



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

October 8, 2021

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New ACEs Equity Act Significantly Expands ACE Screening in California

SACRAMENTO – The Office of the California Surgeon General today applauded Governor Newsom and the Legislature for the enactment of SB 428, the ACEs Equity Act, which will significantly expand coverage for Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) screening.

[ACEs](#) are highly stressful and potentially traumatic experiences that can happen to any of us before we turn 18 years of age including: growing up with a parent struggling with a mental health or substance use disorder, witnessing domestic violence or experiencing abuse or neglect. Research tells us that [two in three adults across the United States](#) have been exposed to one or more ACEs and they affect individuals of all racial, cultural, and socio-economic backgrounds.

ACEs, and the resulting toxic stress response that may occur, are a root cause to some of the most common, serious, and costly health challenges facing our society today, including [nine out of the 10 leading causes of death](#) in the United States. A [recent estimate](#) showed that ACEs cost California \$112.5 billion overall annually and may cost over \$1.2 trillion in the next 10 years in California.

“There couldn’t be a more important time to enact this legislation,” said California Surgeon General, Dr. Nadine Burke Harris. “While the COVID-19 pandemic itself is not one of the traditional ACE criteria, it has been unique in creating the two main ingredients for development of the toxic stress response by one, acting as a major stressor while two, simultaneously cutting off access to many of the usual sources of buffering care necessary to help children, youth and adults regulate their stress responses.”

SB 428, which was introduced by State Senator Melissa Hurtado (D-Sanger), applies to all health care service plan contracts, including Medi-Cal managed care plan contracts, and health insurance policies issued, amended, or renewed on or after January 1, 2022 that provide coverage for pediatric services and preventive care. It builds on the work of the [ACEs Aware initiative](#)—which offers Medi-Cal providers training, screening tools, clinical protocols, and payment for screening children and adults for ACEs. Since January 2020, Medi-Cal providers have screened more than half a million patients.

“It only takes one screening to change the trajectory of an individual's life,” said California Surgeon General, Dr. Nadine Burke Harris. “I look forward to continuing this transformative work with ACEs Aware, our government partners and our health care providers—as we continue working towards our goal of cutting ACEs and toxic stress by half in a generation”

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ABOUT THE OFFICE OF THE CALIFORNIA SURGEON GENERAL

The role of California Surgeon General was created in 2019 by Governor Gavin Newsom to advise the Governor, serve as a leading spokesperson on matters of public health, and drive solutions to our most pressing public health challenges. As California's first Surgeon General, Dr. Nadine Burke Harris has established early childhood, health equity, and ACEs and toxic stress as key priorities. Dr. Burke Harris has set a bold goal to reduce ACEs and toxic stress by half in one generation.