



This internal use document provides high-level talking points about ACES Aware and the COVID-19 emergency. This information is intended to provide background and additional information, as well as to ensure message consistency. This document is not for distribution.

ACES Aware and the COVID-19 Emergency

- The mission of the ACES Aware initiative is to change and save lives by helping providers understand the importance of screening for Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs), and training providers to respond with trauma-informed care that mitigates the impacts of toxic stress. This mission is even more important today as we address the stress and resulting health impacts of the COVID-19 emergency and the long-term effects of measures used to curb the spread of the virus.
- The health impacts of this pandemic go beyond the COVID-19 cases. Many patients are experiencing disruptions in their access to medications and care or are even delaying needed care out of fear of COVID-19.
 - What's more is that the stress caused by outbreak, the necessary physical distancing measures to slow the spread of the virus and the resulting distress due to lost wages, unemployment, and school closures are taking an intense toll on our brains and bodies.
 - These secondary impacts will acutely affect the health and well-being of Californians in the weeks, months and years ahead.
- Experience and research have demonstrated that crises including widespread communicable disease outbreaks (such as COVID-19) and natural disasters result in short- and long-term physical and mental health impacts, including increased cardiovascular, metabolic, immunologic, and neuropsychiatric risk. These result from disruption of access to care and the resources needed for health maintenance, as well as to overactivity of the biological stress response, also known as the [toxic stress response](#).



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- Providers can help to address and mitigate negative health outcomes associated with toxic stress by responding with disaster-responsive, [trauma-informed care](#), and treatment plans that also include [measures to help regulate the stress response system](#).
- This is how ACEs Aware can help, by giving providers the information and tools they need to care for their patients during these extraordinary times. During this time, ACEs Aware will:
 - Continue to provide information on the science of the short- and long-term health impacts of toxic stress resulting from ACEs, as well as stress created by the COVID-19 emergency and associated mitigating factors such as social distancing, economic disruption, and uncertainty.
 - Help Medi-Cal providers and their teams make the connection that training on ACEs and toxic stress physiology will enhance their understanding of the stress-related health impacts associated with the COVID-19 emergency.
 - Continue to provide evidence-based information on interventions and buffering factors that can be used to enhance resilience and mitigate the impacts of toxic stress on health.
 - Support Medi-Cal providers and their teams to integrate evidence-based interventions and disaster-responsive, trauma-informed care into their clinical practices in the short and long term to support the providers and their medical staff as well as the patients.
 - Continue to provide information on how providers can apply stress management information and practices to their own self-care.
- ACEs Aware is developing a series of micro campaigns to support this work, with the following key themes:
 - **LEARN:** Understand that the COVID-19 emergency is a stressor with short- and long-term health effects, and individuals with ACEs and/or existing health conditions are especially vulnerable.
 - **ACT:** Apply the principles of trauma-informed care to help patients, including enhancing evidence-based buffering and protective



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factors to mitigate the secondary health impacts of the COVID-19 emergency. Use and adapt buffering interventions to support provider self-care during the COVID-19 response and encourage providers to share those tools with their teams.

- **INTEGRATE:** Support providers in bringing their new knowledge about the secondary health effects of the COVID-19 emergency (including expected increase in ACEs and increased morbidity and mortality) and about how to respond with disaster-responsive, evidence-based trauma-informed care into sustained practice.

Find more information, including COVID-19-related resources for providers, at ACEsAware.org.