

## 20+ Years of Addressing Childhood Trauma in Communities

Trauma has come to be recognized as a pervasive societal problem that can have profound effects on a person's physical and mental well-being throughout life. Trauma refers to any experience in which people are exposed to or confronted by a negative event that threatens their sense of safety and overwhelms their ability to cope – or when people witness these events inflicted on a family member, friend, or peer. An estimated 70% of U.S. adults – more than 223 million people – have experienced a traumatic event at least once in their lives.<sup>1</sup>

The experience of trauma affects people of all socioeconomic statuses, ages, races, and backgrounds. However, individuals and communities that experience discrimination in any form are disproportionately affected by trauma. Trauma can also occur through adverse childhood experiences, or ACEs, such as abuse and household dysfunction. ACEs can impact adult outcomes of disease, quality of life, care utilization, and mortality. In 2016, nearly half of U.S. children – 34 million – had at least one ACE and more than 20% experienced 2 or more.<sup>2</sup>

Addressing childhood trauma is one element of Kaiser Permanente's long-standing commitment to total health of mind, body, and spirit. Kaiser Permanente seeks to identify and implement evidence-based solutions focused on prevention and early intervention that will positively impact the lives of its members and the surrounding communities.

### A brief history of Kaiser Permanente and childhood trauma

Kaiser Permanente's leadership in addressing childhood trauma began with a seminal study conducted in 1995 through 1997 in partnership with the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The study revealed that the greater the number of ACEs a person had, the more likely and the greater the burden of chronic illnesses, including diabetes, cancer, heart disease, chronic lung disease, substance use disorder, and mental health problems.<sup>3</sup> The results of this study have since been validated in more than 1,500 peer-reviewed studies.

Kaiser Permanente has long believed that everyone deserves to build safe and healthy relationships that buffer against trauma. Since 1998, Kaiser Permanente's Family Violence Prevention Program has served as a model for family violence prevention in the health care setting. This model supports physicians and health care teams to identify domestic violence and provide referrals and resources to help end abuse, effectively preventing ACEs before they happen. The

Family Violence Prevention Program is now used at all Kaiser Permanente facilities to provide a comprehensive and integrated approach to build awareness, provide care, and prevent domestic violence.

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## What is Kaiser Permanente doing to address childhood trauma today?

Today's health care system faces significant challenges to addressing the need for mental health services – including the complex health issues associated with trauma – across a person's lifespan. Kaiser Permanente is committed to empowering its members to maximize their total health by building a health care model that better integrates mental health services with primary care and community supports to better address mental health needs early on.

Another way Kaiser Permanente supports the total health of its communities is through its community health portfolio, which includes programs that ensure health access by providing individuals with integrated health and social services and efforts to improve the conditions for health and equity in Kaiser Permanente communities. Over the past 5 years, Kaiser Permanente has invested nearly \$9 million to fund programs related to the prevention or treatment of trauma in children.

Kaiser Permanente's trauma-related investments include:

### Building resilient communities

Kaiser Permanente is refining a community resilience strategy, which starts by exploring the most effective entry points for community trauma-informed approaches such as community safety and violence prevention, delivering human services and early childhood services, and working with the justice system. This work also integrates its resiliency efforts with school and safety-net partners in the education and clinical sectors, detailed below.

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### Fostering resilience in schools

Evidence suggests that trauma and associated mental health symptoms can interfere with student learning, school engagement, and academic performance. Schools offering safe and supportive environments may buffer the negative impacts of trauma and foster resilience among students. Kaiser Permanente's Resilience in School Environments, or RISE, initiative provides customizable, onsite and virtual guidance and resources for schools and districts as they work to improve school staff connectedness, satisfaction, and well-being to promote staff and student resilience. Kaiser Permanente is looking at opportunities to scale RISE at the national level in order to reach thousands of schools and districts in the coming years.

### Strengthening the safety net in clinical settings

Investments in supporting trauma-informed care and resilience in the clinical setting have focused on trauma treatment, specifically adoption, standardization, and dissemination of trauma-informed care practices by providers in primary care settings. In addition, grant-making has supported interventions to bring a trauma-informed care and resilience approach to locations where youth are served, such as community clinics.

In October 2019, Kaiser Permanente announced a new \$2.75 million investment in research grants

to advance solutions to prevent and mitigate the impact of adverse childhood experiences. This new research will provide important insights for both clinical and community-based interventions.

These trauma and resilience efforts align with Kaiser Permanente's commitment to promoting the physical, mental, and social well-being of its members, workforce, and the communities it serves.

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<sup>1</sup> Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder Fact Sheet, Sidran Traumatic Stress Institute, 2018. [www.sidran.org/resources/for-survivors-and-loved-ones/post-traumatic-stress-disorder-fact-sheet/](http://www.sidran.org/resources/for-survivors-and-loved-ones/post-traumatic-stress-disorder-fact-sheet/)

<sup>2</sup> Traumatic Experiences Widespread Among U.S. Youth, New Data Show, Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, October 19, 2017. [www.rwjf.org/en/library/articles-and-news/2017/10/traumatic-experiences-widespread-among-u-s-youth--new-data-show.html](http://www.rwjf.org/en/library/articles-and-news/2017/10/traumatic-experiences-widespread-among-u-s-youth--new-data-show.html)

<sup>3</sup> About the CDC-Kaiser ACE Study, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, Division of Violence Prevention, June 14, 2016. [www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/acestudy/about.html](http://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/acestudy/about.html)