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Slowly, it appears to me, our country and Alaskans are awakening to the significance of mental health to the overall health of our population. In addition the importance of very early childhood experiences on lifelong physical and mental health is now well documented by high quality, reproduced evidence. The period from birth to three years where 80% of the adult head size occurs not by producing more neurons but by the development of more connections and interactions between existing neurons. This “wiring” progresses as a result of stimulation and experience as the infant learns. Conversely a lack of stimulation can lead to permanent pruning away of unused neurons (why waste energy on unused neurons?) and permanent lifelong consequences. We also know that our brains are amazing at learning but very poor at unlearning. (Ever try to unlearn how to ride a bike?) These facts taken together clarify why very early childhood experiences of abuse, neglect, conflict, etc. are not “unlearned” but have to be treated later, if they get any attention at all. Without treatment (or prevention) anxiety, depression, substance abuse, shorter life spans and productivity, and cycling of the effects to the next generation occur. This describes a situation where once again prevention clearly is far less expensive and more successful than treatment. Thus I greatly support HCR 21 despite the clear present economic realities. We ALL need to provide all the support we can muster for such an important effort to prevent adverse childhood experiences.

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