K·STATE Research and Extension

Executive Summary

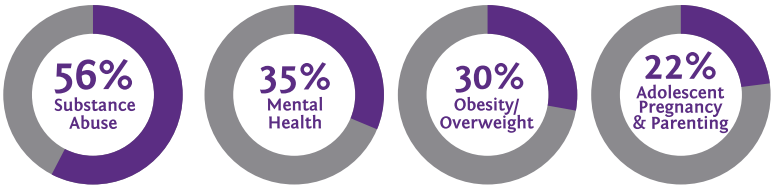
Guiding Principles of Positive Youth Development

Adolescence is an important developmental stage filled with health opportunities, as well as health risks. During this stage, health behaviors are established that pave the way for adult health, productivity and longevity. Adolescents who thrive have access to caring adults that foster healthy development, and are offered meaningful opportunities to belong and build their competencies and abilities (Lerner, 2009). Instead of being problems to be managed, adolescents are assets to their communities. Consequently, Kansas chose a postive youth development approach for its five-year needs assessment for the 2016-2020 Title V Maternal and Child Health Services Block Grant for the Bureau of Family Health, Kansas Department of Health and Environment. The assement was conducted by Kansas State University's Kansas Adolescent Health Project, consisted of: a) a review of existing health data, b) an online community input survey, c) community focus groups, and d) interviews with key individuals and leaders.

Identifying Needs and Issues among Kansas Adolescents

More than 850 respondents* of an online survey, which was open from August to September, 2014, resulted in the following findings:

Top health issues affecting adolescents in their area were:



Top barriers that youth faced to accessing health services were:

(= 854 respondents were 86.4% female; average age of 49; 60% rural and small town; 22.7% upper middle income; 85 counties represented. A Spanish version of survey was offered, but no Spanish version surveys were received.)*

More than 400 Kansans** shared their perspectives through 26 focus groups conducted in Chanute, Dodge City, Great Bend, Hoisington, and Kansas City. Many commonalities exist between youth and adult focus group participants:

*(** = 324 of the 401 participants were high school students; 60% female, 63% white, 17% Latino/Hispanic, 7% African American; 2% mixed race, <1% Asian, American Indian, etc. Focus groups were conducted with high school FCS/advising/study hall classes, local coalitions, Kansas Partnerships for Health conferees, health departments, Young Women on the Move afterschool members, 4-H councils, ESL mothers group, Wyandotte High Health Science III class members.)*

The focus group data resulted in the following findings relating to issues, barriers and challenges expressed by youth and by adults (in order of prominence of youth focus group data):

Top health issues included:

- School lunch (portions too small or distasteful food)
- Substance abuse
- Sexuality and reproductive health
- Mental health (including depression and self-injury)
- Obesity
- Overall stress
- Bullying
- Boredom leading to the use of technology
- Wanting real services and information
- Wanting to confide in adults and mentors.

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Top barriers and challenges included:

- Lack of information
- Access to services
- Costs too high
- Lack of parental support/skills and awareness
- Embarrassment/shame
- Lack of mentors.

Recommendations and Strategies to Address Adolescent Health

The overall goal is to enhance the health of adolescents and young adults (ages 12 to 22) across the lifespan.

RECOMMENDATION 1: *Address the highest priority adolescent health issues.* Thus, some of these recommendations are redundant by intent. Each of these health issues is related and should be addressed as such. Mental health was shown to be linked to each of the health issues affecting adolescents, and as a result was ranked as the number one priority to address.

Mental Health

Recommended Strategies/Planned Activities:

- Provide school-based access to confidential mental health screening, referral, and treatment that reduces the stigma and embarrassment often associated with mental illness, emotional disturbances, and seeking treatment.
- Establish networks of skilled, supported adult mentors that are available to adolescents in safe, accessible environments.
- Provide opportunities for adolescents to learn and practice social emotional coping skills in safe, accessible environments.

Substance Abuse

Recommended Strategies/Planned Activities:

- Increase access to substance abuse screening, treatment, and prevention services through co-locating screening, treatment, and prevention services in schools and/or facilities easily accessible to adolescents in out-of-school time.
- Establish networks of skilled, supported adult mentors that are available to adolescents in safe, accessible environments.
- Provide opportunities for adolescents to learn and practice social emotional coping skills in safe, accessible environments.
- Provide opportunities for adolescents to occupy their out-of-school time in pro-social activities, establish pro-social relationships, and gain meaningful skills and competencies.

Sexual and Reproductive Health

Recommended Strategies/Planned Activities:

- Make accurate information on responsible sexual behavior, including the benefits of abstinence, more easily available to youth and their families.
- Support youth development behavioral interventions (for example, social, emotional, or cognitive competence training that promotes pro-social norms, improved decision making, improved communication skills, positive bonding experiences between youth, their peers, or non-parental role models) coordinated with community services to reduce sexual risk behaviors.
- Provide confidential, youth-friendly reproductive health services.
- Encourage communication between adolescents and their parents about reproductive health issues.
- Encourage all providers who serve adolescents to screen sexually active females for chlamydia.

Nutrition and Physical Activity

Recommended Strategies/Planned Activities:

- Increase the availability of healthy food and beverages in sufficient supply in schools.
- Increase opportunities for students to participate in regular physical activity both in and out-of-school (e.g., non-competitive sports leagues, intramural sports).
- Improve adolescents' awareness of good nutrition and physical fitness through relevant and technologically current education during the school day and out-of-school.

- Implement an awareness/information campaign to reduce sedentary recreational screen time among adolescents.

Injury Prevention

Recommended Strategies/Planned Activities:

- Encourage the implementation of policies, procedures, and the evaluation of programs in health-care settings to assess for and intervene with adolescents at risk for suicide.
- Support public awareness campaigns to prevent adolescent self-injury.
- Develop policies and establish prevention activities that work to reduce motor vehicle crash injuries and deaths to adolescents due to distracted driving and/or use of substances.
- Continue to enforce existing laws regarding adolescent drivers, such as mandatory seat belt use and zero tolerance for alcohol use.
- Establish networks of skilled, supported adult mentors that are available to adolescents in safe, accessible environments.
- Provide opportunities for adolescents to learn and practice social emotional coping skills in safe, accessible environments.

RECOMMENDATION 2: *Help families support the health and well-being of their adolescents.*

Recommended Strategies/Planned Activities:

- Increase the availability of information to parents and family members about normative adolescent development, and risk and protective factors for youth.
- Provide support to parents who experience problems, such as relationship, violence, substance abuse and mental health issues, to enable enhanced relationships with their adolescents.
- Provide support to parents who experience problems — such as relationship, violence, substance abuse, and mental health issues — to enable enhanced relationships with their adolescents.
- Using the "Parents as Teachers©" model, provide parenting resources and mentors for parents of adolescents.
- Encourage communication between adolescents and their parents about any health issue.
- Provide opportunities for parents to improve their skills in seeking out quality health-related information and services.

RECOMMENDATION 3: *Provide educational environments that prepare youth for healthy adulthood.*

Recommended Strategies/Planned Activities:

- Emphasize social emotional as well as academic competence in the school setting.
- Increase the availability of skill-based health information for youth.
- Support schools to establish and sustain health access points and health services on-site during the school day.
- Increase connections among schools, families, communities, and health providers through programs such as Communities in Schools (CIS)©, and KU Medical Center's "Bull Dog/Bull Doc Clinic" at Wyandotte High School.
- Provide school-based access to confidential mental health screening, referral and treatment that reduces the stigma and embarrassment often associated with mental illness, emotional disturbances, and seeking treatment.
- Establish networks of skilled, supported adult mentors that are available to adolescents in safe, accessible environments.
- Provide opportunities for adolescents to learn and practice social emotional coping skills in safe, accessible environments.

RECOMMENDATION 4: *Encourage collaborations and increase community support for those working for and with youth.*

Recommended Strategies/Planned Activities:

- Co-locate services for youth to ease access and decrease embarrassment.

- Support effective afterschool and out-of-school programs.
- Provide assistance to help community programs integrate positive youth development approaches and principles into their service framework.
- Increase youth-related continuing education opportunities for professionals and para-professionals.
- Catalogue agencies, organizations, and programs serving youth, and identify their missions and goals.
- Encourage interdisciplinary teams to provide comprehensive and coordinated services for youth.
- Institute regular interdisciplinary conferences and workshops to encourage development of shared knowledge, language, and goals among networks and communities.
- Include youth in decisions about service integration.
- Expand on the successful "Parents as Teachers" model that provide parenting resources to help parents of adolescents understand the critical importance of their child's adolescent years.

RECOMMENDATION 5: *Improve the responsiveness, availability, and access of health care to youth*

Recommended Strategies/Planned Activities:

- Use education and outreach to inform youth and parents about health-care options and providers who specialize in serving adolescents.
- Increase training about adolescent health care for providers to ensure youth-friendly, culturally competent health services.
- Create avenues for youth to be involved in discovering and utilizing health-care systems that meet their needs.
- Work with health insurers to widen the concept of well-child visits through adolescence (up to age 24).
- Improve access to comprehensive care including dental, eye/vision, and mental health services.

(Details are included in the full Kansas State Adolescent Health Report, which is available at http://www.he.k-state.edu/fshs/extension/)

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