

CONSENSUS STATEMENT:

To Build Better Lives We Need to Build Better Brains

On November 14 & 15, 2017 the Child and Youth Mental Health and Substance Use (CYMHSU) Collaborative hosted the *Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) Summit: BC and Beyond*. At the Summit, leaders were invited to strategize and prioritize next steps towards addressing ACEs in education, health care, social services, poverty reduction, policing, justice and economic development.

Given the science of ACEs and the evidence of the impact of ACEs over a life time, it was agreed: “to build better lives we need to build better brains”. This begins with recognizing, preventing and addressing the impacts of childhood trauma and adversity on mental and physical health, substance use and social and economic wellbeing over a life time.

Three principles also emerged from the ACEs Summit:

- **listen and learn from Indigenous Peoples** whose traditions support both preventive and healing practices
- **work with people living with high ACEs** to create effective legislative, policy and practice changes for better lives
- **support visionary leadership using bottom up** (community-based Local Action Teams) **and top down** (Ministries working in collaboration) **models** to solve very difficult, long-standing problems across society

The leaders, working in small groups identified the priorities as follows:

- understand the impact of ACEs in all aspects of health, social and economic wellbeing and adopt a framework for action to prevent and address ACEs in BC
- prevent ACEs-related harm to the brain and build resiliency
- enact interventions that work
- change current practice in health/social services/policing/education/justice and economic sectors to reflect brain science and to become trauma informed

We propose the following priority actions to prevent and address the negative impact of ACEs in British Columbia:

1) Adopt a shared framework to prevent and address ACEs. We suggest a process that promotes visionary leadership bottom-up and top-down: a cross-sectoral government action team working directly with Local Action Teams for quick and lasting results.

2) Implement proven interventions that prevent child adversity and promote resilience. Preventing child adversity and intervening early to build resilience in children and families are consistently identified as the most effective options for addressing the impact of ACEs. Therefore our recommendation is to fund the following interventions:

- Nurse Family Partnership program
- Well-baby visits
- Parenting courses in the community (Examples: Circle of Security, MCFD’s parenting classes and Confident Parents: Thriving Kids)
- Preventure offered in schools
- Wrap-around family-based care and supports for at risk students and families (West Kootenay model)
- UVic’s Patient Self-Management program
- BOUNCE BACK 15+ telephone cognitive behavioural therapy based telephone coaching
- FOUNDRY e-supports related to resiliency: especially for young parents/parents-to-be

3) Strengthen policies to ‘build better brains and build better lives’ (see [reference](#))

Consider trauma-informed legislation related to social services and health practitioners:

- review current policies related to: schools, child protection, social services, health care, policing, job training and justice to identify policies that need to be removed or adjusted to become trauma-informed
- adopt policies to prevent ACEs as follows:
 - Increased access to quality day care
 - Expansion of kindergarten
 - trauma-informed schools
 - Integrated bio-psycho-social model of mental health and addictions with primary care
- join voices across Canada to include mental health and substance use and brain science into the Canada Health Act

- 4) **Implement brain science and trauma-informed training across all sectors** (see [Brain Story Certification](#))
- offer **training to all professionals and staff** who have day to day contact with children, youth and families especially those in perinatal care, day care, schools, health care, social services, policing and justice.
 - **embed brain science and the role of ACEs into curricula** for teachers, physicians, social workers, counsellors, police officers, lawyers and judges
 - **support schools to become trauma-informed and implement hiring policies** requiring all teachers and staff to receive trauma-informed training
 - **provide clinical practice guidelines** for physicians, psychologists and social workers to recognize ACEs and promote resilience

We are asking this new government in British Columbia to take an innovative new and historic approach to shine a spotlight on **nurturing and building better brains to build better lives**, just as previous governments have focussed on promoting healthy diets and smoking cessation to promote healthy bodies.