

We Can Prevent Childhood Adversity

The Science of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) Shows We Can Improve People's Lives and Help Them Thrive

Understanding ACEs

Adverse childhood experiences, or ACEs, are potentially traumatic events in childhood (0-17 years), such as neglect and experiencing or witnessing violence.

ACEs include aspects of a child's environment that can undermine their sense of safety, stability, and bonding, such as living in a household with substance misuse or mental health problems.

ACEs can negatively impact physical, mental, emotional, and behavioral development. ACEs can also have lasting effects on health, well-being, and prosperity well into adulthood.



Many People Report ACEs

According to data collected from adults across all 50 states and the District of Columbia between 2011 and 2020:



Types of ACEs

Abuse

- Emotional
- Physical
- Sexual

Household Challenges*

- Substance misuse
- Mental illness, including attempted suicide
- Divorce or separation
- Incarceration
- Intimate Partner Violence or Domestic Violence

Neglect

- Emotional
- Physical

Other Adversity

- Bullying
- Community violence
- Natural disasters
- Refugee or wartime experiences
- Witnessing or experiencing acts of terrorism

* The child lives with a parent, caregiver, or other adult who experiences one or more of these challenges.

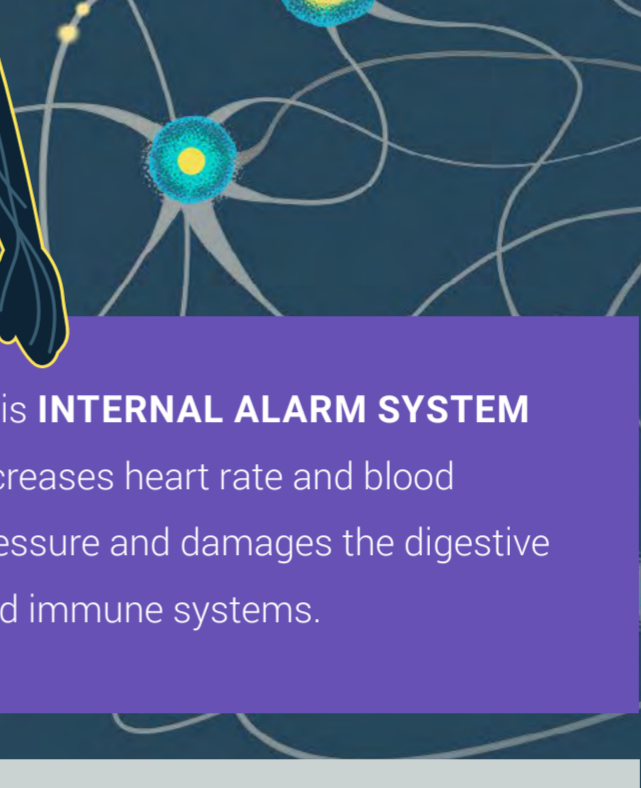
Some Groups Are More Likely to Have Experienced ACEs

Multiple studies show that people who identified as members of these groups as adults reported experiencing significantly more ACEs:

- Non-Hispanic American Indian or Alaska Native people and multiracial people
- People with less than a high school education
- People making less than \$15,000 per year
- People who are unemployed or unable to work
- Lesbian, gay, or bisexual people

ACEs Can Accumulate and Their Effects Last Beyond Childhood

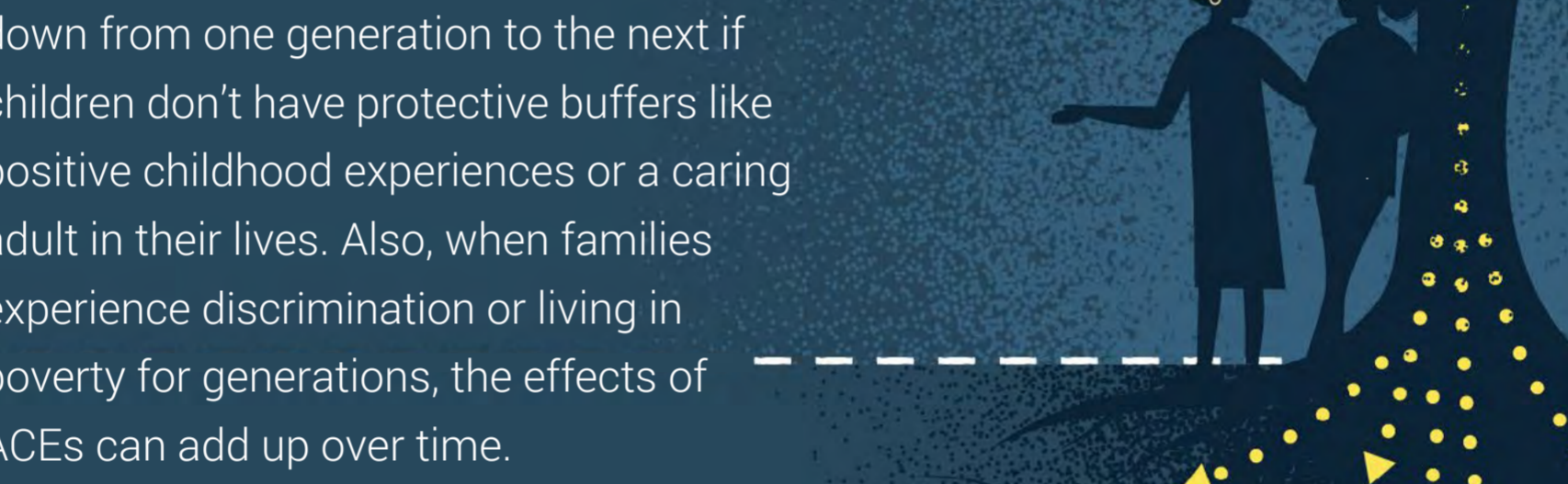
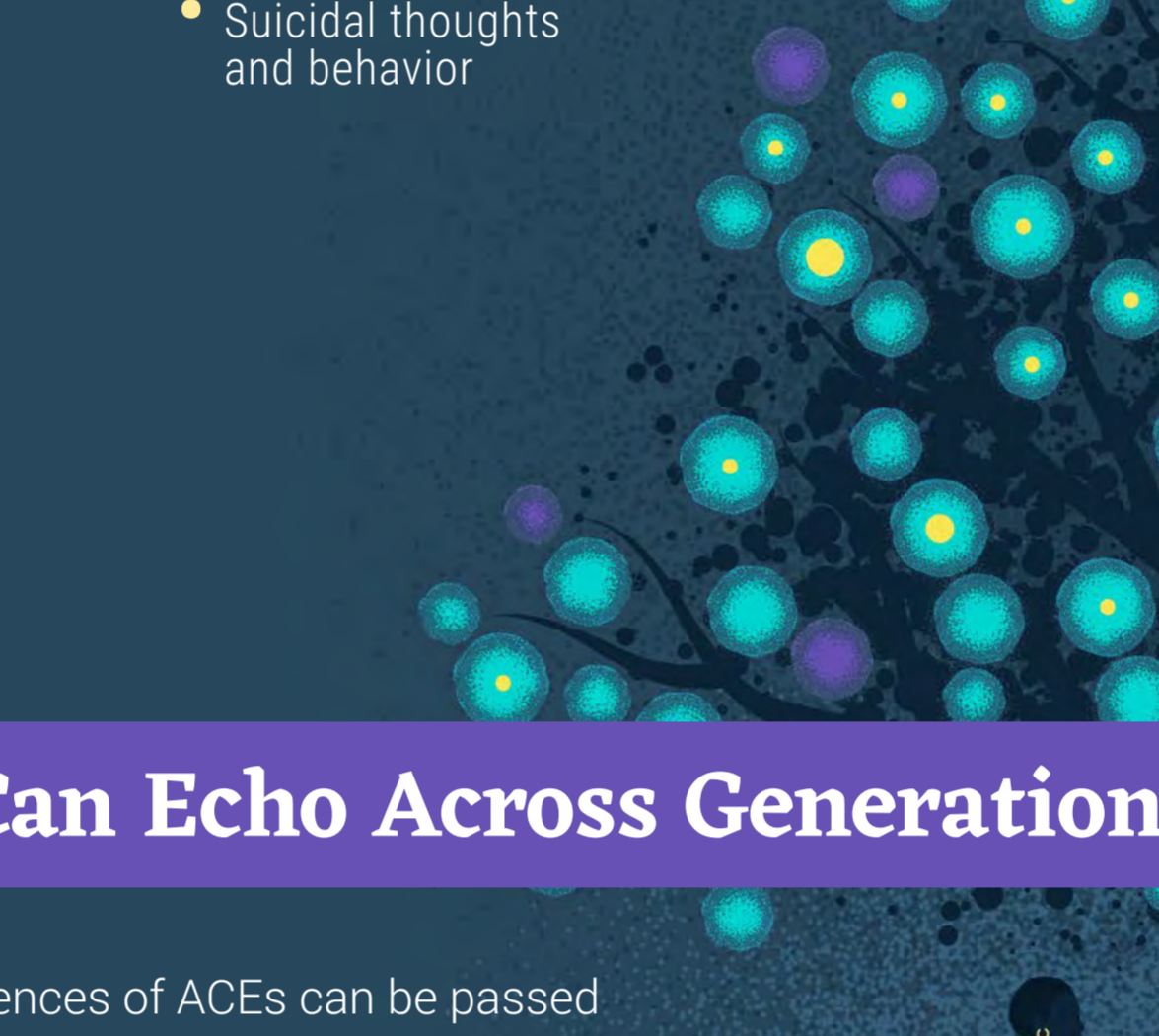
The effects of ACEs can add up over time and affect a person throughout their life. Children who repeatedly and chronically experience adversity can suffer from **TOXIC STRESS**.



Toxic stress happens when the brain endures repeated stress or danger, then releases **FIGHT-OR-FLIGHT HORMONES** like cortisol.

This **INTERNAL ALARM SYSTEM** increases heart rate and blood pressure and damages the digestive and immune systems.

Toxic stress can disrupt **ORGAN, TISSUE, AND BRAIN DEVELOPMENT**. Over time this can limit a person's ability to process information, make decisions, interact with others, and regulate emotions. These consequences may follow a person into adulthood.



ACEs Can Increase Risk for Poor Social Outcomes, Disease, and Death

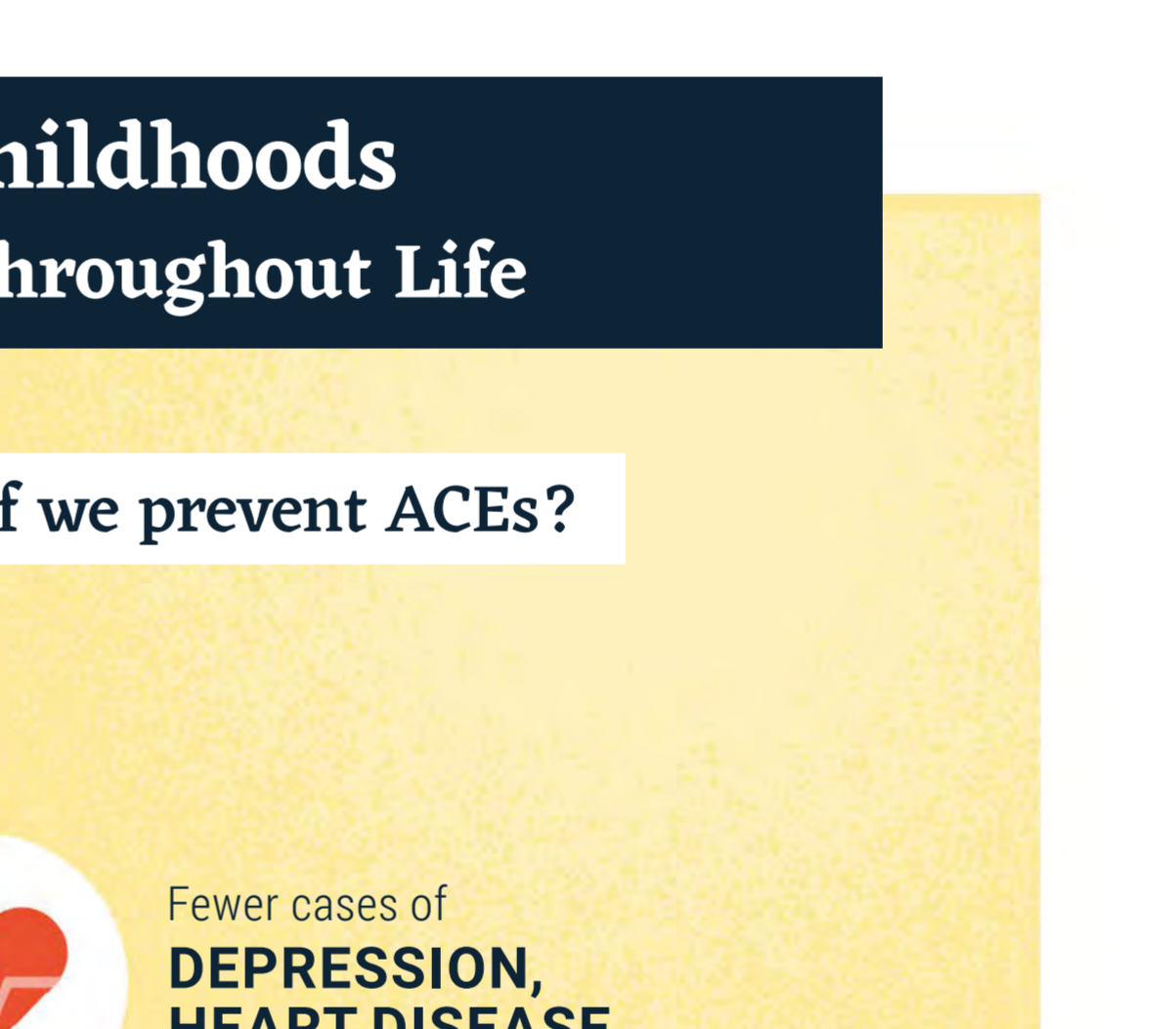
Research shows that experiencing a higher number of ACEs is associated with many of the leading causes of death like heart disease and cancer.

- Chronic Health Conditions**
 - Coronary heart disease
 - Stroke
 - Asthma
 - Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD)
 - Cancer
 - Kidney disease
 - Diabetes
 - Obesity
- Health Risk Behaviors**
 - Smoking
 - Excessive alcohol use
 - Substance misuse
 - Sexual inactivity
 - Sexual risk behaviors
 - Suicidal thoughts and behavior
- Social Outcomes**
 - Lack of health insurance
 - Unemployment
 - Less than high school diploma or equivalent education
- Mental Health Conditions and Substance Use Disorders**
 - Depression
 - Substance use disorder including alcohol, opioids, and tobacco



ACEs Can Echo Across Generations

The consequences of ACEs can be passed down from one generation to the next if children don't have protective buffers like positive childhood experiences or a caring adult in their lives. Also, when families experience discrimination or living in poverty for generations, the effects of ACEs can add up over time.



We Can Create Positive Childhood Experiences

The science of ACEs also reveals opportunities to improve the lives of all children and adults.



- Strengthen families' financial stability**
 - Paid time off
 - Child tax credits
 - Flexible and consistent work schedules
- Promote social norms that protect against violence**
 - Positive parenting practices
 - Prevention efforts involving men and boys
- Help kids have a good start**
 - Early learning programs
 - Affordable preschool and childcare programs

- Teach healthy relationship skills**
 - How to handle conflict
 - Negative feeling management
 - Pressure from peers
 - Healthy non-violent dating relationships
- Connect youth with activities and caring adults**
 - School or community mentoring programs
 - After school activities
- Intervene to lessen immediate and long-term harms**
 - ACEs education
 - Therapy
 - Family-centered treatment for substance abuse

Healthy Childhoods Have Benefits Throughout Life

What could happen if we prevent ACEs?



Fewer cases of **DEPRESSION, HEART DISEASE, AND OBESITY**

15% REDUCTION in the number of adults who are **UNEMPLOYED**

16% REDUCTION in the number of adults with **KIDNEY DISEASE**

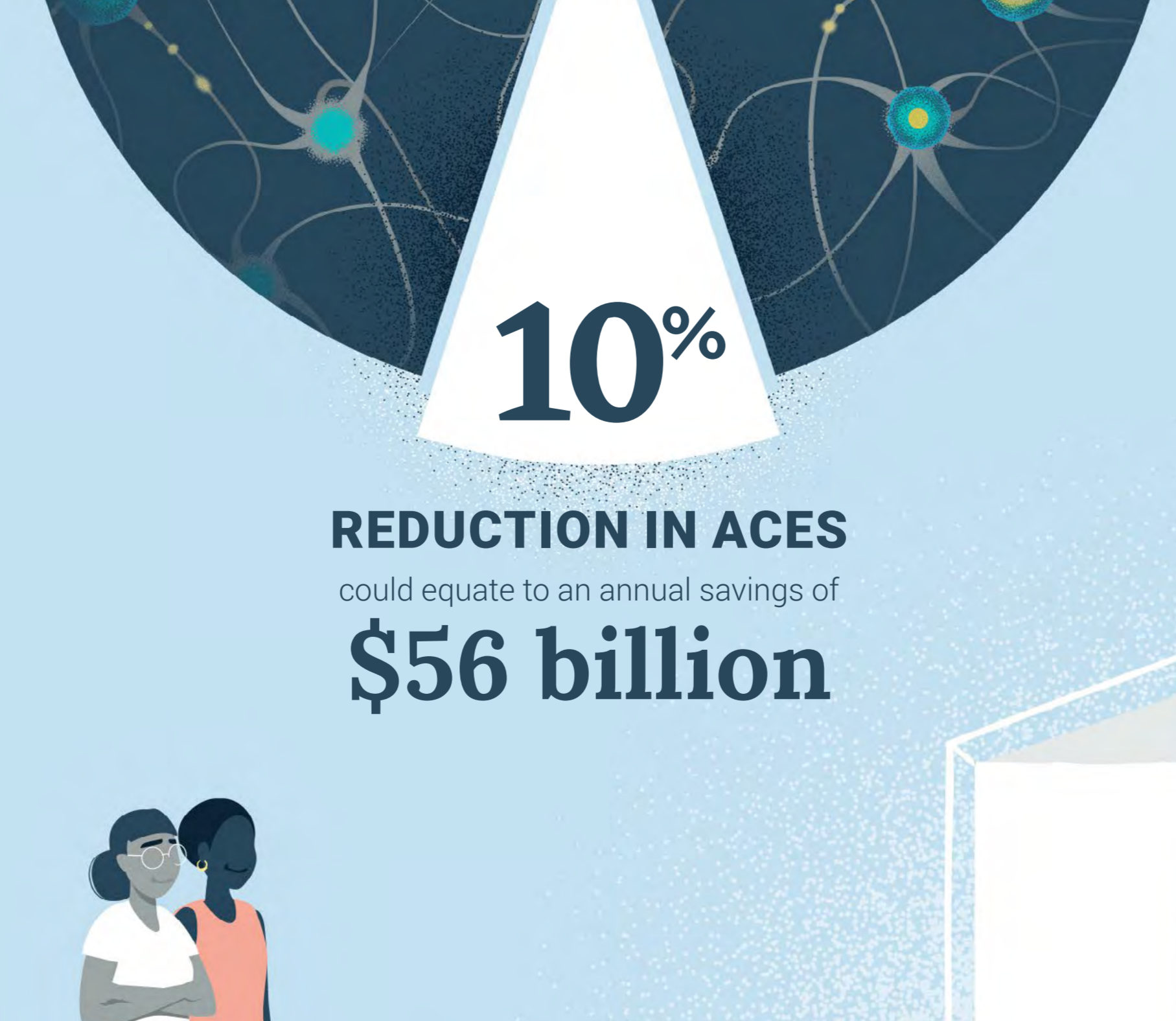
24-27% REDUCTION in the number of adults with respiratory problems such as **ASTHMA AND COPD**

33% REDUCTION in the number of adults who **SMOKE**

44% REDUCTION in the number of adults with **DEPRESSION**

Positive Childhood Experiences Can Help the Economy

The primary prevention of ACEs — stopping ACEs before they start — would benefit the economy and relieve pressures on healthcare systems.



Healthy Childhoods Start Now

Working together, we can help create neighborhoods, communities, and a world in which every child can thrive.

Learn how you can help!

vetoviolence.cdc.gov/apps/aces-infographic

