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Welcome!

Welcome to your new role as State Adolescent Health Coordinator! Whether you are new to public health and adolescent health or a seasoned professional, are focused on a specific health issue or are responsible for a broad spectrum of adolescent health issues, you are now part of an integral state-level system that serves the unique health and wellness needs of adolescents. You are also an automatic member of a whole national community of adolescent and young adult health partners.

A variety of resources and technical assistance are available to you as a state public health professional charged with managing adolescent and/or young adult health initiatives.

This guide is one of them. It can help you explore your role and find resources and tools to help you build your knowledge, skills, and opportunities for supporting adolescent and young adult health.

Who we are

This guide is brought to you by the **State Adolescent Health Resource Center (SAHRC)** at the University of Minnesota. SAHRC works to build a national network of states and territories in which adolescents and young adults (AYA) are bedrock priorities in practice and policy. Created by MCHB in 2000 to elevate AYA health as a state-level priority within the Title V/Maternal and Child Health Block Grant structure, SAHRC offers workforce development in the form of ongoing responsive leadership, technical assistance, research-based resources, and community-building opportunities for SAHCs and other key adolescent health focused staff in state level public health agencies. For over 20 years, SAHRC has provided training and tools to SAHCs and state Title V/MCH programs to support and celebrate their AYA work.

SAHRC is a partner in the HRSA/Maternal and Child Health Bureau funded Adolescent and Young Adult Health – National Resource Center (The Center), a collaborative of four national adolescent and young adult (AYA) health-focused, resource centers: the [National Adolescent Health Information Center](#) (NAHIC) at the University of California at San Francisco; the [Association for Maternal and Child Health Programs](#) (AMCHP) in Washington, D.C.; the [State Adolescent Health Resource Center](#) (SAHRC) at the University of Minnesota, Twin Cities; and the [National Improvement Partnership Network](#) (NIPN) at the University of Vermont. Together, our four resource centers power the capacity of state Title V MCH programs and their partners to increase young people's (ages 10-25) access to high-quality, integrated, equitable health care. We disseminate research and provide technical assistance and continuous quality improvement measurement to AYA health professionals in clinical, educational, and public health policy settings.

As a designated SAHC, you are an automatic member of the National Network of State Adolescent Health Coordinators (NNSAHC), a national voluntary leadership network that provides a community of support among your peers in other states and territories. Many of the resources you'll find in this guide are created by or for NNSAHC with the help of national partners like SAHRC. [Learn more about NNSAHC.](#)

Whether you work in or alongside a Title V/MCH Block Grant program or within another public health division or program, this is the place to explore your role in elevating the needs and voices of young people in your state public health agency.

The role of the SAHCs

As a SAHC, you are a critical part of a system that ensures adolescent and young adult health needs are represented in the [ten essential public health services](#) provided by your state or territory. Many State Adolescent Health Coordinators have broad roles but we find that SAHC positions typically fall into one of three types:

Broad focus on adolescent health	Specific focus on adolescent health issues	Limited focus on adolescent health
The SAHC brings an adolescent focus to broader public health initiatives (e.g. chronic disease) and addresses systems issues (e.g. technical assistance, training, needs assessments, strategic planning, building a positive youth development focus, and collaboration).	The SAHC manages certain adolescent programs at the local and regional level, such as those addressing teen pregnancy or sexual health. This role might include managing grants, providing technical assistance, and training, and evaluating programs.	The SAHC acts as a point person for youth issues within their agency. They often manage many other public health issues (e.g. perinatal health, family planning, and child health), with adolescent health as an add-on issue or population.

Your particular job description may be a combination of these common types of SAHC roles. Or, you may feel like your role doesn't fit neatly into any of these categories. You're not alone: that's the nature of the SAHC role: in each state and territory, it has evolved according to the history and culture of the health department and program that houses it. For a more detailed discussion of what these different SAHC roles look like in practice, see [What is a State Adolescent Health Coordinator?](#)

Keys to your success

Whether your role is focused broadly on adolescent health, on specific adolescent health issues, or has a limited adolescent focus in the context of other work, these eight tips will contribute to your success.



1 Ground your work in adolescent development

Keeping the stages of adolescent development front and center will help you in every aspect of your job, including: identifying strategies; planning your work; developing programs, policies, and partnerships; building communications and trainings; guiding grantees; and finding resources.

This Key corresponds to [MCH's Leadership Competency #1: MCH Knowledge Base/Context](#).

What does this look like in practice?

- You think about the developmental tasks young people are working on and build them into the health issue you are working on. You consider what specific supports would help young people succeed.
- You also look at a situation from young peoples' perspective, considering their development both in how you *assess* an issue and how you *respond* to it.
- You build the fundamental requirements of healthy youth development into everything you do (caring supportive relationships with adults, opportunities to experiment, purposeful and fun learning, opportunities to build on youth strengths, and involvement of youth in the process).
- You connect your grantees and partners to professional development resources help them better apply adolescent development to their work.

How can I learn more?

Understanding Adolescent Development video series

[Part 1: The Basics](#) (21:03 minutes)

[Part 2: Development Tasks \(Body\)](#) (25:04 minutes)

[Part 3: Developmental Tasks \(Sense of Self, Relationships\) \(32:56 minutes\)](#)

[Part 4: Understanding Adolescence \(Now What?\) \(20:05 minutes\)](#)

[Adolescent Development Series](#) (Summary of embedded links)

Young Adult Development video series

[Young Adults & MCH](#), an overview of YA development and considerations for the role of SAHCs and MCH programs in supporting YA programs (14:10 min)

[10 Things MCH Should Know About Young Adults](#), important tips for understanding and working with young adults (18:49 min)

Developmental Stages of Adolescence - fact sheets

Brief syntheses of the developmental stages and tasks of adolescence. Spanish adaptations available thanks to the Colorado Department of Health and Environment's Title V/Maternal and Child Health Program.

Early Adolescence 10-14 [English](#) [Spanish](#)

Middle Adolescence 15-17 [English](#) [Spanish](#)

Late Adolescence 18-24 [English](#) [Spanish](#)

How can I build my skills?

- [Adolescent Developmental timeline activity - Facilitator instructions and materials](#), an activity designed by SAHRC for SAHCs and MCH professionals to lead small groups through the stages of adolescent development and apply it to their work.
- [Adolescent Developmental Lens Case Study Exercise](#), An activity designed by SAHRC for individuals or groups to analyze youth behaviors that are traditionally misunderstood and responded to incorrectly by adults through a developmental lens, and to identify developmentally appropriate strategies for use by participants, organizations and communities with and/or for youth
- [Youth Need](#), SAHRC's 11-page overview of the fundamental supports and opportunities youth need for healthy development, Positive Youth Development strategies to provide them, and an activity to consider the role of public health in supporting PYD.

2

Be a systems thinker

Even if your work is limited to a specific program or grant, you can be a force for good by considering how your work impacts other systems that affect young people. Systems thinking recognizes complexity. It looks at the interactions among components—norms, laws, resources, infrastructure, and individual behaviors—that influence outcomes. It also takes into account how these components interact at multiple levels (organizational, individual, and in community).

This Key [corresponds to MCH Leadership Competency #11: Working with Communities and Systems.](#)

What does this look like in practice?

- You understand the social and cultural contexts (social determinants of health) in which the youth you serve live and grow, and you consider how their contexts may impact their health and behavior.
- You see the gaps in the current system and look for ways to get around these systemic barriers to young people's full participation. You or your partners, for example, could provide transportation, food, or shelter.
- You use a different lens, thinking about *how* something is being done (how are providers being trained, how can we improve), vs. *what* is being done (creating a training or a flyer).

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How can I learn more?

- [Making the Case: A Comprehensive Systems Approach for Adolescent Health & Well-Being](#), a 16-page white paper, March 2010, by the Association of Maternal and Child Health Programs.

How can I build my skills?

- [System Capacity Tool for Adolescent Health](#), a user-friendly tool brought to you by SAHRC and AMCHP to help you assess and strengthen your MCH program's capacity to support the ten essential public health services that build effective state adolescent health programs.

3 Define your role, strategy, and work plan

Your job description may be different from that of your peers in other states (based on funding sources, etc.) And it may not fully describe the range of your responsibilities or goals. Consider how you want to grow in your role and skills as you think about your overall strategy.

What does this look like in practice?

- You regularly assess your skills related to your role and seek out tools to help you grow in your work.
- You have a strategy in place: you've identified a reachable goal and mapped out the steps to get there.
- Your strategy conveys to your colleagues that you understand, align, and advocate for your work within the context of your agency/division's priorities.
- You have a work plan in place, giving you a clear idea of which partners and opportunities will help you accomplish your goals and who is accountable for delivering what and when.
- You know how and when you will measure your progress and success.

How can I learn more?

- [SAHRC's July 2021 "Connections" newsletter](#) is all about strategic planning resources for SAHCs.
- SAHRC's database of state adolescent health strategic plans offers [38 examples of department and programmatic strategies](#). (Remember that your work may look different than that of your national peers based on funding sources, and other contexts specific to your state.)
- [How the Title V/MCH Block Grant Can Advance Adolescent Health](#) is a 38-minute video overview from the Association of Maternal and Child Health, 2020.

How can I build my skills?

- [How-to Guide for State-Level Strategic Planning and Action for Adolescent Health](#) was developed by SAHRC and NAHIC with extensive input from state adolescent health coordinators and MCH programs.
- [Community Toolbox](#), from the Center for Community Health and Development at the University of Kansas, is a resource for those working to build healthier communities and bring about social change. Tools and topics include strategic planning, development logic models, and creating and maintaining partnerships.
- [PREP Logic Model Tip Sheet and Tools](#), from Family and Youth Services Bureau, helps you visualize your strategy graphically.

4 Communicate strategically

Knowing how and when to talk about your work deepens its impact. As an adolescent health champion, you'll need to get in the habit of "framing" youth positively for adult audiences, and be clear about who you need to influence next.

This key corresponds to MCH Leadership Competency #5: Communication.

What does this look like in practice?

- You can articulate your perfect world scenario, the gaps between now and then, and what needs to happen next in a 60-second elevator speech.
- You understand what motivates, scares, and interests the audience you're trying to influence, and can show which important values your program shares with them (such as a productive workforce).
- You have a communications strategy and a work plan that support some or all of your program's or department's strategic plan.

How can I learn more?

- Check out how Frameworks Institute, the national gold standard in shaping effective communications, uses social science research to help professionals like you [apply a positive "frame" to adolescent health](#).
- Likewise, you can use Frameworks Institute's recommendations to [frame health equity with bi-partisan values](#) like solutions, opportunity, fairness, and prosperity.

How can I build my skills?

- Use SAHRC's [one-page communications self-assessment](#) to see how strategically your brain currently approaches adolescent health communications.
- Fill out SAHRC's [simplified version of Spitfire Strategies SmartChart 4.0](#) (the national gold standard in helping real people develop great communications strategies). Align it with your (actual or aspirational) strategic plan.
- Practice positioning yourself in casual conversations as the internal expert, with the goal of reminding your health department and partners that adolescent health is worthy of dedicated funding and programming.

5

Grow diverse partnerships

Time spent building relationships creates lasting systemic benefits and helps your equity work get traction. When you get to know your colleagues within your agency, other state agencies, communities, academia, the private sector, the public sector – you name it – you find promising intersections with adolescent and young adult health.

This key corresponds to MCH Leadership Competencies #7: Cultural Competency and #10: Interdisciplinary/Interprofessional Team Building.

What does this look like in practice?

- You make it a daily priority to make connections and grow new relationships, whether personal or professional, inside or outside your program or agency.
- You leverage these relationships to ask about the formal and informal ways things tend to get done.
- You serve as a resource to other professionals working with young people and share your expertise on supporting adolescent health with a developmental lens.
- You find or build common ground with other programs/divisions/bureaus such as data sharing, shared training, de-siloing work in the same communities, etc.

How can I learn more?

- Join coalitions, advisory groups, and other programs'/agencies' events to learn more about their work and see how you can help each other.

- Find out who else is doing work in the communities you serve (grants, programs) and compare notes: What do you both struggle with? Is there an area you could both be more effective with if you worked together? What are the similarities and differences between your programs, frameworks, reporting systems, etc.? (Defining your respective brands can help you both approach funders).

How can I build my skills?

- Use this [System Capacity Tool for Partnerships, Chapter 7](#) from the System Capacity Tool for Adolescent Health.
- Try SAHRC's [Recipes for Working with Partners](#), a fun collection of tips, tools, and scenarios to explore on your own or with a colleague.
- Consult Community Toolbox's detailed [Creating and Maintaining Partnerships](#).

6

Partner authentically with youth

When thinking about relationships and partners, don't forget about youth themselves! Youth engagement is a fundamental need of healthy youth development. When youth and adults come together to assess, plan and work on youth health issues, efforts are more effective and youth (and adults) grow.

This key corresponds to MCH Leadership Competency #8: Family-Professional Partnerships.

What does this look like in practice?

- You engage youth directly in needs assessments and other advisory roles such as youth advisors and interns, hiring youth as DOH employees, and establishing youth advisory councils.
- If this isn't possible, you engage youth in other ways, asking for their feedback, including them in programming, and asking partners to engage their youth advisors in your work.
- You encourage grantees and community partners to include youth at the table ("nothing about me without me") and help them build skills around youth engagement and youth-adult partnerships.

How can I learn more?

- [State-Level Youth Advisory Structures: Where Can I Find One?](#) This PowerPoint compilation of tools and examples of state youth advisory structures comes from our national partners AMCHP, Georgetown MCH Workforce Development Center, NNSAHC, and SAHRC.
- SAHRC's [Youth Advisory Board Catalog](#) (LINK TBD) is a detailed spreadsheet listing all states reporting YABs, plus membership numbers, compensation, operating structures, and funding sources.
- [Partnerships with Youth and Young Adults](#) This 14-page AMCHP case study describes strategies that Title V/MCH and other state-level public health partners use to engage youth in meaningful ways.

How can I build my skills?

- [Youth Advisor Organizational Readiness Assessment](#) This 12-pager developed by the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment helps you gauge your organization's readiness to adopt a Youth Advisor model.
- [Wisconsin Youth Engagement Toolkit](#) Designed by the Wisconsin Department of Health Services to help adult facilitators engage young people, this 48-page toolkit helps adults set up youth as authentic program leaders.
- [What is Youth Engagement, Really?](#) Act for Youth Center's collection of tools and resources for youth engagement, includes sections on Youth in Decision-Making, Strengthening Communities through Youth Participation, Youth as Evaluators, and a Washington Your Voice Handbook.

7 Build your training and facilitation skills

Training and facilitating meetings are foundational skills necessary to this role. Few people are well trained in these skills. Take the time to learn effective ways to teach adults and facilitate groups. There are many good trainings, books and online resources available to help you. Also, watch other trainers and facilitators – identify what worked and what didn't, learn from those who are effective. Strengthening these skills is well worth the time and effort.

Graphic pullout: This key corresponds to MCH Leadership Competency #9.

What does this look like in practice?

- You have a goal, agenda, and time limit for every gathering.
- You build team agreements and safe spaces.
- You choose tools and processes that help move your team/project forward.
- You guide the group process in a way that ensures all individuals are engaged effectively.
- You encourage others to share ideas and engage them in emerging solutions or decisions.

How can I learn more?

- [Facilitation Skills Self-Assessment](#), a one-pager from the Center for Health Promotion in the New England Workplace, is a great exercise to measure your current skill level.
- [The Role of a Facilitator: Guiding an Event Through to a Successful Conclusion](#), This 12-page guide from Mind Tools is like a “Facilitation 101.”

How can I build my skills?

- [15 ½ Ideas to Make Your Presentation Go from Boring to Bravo](#) is a 16-page fast and entertaining read by current President of the U.S. National Speakers Association, Kristin Arnold.
- [A Short Guide to Facilitating Workshops](#) from Seeds for Change can help you and your program get to the next level in terms of being strategic, inclusive and sustainable.

8 Connect to resources

There is a whole universe of resources to help you elevate state adolescent health work and priorities! The real challenge is remembering to use them.

What does this look like in practice?

- You have a system for organizing and dating the resources you gather.
- You share these resources widely and invite your colleagues, grantees, and partners to do the same.
- You understand the “org chart” of your national partners and their roles in supporting the work of state adolescent coordinators.

How can I learn more?

- Watch for--and start a topical list of--trainings, speakers, publications, toolkits, meet-and-greets, initiatives, research, and other states' examples.
- Ask your colleagues in your program/agency and in other youth-serving roles for their go-to-resources on adolescent health and other priority topics.
- Visit the [NNSAHC website](#) for more information on your national resource partners working to promote state adolescent health initiatives.

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- Check out this [snapshot](#) of where adolescent and young adult health, and Positive Youth Development related programs and resources can be found in federal agencies.

How can I build my skills?

- [Acronym Soup - A Matching Game](#) to learn more about national and Federal partners and your resource needs
- [AMCHP's Leadership Lab](#) is an intensive training cohort that helps state adolescent health coordinators build their capacity to convey the importance of Title V programs, create a vision for success, and foster authentic engagement and collaboration across disciplines.
- [MCH Navigator](#) is an advanced curriculum for MCH leaders. Check it out to see if this describes you!