



# THE PROMISE OF ADOLESCENCE: REALIZING OPPORTUNITY FOR ALL YOUTH

A consensus study  
report from

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## The Health System

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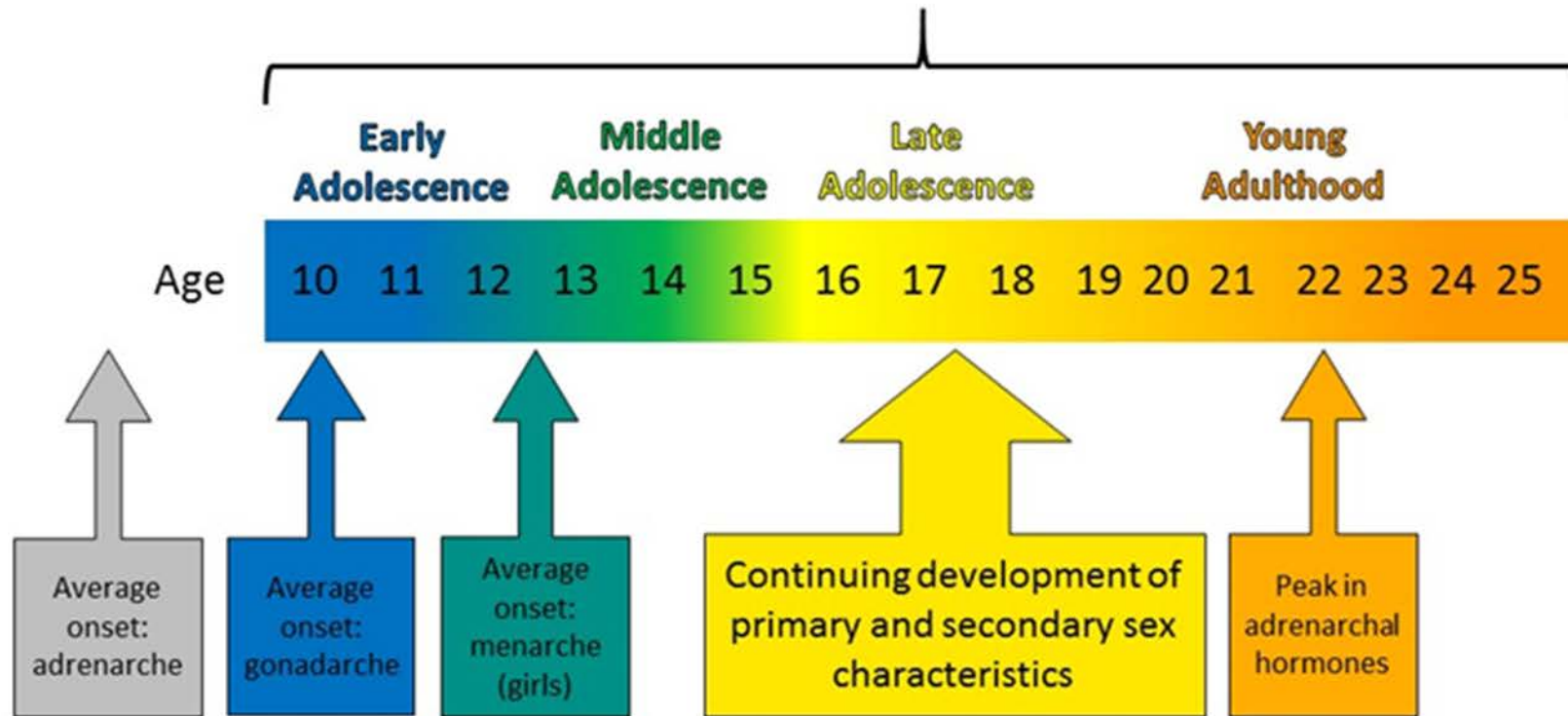
## Statement of Task

The study sponsors asked the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine to provide an evidence-based report that:

- Examines the neurobiological and socio-behavioral science of adolescent development, and
- Explores how this knowledge can be applied to institutions and systems so that adolescent well-being, resilience, and development are promoted and that systems address structural barriers and inequalities in opportunity and access.



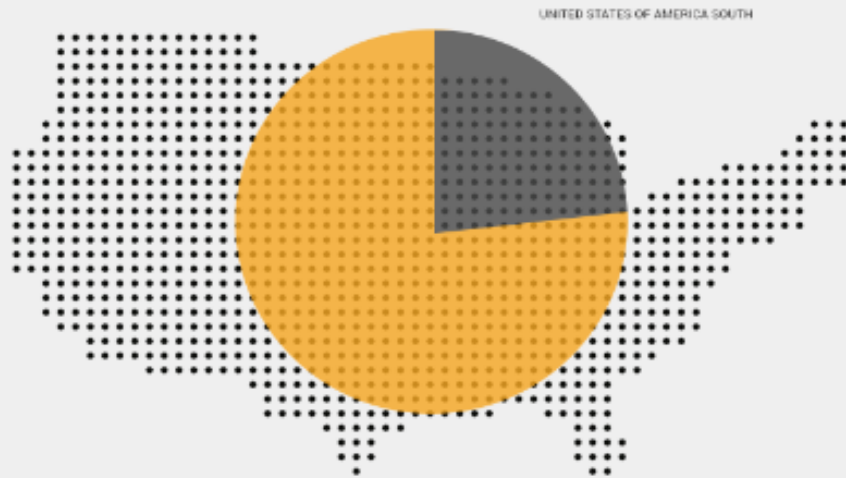
## Developmental Periods of Adolescence





## 2017

There were approximately 73.5 million adolescents ages 10 to 25 in 2017, representing 22.6 percent of the U.S. population.



## 2020

The adolescent population is expected to become majority-minority by 2020.



Relative to young children, adolescents have **advanced decision-making skills** and can better seek solutions that are **right for them.**

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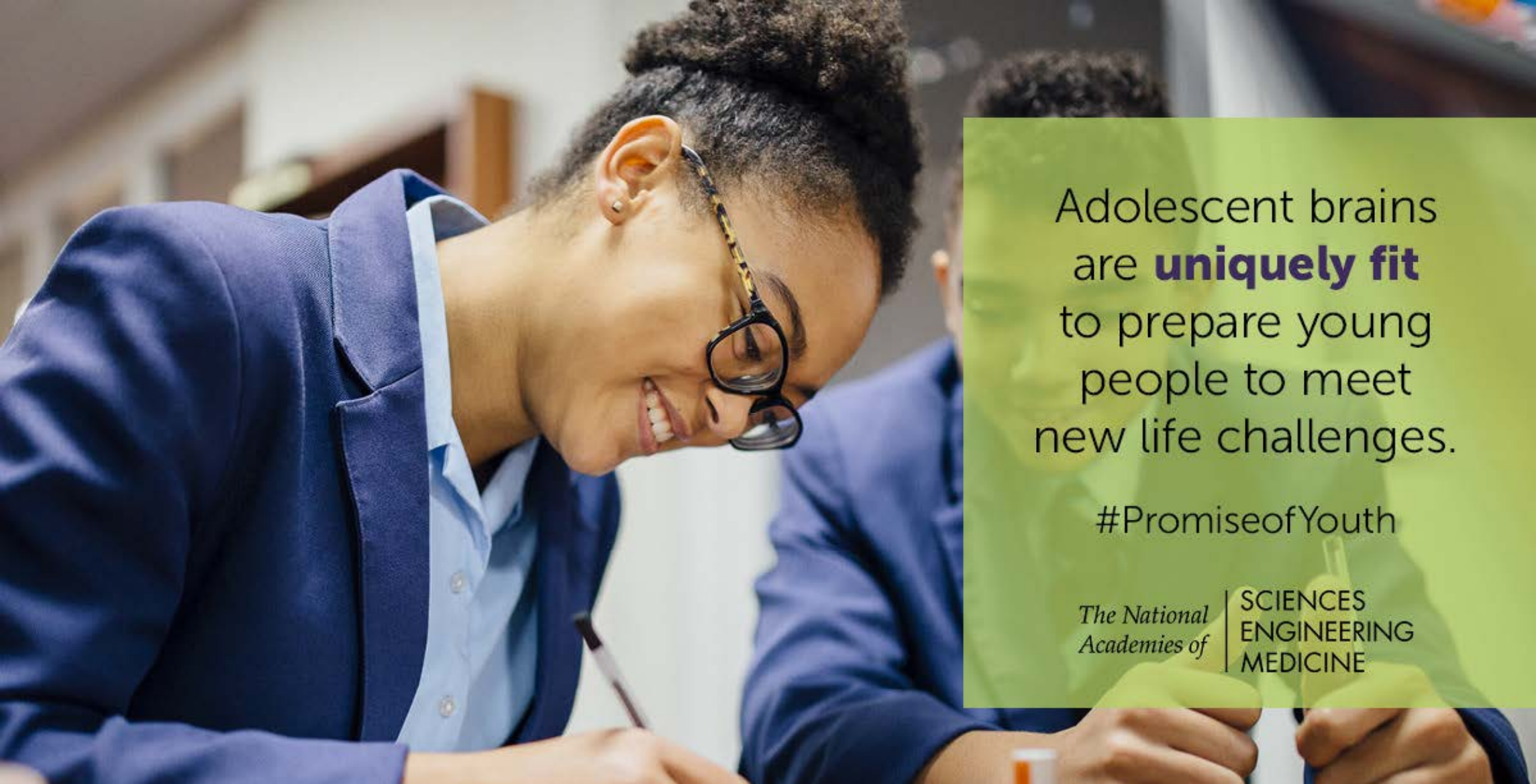
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# Adolescent Development: Socio-Behavioral Context

- Identity development
- Developing new social relationships with peers and adults outside the family
- Attunement to one's social status
- Growing capacity for self-direction





Adolescent brains  
are **uniquely fit**  
to prepare young  
people to meet  
new life challenges.

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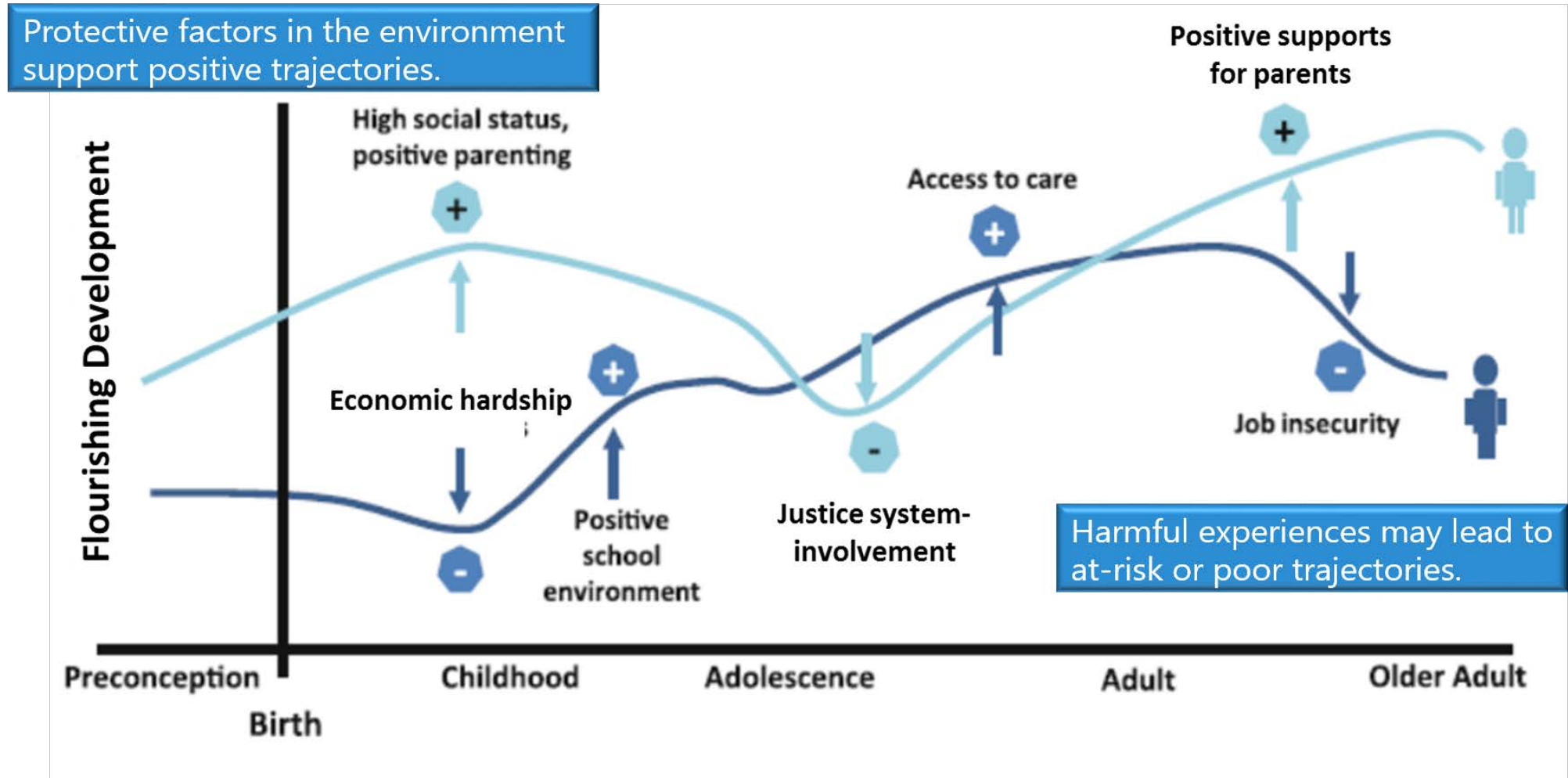
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# Adolescent Development: Neurobiological Context

- Adolescent brain development and brain connectivity
- Heightened curiosity and reward sensitivity
- Increased cognitive abilities, logical thinking, problem-solving
- The interface of neurobiological development and the social context are critical

# Epigenetics: Environmental Influences that Shape Adolescent Development




# Inequity and Adolescence

- How do we ensure that *all* adolescents have opportunities to flourish and succeed?
- Inequalities in opportunity and access severely curtail the promise of adolescence for many youth
- Potent structural inequities and societal determinants shape adolescents' life-course trajectories in multiple ways.



# Inequity and Adolescence

- Striking differences in opportunity are associated with differences in outcomes—in health, safety, well-being, and educational and occupational attainment—and in trajectories over the life course. For example:
  - LGBTQ youth have much higher rates of alcohol, marijuana, and tobacco use than the general population of adolescents and higher rates of HIV infection.
  - Black youth ages 10 to 24 have mortality rates roughly 50 percent higher than White and Latinx youth, driven mainly by differences in rates of death by homicide.
  - Rural youth and youth experiencing homelessness have less access to care
  - Youth who have experienced discrimination demonstrate greater depressive and anxiety symptoms



**Adolescence is a period  
of great opportunity**  
to promote learning and  
discovery and to address  
the harmful effects of past  
negative experiences.

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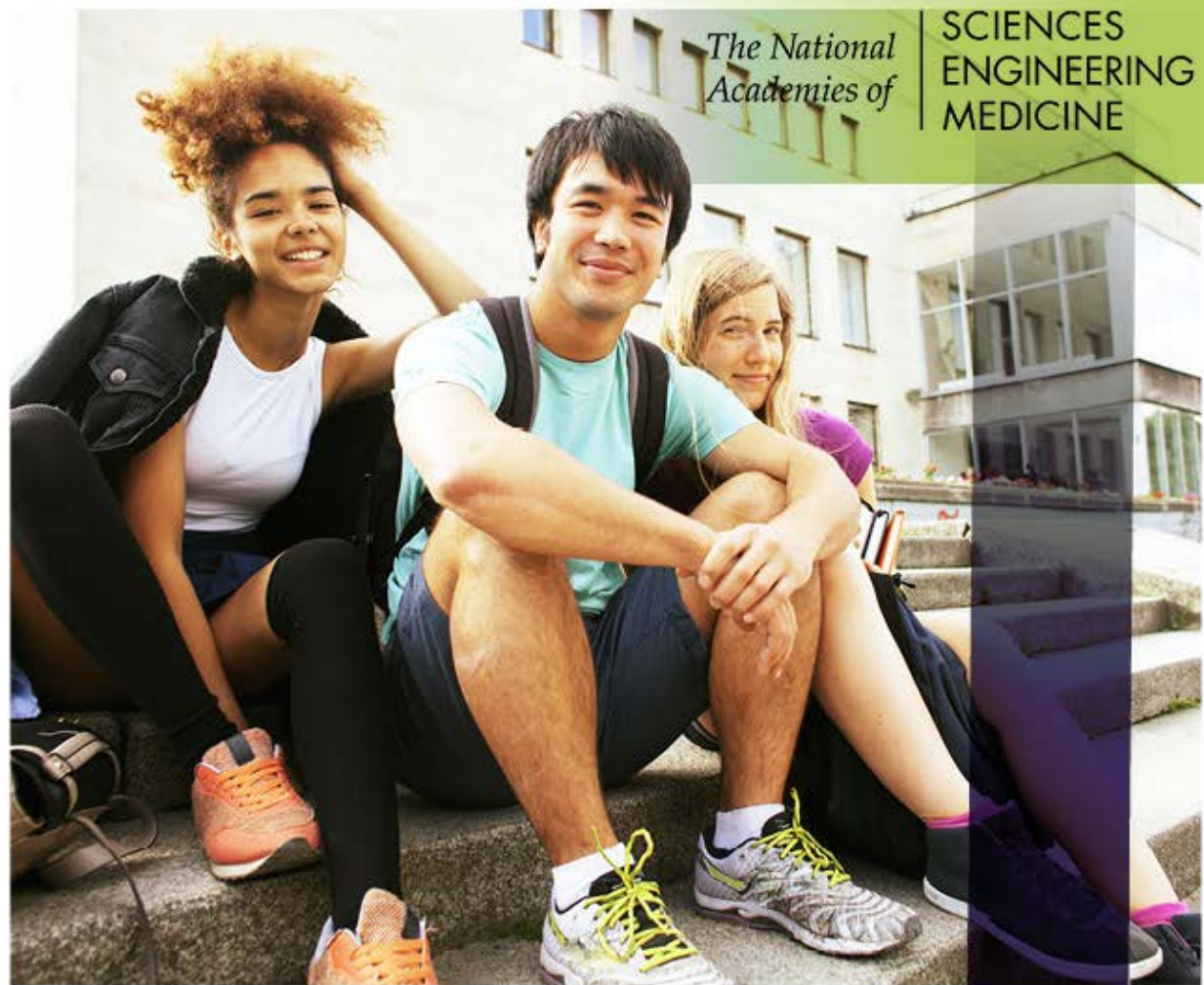
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It's time to **reimagine and redesign the systems** and settings that adolescents most frequently encounter.

Together, we can ensure that millions of young people can impact society for the better.

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# Health System

- Access to appropriate health care services is important to ensure adolescents' well-being today and for a lifetime
- Adolescents face **unique challenges** in the health care system:
  - Less experienced in navigating the system
  - More concerned about their confidentiality, with fewer legal protections
  - More likely than adults to engage in risk-taking behaviors that could have both short- and long-term effects on their health.

# Health System

- But, there are **unique opportunities** associated with this stage of life:
  - Stronger abstract reasoning and executive function skills
  - Heightened neurobiological flexibility and resilience
- These distinct characteristics require health care delivery approaches tailored to adolescents' developmental needs.

# Health System

- Adolescence is a prime opportunity for the health care system to support optimal growth and development.
- The health care system should support adolescents through:
  - Developmentally appropriate changes to provider practices
  - Innovative care delivery systems
  - Integrated, comprehensive health services
  - Prepare youth for the changes they face
  - Support their growing autonomy
  - Culturally-informed services



# Health System

- Developmentally appropriate changes to provider practices
  - Provide time alone with the provider during office visits
  - Counsel adolescent patients on confidentiality
- Innovative care delivery systems
  - School-based behavioral health
  - eHealth
- Integrated, comprehensive health services
  - Mount Sinai Adolescent Health Center

# Recommendations for the Health System

**Recommendation 7-1:** Strengthen the financing of health care services for adolescents, including insurance coverage for uninsured or under-insured populations.

**Recommendation 7-1A:** Federal and state policymakers should make changes within Medicaid to:

- increase access for adolescents, including expanding Medicaid in states that have not yet done so,
- increase Medicaid reimbursement rates for pediatric health services to be on par with those for Medicare,
- allow equitable reimbursement for comprehensive health services, and
- eliminate the five-year-eligibility restriction on the use of Medicaid for documented immigrant adolescents.

# Recommendations for the Health System

**Recommendation 7-2:** Improve access to comprehensive, integrated, coordinated health services for adolescents.

**Recommendation 7-2D:** Health care providers and health organizations should implement:

- policies and practices that support adolescents' emerging sense of agency and independence, such as ensuring that all adolescents receive confidential health care for sensitive services as appropriate, and
- empowering youth to meaningfully participate in their health care.



# Recommendations for the Health System

**Recommendation 7-3:** Increase access to behavioral health care and treatment services.

**Recommendation 7-3A:** Federal agencies and behavioral health education institutions should work together to:

- grow the behavioral health workforce available to adolescents, particularly those in underserved areas by expanding HRSA's Behavioral Health Workforce Education and Training program, and
- expanding the National Health Service Corps' scholarship program to include mental and behavioral health providers.

# Recommendations for the Health System

**Recommendation 7-4:** Improve the training and distribution and increase the number of adolescent health care providers.

**Recommendation 7-4A:** Regulatory bodies for health professions in which an appreciable number of providers offer care to adolescents should include:

- a minimum set of competencies in adolescent health care and development into their licensing, certification, and accreditation requirements, and
- all pediatricians and primary care providers should have a minimum level of competency in adolescent medicine.

# Recommendations for the Health System

**Recommendation 7-5:** Improve federal and state data collection on adolescent health and well-being, and conduct adolescent-specific health services research and disseminate the findings.

**Recommendation 7-5C:** Federal health agencies and private foundations should prepare a research agenda for improving adolescent health services that includes:

- assessing existing service models,
- developing new models for providing adolescent-friendly health services,
- piloting projects to develop and test innovative approaches for incorporating neurodevelopmental and socio-behavioral sciences in the delivery of health care to adolescents, and
- evaluating the effectiveness of collaborations.

## Conclusion

- Society has a collective responsibility to build systems that support and promote positive adolescent development.
- Systems (health, education, justice, and child welfare) should reflect a rich understanding of the developmental needs of adolescents and recognition of adolescence as a time of great opportunity to promote learning and discovery and to remediate past developmental challenges.

## Conclusion

- Until society embraces this responsibility, the promise of adolescence will remain unfulfilled for millions of youth.
- To fail to build systems that support all youth is to waste human capital, reducing economic growth and exacerbating rising income inequality.
- Creating positive impact through opportunities not only improves adolescents' trajectories, but also can provide high-impact, cost effective interventions to counteract the effects of childhood stresses and deprivations and prevent negative outcomes in adulthood.



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**RESEARCH HAS FUNDAMENTALLY CHANGED  
OUR UNDERSTANDING OF HOW YOUNG PEOPLE  
DEVELOP, GROW, AND LEARN.**

Society must embrace this new knowledge in order to  
reimagine systems so that all young people can thrive.



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# Additional Webinars

Justice System

Child Welfare System

Education System (forthcoming)