

Recent Colorado Policy Fails to Address Child Care Worker Needs

Adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) are traumatic events that occur before the age of 18 and affect the majority of adults (61.7%) in Colorado.^{2,3,5,7} Last week, the ACE Hardware volunteer group proposed a policy that requires all child care workers in Colorado receive training which discusses ACEs, focusing on trauma and resilience.¹ However, this policy raises ethical issues which must be addressed to truly serve its purpose: increasing the quality of life of Colorado's children.

The most significant issue with this policy is that Colorado contains several child-care deserts in the very communities where children are most at-risk of experiencing ACEs.^{4,6} Child care deserts are areas where residents with children have little to no access to child care services.^{4,6} One example is the zip code 80249, which contains northeast Denver and areas of Aurora and is "one of the biggest child care deserts in the state"⁶

According to the Colorado Children's Campaign, Colorado sees child-care deserts occur in mostly rural areas, urban areas where families earn below the average median income, Latino and American Indian and Alaska Native (AIAN) communities, and areas with a decreased maternal labor force.⁴ This is especially important as women, people of color, and low income households are at higher risk of experiencing ACEs compared to the general population.³ This policy affects child care facilities which are already established. However, it does not increase access in those places where child care is needed. Thus, the government should increase access to child care across the state, reduce the burden on parents, and protect more children from ACEs.

In addition, this training does not address secondary traumatic stress (STS) in child care workers. The National Child Traumatic Stress network defines STS as the emotional stress one feels after listening to another's trauma.⁸ STS can have serious mental health consequences for child care workers.^{8,9} However, the ACE policy does not attempt to address the effects of STS, nor does it aim to support workers through further staff trainings or interventions such as "supportive supervision" or "workplace self-help groups."⁹ Thus, while the policy places the responsibility of identifying and helping children who have experienced ACEs on child care workers, it lacks support for the workers themselves as they navigate this complex and often distressing landscape.

The state of Colorado has an increased awareness of ACEs and seeks to decrease their burden on its children. That is a great purpose, one which is easily supported by its citizens. However, this specific policy is lacking. While training child care workers makes sense, in reality the issue is more complex. All children in the state must have access to child care, and the mental health of the workers themselves must be supported. I implore the ACE Hardware volunteer group to improve their policy using these ethical considerations before moving further. They must do so to prove they are fighting for the children of this state, for their well-beings, and for their futures.

References

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