



New State Adolescent Health Coordinator (SAHC) Orientation Guide

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.

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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. [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 SAHC

As a SAHC, you are a critical part of a system that ensures adolescent and young adult health needs are represented in MCH Life course programming. 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 | LIMITED FOCUS on Adolescent Health |
|---|--|--|
| The SAHC brings an adolescent focus to broader public health initiatives (e.g. chronic disease), address systems issues (e.g. technical assistance, training, needs assessments, strategic planning, building a positive youth development focus, collaboration). | The SAHC manages adolescent programs at the local and regional level; teen pregnancy/ sexual health is most frequent issue addressed. This might include: managing grants; providing technical assistance and training; evaluating programs. | The SAHC acts more as a focal point for youth issues within their agency. They often manage many other public health issues (e.g. perinatal health, family planning, 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, the following eight tips will contribute to your success.

01

GROUND YOUR WORK IN ADOLESCENT DEVELOPMENT

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

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.

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.

LEARN MORE[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
- Middle Adolescence 15-17
- Late Adolescence 18-24

[Understanding Adolescent & Young Adult 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)
- **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)

BUILD SKILLS

- [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.
- [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.
- [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.

02

BE A SYSTEMS THINKER

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

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).

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).

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.

BUILD 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.

03

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.

LEARN MORE

[SAHRC's July 2021 "Connections" newsletter](#) is all about strategic planning resources for SAHCs.

BUILD 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.

SAHRC's catalog 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.

[Community Toolbox](#), from the Center for Community Health and Development at the University of Kansas, this 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.

[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.

[PREP Logic Model Tip Sheet and Tools](#), from Family and Youth Services Bureau, helps you visualize your strategy graphically.

04

COMMUNICATE STRATEGICALLY

This Key corresponds to MCH’s Leadership Competency #5 Communication

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.

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.

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.

BUILD 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.

05

GROW DIVERSE PARTNERSHIPS

This Key corresponds to MCH’s Leadership Competency: [#7 Cultural Competency and #10 Interdisciplinary/Interprofessional Team Building](#)

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.

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.

LEARN MORE

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).

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

BUILD SKILLS

Use this [System Capacity Tool for Partnerships](#), Chapter 7 (page 76) 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](#).

06

PARTNER AUTHENTICALLY WITH YOUTH

This Key corresponds to MCH’s Leadership Competency: [#8 Family-Professional Partnerships](#)

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.

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

LEARN MORE

[State Public Health Youth Advisory Structures Catalog and Companion Library](#) synthesizes decades of technical assistance to state adolescent health programs in Maternal and Child Health and other public health entities. It includes great state examples, typical structures, and lessons learned; and connects to a Google drive of supporting documents.

[Promoting Positive Youth Development in Your State](#) provides examples of and resources for state directed initiatives to promote and infuse a PYD approach into adolescent focused initiatives and links to an accompanying google folder including commonly cited research and frameworks; and examples of: Proclamations & Legislation examples; Posters & Handouts examples; Health Memes created by youth (NM); and PYD related Activities/Icebreakers.

[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.

BUILD 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.

[Colorado PYD in Action Toolkit](#) Developed by the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment to foster reflection, discussion, and continuous improvement for youth serving entities, this toolkit includes examples of operationalizing PYD in programs, practices, and policies.

07

BUILD YOUR TRAINING AND FACILITATION SKILLS

This Key corresponds to MCH’s Leadership Competency: [#9 Developing Others Through Teaching, Coaching, and Mentoring](#)

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.

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.

LEARN MORE & BUILD SKILLS

[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.”

[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.

08

CONNECT TO RESOURCES

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| | <p>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.</p> <p>What does this look like in practice?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• 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. |
|--|---|

LEARN MORE

Watch for—and start a topical list of— trainings, speakers, publications, toolkits, meet-and-greets, initiatives, research, and other states’ examples.

Visit the [NNSAHC website](#) for more information on your national resource partners working to promote state adolescent health initiatives.

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.

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.

BUILD SKILLS

[MCH Navigator](#) is an advanced curriculum for MCH leaders. Check it out to see if this describes you!