



2023 Issue 4: June

Dear colleagues,

Since supporting our collective mental health is a complex public health issue, it was GREAT to experience how simple it can be on an individual level. What a boost to my own mental health to greet so many of you last month at the annual State Adolescent Health Coordinator (SAHC) meeting and AMCHP conference in New Orleans!

It has only been three years since the start of the pandemic: I don't take for granted the gift of gathering together with my fellow humans. Our virtual gatherings were a lifeline, but never as fulfilling as sharing ideas and generating solutions face to face. Seeing my colleagues, some for the first time in real life, felt healing and restorative. After all, this work is about *people!*

In one session, 988 Create, an arts campaign led by amazing Alaska youth and made for youth, reminded us of this very basic human need – and responsibility – to connect with one another. In [this powerful video](#), they promote mental health awareness and the 988 crisis hotline (thanks, Alaska SAHC Jenny Baker, for sharing with us!) with original art and song: "Let's just talk a little while, see if I can make you smile, tell me what you're going through, I'll be there to comfort you."

We are wishing you a summer full of time to slow down and connect (and, also, lots of ice cream...).

Sincerely,  
[Lynn Bretl](#), MPP

Director, State Adolescent Health Resource Center at the University of Minnesota



"If we seize this moment, step up for our children and their families in their moment of need, and lead with inclusion, kindness, and respect, we can lay the foundation for a healthier, more resilient, and more fulfilled nation."

—Dr. Vivek H. Murthy

Surgeon General of the United States

[Read about the Surgeon General's Advisory on Protecting Youth Mental Health](#)

## resources by and for youth

[The Jed Foundation's](#) (JED) mental health resource center helps young people manage feelings like anxiety and sadness, navigate emotional challenges like break-ups and other difficult transitions, get information on mental health conditions like depression, discover tools for self-care, and get help for themselves or a loved one.

[Evokate: An App Created by Teens to Address Teen Mental Health](#) was created by and for young adults, ages 18-25, to help users advocate and organize at the intersection of mental and social issues at the local and state level. The new tool, released by Well-Being Trust and their partners, including Young Invincibles, covers topics such as racial justice, links to resources like a directory for mental health providers focused on the LGBTQ+ community, and offers videos, advocacy toolkits, statistics, youth stories, and links to related organizations.

[Letters to Strangers](#) (L2S) is the largest global youth-run nonprofit working to destigmatize mental illness and increase access to affordable, quality treatment, particularly for youth. Their programming takes three forms: science-based peer education, grassroots policy-based advocacy, and letter writing about personal experiences with mental health challenges. These anonymous, handwritten letter exchanges occur through Letters to Strangers' chapters, on school campuses, in local communities, or through an online platform allowing the public to participate in a digital version. Letters to Strangers partnered with members of the Screen Actors Guild of New York and other incredible creative professionals to create a short film series in which actors read aloud letters submitted by young people with mental health concerns around the world. [Watch the series](#) for a dive into race, ethnicity, youth, and mental health around the world.



## resources for youth-serving professionals

Mental Health Awareness Month (MHAM) was in May but its themes resonate all year, especially for young people. This [Mental Health America](#) campaign challenges all of us to consider how the world around us affects our health (something we talk about in AYAH in the form of social determinants of health). MHA's 2023 toolkit includes information and resources for improving and maintaining well-being, and how to seek help for mental health challenges.

[Promoting and Caring for Young Adult Mental Health: Challenges and Opportunities for Improvement](#), developed by a team from the Adolescent and Young Adult Health National Resource Center, provides:

- the most recent national findings on Young Adult mental health status and utilization of mental health care.
- summaries of the developmental factors important for positive mental health.
- evidence-based resources for mental health promotion, prevention, and treatment at the individual and community levels.

This year, the [National Alliance on Mental Illness](#) celebrated Mental Health Awareness Month with the launch of their #MoreThanEnough Campaign, which reminds us of the inherent value we each hold regardless of diagnosis, appearance, socioeconomic status, background or ability. We think "More than enough" is a great message for our AYA workforce to (continue to) bring to our communities: we support youth mental health by emphasizing the value we see in every young person, amplifying it, and celebrating it.

A recent Annie E. Casey Foundation's webinar, [Framing Youth Mental Health for Well-Being and Opportunity](#), focuses on how advocates can communicate effectively about youth mental health and engage decision-makers in seeking solutions. It features research insights from the [FrameWorks Institute](#) and insights from young panelists.

The Children's Partnership and the National Black Women's Justice Institute report, [Youth-Centered Strategies for Hope, Healing and Health](#), sets forth actionable solutions for policymakers at the federal, state and local levels to build a culturally-responsive and gender-affirming mental health care system for all youth, especially youth of color. The report is based on recommendations from [The Hope, Healing and Health Collective](#), a youth-led policy council that elevates the voices of marginalized youth in developing policy solutions to address their own mental health needs.

In a new essay for Issues in Science and Technology, [When Youth Are Experts in the Field](#), authors describe how they incorporated the views of young people into a recent report from the Board on Children, Youth, and Families about adolescent health. "For research related to children, youth, and families to be impactful," they write. "It must also be relevant and responsive to the diverse lived experiences of young people themselves."

[Teen Mental Health First Aid](#) is the result of a partnership between the National Council for Mental Wellbeing and Lady Gaga's Born This Way Foundation. The program teaches teaches young people in

## specific resources for Title V/ MCH programs



**Innovation in Service Delivery**

**Emerging Topical Issues in AYA Mental Health**

**MCH Workforce Capacity and Skillsets**

The **Association of Maternal and Child Health Programs** new [online learning module series](#) can help Title V staff leverage their jurisdiction's MCH block grant program to improve systems of mental health care for adolescents and young adults (AYAs). Each of the four modules is a standalone learning experience: users can navigate between them in any order. Each offers an introduction and background on the topic, key resources, examples of MCH programs in action, a summary of takeaways, and an opportunity for individual reflection. Topics include:

- **Emerging Topical Issues in AYA Mental Health:** the state of mental health among AYAs and trends over the last decade.
- **Innovation in Service Delivery:** the ways in which creativity in youth screening procedures has reduced some existing barriers to high-quality treatment and support.
- **Integration of Mental Health into Primary Care for AYAs:** frameworks, strategies, and real-world examples of mental health services integrated into primary care encounters for AYAs.
- **MCH Workforce Capacity and Skillsets:** Pivoted approaches to workforce development for the AYA-MCH workforce to improve mental health care systems.

And, check out the Mental Health resources page on the **National Network of State Adolescent Health Coordinators** ([NNSAHC website](#)).

## engaging youth in mental health and public health promotion

### At the state level:

Did you know that SAHRC has compiled a catalog of state-level youth engagement efforts? It documents the extensive youth engagement work taking place in state public health agencies, and how your SAHC colleagues are walking the walk of seeing, developing, and celebrating young people's contributions to inform adolescent and young adult programs and policies. Check out our [Catalog of State Youth Advisory Structures](#), compiled over many years by SAHRC TA consultant Rena Large.

[Youth MOVE National](#) (Motivating Others through Voices of Experience) is a youth-guided, chapter driven organization dedicated to improving services and systems that support positive growth and development. It unites the voices of individuals who have lived experience in various systems including mental health, juvenile justice, education, and child welfare. Check them out for tips on expanding HYD opportunities in your agency or system.

### At the national level:

Mental Health America's [Young Mental Health Leaders Council](#) (YMHL) connects young leaders from across the U.S. who have created programs and initiatives that fill gaps in traditional mental health services in their communities. Through YMHL, members connect with other leaders, share their work with MHA's audiences, and expand their ideas into new communities. The 2022-2023 cohort is working to support mental health across many areas including education, housing, foster care, addiction recovery, and state-level policy. [Learn more about their work.](#)

*Are you engaging young people in public health initiatives?  
[Tell us about it!](#)*

## state spotlight: Maine

According to the Maine Youth Action Network (MYAN), finding meaningful solutions to AYA mental health challenges depends on engaging young people in all conversations and all phases of program development.

A statewide youth leadership development organization that started out as a youth-organized wellness conference, MYAN has grown into a non-profit that supports youth-adult partnerships and builds infrastructure to sustain them. It offers educational opportunities, leadership development, and collaborative community programs to engage youth in leading community change.

Basically, MYAN does whatever it takes to foster healthy, thriving youth-lead action: It supports young people in planning and leading the Maine youth leadership conference, attended by 400 youth annually. It uses this conference as a regional model for youth-led conferences. And, it incubated a youth employment program, Gateway to Opportunity, that scaled up last year as a statewide program.

Young people guide MYAN's work. MYAN's adult leaders hear from youth leaders now, for example, that addressing poverty and basic needs must be the first step in solving the AYA mental health puzzle. As a result of this guidance, MYAN's funding proposals prioritize basic needs (housing, food, safety) ahead of a narrower focus on mental health.

MYAN also delivers professional development and technical assistance to adult leaders on the fundamentals of youth development and what successful youth partnership looks like. According to Beth, "We are being more intentional about forming the alliances needed to advance healthy youth development policies and practices." MYAN and six partner organizations just launched a statewide Youth Development Council, for example, to remove systemic silos and advance more equitable youth engagement.

Staff continuously do the critical work of examining how racial bias impacts programming and program design. "Our racial equity work is mostly internal," says Beth. "We're really looking to improve our programmatic structures and systems because they are at the core of any external work we undertake." MYAN is also scrutinizing its own conference planning using a modified version of the [GARE](#) racial equity audit tool. "We want to know if our goals are having their intended impact, though we're not sure yet if the impact is manifesting. This work is a slow boil."

Beth's advice for those states and professionals in the early stages of youth engagement? Be mindful of the strain the last several years have put on the AYAH workforce itself. "We need to create supportive mentoring and networking spaces for the adults already working in youth engagement to ensure that their hard-earned expertise doesn't leave the field."

At the end of the day, Beth thinks adolescent and young adult health promotion is all about connection. "We are all small agents within bigger systems. And young adults feel like systems are actively, intentionally working against them. This makes it hard to build connections – and more necessary, especially as our work to change systems unfolds so slowly. Connectedness matters more than other protective factors."

Share this newsletter with colleagues, grantees and other partners! Anyone may subscribe to SAHRC Connections by [signing up here](#).

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## about sahrc

The State Adolescent Health Resource Center (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/MCHB structure, we offer workforce development in the form of ongoing responsive leadership, technical assistance, research-based resources, and community-building opportunities. This newsletter is funded through SAHRC's partnership with The Adolescent and Young Adult Health – National Resource Center ("the Center") which also includes the [National Adolescent Health Information Center](#), the [Association for Maternal and Child Health Programs](#), and the [National Improvement Partnership Network](#). The Center is supported by the Maternal and Child Health Bureau, Health Services and Resources Administration, USDHHS cooperative agreement U45MC27709, Adolescent and Young Adult Health Capacity Building Program. The contents don't necessarily represent the views of or an endorsement by HRSA, HHS, or the U.S. Government.



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