



Testimony
Ohio House of Representatives Behavioral Health Committee
April 23, 2024

Respectfully Submitted by:
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Franklin County Public Health

Chair Pavliga, Vice Chair White, Ranking Member Brewer, Representative Baker, Representative Carruthers and other esteemed members of the Ohio House, Behavioral Health Committee.

My name is Joe Mazzola. I currently serve as the Health Commissioner at Franklin County Public Health and am a past president of the Association of Ohio Health Commissioners. I am grateful for the opportunity to speak to this committee today and offer both Franklin County Public Health and my state Association's strong support for HB 352.

As you know, Adverse Childhood Experiences, or ACEs- are potentially traumatic events that occur in childhood, often between the ages of 0 to 17 years old. As noted by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, ACEs can include being a victim of violence, abuse or neglect, witnessing violence in the home or the community, substance use in the home, not having enough food to eat, experiencing homelessness or unstable housing, or experiencing discrimination. The environment where a child grows up can have a lasting and significant impact on their sense of safety and stability and these traumatic experiences can impact lifelong health and wellbeing.

Data from Ohio Medicaid Assessment Survey indicates 20% of children in Franklin County have experienced at least one ACE, with the experience of the separation or divorce of a parent/guardian most commonly reported. 12% of Franklin County children have experienced 3 or more ACEs. Research indicates, if left untreated, children with a high ACE score face a 20-year decrease in life expectancy. Children who experience four or more ACEs are 7.4x as likely to suffer from alcoholism and 12.2x as likely to attempt suicide.

ACES that lead to early trauma can lead to poor life choices and health outcomes in adolescence and adulthood, including the development of substance use disorder, perpetuating cycles of trauma and addiction. ACES impact educational attainment, future employment opportunities, addiction, and other social determinants of health. And like many other public health issues, there are significant disparities in the prevalence of ACES among Ohioans particularly those who are economically disadvantaged and/or racially segregated communities.



Franklin County Public Health, with our goal to achieve equity, remains steadfast in our work to combat substance use disorders and enhance access to essential healthcare services. However, true substance use prevention begins with mitigating the effects of ACEs. Along with preventing ACEs, Franklin County Public Health and our partners have focused on providing resources to those who have experienced ACEs to build resiliency through Protective and Compensatory Experiences or PACEs among at-risk populations, especially youth in Franklin County. In 2021, our health department led the planning and execution of the inaugural Franklin County ACEs, PACEs, and Addiction Summit. The Summit brought together hundreds of multi-disciplinary professionals and inspiring youth leaders in Franklin County, all who had a vested interest in protecting, empowering, and informing families and youth. The Summit also served as an opportunity for individuals to come together and explore the influence of ACEs on the development of addiction, as well as PACEs that can reduce the effects of childhood trauma in children and adults.

In July 2023, FCPH partnered with the Columbus and Franklin County Addiction Plan to host the second ACEs, PACEs, and Addiction Summit, "Empowering Communities by Building Resilience." The Summit continued to explore the role that PACEs play in mitigating the impact of ACEs. The event featured youth panel discussions, powerful breakout sessions and was attended by more than 325 participants. By understanding the risk and protective factors, we can better equip our community to address ACEs both in the near-term as well as in the long-term impacting future generations.

Thanks to support from the Franklin County Board of Commissioners, FCPH was also able to award the first round of ACEs Mini Grants at the 2023 Summit. Five community partners: Comp Drug, Ethiopian Tewahedo Social Services (ETSS), WE ARE LINDEN, Health Policy Institute of Ohio (HPIO), and After-School All-Stars were each awarded \$25,000.00 to implement innovative strategies to support youth and educate professionals in Franklin County. Through these funds, youth in Franklin County have been mentored by first responders, learned social-emotional regulation skills, and given back to their communities through community clean up. FCPH invited all Summit participants to join the Columbus and Franklin County Addiction Plan, Prevention and Education Subcommittee, Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) Work Group to assist in continuing to move this work forward. As a group of community partners, we strive to understand, address and alleviate not only the health outcomes that present in adolescence and adulthood but also the root causes. Franklin County, and our partners remain dedicated to meeting Franklin County residents where they are and supporting them as they identify what recovery and wellness look like for them.

On behalf of my colleagues at FCPH and my fellow health commissioners represented by the AOHC, I offer my sincere gratitude to the committee for including public health on the ACEs taskforce. As demonstrated here in Franklin County, local health departments are uniquely positioned to coordinate and convene partners in our communities to address the root causes of ACEs and develop long-term solutions to address their impact. As we learn at the local level, the opportunity to share that



perspective as part of this statewide committee will ensure alignment and create sustainable models of success. Moreover, we are incredibly appreciative this task force is going to focus on policy solutions to address ACEs and mitigate their lasting implications on the communities we serve. Examples of such policy changes may include:

1. **Funding Prevention and Early Intervention Programs:** Allocate resources at the state and local levels to support evidence-based programs that prevent ACEs and provide early intervention for at-risk families. Investing in parenting support, home visitation programs, and trauma-informed education can break the cycle of adversity and promote healthy child development.
2. **Integrating Trauma-Informed Practices:** Ensure that all sectors, including healthcare, education, child welfare, and criminal justice, adopt trauma-informed approaches. This involves training professionals to recognize and respond to the effects of trauma, creating safe environments, and providing appropriate support services.
3. **Expanding Access to Mental Health Services:** Increase funding for mental health services, particularly for children and families affected by ACEs. Ensure that services are culturally competent, accessible, and destigmatized to encourage early intervention and treatment.
4. **Implement School-Based Initiatives:** Implement trauma-informed practices in schools to support students who have experienced ACEs. This includes training educators, providing mental health resources, and creating supportive environments that promote academic success and emotional well-being.
5. **Enhance Policy Coordination and Data Collection:** Establish interagency collaborations to coordinate efforts and collect data on ACEs prevalence, outcomes, and interventions. Use this information to inform future policy decisions, allocate resources effectively, and measure the impact of interventions over time.

By addressing ACEs comprehensively, we can promote healthier outcomes for individuals, families, and communities. Together, we can create a future where all children thrive, regardless of their past experiences.

On behalf of Franklin County Public Health and the Association of Ohio Health Commissioners, our goal commitment to this committee and the General Assembly is to inform our state about the impact and prevalence of adverse childhood experiences and childhood trauma, the role of resilience, and the possibility of healing and recovery.

Thank you again for the opportunity to speak with you today in support of HB 352. I would be happy to answer any questions.