

# Congress of the United States

## House of Representatives

COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND REFORM

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### Opening Statement Chairman Elijah E. Cummings

#### Hearing on “Identifying, Preventing, and Treating Childhood Trauma: A Pervasive Public Health Issue That Needs Greater Federal Attention”

July 11, 2019

Today, we are examining a critical issue that does not get enough attention here in Congress or throughout the nation—childhood trauma.

**Childhood trauma is a pervasive public health issue with long term negative health effects that cost the United States billions of dollars.**

In 1998, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) published a landmark study that found that adults who suffered from adverse childhood experiences—or ACEs—are at a much greater risk of several leading causes of death, including heart disease, lung disease, cancer, substance use disorder, and suicide.

The study examined the effects of adverse childhood experiences such as abuse, neglect, or separation from a parent, and it also examined the long-term effects that these events have on children throughout the rest of their lives.

The science is powerful. Traumatic experiences can injure the developing brains of children, create life-long impairments to their ability to manage stress and regulate emotions, and significantly increase the likelihood of negative health outcomes.

As we will hear today, a growing number of researchers, medical professionals, public health experts, and government officials warn that childhood trauma may be one of the most consequential and costly public health issues facing our nation today.

The CDC recently estimated that cases of substantiated child maltreatment in 2015 alone will generate consequences that will cost the United States \$428 billion. As staggering as that sounds, the CDC warns that this estimate likely undercounts the true costs to our nation because it examined only some of the types of trauma that children experience.

The good news—and the reason we are holding this hearing today—is that childhood trauma is preventable and treatable. The effects of traumatic experiences can be identified, damage can be healed, and children who have experienced trauma can become thriving adults.

**To do this, we need a comprehensive federal approach that recognizes the severe impact of childhood trauma and prioritizes prevention and treatment.**

I applaud the efforts of dedicated professionals at the CDC and other agencies to address childhood trauma. However, efforts at the federal level are still severely underfunded, and they do not provide the comprehensive, whole-child approach we need to combat this crisis.

Childhood trauma is a nationwide public health issue associated with an epidemic of negative health consequences. For example, in 2017, substance use disorder and suicide took approximately 150,000 lives in this nation and reduced life expectancy for the third year in a row.

The federal government should be providing national leadership and resources to combat this public health epidemic.

**Some states and localities are implementing promising programs to help prevent and treat childhood trauma that can inform federal solutions.**

State and local public health agencies are on the front lines of the childhood trauma crisis. They are confronting many of the negative health consequences that trauma produces.

Sadly, I see this every day in Baltimore, where far, far too many of our community's children are suffering severe trauma, including experiencing or witnessing violence or losing parents to violence, incarceration, or substance use.

As we will hear today, state and local agencies are pioneering innovative interventions to address the crisis. The Government Accountability Office has highlighted several of these promising efforts. However, it has also warned that states are facing limitations in funding, technical capacity, and personnel to address this complex and multi-faceted challenge.

As a nation, we have a significant economic incentive and, more importantly, a profound moral imperative to ensure that our children have the opportunity to thrive and succeed. That is why we are having this hearing today, and I thank you all for being here.

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