Outline

- Background science
- RWJF Commission to Build a Healthier America
- What can we do
Growing up poor isn’t merely hard on kids. It might also be bad for their brains. A long-term study of cognitive development in lower- and middle-class students found strong links between childhood poverty, physiological stress and adult memory.

The findings support a neurobiological hypothesis for why impoverished children consistently fare worse than their middle-class counterparts in school, and eventually in life.

"Chronically elevated physiological stress is a plausible model for how poverty could get into the brain and eventually interfere with achievement," wrote Cornell University child-development researchers Gary Evans and Michelle Schamberg in a paper published Monday in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences.
Investing in children: Younger is better

Rates of Return to Human Capital Investment at Different Ages: Return to an Extra Dollar at Various Ages

Adapted from Heckman JJ. Skill Formation & the Economics of Investing in Disadvantaged Children. Science 2006; 312: 1900-02
Giving Children a Healthy Start Pays Off

- Estimates are that, compared with their counterparts who participate in high-quality early childhood interventions, at-risk children without such services are:
  - 25 percent more likely to drop out of school
  - 40 percent more likely to become a teen parent
  - 50 percent more likely to be placed in special education
  - 60 percent more likely never to attend college
  - 70 percent more likely to be arrested for a violent crime

HEALTH AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT WORK SIDE-BY-SIDE BUT ARE STRANGERS
Health Consequences of Poverty

- Increased infant mortality
- Low birth weight
- Chronic diseases: asthma, obesity, poor development
- Food insecurity, poorer nutrition and growth
- Less access to quality health care
- Increased accidental injury,
- Higher exposure to toxic stress

Time to Act: Investing in the Health of our Children and Communities

Jan 13, 2014
New RWJF Recommendations

- Invest in foundations of lifelong physical/mental wellbeing in early childhood
- Create communities that foster health-promoting behaviors
- Broaden health care to promote health outside of medical system
Potential Actions

- Be a voice
- New vital signs
- Partner with early childhood education supporters