

LOCAL

## Prescriptions for a better childhood: How to avoid adverse experiences in New Mexico

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Katherine Ortega Courtney — a former researcher and policy analyst for New Mexico’s juvenile justice department and Children, Youth and Families Department — and Dominic Cappello are the authors of "Anna, Age Eight," a 2017 book about childhood trauma that has inspired the creation of an institute at Northern New Mexico College.

They outline eight basic changes that need to take place in order to heal and eradicate Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) in New Mexico.

### Health care

Many families go without needed medical and dental care because of poverty. This leads to stress, which increases ACEs.

**New Mexico Legislature 2019 recap:** What passed and what didn't?

### Housing

The lack of affordable housing means many kids live in “substandard units in the worst neighborhoods, while making it all the harder [for a parent] to flee an abusive relationship.”

**Las Cruces:** Special financing may be available for homebuyers in economically distressed neighborhoods

### Education and family-centered schools

“The more services we can pack into schools, after school and summer programs, mentoring programs, social workers, case managers, employment centers, medical, reproductive, and

behavioral health services, on site tutoring, the better. ... [I]f we put all of these services in a place that kids are going anyway, they are far more likely to take advantage of them.”

## **Job training and living-wage jobs**

“More living wage jobs means fewer ACEs.” Adequate, affordable (or free) food for all. Even with SNAP and food pantries, many poor families continue to struggle to provide enough food for their children.

## **Public transportation**

If families can't get to medical appointments, school or work, ACEs increase.

**Pedal prep:** Las Cruces kids learn bike safety at Family Bike Fiesta

## **Behavioral health care**

“We won't be healing and preventing childhood trauma and maltreatment without a robust behavioral healthcare system in every community.”

Evenly distribute public resources to rich and poor alike. “[W]e cannot afford the lost economic productivity, tax revenue, and increased addiction and crime that neglecting the kids in our less attractive zip codes would produce.”

**New Mexico:** House OKs bill to establish Early Childhood Education and Care Department

*From "Anna, Age Eight: The Data-Driven Prevention of Childhood Trauma and Maltreatment" by Katherine Ortega Courtney and Dominic Cappello*