



Sunshine Community Health Center

HC 89 Box 8190, Mile 4.4 Talkeetna Spur Rd, Talkeetna, AK 99676
Willow Clinic: PO Box 1049, 24091 Long Lake Road, Willow, AK 99688
Telephone: 907-733-2273 Fax: 907-733-1735 E-Mail: SCHC@sunshineclinic.org

March 15, 2016

Dear Governor Bill Walker,

Child abuse and neglect in Alaska are a chronic and devastating problem. To overcome the high rates of trauma experienced by our children and youth, prevention efforts need to be deployed at multiple levels.

Unfortunately, the trauma and sustained toxic stress associated with child abuse, neglect and a list of other adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) such as incarceration of a parent and drug and alcohol abuse have been shown to undermine a child's healthy development. Such factors damage the developing brain and adversely impact a child's learning and behavior, making academic achievement more difficult. Moreover, such factors increase susceptibility to physical and mental illness and put children at higher risk for involvement in delinquent and/or criminal activities. When children do not have equal opportunity for healthy growth and development, we are putting the future society of Alaska at risk.

The long-term effects of ACEs in Alaska are costly. High ACE scores are linked to social, emotional and cognitive impairment; adoption of health-risk behaviors; chronic medical diseases; disability and social problems; and early death. More than 65 percent of Alaskans have experienced adverse childhood experiences in their lifetimes. Additionally, Alaska has some of the highest adverse trauma rates among the five other states surveyed by the Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance Systems survey (Washington, Louisiana, Tennessee, Arkansas, and New Mexico).

Preventing childhood trauma and supporting those who have experienced childhood trauma will save the State of Alaska significant costs across the board including spending on health care, Medicaid, incarceration and juvenile justice systems. According to a recent report by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the average lifetime cost per victim of nonfatal child maltreatment is over \$48,000 per child. There are thousands of reports of child maltreatment every year in Alaska, meaning we are spending tens of millions of dollars every year for costs related to child abuse.

Sunshine Community Health Center supports HCR21 as one component of a statewide prevention system needed to help reduce traumatic experiences among our children, but also as an investment in our state's infrastructure and future.

Sincerely,

Shelis Jorgensen, DNP, ANP
Medical Director