

## Youth-Serving Provider Perspectives: Youth-Friendly Care and Community Responsiveness

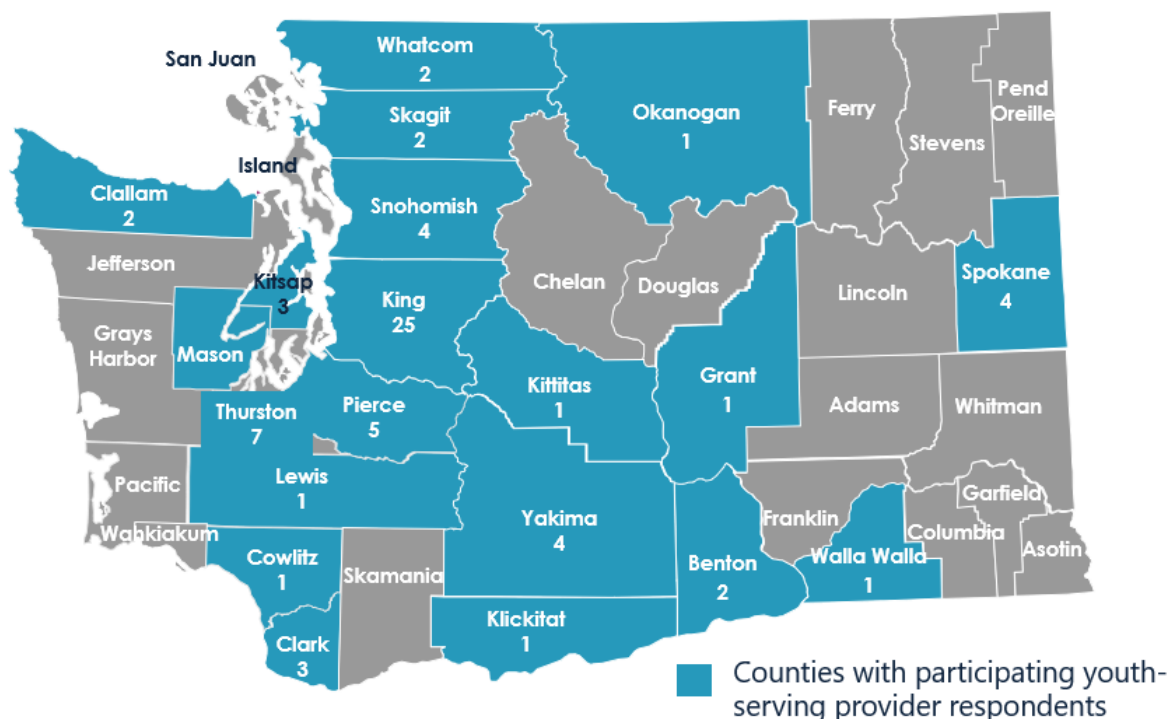
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**Providers want to deliver high quality, youth-friendly care that is responsive to the needs of the young people and the communities they serve and, but they need more funding and support.**

In 2024, the Adolescent and Young Adult Health team at the Department of Health (DOH) completed a **mini-needs assessment to understand the state of adolescent and young adult health** care in Washington and the support needs of those who serve teens and young adults. During a series of engagement activities, youth-serving medical and behavioral health providers and professionals shared their feedback and insight on important adolescent health topics, including adolescent well visits.

Over 70 providers participated in engagement activities:

- 65% were advanced practice providers, like medical doctors or nurse practitioners, and mental health providers, like licensed therapists and social workers
- 60% said more than half of their patients were youth ages 11-24
- 54% served young people in a medical setting like a private practice, community health center, or school-based health center. Many worked in more than one setting.
- Most worked in the Puget Sound region.



# Youth-friendly Care and Community Responsiveness

Providers report working hard to provide age-appropriate and youth-centered care that prioritizes young people's needs and protects their privacy. They value being connected and responsive to young people and recognize that cultural relevance and community engagement impact how young people experience patient-provider relationships.

Many providers are taking action to create youth-centered spaces, build relationships in their communities to address common and unique barriers encountered by their young patients and families, and engage with young people and families to better understand community needs. Many providers also still have questions about the best ways to serve young people and need support to provide youth-friendly care while navigating systems and policies that aren't youth friendly, and persistent and classic barriers in health care.

## What's going well

Providers shared successful youth-centered care strategies:

- **Getting involved in the community:** Coordinating outreach and events with schools, parent-teacher groups, and other organizations, networking with other clinics and agencies, getting involved in their community, providing services in settings where young people are (like schools), and visiting regional locations to better understand the needs of their patients.
- **Engaging with youth:** Providing care at after-school activities, serving on teen and youth advisory boards, using social media, and topic-focused groups, and funding or coordinating extracurricular activities.
- **Connecting youth to resources:** Connecting young people with community resources and providing hygiene items and snacks.
- **Making care easier to access:** Offering low or no cost care, same-day appointments, extended and weekend hours, longer appointment times, and free contraception. Providers said they also help coordinate transportation, and offer school-based, mobile, and telehealth options.
- **Creating welcoming environments:** Making physical spaces more welcoming and inclusive, including visual cues that tell youth the space is youth-friendly.
- **Accessible care:** Offering flexible hours (like before or after school), using telehealth, and making multidisciplinary teams available on-site to ensure care is accessible.
- **Accessible communication:** Using youth-friendly language to communicate and providing developmentally and age-appropriate care and materials to ensure young people understand.
- **Confidentiality and privacy:** Protecting privacy and confidentiality for young people, having open discussions about minor consent laws, and answering young people's and parents'/caregivers' questions.
- **Trust and respect:** Prioritizing relationship building and positive, compassionate, and safe interactions, explaining information, terms, options and processes before they happen, speaking in non-judgmental ways, communicating directly to youth patients (not just caregivers), centering young people in all aspects of their care.

“I try to stay up to date with current interests of youth including slang, social media, and entertainment. My practice is client centered and client led - I help clients know they have choice and that I am here to support them and their needs - not my own agenda.”

“I do explain how our exam is different from an adult exam and make sure patients are not asked to undress prior to me meeting them.”

“I center the young person's concerns and questions in all aspects of my work.”

“Having sports, clubs and positive ways for kids to engage from the Communities in Schools program to different activities are the Best ways that we can connect with kids and help move them in a positive direction”

“We have had youth partners who have come through our clinic and give feedback how to make more youth friendly. And we follow through with their recommendations”

## What needs more work

Providers shared areas where they need more support to better meet young people’s needs:

- **Not enough capacity to engage young people:** Not enough time, knowledge or staff to do deeper engagement activities, like strengthening community networks and understanding how to engage young people.
- **Not enough money or reimbursement:** Youth-friendly care practices can be costly, which prohibits uptake in many clinic and practice settings, for example, upgrading physical or online spaces, hiring and retaining support staff, completing training on youth-friendly care, or longer appointments with young people
- **Stigma and misinformation delays care:** Resistance to medications or vaccines due to lack of understanding, misinformation, or inaccurate information, which delays treatment or blocks care for teens and young adults.
- **Persistent barriers and lack of resources for support:** Persistent barriers include un-or underinsured youth and families, housing and food insecurity, transportation gaps (especially in rural areas), language barriers, and accessibility needs. These barriers are intensified by gaps in community resources to meet the need, inconsistent and changing resources, broken connections to existing resources, and staff turnover at organizations and agencies.

“We need...a parent or patient council but have been struggling with time and the burnout of parents and clinic staff”

“Transportation remains a constant barrier to care in our area. Telehealth and school-based services are helpful with this”

“There are limited resources or inconsistent/ changing resources in our community for youth.”

“One challenge is helping youths/their families with SDOH [social determinants of health] issues and connecting them to community resources”

## Recommendations

Recommendations are based on provider feedback and actions that can address their needs:

- **Increase reimbursement for adolescent health care**, including higher reimbursement for extended appointment times, and higher rates of reimbursement for adolescent health care, overall.
- **Provide funding for projects that increase access to youth-friendly health care services** like teen clinics, mobile clinics, school-based health care, and integrated behavioral health.
- **Provide funding and support for improvement projects to increase youth-centered practices**, like expanding clinic hours, updating waiting rooms and exam rooms, integrating technology, and updating websites and online portals.
- **Provide technical assistance, training, and support for providers** on engaging parents and caregivers, young people, and community.
- **Create spaces for youth-serving providers and professionals** to share best practices, successes, troubleshooting challenges, and network.
- **Fund non-billable services** like case management, care coordination, resource connecting, prevention activities, and health education.
- **Address barriers to care** and improve transportation options and lower the cost of health care for young people.

## Action

The Department of Health is committed to responding to what we've learned from youth-serving providers and the young people in Washington by taking action.

Over the next four years, DOH's Adolescent and Young Adult Health team will:

- **Collaborate with other DOH programs** to identify steps to respond to feedback.
- Expand **engagement activities to include parents and caregivers** to learn more about their questions, concerns and needs.
- **Work with partners like the Health Care Authority** to increase technical assistance and support to youth-serving providers.
- **Implement a youth-friendly care certification program** to promote youth-centered care for teens and young adults and support providers. Learn more: [Youth Friendly Care Network | Healthier Washington Collaboration Portal](#)

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