

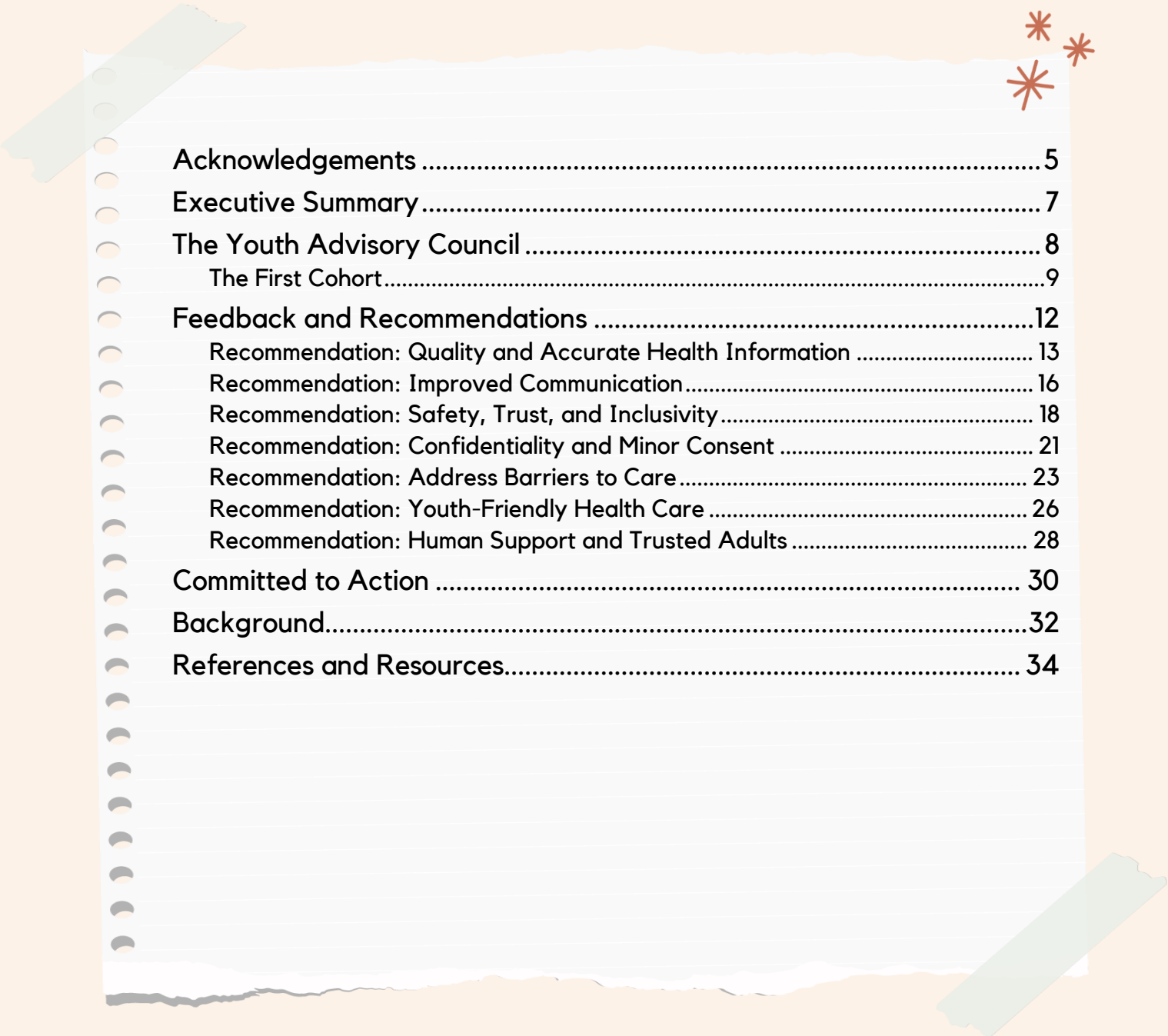


Washington State  
Department of Health

Adolescent and  
Young Adult Health

# Youth Advisory Council REPORT

2022 Cohort



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## Acknowledgements

The Youth Advisory Council and this report are part of community engagement efforts and activities in the Adolescent and Young Adult Health Unit at the Washington State Department of Health. Findings and recommendations shared here are a summary of the Youth Advisory Council's feedback with support from the Adolescent Health Team. This work would not be possible without the amazing young Washingtonians who trusted us with their time and their thoughts, ideas, and recommendations to improve health care for teens and young adults. They are an inspiration.

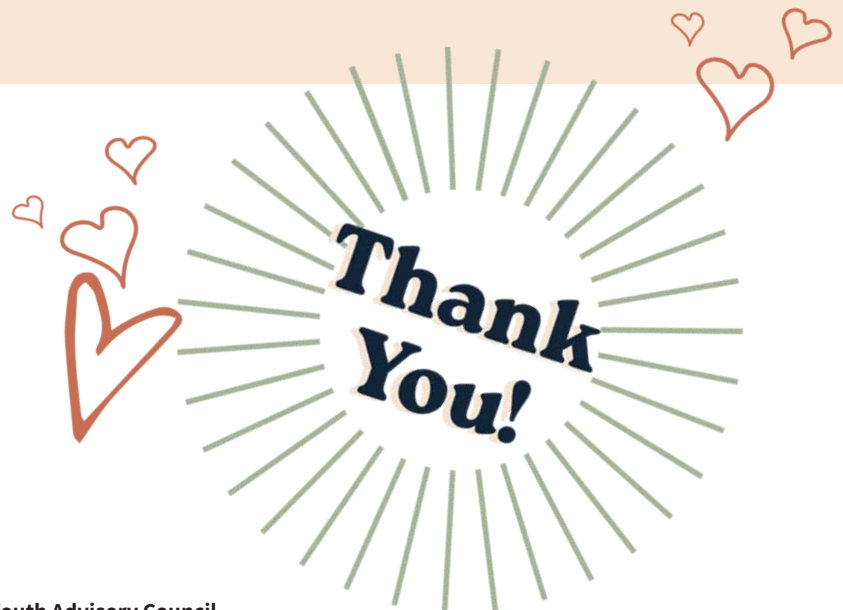
## The Youth Advisory Council Members of 2022

First name and age at the time of service

Alejandra 21  
Alyssa 21  
Anisa 19  
Ari 16  
Blake 13  
Chanthea 15  
Clara 17  
Colin 18  
Darren 14  
Desiree 15  
Eduardo 14

Feier 18  
Gabriela 21  
Jack 16  
Josue 15  
Judah 15  
Juwayriyah 18  
Leah 19  
Kenzie 18  
Marcela 16  
Maz 19  
Micah 15

Miles 15  
Neva 15  
Paola 17  
Rano 20  
Simone 16  
Sol 18  
Stephanie 17  
Susan 16  
Tracey 19  
Violet 18





We also thank our colleagues, partners, and collaborative agencies for their support, insight and expertise in youth and community engagement. Their willingness to share their experiences, knowledge, time, and energy with us made this work happen.

<b>Name</b>	<b>Agency/Organization</b>
Passia Abraham	Department of Health
Asia Brown	Northwest Portland Area Indian Health Board
Ella DeVerse	Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction
Nikki Dyer	Department of Health
Zoey Hogan	Department of Health
Christymarie Jackson	Department of Health
Valeria Jones	North Sound Behavioral Health ASO
Starleen Maharaj Lewis	Department of Health
Greg Williamson	Department of Children Youth and Families

Finally, this work would not be possible without the full support of the Department of Health leaders who support the Adolescent and Young Adult Health Unit and team:

<b>Name</b>	<b>Role at the Department of Health</b>
Dr. Umair A. Shah	Secretary of Health
Lacy Fehrenbach	Deputy Secretary, Prevention, Safety, and Health
Michele Roberts	Assistant Secretary, Division of Prevention and Community Health
Stephanie Dunkel	Deputy Assistant Secretary, Division of Prevention and Community Health
Katie Eilers	Director, Office of Family and Community Health Improvement and Title V Maternal Child Health Block Grant
Astrid Newell	Section Manager for Thriving Children and Youth
Rabeeha Ghaffar	Adolescent and Young Adult Health Program Manager
Brad Klos	Evaluation Unit Supervisor



# Executive Summary

The Department of Health's (DOH) Adolescent and Young Adult Health Youth Advisory Council (YAC or the Council) is a formal structure for young people to participate in public health programming at the DOH. Members of the Council come from diverse backgrounds, have unique lived experiences, and live in different parts of Washington. They come together to discuss health topics that are important to them, including barriers, challenges and youth-friendly solutions to issues young people face in health care. Their contributions and ideas help shape adolescent health programming at DOH, including our Title V Maternal Child Health Block Grant activities.

Thirty-three Council members ages 13-21 participated in six meetings in 2022. They discussed topics like physical and behavioral health, youth-friendly care, and confidentiality and consent in health care. Members shared valuable insight, expertise, advice, and opinions with each other, and DOH staff. They gave feedback on health care, and identified areas for systems-level improvement, provider interaction issues, and how to support young people better.

This report summarizes their feedback and recommendations. We will share this document with DOH programs that serve teens and young adults, state-agency partners, youth-serving organizations, and clinical and service providers in the health care systems working with youth.

## We learned from the YAC that young people need...

Easy access to accurate, high quality, and youth-friendly health information available online and mobile.

More youth-friendly communication from providers and health systems.

Health care services and providers they trust, who are inclusive, non-judgmental, and can answer their questions and give them facts.

To understand their health care rights, including rights to consent to care and rights to confidentiality.

Adults to do more about barriers to care, including transportation, health care costs, and stigma.

Safe, compassionate, welcoming, and non-judgmental health care and support environments, offered in convenient ways using electronic tools, telehealth, and school-based health.

Support and encouragement from trusted and compassionate adults and to learn how to support each other.



# The Youth Advisory Council

The Youth Advisory Council is a group of young people from all over Washington state who provide feedback and recommendations on ways to improve health care and public health systems for teens and young adults. To do this, the YAC meets with DOH staff online every other month for about an hour and a half. During meetings, members discuss public health topics that impact adolescent and young adult health, and which align with Title V Maternal Child Health Block Grant’s adolescent health priorities ([Maternal and Child Health Block Grant | Washington State Department of Health](#)).

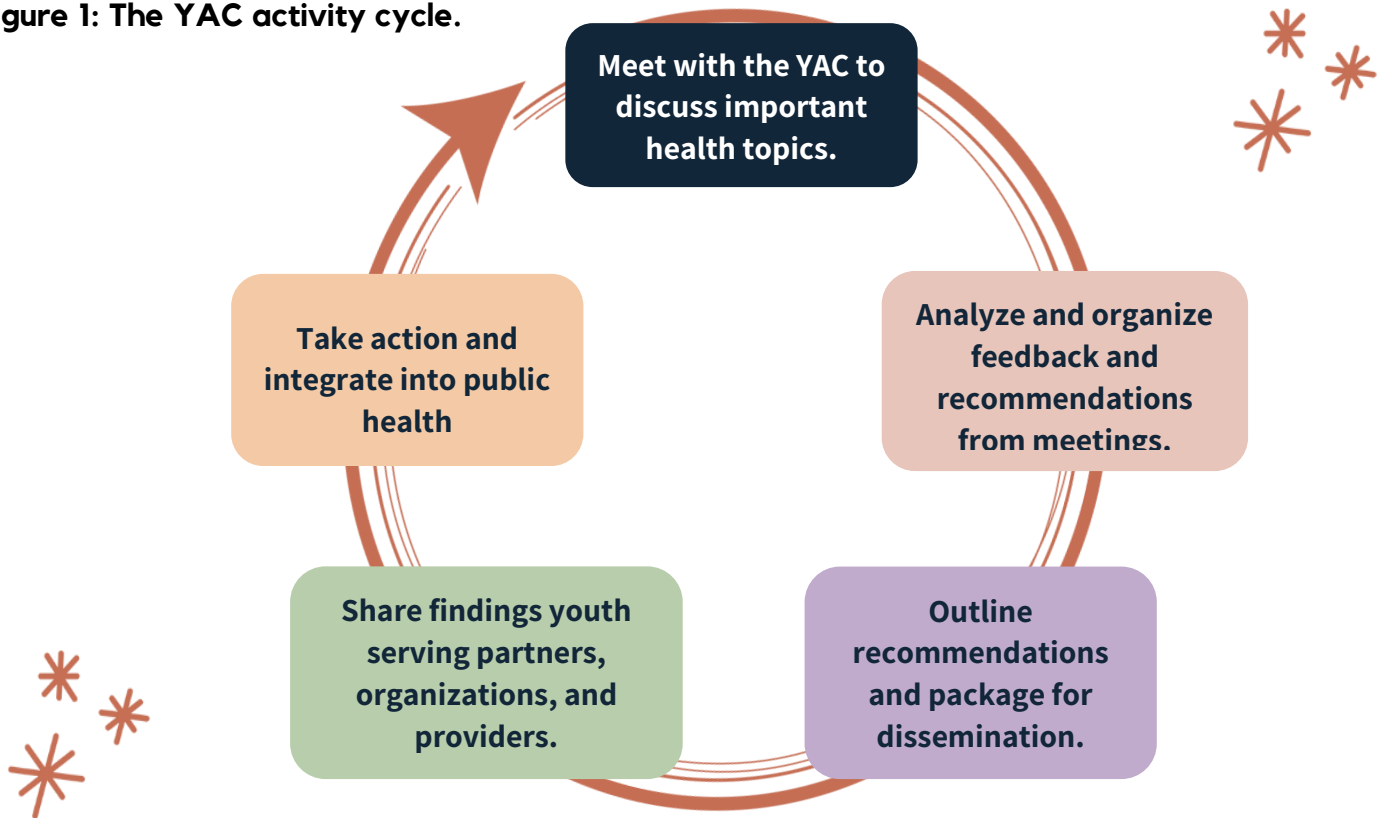
The first cohort was established in 2022. Over their 12-month service period, Council members discussed the challenges and barriers young people encounter in health care and public health systems, the issues they see, and the experiences young people have. They also shared ideas and recommendations for youth-friendly strategies to address and alleviate problems and barriers, and overall, better meet the needs of young people in the state. Ultimately, the Council outlined hundreds of lines of discussion statements and recommendations. Members received a \$50 Amazon electronic gift card as compensation for their participation, time, and expertise in each discussion and activity.

## Discussion topics in 2022:

- Youth Engagement
- Youth Mental and Behavioral Health
- Youth Friendly Care
- Adolescent Well-Visits
- Transition from Pediatric to Adult Health Care
- Confidentiality and Consent in Health Care

After meetings, DOH staff compiled members’ responses and conducted qualitative analysis to identify themes and subthemes of challenges and issues in adolescent health, and clear recommendations for solutions and action. Their feedback and recommendations are formalized in this report and packaged for dissemination to relevant programs and leadership at DOH, state agencies like the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction, the Health Care Authority, and the Department of Children, Youth and Families, youth-serving health care providers, and other organizations that serve youth.

**Figure 1: The YAC activity cycle.**



## The First Cohort

To establish the first YAC, we invited teens and young adults living in Washington to submit an online application. Applicants shared their motivation to participate in the YAC and the health-related issues they want to improve in their communities. A small team of DOH staff reviewed the applications and selected forty teens and young adults to serve for 12 months. DOH staff made thoughtful selections to ensure diverse perspectives were represented in the group, and final decisions considered applicants' backgrounds, lived experiences, and geographic location in the state.

Members of the 2022 Cohort come from different parts of Washington (Figure 2) and their ages range from 13-22. They bring diverse cultural and ethnic backgrounds, and unique identities and experiences (Figure 3). Members include people who are immigrants and whose parents are immigrants, people who identify as BIPOC, including Black, Asian, Latino/Latina, Indigenous, Native, Native American, and Alaska Native, people from the 2SLGBTQIA+ community, people with visible and invisible disabilities and special health care needs, people with chronic illness, people with mental health needs, and people who have interacted with institutional systems like juvenile justice and foster care (Figure 3). These diverse backgrounds and experiences increase representation and result in rich discussions with multiple points of view.

Figure 2: 2022 YAC Cohort – members' counties of residence.





Figure 3: 2022 YAC Cohort - responses to application questions about demographics, including sexual orientation, race/ethnicity, and gender identity.

### How would you describe your sexual orientation?

Bisexual • No response • Gay • Gay/lesbian Heterosexual  
 I choose not to identify but I am a part of the LGBTQ+ community  
 Lesbian • Pan • Queer • Straight

### How would you describe your race/ethnicity?

African American	No response	Latina
Alaskan Native	Caucasian	Latino
American Indian/ Indigenous	Central Asian	Somali/Black-American
Asian	Colombian/American	Mixed
Asian/Filipino	Filipino/Chinese	Southeast Asian/ Vietnamese
Black	Hispanic	White

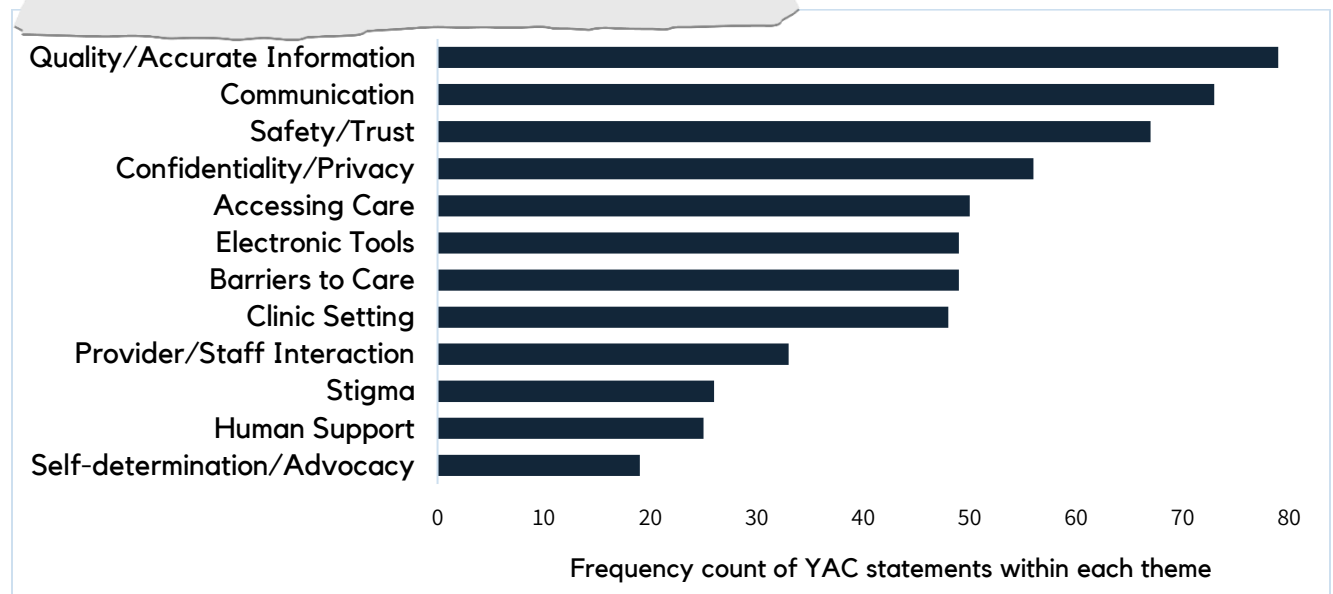
### How would you describe your gender identity?

No response • Female • Female (transgender) • Genderfluid  
 Male • Non-binary • Trans man • Trans Male

# Feedback and Recommendations

We use qualitative data analysis to organize and understand the feedback and recommendations of the YAC. This method includes coding members' individual discussion statements and organizing them into themes and subthemes for each meeting and across all meetings. Many are related to the specific discussion topics, but through this process, we learned that there are key themes that are relevant across all topics (Table 1).

**Table 1: Top YAC Discussion Themes – all topics**



This methodology helped us identify the top health care and public health needs for youth as identified by the YAC, which include:

- Better access to quality and accurate health information and education
- Improved communication about individual health information and health care
- Increased safety, inclusiveness, and respect from providers and caregivers
- More information about health care rights and guarantee of confidentiality
- More access points to youth-friendly health care and services

The following is a summary of the YAC's recommendations and includes direct quotes from Council members. Most recommendations are geared to health care systems, providers, and service professionals; they are relevant anywhere young people are being served. This report cannot fully capture the richness and depth of their discussions and should not replace ongoing youth engagement to improve health care systems.



## Recommendation: Quality and Accurate Health Information

Young people want access to accurate and quality health information and education that is youth-friendly, age appropriate, culturally relevant, and available online and on mobile devices.



The YAC emphasized that young people need better access to accurate, quality health information, on health topics they want to know about, and that is presented in youth-friendly and confidential ways. The lack of access to reliable health information is a common need identified by the YAC. Young people recognize there is a lot of misinformation about health online and on social media, but it's hard to know what is accurate and what isn't.

**Tip for Teens:**  
Find credible and  
compassionate  
health information  
at  
[doh.wa.gov/  
teenhealthhub](https://doh.wa.gov/teenhealthhub)

The YAC recommends the following to increase young people's access to quality and accurate health information:

**Use mobile applications, websites, social media,** booklets and brochures in places where young people spend time, curriculum in schools, text messaging, and direct contact with young people to get high quality, accurate, and unbiased health information to teens and young adults, and to combat online misinformation.

**Make sure health information for young people is youth-friendly and demonstrates quality and reliability.** For example, show verification that information is from trustworthy sources or has been reviewed and approved by experts.



Make resources guided towards young people, straight forward, and easy to access."



**Parents, caregivers, and other supportive adults also need access to high quality health information** so they can guide young people to reliable resources, and so they can help address misinformation.

The YAC says young people want...

"Apps and resources verified by your provider."

"Social media platform specifically...for health care resources and information that is fact-checked by professionals to avoid misinformation."

"Advertising through social media and making a specific website can help give information to youth."

"YouTube/TikTok/Interactive videos that can get the [health] information out there."

### Topics young people want information about include:

- Sexual and reproductive health, including contraception
- Physical health and wellbeing and age-appropriate development
- Gender diverse health
- Transition from pediatric care to adult care
- Confidentiality and minor consent, and advocating for health care rights
- Navigating health care and how-to-guides for common activities, like scheduling appointments, finding a provider, and getting health insurance

"A way to get information on trans healthcare services, birth control, contraceptives, etc."

"What will change when we are 18/have control of our own medical care."

"How to independently help themselves without having to rely on others or adults."

"How to stand up to being mistreated or not believed by mental health professionals."

"Understandable info on insurance."

**Young people specifically want access to accurate and straight-forward information on mental and behavioral health.** This includes how to recognize symptoms of suicide risk, substance use risk, and unhealthy or harmful behaviors, how to help and support their peers, and how and where to get help when it's needed.

“

The YAC says young people want to know....

“How do you know whether your behaviors are healthy or unhealthy?”

“How to correctly recognize different [mental health] issues.”

“More strategies on how to deal with their [mental health] difficulties.”

“Resources...that support youth with substance use and mental health in schools.”

“I think young people want to know where to get help.”

”

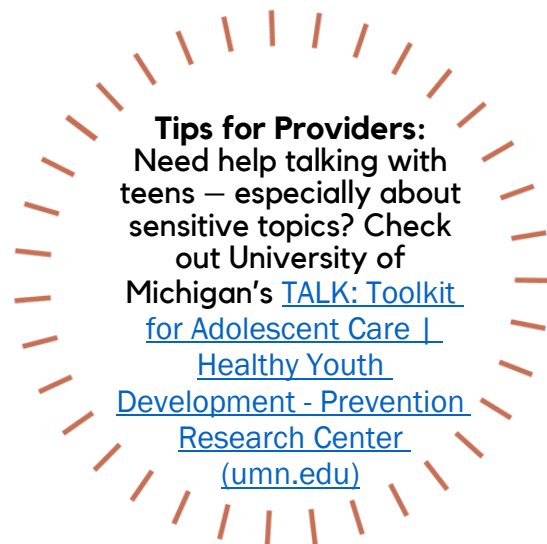




## Recommendation: Improved Communication

✦ Young people need better and more youth-friendly communication with and from providers and health systems.

The YAC suggests that health care systems, providers, and caregivers get better at communicating personal health information – like diagnoses, care plans, treatment options, and follow up needs - directly with young people. As teens and young adults learn to take charge of their health and care during adolescence, they need trust and support from trusted adults. This includes frequent and clear communication from health systems, providers, and caregivers. This development stage offers an ideal opportunity to build health literacy and navigation skills, and trust in health care providers and systems.



**Tips for Providers:**  
Need help talking with teens – especially about sensitive topics? Check out University of Michigan's [TALK: Toolkit for Adolescent Care | Healthy Youth Development - Prevention Research Center \(umn.edu\)](https://www.healthy.youth.umich.edu/)

The YAC recommends the following to improve communication with teens and young adults:

**Communicate and share important health information with teens and young adult patients**, not just adults and caregivers. Share important information about health conditions and diagnoses, but also care information, like scheduling appointments, follow ups, and care plans.

### **Communications should be clear, straight forward, and**

**factual.** This means talking with them in a factual, unbiased, and non-judgmental way, using easy-to-understand language without medical jargon. Communicate in ways that work for them, like email, text messaging, websites, and social media.

"Who you need to call, what information you need, (social insurance, etc.), list of relevant providers in your area."



**Provide clear and easy information and guidance to young patients about their health system and how to prepare for appointments.** This can include information about providers, scheduling options, transportation options, preparing for an appointment, what to expect, understanding what happened, asking questions, and how to follow up. Be sure they have access to live help if they need it.

The YAC says young people need....

"Easier bridge of connection from doctor to client."

"Text scheduling rather than waiting for a call back/leaving voicemail."

"To be allowed to make an appointment with least parental involvement possible."

"More visible directions?? I don't really know how to explain it, but going to the doctors can be confusing like figuring out where to go and who to talk too."

"Providers to communicate in a way that makes sense to youth, so explaining medical terms that may be confusing."

"Not hiding behind legalese and doctor speak, being friendly and welcoming."

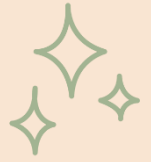
"An app on your phone or computer where all of your doctors are in one place, and they can call and schedule meetings with you from there."

It'd be helpful to have a list of things they're looking for or checking that way you know what to bring up? For example, a lot of young people might not know to bring up mental health concerns at a well visit because they think they can only talk to psychiatrists about that or etc."





## Recommendation: Safety, Trust, and Inclusivity



Young people want to engage with providers and systems they trust. They want to know their providers are inclusive, non-judgmental, and can answer their questions and give them facts.

In their discussions, the YAC members consistently identified gaps in safety, trust, and inclusivity. These gaps included lack of safety and trust as barriers to care, and increased inclusivity and compassionate care as a solution to those barriers. Young people want dignity, respect, and compassion, regardless of their identity, background, reason for seeking care, or location. The YAC recommends health care systems, agencies, and providers do more. This includes ensuring young people's safety, earning their trust, and being inclusive when interacting with them.

The YAC recommends the following to ensure safety, trust, and inclusivity:

### **Respect and treat young people as competent individuals who can and want to understand their health and care information.**

Encourage and trust them to actively - and autonomously when appropriate - participate in and drive their health and care. Health care providers, staff, systems, and caregivers can help by including them in conversations, encouraging them to make decisions about their health care.

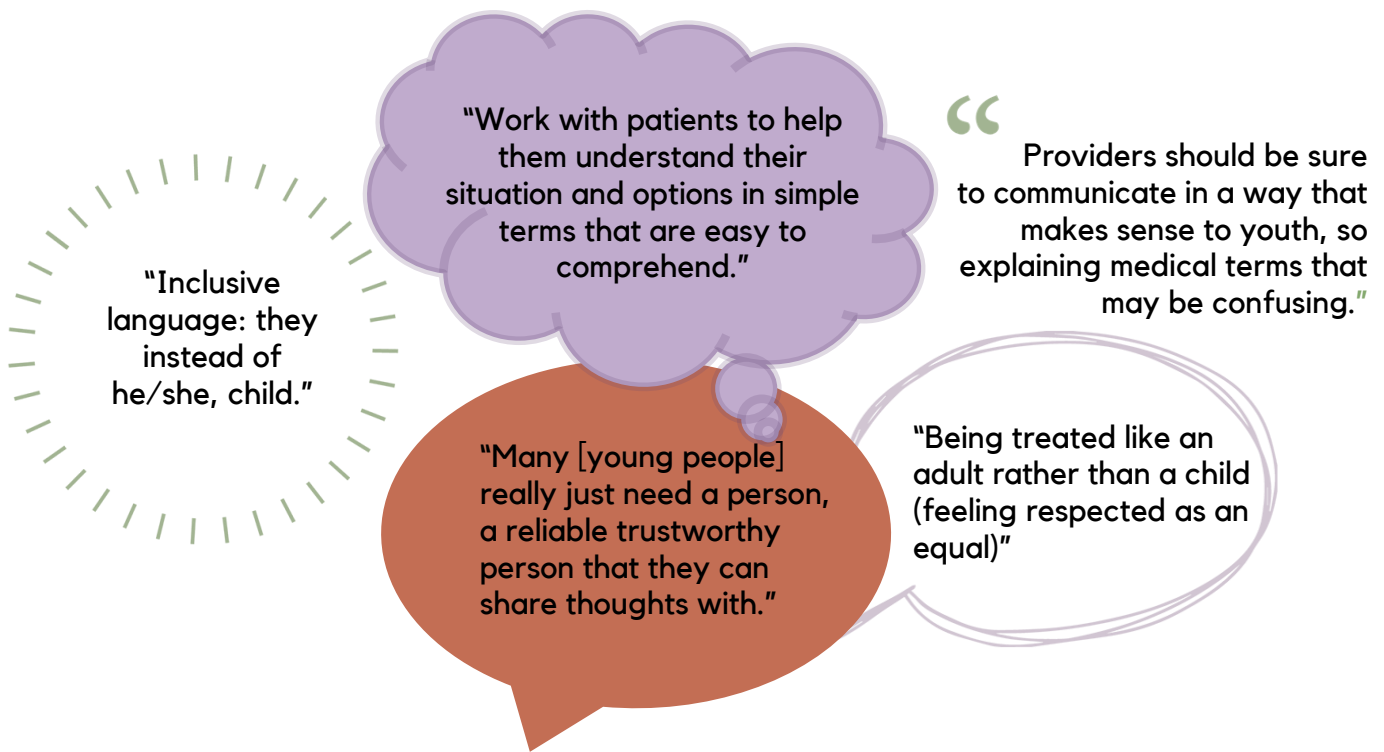


Mental and behavioral health can be a difficult topic in conversations between youth and adults because it put youth in a position of vulnerability.

**Be compassionate and non-judgmental in interactions with young people.** This includes using inclusive language, like correct pronouns and name, and remembering that young people may feel vulnerable, intimidated, and sometimes scared during health care encounters.







**Show that you value and accept teen and young adult patients as they are**, and that you want to take care of them. This can look like spending more time with them during appointments, so they feel heard, and don't feel rushed, and have enough time to form and ask questions. Conversationally talking to young people without medical jargon can improve discussions and trust.

The YAC says young people want....

"We want to feel accepted and heard even if you can't understand what we are going through."

"Ease with the flow, more like a conversation rather than firing up bunches of questions."

"Kinder and more patient since the young person is learning."

"We want to be seen and heard when we speak."

"Slow down, provide consult, information, time for questions."

"Someone who enjoys their job...Is excited to be there."



**Providers and service professionals, and clinics and practices, should find a way to highlight your values** so young people will know they are safe. They want easy ways to search for providers who look like them or are from the community they serve. Choosing the right providers for teens and young adults find can look like learning if providers identify with and support 2SLGBTQIA+ or BIPOC communities, offer youth-friendly or -centered care, and if they've had relevant specialized training.

**Young people also need providers and professionals who are trauma informed and healing- centered** so they know how to handle the tough situations young people encounter, and confidently have sensitive discussions.

"Being able to see the providers values or - like LGBTQ - that so we know where providers are before we go see them, and to help us choose the right provider."

**Tips for Providers:**  
Find free training on healing centered care at [Youth at the Center: Effective and Equitable Support at Adolescent Healthcare Clinics Across Washington State - Cardea Training Center \(matrixlms.com\)](#)





## Recommendation: Confidentiality and Minor Consent

Young people want to understand and exercise their health care rights, including their rights to consent for health care services and their rights to confidentiality for applicable health care services.

Confidentiality and minor consent came up in most YAC discussions as issues impacting health for young people. Young people lack trust in confidentiality within health systems and services, and this affects their willingness to access and use important health care services. This issue is most stark in mental and behavioral health and other services they may have a legal right to consent to. Young people need guidance and support from parents, caregivers, and other trusted adults, and at the same time, they also need to build confidence to navigate and access services on their own, in safe environments.



The YAC recommends the following to improve confidentiality and support young people to exercise their health care rights:

**Make age-appropriate information on minor consent, adolescent health care laws, and confidentiality** easily accessible for young people, including online and in print. One way is through youth-friendly websites and posters with information on minor consent and related laws. Another is providing youth-friendly training for providers and health professionals serving adolescents.

**During health care visits, providers should be up front and factual about which information is confidential** and which is not. This is especially vital for building trust with BIPOC and 2SLGBTQIA+ communities. Informing young patients about what information will be confidential and what may be shared with caregivers will increase their confidence. Services young people choose to access and have a legal right to consent to should remain confidential without extra steps or barriers.

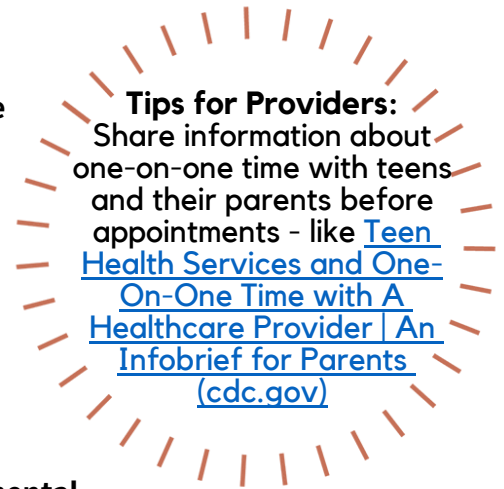


### Young people want to know more about...

"Confidentiality and going over what you need consent from parent to be treated for and youth should have ability to put what they want shared and what they don't want shared and will add to reassurance between youth and provider and would get seen more often."



**Providers should follow best practices and provide one-on-one time for teen patients away from their parents and caregivers.** This is an important part of healthy development and fosters health literacy in safe environments. It's also recommended by both the American Academy of Family Physicians Foundation ([AAFP](#)) and the American Academy of Pediatrics ([AAP](#)).



**Increase easy access to (and information about) confidential mental and behavioral health services** for teens and young adults. The YAC says this could look like confidential and anonymous helplines with experienced professionals that do not track your location or ask for a zip code, anonymous ways to connect like online chats to talk with peers and professionals about mental health needs, and ways to get mental and behavioral health support and care without parent involvement if needed.

“  
More clarity on consent, especially what you can refuse.”

“A place where we can speak to the doctors **WITHOUT** our parents.”

“Where we can get support safely and confidentially without involving parents if needed.”

“Anonymous ways to talk with others without having to worry about family.”

“What parents will and will not have access to.”

“Gender affirming health care questions away from parents.”

“A lot of young people struggle with mental/behavioral health but don't know how they can get support or therapy without having to involve their parents.”



## Recommendation: Address Barriers to Care

Young people need adults to do more about barriers to health care, including transportation, health care costs, and stigma.

The YAC identified many health care barriers impacting teens, young adults, and their families. Barriers include lack of transportation, health care costs, and stigma. These affect young people's access to and use of health services during urgent and emergent health care needs, and on a regular basis for preventive care and ongoing health care needs for chronic and mental health conditions.

The YAC recommends that health care systems and providers do more to recognize and address these barriers by doing the following:

### Transportation

**Ensure easy ways for teens and young adults to travel** for their mental health, chronic illness, disability care, and frequent doctor visits. Existing benefits and community transportation support should be more youth-friendly, dependable, and easier to use - and more should be done to get information about them to young people. Alternative low-cost or free options should also be available, including ride services and gift cards for Uber or Lyft.

**Transportation support should be confidential** when associated with services young people can consent to without a parent or adult.

The YAC says young people need...

"Transportation to and from in person therapy can be very hard to get, so [therapy] gets pushed to the side."

"A ride service provided by the provider."

"Coverage for transportation to go to the doctors."

"Public transport services, example: uber, but for doctors' appointments specifically."

"Transportation. The ability to do it without a parent/parent's knowledge."

**Telehealth options should be readily available** for young people who can't or don't want to travel. Provide support and funding for telehealth and internet infrastructure for provider offices and patient homes.

"Sometimes telehealth is the only option."

"Telehealth services... since many young people can't transport themselves."

"Internet access and device for telehealth appointments."

### Health Care Costs

**Health care systems should do more to make sure all young people have health care, health insurance, and lower costs.**

When possible, they should provide free or very low-cost care and services for young people and their families that includes physical and behavioral health care.

**Tip for Teens:**  
Find easy links to health insurance information and transportation support at [doh.wa.gov/teenhealth-hub](https://doh.wa.gov/teenhealth-hub)

**Health care systems and providers should clearly communicate**

**costs upfront** before services occur and always inform young people that financial assistance is available. This can support people who need (but may not look like it) to reduce barriers. Simplify billing so young patients and families can easily understand and pay them.

The YAC says...

"Simplify... the random extra costs."

"Financial support would be very helpful. A lot of people can't afford safe healthcare."

"Lower price of medications and lower price of appointments."

"Therapy is a big help, but it's expensive and hard to access."

"[We want to know] the cost of the visit/how much insurance will cover and why they're important or needed."

"We should have free access online to medical care."

"Free access to therapies/counselors that are confidential."

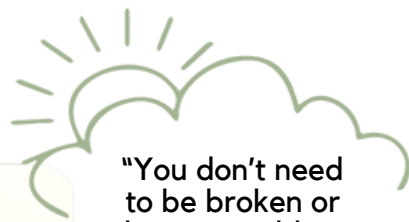
"On a very large scale please universal healthcare."



## Stigma

**Health care systems and providers should do more to address the stigma around health care for teens and young adults, and being responsive to the health care needs they identify.** This is especially important for BIPOC and LGBTQIA2S+ communities.

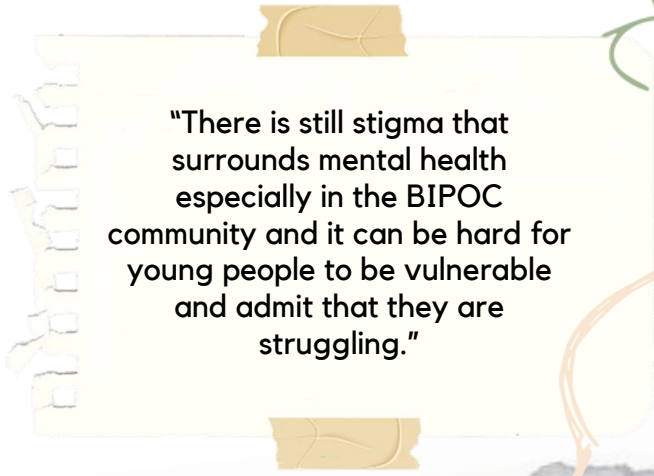
**Actions should include efforts** to reduce stigma around chronic health conditions, youth disabilities and special health care needs, and mental and behavioral health, as well as tools and resources to support parents and adults in their communities. Culturally relevant activities in places familiar to young people, like social media, online, and in schools, are preferred.



"You don't need to be broken or have a problem to seek help."



"One of the biggest influences on young people is peer pressure, as many want to feel they belong and are accepted."

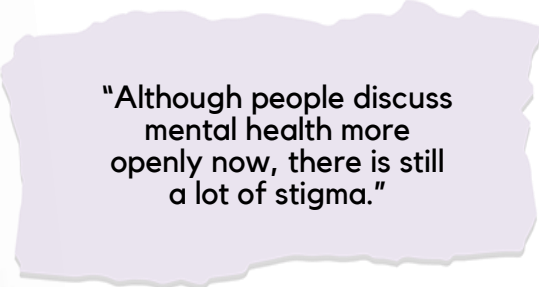


"There is still stigma that surrounds mental health especially in the BIPOC community and it can be hard for young people to be vulnerable and admit that they are struggling."



"It's hard to talk to people that we already know due to the fear of being judged."

Young people need to feel that behavioral health care is a natural thing to seek out."



"Although people discuss mental health more openly now, there is still a lot of stigma."





### **Recommendation: Youth-Friendly Health Care**

Young people need access to safe, compassionate, welcoming, and non-judgmental health care environments, and health care that is offered in ways that are convenient to them by using electronic tools, telehealth, and school-based health.

Access to youth-friendly health care and services was a consistent concept throughout all YAC discussions. Council members discussed how health care systems are consistently centered around adults – adult patients, adult providers, and adult staff - even people aged 10-24 made up nearly twenty percent of Washington’s population ([Office of Financial Management](#), 2023).

The YAC recommends the following for more youth friendly care:



**Tips for Providers:**  
Learn more about providing youth-friendly health care and services at: [Youth-Friendly Care - Adolescent Health Initiative \(umhs-adolescenthealth.org\)](https://umhs-adolescenthealth.org)

#### **Create youth-friendly and youth-centered policies, practices, and procedures, in health care systems – and provide support for implementation.**

This includes policies for creating warm and welcoming environments, supporting friendly and non-judgmental staff, and nurturing friendly, caring, responsive, and compassionate providers. This also includes ensuring your office hours work for teens, providers have one-one time with teen patients, and parents and teens know to expect youth-centered care at appointments with notifications both before the appointment and at the beginning of the visit.

**Create inclusive and welcoming spaces and environments** – waiting areas and exam rooms should be warm, safe, and welcoming to young people. Have accessible and gender inclusive bathrooms that help people from all backgrounds and identities feel accepted.



The YAC says a welcoming environment is...

“A quiet calm place, with some color and decoration haha.”

“An accessible bathroom because...they’re always hidden somewhere complicated lol.”

“Not so scary pls.”

“Not just square rooms and more decorations.”

“Calming and familiar...less intense lighting that is more natural (like the sun).”

“Wall murals and/or posters to make the space feel less sterile and more like a home.”

“[A] safe feeling environment.”





**Offer multiple options for teens and young adults to find, schedule, and use services.** Use websites, apps, and text messaging to increase young people's autonomy for their health care needs telehealth options and access to internet. And create better access to in-person providers for primary care and behavioral health in places convenient for young people like pop-up clinics, care in schools and colleges, and collaboration with existing support within local communities.

The YAC says this could look like...

"Counselors/ therapy services at school (easy access)."

"Easier access to a PCP."

"Pop up clinics at school or in the community."

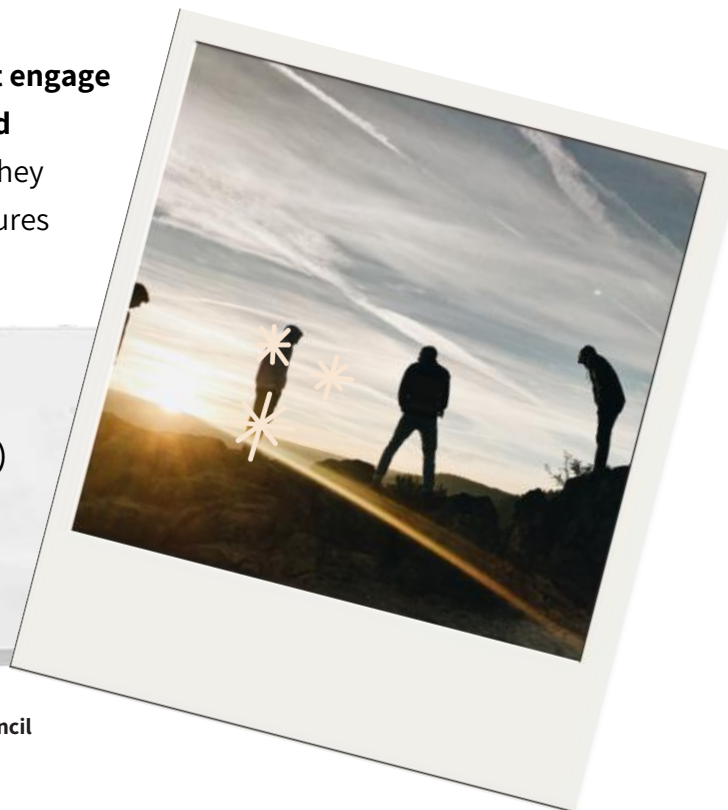
"Maybe urgent cares who do checkups should advertise if they don't have pcp."

**Trusted adults – including caregivers and youth-serving providers - need to offer more support to teens navigating the transition from pediatric care to adult care.** This includes helping teens understand that there is a transition to adult care before it happens, and what that transition that means. Providers can be youth-centered by doing a warm hand off and connecting teens with adult primary care providers and specialists for chronic health conditions, special health care needs and disabilities, sexual and reproductive health, and gender-affirming care.

**Tips for Providers:**  
Find tools and resources for supporting teens' transition to adult care at [Got Transition®](#)

**Health care systems, providers, and agencies must engage young people in health care planning, delivery, and structuring.** Young people want a seat at the table. They want to be part of constructing the health care structures that serve them.

"Give youth a seat at the table (like the DOH YAC) for us to have direct input in the decisions that affect us the most."





## Recommendation: Human Support and Trusted Adults

Young people need and want support from trusted and compassionate adults, and they want to learn how to support each other.

While the YAC discussed ways young people want and need more control over their health, they also recognize that they can't do everything on their own. They value and understand the benefit of support from trusted adults. They also want to support each other with health care needs and through adolescence into adulthood.

The YAC recommends several ways health care systems can better support young people:

**Health care systems should ensure human support is available to help young people navigate the system.** This includes helping teens with finding the right providers, scheduling and getting to appointments, coordinating and understanding their health care, and completing follow-up actions. Information about human support should be easy to find.

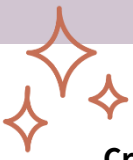
"An agent or helper well versed in medical care that can help provide support to youth while scheduling or making appointments."

"Some sort of case worker to help/support/teach the person while making appointments."

**Adults should be encouraging and supportive to teens and young adults** about seeking health care and support when it's needed. They should learn and better understand the health care needs of young people in their lives, and the resources and information available to them.

"[We need] encouragement for seeking help by adults (since asking for help is a huge step in healing and it's scary for many young people struggling with mental illness)"





**Create more safe and supportive environments and spaces for young people to talk to and support each other** about their health care issues and experiences with mental health, chronic illness, and disabilities – within the safety of trusted, knowledgeable, and supportive adults. Create these spaces where young people like to spend their time, like school groups, chats, and online groups.

**Create and support education and training for teens and young adults to learn how to recognize the signs and symptoms of mental and behavioral health conditions and how to find and get help.** This means creating peer support programs in and outside of schools, funding mental health first aid for teen/young adults to participate in, teaching about healthy and harmful behaviors, and creating and promoting youth-friendly resources, tools, and information.



The YAC says young people need/want to know...

“School groups or clubs that allow peers to talk about mental and behavioral health without stigma.”

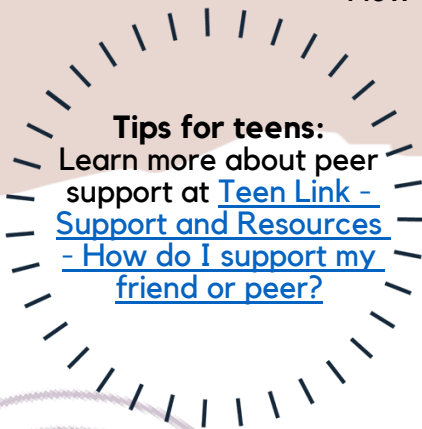
“We should be able to have a safe space whenever we feel like talking to someone.”

“I strongly believe that having Zoom meetings can help spread awareness on our own behavioral health.”

“Many of us feel more comfortable talking to each other about mental health issues rather than talking to parents/family.”

“How to support friends/peers who are struggling with mental health issues and encourage them to get professional help.”

“How to handle when a friend is in crisis.”



## Committed to Action



The DOH Adolescent and Young Adult Health Unit is taking the following actions based on direct recommendations of the Youth Advisory Council: 2022 Cohort. Please note this list is not exhaustive:

- We will **continue implementing teen pregnancy prevention programming (Washington Youth Sexual Health Innovation and Impact Network)** to help increase equitable access to sexual health information, education, and services for young people.
- **We collaborated with the Youth Advisory Council to customize a new youth-focused webpage at DOH's website called [Teen Health Hub WA](#).** This resource features a curated online directory of accurate and reliable youth-friendly health information.
- We will leverage partnerships to **develop youth-friendly how-to guides on common health care tasks**, including how to schedule a doctor's appointment, find a provider, navigate health insurance, and understand confidentiality and consent in health care. We will also create outreach materials with information about moving to adult health care.
- We will continue **supporting and promoting physical and behavioral health care and services in schools, including school-based health centers**. Adolescent Health currently administers the DOH School-Based Health Center Grant program as directed by RCW [43.70.825](#). SBHCs and other school-based health care provide children and teens access to quality health care in places where they already spend their time and in environments with adults they already trust.
- **We will partner with youth and youth-serving providers to outline a new Youth-Friendly Certification.** This certification will help youth-serving providers and practices learn about and commit to youth-centered, age-appropriate, and culturally relevant health care in Washington.
- We will **improve and create adolescent health communications developed by youth and for youth**. We will start by creating a defined brand for all youth-facing content and increase our social media presence to get important health information to teens and young adults.
- We will **seek opportunities to secure funding for more behavioral health care in schools and youth training in mental and behavioral health**. These include resources like peer support, Mental Health First Aid training, and resources.

Our partners at DOH are taking the following actions based on YAC input:

- The Children and Youth with Special Health Care Needs program will integrate feedback from the YAC into their public health programming, and will share this report with their partners, throughout the state.
- The Health Systems Transformation program will share this report with partners like Medicaid Managed Care Organizations (MCO). This team will also use the YAC's suggestions to inform and guide future MCO Performance Improvement Plan activities for the Well-Child Visit workgroup and the Children's Mental Health Treatment workgroup.

### **What's next for the YAC?**

In early 2023, we selected the second-generation Youth Advisory Council members. These 40 teens and young adults will carry this critical work through 2024. They will continue discussing key topics like mental and behavioral health and youth-friendly care. They'll also talk about new topics like teen dating and healthy relationships, healthy eating, and sexual and reproductive health care. The new YAC cohort wants to devote more time to mental and behavioral health and sexual and reproductive health through dedicated subcommittees. Through these new subcommittees, the YAC members will connect directly with DOH subject matter experts who manage subject-specific programming. These groups will develop calls to action and recommendations for public health action to address gaps and needs of young people in Washington.

If you, your practice, organization, or agency make changes in your work based on the YAC's feedback and this report, please share them with us! We would love to feature them on our webpage at: [Youth Engagement and the Youth Advisory Council | WaPortal.org](#)

To learn more about how to engage young people in your work, we are happy to share our insights! You can reach out to us at [adoelscenthealthunit@doh.wa.gov](mailto:adoelscenthealthunit@doh.wa.gov).





# Background

DOH is a recipient of the Title V Maternal and Child Health Block Grant (MCHBG) from the US Health Resources Services Administration (HRSA). Every 5 years, we conduct a needs assessment to learn more about the health care needs and barriers of people served by the MCHBG. During the last needs assessment, respondents included people working with and caring for adolescents and young adults, but it lacked the voices of young people themselves. We used this as an opportunity to establish a new Youth Advisory Council to bring together teens and young adults from around the state to share their ideas and recommendations about public health topics that are important to young people, today. We use the YAC's advice and feedback to guide public health programming in the Adolescent and Young Adult Health unit and other DOH programs that impact teens and young adults, including Title V MCHBG activities. Ultimately, the YAC's contributions will help improve health care and public health systems that serve all teens and young adults in Washington.

Engaging with teens and young adults through a Youth Advisory Council is a new activity at DOH and requires coordinated efforts among several programs in DOH's Office of Family and Community Health Improvement. Program participants include Adolescent and Young Adult Health, Children and Youth with Special Health Care Needs, Health Systems Transformation, and Surveillance and Evaluation.

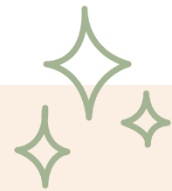
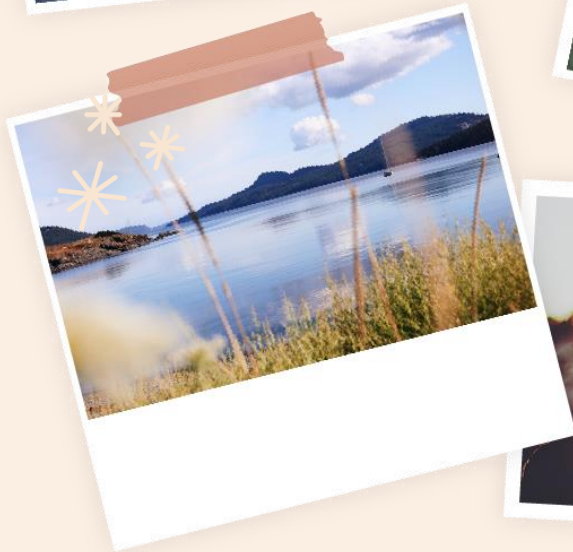
Coordination of the YAC also requires funding. Two federal grants fund this activity: the Title V Maternal Child Health Block Grant (MCHBG) awarded by the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) in the US Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) and the Washington Sexual Health Innovation and Impact Network (WYSHIIN) Grant, awarded by the Office of Population Affairs (OPA) in HHS.

The Youth Advisory Council also creates opportunities for Positive Youth Development at DOH. The Office of Population Affairs [\(2023\) describes this framework as:](#) “An Intentional, pro-social approach that engages youth within their communities, schools, organizations, peer groups, and families in a manner that is productive and constructive; recognizes, utilizes, and enhances young people's strengths; and promotes positive outcomes for young people by providing opportunities, fostering positive relationships, and furnishing the support needed to build on their leadership strengths.” Through YAC participation, members build and practice



leadership skills, express their thoughts and ideas about big concepts, collaborate to create positive and effective change, and empathize with those different from them, and learn about public health programming, activities, and government processes.

Youth engagement benefits the young people who participate, the adults who collaborate with them, and the young people who engage with improved systems that result from youth engagement. Young people's active participation in public health helps make sure these and related systems are more relevant, more trusted, and ultimately, better utilized by young people.



## References and Resources

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Washington State Department of Health. 2023. [WA Portal Adolescent and Young Adult Health Youth Advisory Council](#).

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**Thank  
You!**

