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**First 5 California Announces Launch of Stronger Starts Campaign Raising Awareness of Toxic Stress Response in Young Children**

*Nearly two million children in California are affected by adverse childhood experiences*

**SACRAMENTO, California (June 1, 2023)** - Today, First 5 California announced the official launch of its Stronger Starts campaign at a celebratory event held at the Sacramento Zoo. First Partner of California Jennifer Siebel Newsom, California Surgeon General Dr. Diana E. Ramos, and Sacramento Kings NBA player Domantas Sabonis joined First 5 California Executive Director Jackie Thu-Huong Wong to discuss the impact that toxic stress has on children's development and long-term mental and physical health.

The Stronger Starts campaign is a First 5 California initiative to raise awareness among California parents and caregivers about Toxic Stress Response in children 0-5 years old caused by Adverse Childhood Experiences, also known as ACEs. The campaign helps parents and caregivers learn about what toxic stress is; the physiological, psychological, and socio-emotional effects on children; and how ACEs can lead to its development.

"Adverse childhood experiences and toxic stress are signs of a public health crisis that is impacting children and families in California, who have gone through difficult, oftentimes, traumatic experiences," said Jackie Thu-Huong Wong. "Through our Stronger Starts campaign, we are bringing to light the importance of recognizing the effects of these traumatic events on children's developmental growth and providing actionable strategies for parents and caregivers to create safe, stable, nurturing relationships and environments. With the support of our partners and state leaders, we hope to ensure that all California children have healthy, happy and successful futures."

In California, one in three children are at risk for toxic stress and nearly two million children are affected by ACEs. Being in a constant state of stress can affect a child's brain development, immune system and stress-response system, impacting their ability to learn, and their body's ability to recover from illness and infection. Physical symptoms of prolonged toxic stress can cause issues into adulthood, including stunted growth, obesity, asthma, heart disease, high blood pressure and diabetes.

"California is committed to ensuring every child across our state has the best possible start in life," said First Partner Siebel Newsom. "Toxic stress has a direct impact on children's overall physical and mental well-being, so we have to act with evidence-based tools and support to

prevent and address suffering before it becomes a crisis. That's why First 5 California's Stronger Starts campaign is a critical investment for children and families experiencing—or at risk of experiencing—an adverse childhood experience.”

After the campaign announcement, Wong joined California's former Surgeon General and ACEs expert Dr. Nadine Burke Harris, ACE Resource Network Executive Director Sarah Marikos, and Rescue Agency Senior Vice President Brandon Tate for an in-depth discussion about ACEs and how parents, teachers and adults can buffer against the effects of toxic stress.

“Addressing ACEs in young children in primary care settings is vital to a child's growth and a family's outcomes,” said former Surgeon General Dr. Burke Harris. “ACEs can literally get under the skin and can negatively affect a child's physical and mental health for years to come. However, early awareness and intervention can promote a strong, healthy start for young children and a positive path forward for their families.”

To learn more about the Stronger Starts campaign, toxic stress and ACEs, and resources to navigate children's emotions after a traumatic event, parents and caregivers can find additional information at [first5california.com](http://first5california.com).

### **About First 5 California**

First 5 California was established in 1998 when voters passed Proposition 10, which taxes tobacco products to fund services for children ages 0 to 5 and their families. First 5 California programs and resources are designed to educate and support teachers, parents, and caregivers in the critical role they play during a child's first five years—to help California kids receive the best possible start in life and thrive. For more information, please visit [www.ccfc.ca.gov](http://www.ccfc.ca.gov).

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