Preventing multiple adverse childhood experiences and minimizing a child’s exposure to toxic stress combined with the steady presence of positive caregivers in a child’s life will help to create a healthy environment for a child to grow and thrive. This study provides the data to set the stage for creating such environments for children and families,” says Jennifer Hammel, Director of Early Childhood Development and Trauma Informed Care at Children’s Hospital of Wisconsin Community Services.

The vision of the Prevention Board is for every child in Wisconsin to grow up in a safe, stable, and nurturing environment. For over thirty years, the Prevention Board has advocated for policy changes needed for state programs, statutes, policies, and budgets to strengthen families, reduce child abuse and neglect, and improve coordination among state agencies providing prevention services.

The full report can be accessed on the Child Abuse and Neglect Prevention Board website at <https://preventionboard.wi.gov/Pages/OurWork/Publications.aspx>.

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