



# ADOLESCENT HEALTH AND WELL-BEING: A SNAPSHOT OF A POLICYLAB RESEARCH PORTFOLIO

Adolescents, or youth and young adults ages 12–24, face a number of challenges in accessing quality health care services that meet their unique needs.

Adolescence is a critical time of development, and an individual's health and well-being during this time can have implications for the rest of their life.

## A SYNOPSIS OF VITAL ADOLESCENT HEALTH AND WELL-BEING ISSUES



### BEHAVIORAL HEALTH

*More than 20 percent of children and adolescents have had a serious behavioral health disorder at some point in their life.<sup>1</sup>*



### SPECIAL POPULATIONS OF ADOLESCENTS

*Special populations, including LGBT youth and those with a history in the child welfare system, have disproportionate burdens of socioemotional, behavioral and physical health adversities. For example, as many as half of child welfare-involved youth have a chronic health condition.<sup>3</sup>*



### SEXUAL & REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH

*Half of the nearly 20 million new sexually transmitted infections (STIs) reported each year were among young people between the ages of 15 to 24.<sup>2</sup>*



### TRANSITIONING TO ADULT CARE

*Nearly 20 percent, or 4.3 million, of adolescents in the United States have a special health care need that complicates their transition into adult health care.<sup>4,5</sup>*

**We believe it is essential to understand adolescents' and young adults' unique health care needs and break down barriers that may prevent them from developing into healthy, productive adults.**

To better address adolescent health issues, we've formed a collaborative of PolicyLab researchers who have expertise in four areas: behavioral health, sexual and reproductive health, special populations of adolescents, and transitioning to adult care. Focusing on these topics, we aim to improve health outcomes for the 55 million adolescents and young adults between

the ages of 12–24 in the U.S. by supporting greater accessibility, quality and utilization of services.<sup>6</sup> We also collaborate with stakeholders who impact adolescent health to ensure that our evidence-based research is implemented at the appropriate levels to improve health outcomes during this critical time of human development.





## BEHAVIORAL HEALTH

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**Although behavioral health concerns, such as depression, anxiety and substance use, are common among young people, these problems often go unrecognized and untreated.**

Behavioral health problems during adolescence are associated with a number of negative outcomes, including school drop-out, engagement in high-risk behaviors, suicide ideation and continued behavioral health issues in adulthood.<sup>7,8</sup> Additionally, many children and adolescents with chronic medical conditions experience behavioral health difficulties that can negatively impact medical outcomes and lead to longer hospital stays. To promote adolescents' overall well-being, we design and test novel approaches to behavioral health care, including programs to prevent depression and improve the identification and management of behavioral health issues for adolescents with chronic disease. We also work with stakeholders to develop strategies that better integrate behavioral health care into schools, primary care, and medical sub-specialty settings.



## SPECIAL POPULATIONS OF ADOLESCENTS

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**Certain populations of adolescents are at risk for developing negative health outcomes that are largely tied to a piece of their identity or history.**

For example, transgender youth are often unable to access comprehensive gender-affirming care, and youth who have received child welfare services have higher rates of teen pregnancy than the general adolescent population. Researchers in our collaborative strive to create equitable health outcomes for vulnerable adolescents. We have a body of work focused on ensuring comprehensive care for gender non-conforming youth, documenting the service needs of youth with a history with the child welfare system, and evaluating interventions serving young mothers.



## SEXUAL & REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH

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**Sexual health is defined as a state of physical, mental and social well-being in relation to sexuality, however many adolescents do not receive recommended sexual and reproductive services that could help them reach this healthy state.<sup>9</sup>**

For example, one-third of sexually active girls have never been counseled about birth control. Thus, we see a high prevalence of sexual and reproductive health conditions, which is especially alarming considering the effectiveness of prevention and treatment tactics, including contraception, vaccines and medications such as pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) for HIV. Our research on sexual and reproductive health aims to ensure that sexually active adolescents make smart, healthy choices. We also design and test innovative ways of delivering care to adolescents to promote sexual and reproductive health, including expedited partner therapy to treat STIs, expanded access to contraceptives both in the emergency department and in primary care, and digital health interventions like apps that encourage youth to engage in comprehensive sexual health care.



## TRANSITIONING TO ADULT CARE

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**The transition from pediatric to adult health care is difficult for anyone, but especially for youth with special health care needs.**

These youth have one or more chronic physical, developmental, behavioral or emotional conditions, and they often visit several different specialty pediatric providers. We have found that these patients and families often report poor care coordination and lack of comprehensive health insurance, while providers in both pediatric and adult health care systems report a need for improved transition policies, among other challenges. We have a robust body of work to break down these barriers and the improve transition processes for patients and families.

## REFERENCES

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to learn more about all of our adolescent health and well-being research.



**The mission of PolicyLab at Children's Hospital of Philadelphia (CHOP) is to achieve optimal child health and well-being by informing program and policy changes through interdisciplinary research.**

**PolicyLab is a Center of Emphasis within Children's Hospital of Philadelphia's Research Institute, one of the largest pediatric research institutes in the country.**

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