

# Urgent. Related. Preventable.

Adverse childhood experiences (ACEs), overdose, and suicide are urgent and related public health challenges that have consequences for all of us. But these challenges are preventable if we adopt a coordinated approach that focuses on addressing today's crises while preventing tomorrow's.

## ADVERSE CHILDHOOD EXPERIENCES

- Adverse childhood experiences refers to potentially traumatic events experienced by people under the age of 18. ACEs may include but is not limited to exposure to abuse, neglect, parental substance use, violence in the home and community, and racism.<sup>1</sup>



About 64% of U.S. adults have experienced at least one adverse childhood experience before age 18.<sup>2</sup>

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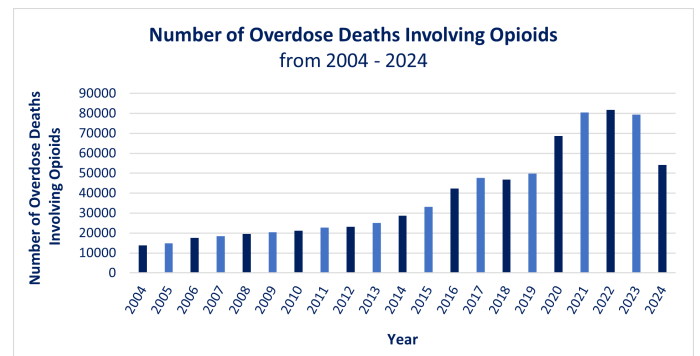


About 17% or 1 in 6 adults reported they had experienced four or more types of ACEs.<sup>2</sup>

- The economic burden of child abuse and neglect, one type of ACE, in the United States is conservatively in the hundreds of billions of dollars each year.<sup>4</sup>
- Experiencing adversity in childhood can change the way the brain develops and functions, contributing to increased risk of chronic diseases such as:
  - » diabetes
  - » cancer
  - » stroke
  - » substance use
  - » suicide
  - » other injury and violence outcomes<sup>5</sup>

## SUICIDE, OVERDOSE AND EARLY DEATH

- Suicide rates increased approximately 36% between 2000–2022. Suicide was responsible for 49,316 deaths in 2023, which is about one death every 11 minutes.
- The sum of opioid-involved overdoses from the last 20 years (2004–2024) was 809,329, which includes prescription and illicit opioids.<sup>6</sup>



- ACEs are associated with younger age of initiation of opioid use, injection drug use, and lifetime overdose.<sup>7</sup>
- Experiencing trauma before age 18 is associated with increased odds of prescription opioid misuse. Adults with four or five or more different experiences of trauma are approximately three times more likely to experience prescription opioid misuse.<sup>8</sup>
- Experiencing any ACE is associated with an increased risk for suicide; the odds of ever attempting suicide are more than 10 times higher for adults with four or more ACEs compared to adults with no ACEs.<sup>9</sup>
- ACEs are associated with at least five of the 10 leading causes of death.<sup>4</sup>

## THE CONNECTION

ACEs increase the risk of overdose and suicide later in life.

- Losing a loved one to overdose or suicide are themselves ACEs that can increase the risk of overdose or suicide.<sup>10</sup>
- Preventing exposure to adverse childhood experiences is an important step in reducing the risk for overdose and suicide, and many other negative health and wellbeing outcomes.
- Low educational attainment, unemployment, and poverty are shared risk factors for ACEs, suicide, and overdose that can reverberate across generations.<sup>11</sup>

## EFFECTIVE WAYS TO PREVENT ALL THREE ISSUES

There is great potential for coordinating and aligning funding, programs, and policies to have greater impact on these three issues together than the current efforts that focus on each issue individually.

- Generate understanding of the connection between ACEs, overdose, and suicide to inform more holistic, comprehensive, and effective policy, programmatic interventions, funding, and service delivery. Use shared, evidence-based, and easy-to-understand messages that create urgency.
- Engage with individuals as leaders for prevention and change in their own communities, including those with lived experience, decision-makers, and others.
  - » Employ a comprehensive public health approach to prevent harm in the first place. Identify people at-risk early and ensure equitable access to needed programs and services.
  - » Provide long-term social and economic supports (e.g., income support for working families, paid family and sick leave, high quality childcare, housing support, and access to substance use treatment that increase safe, stable, nurturing relationships and environments).
  - » Teach coping and problem-solving skills including parenting programs for adults and emotion regulation and relationship skills programs for children and adolescents to prevent or mitigate the effects of ACEs, suicide or suicide attempts, and overdose.
- Efforts may be most effective if we begin by focusing policies, funding, and programs where the need is greatest.
- Invest in research and evaluation to develop, test, implement, and translate evidence-based strategies to prevent ACEs, overdose, and suicide, and to address the connection between them.

FOR MORE INFORMATION, VISIT:

<https://www.cdc.gov/injury/priorities/>

1. [https://www.cahmi.org/docs/default-source/resources/cahmi-state-fact-sheet---national-v-3-\(state-range\).pdf?sfvrsn=9d0720b0\\_2](https://www.cahmi.org/docs/default-source/resources/cahmi-state-fact-sheet---national-v-3-(state-range).pdf?sfvrsn=9d0720b0_2)
2. <https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/aces/ace-brfss.html>
3. <https://www.cdc.gov/injury/wisqars/cost/>
4. <https://www.cdc.gov/vitalsigns/aces/index.html>
5. <https://wonder.cdc.gov/mcd-icd10.html>
6. <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/36598401/>
7. <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/28841495/>
8. <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/27816251/>
9. <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/29253477/>
10. <https://www.cdc.gov/aces/prevention/index.html>
11. <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/28419887/>

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