

Committee on Applying Lessons of Optimal Adolescent Health to Improve Behavioral Outcomes for Youth

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Study Sponsored by:

Office of the Assistant Secretary for Health (OASH) of the
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services



Sponsor

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of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services



Statement of Task

The National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine will convene an ad hoc committee to review key questions related to the effective implementation of the Teen Pregnancy Prevention (TPP) program. The committee, using an optimal health lens, will explore the scientific and public health literature surrounding key elements or core components effective in improving behavioral outcomes for youth. Specifically, the committee will analyze components of a variety of youth programs which may be successful in preventing adolescent-risk behaviors with the parallel goal of accelerating progress toward the discontinuation (and not merely the reduction) of those risks among currently engaged adolescents. The committee will identify the programs and outcomes to review and examine which factors contribute to optimal health. In addition, the committee will consider broader issues of methodology as they relate to examining specific components of programs in comparison to research that uses the program as the unit of analysis.

The report will recommend a research agenda that incorporates a focus on optimal health for youth. The report will also offer recommendations on ways that the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Health (OASH) can use its role to foster the adoption of promising elements of youth-focused programs in the initiatives it oversees such as mental and physical health, adolescent development, and reproductive health and teen pregnancy. Drawing on lessons learned, the report will present recommendations on ways OASH youth-focused programs could be improved.



Committee Members

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Study Methodology

- in-person closed session meetings (n=5)
- public information-gathering session (n=1)
- extensive review of the literature
 - systematic review of core components of adolescent health programs
- memos received from TPP Tier 1 B grantees (n=6)
- papers commissioned (n=5) on adolescent health and media, consent, LGBTQ youth, youth with disabilities, and youth perspectives



Optimal Health: Defined



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A dynamic balance of physical, emotional, social, spiritual, and intellectual health.

O'Donnell (2009, p. vi)



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Living my best life would include being physically, mentally, and emotionally “fit” and striving every day to reach a sense of stability.

Male, age 17, MyVoice



Optimal Health: Defined

It is not realistic to expect to reach that magic point of perfect balance and stay there. It is more realistic to seek opportunities for growth and think in terms of a process of striving for balance under changing circumstances.

O'Donnell (2017, p. 76)



Healthy risk taking is a normal and necessary part of adolescent identity development, providing adolescents with opportunities to explore their environments, practice decision-making skills, and develop autonomy.

Chapter 5



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Chapter 5

Living my best life means to be happy and accepting of myself in all aspects. I'm free to make my own decisions and whether they turn out good or bad I know I'm one step closer to where I need to be [sic] in life.

Female, age 17, MyVoice



Recommendations and Promising Approaches

Programs

Optimal Health Programming

The OASH should fund universal, holistic, multi-component programs that meet all of the following criteria:

- promote and improve the health and well-being of the whole person;
- begin in early childhood and are offered throughout adolescence;
- consider adolescent decision making, exploration, and risk taking as normative;
- engage diverse communities, public policy makers, and societal leaders to improve modifiable social and environmental determinants of health; and
- are theory-driven and evidence-based.



Key Findings and Conclusions



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- Promising components across optimal health domains:



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 - Universal programs
 - Promoting social-emotional learning and positive youth development competencies
 - Beginning in childhood
 - Including diverse youth and communities in program development
 - Creating a supportive and inclusive culture in program settings
 - Theory-based approaches



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- Risk taking is a normal and necessary part of adolescence



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 - Creating a supportive and inclusive culture in program settings
 - Theory-based approaches
- Risk taking is a normal and necessary part of adolescence
- Programs should be informed by scientific research evidence



Research

Core Components Research



Core Components Research

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services should fund additional research aimed at identifying, measuring, and evaluating the effectiveness of specific core components of programs and interventions focused on promoting positive health behaviors and outcomes among adolescents.



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- Most current research is not designed to identify which program components are more effective than others.



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- More research is needed to determine how, when, and for whom the common components of programs are effective in promoting positive adolescent health behaviors and outcomes.



Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS)



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The Division of Adolescent and School Health (DASH) of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) should

- update and expand the YRBS to include
 - out-of-school youth (e.g., homeless, incarcerated, dropped out), and
 - survey items that reflect a more comprehensive set of sexual behaviors with specific definitions; and
- conduct further research on the ideal setting and mode for administering the YRBS with today's adolescents



Key Findings and Conclusions

- The current YRBS does not reflect the experiences of out-of-school adolescents (e.g., dropped out, homeless).



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- The current YRBS does not reflect the experiences of out-of-school adolescents (e.g., dropped out, homeless).
- The sexual behavior items are neither specific nor comprehensive enough to provide the most accurate estimates of the sexual behaviors in which today's youth engage.



Promising Approaches

Promote Inclusiveness and Equity

Programs can benefit from implementing and evaluating policies and practices that promote inclusiveness and equity so that all youth are able to thrive.



Key Findings and Conclusions

- Having supportive environments and improved access to resources can lead to greater positive program effects.



Key Findings and Conclusions

- Having supportive environments and improved access to resources can lead to greater positive program effects.
- Programs that target social determinants of health and well-being can have widespread, positive effects on multiple behaviors and outcomes.



Youth Involvement



Youth Involvement

Programs can benefit from including youth of diverse ages, racial/ethnic backgrounds, socioeconomic status, rurality/urbanity, sexual orientations, sexes/genders, and disability/ability status in their decision-making processes.



Key Findings and Conclusions



Key Findings and Conclusions

- Youth are experts of their own experiences and challenges.



Key Findings and Conclusions

- Youth are experts of their own experiences and challenges.
- Program development, implementation, and evaluation efforts would benefit from including youth of diverse ages, racial/ethnic backgrounds, socioeconomic status, rurality/urbanity, sexual orientations, sexes/genders, and disability/ability status.



And for me, what I think a thriving person in 2019 is when you're physically, mentally, and emotionally stable. I feel like you accept yourself for who you are and you're around people that support you emotionally and you can in return give that support back.

Natnael Abate, age 18
Peer Educator with Promising Futures DC
Public Information-Gathering Session, April 17, 2019



DISCUSSION

To read or download a copy of the report, please visit:

<https://www.nationalacademies.org/adolescent-health>

Follow us on  #adolescenthealth

For more information about the study or dissemination activities, please contact:
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APPENDIX



References

- O'Donnell, M.P. (2009). Definition of health promotion 2.0: Embracing passion, enhancing motivation, recognizing dynamic balance, and creating opportunities. *American Journal of Health Promotion*, 24(1), iv.
- O'Donnell, M.P. (2017). *Health Promotion in the Workplace* (5th ed.). Troy, MI: Art & Science of Health Promotion Institute.



REPORT RECOMMENDATIONS AND PROMISING APPROACHES

RECOMMENDATION 1: The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services should fund additional research aimed at identifying, measuring, and evaluating the effectiveness of specific core components of programs and interventions focused on promoting positive health behaviors and outcomes among adolescents.

RECOMMENDATION 2: The Division of Adolescent and School Health (DASH) of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) should

- update and expand the Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) to include
 - out-of-school youth (e.g., homeless, incarcerated, dropped out), and
 - survey items that reflect a more comprehensive set of sexual risk behaviors with specific definitions; and
- conduct further research on the ideal setting and mode for administering the YRBS with today's adolescents.

RECOMMENDATION 3: The Office of the Assistant Secretary for Health within the Department of Health and Human Services should fund universal, holistic, multi-component programs that meet all of the following criteria:

- promote and improve the health and well-being of the whole person, laying the foundation for specific, developmentally appropriate behavioral skills development;
- begin in early childhood and are offered during critical developmental windows, from childhood throughout adolescence;
- consider adolescent decision making, exploration, and risk taking as normative;
- engage diverse communities, public policy makers, and societal leaders to improve modifiable social and environmental determinants of health and well-being that disadvantage and stress young people and their families; and
- are theory-driven and evidence-based.

PROMISING APPROACH 1: Programs can benefit from implementing and evaluating policies and practices that promote inclusiveness and equity so that all youth are able to thrive.

PROMISING APPROACH 2: Programs can benefit from including youth of diverse ages, racial/ethnic backgrounds, socioeconomic status, rurality/urbanity, sexual orientations, sexes/genders, and disability/ability status in their decision-making processes.