



The Healthy Transitions grant program, funded by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), aims to improve access to treatment and support services for youth and young adults ages 16-25 years-old that either have, or are at risk of developing, a serious mental health condition. Through this initiative, 16 grantees representing states, tribes, and territories, are currently funded with the aims of increasing awareness, providing screening and detection, conducting outreach and engagement, coordinating referrals to treatment and care, and implementing evidence-informed treatment.

Inherent within the goals and objectives of Healthy Transitions is a call to action for communities across the nation to identify innovative strategies for improving the continuum of care for youth of transition age. One important strategy used by Healthy Transitions sites to advance sustainable change has been the development and implementation of short- and long-term strategic policy plans. These policy plans impact the formal guidelines used by state and local governments, departments, and other organizations that govern how these agencies respond to and work with youth and young adults experiencing mental health challenges.

Policies come in many shapes and sizes. Some Healthy Transitions sites focus their efforts on creating far-reaching policies at the state level, in the form of legislation, funding, and state comprehensive planning. Others work to impact policy that governs practices in one organization or department, either within their state or locally. High-level policy change can be labor-intensive and may require years of planning, collaboration, and the right political support. It can also be one of the most impactful and far-reaching sustainability strategies. Changes to organizational or local policy may not produce the same widespread impacts, but can often be easier to influence and tailored to specific practices identified through Healthy Transitions. Several small changes can also create the momentum to eventually lead to larger policy impacts. Both types of changes can be used together in a larger policy plan that supports youth and young adults in transition.

This issue brief was informed by data collected continuously through a range of media over four years of intensive coaching and TA support. The brief serves to inform grantees, stakeholders, and policymakers of the policy areas influenced by the Healthy Transitions Grant.



Examples from Healthy Transitions

The following section of this issue brief summarizes key policy areas impacted through Healthy Transitions. These examples include the implementation of large and small policy changes occurring statewide and locally, as well as efforts to inform policymakers and key stakeholders. Areas highlighted include: changes to state infrastructure, adaptations to state Medicaid plans, formalizations of cross-system collaboration, development of youth and young adult peer supports, changes within local agencies, and development of general policy recommendations and guidelines. A specific Healthy Transitions grantee example is highlighted for each policy area identified.

Building State Infrastructure

Modifying or building state organizational structure to increase a state's capacity to serve youth and young adults has been a powerful strategy employed by some Healthy Transitions grantees. Some examples of these changes from Healthy Transitions grantees include:

- Adapting state hiring practices and developing new positions at the state level:
 - Integrating Youth Coordinator and/or youth advocate positions into the state infrastructure.

- Designating a state position to specifically manage and plan for youth and young adult services and supports.
- Requiring that young adult positions are built into future state grants.
- Building state infrastructure to allow for a more seamless transition between child- and adult-serving systems:
 - Creating flexibility and choice for youth and young adults accessing services across both systems.
 - Developing a separate state department or center that oversees services for youth and young adults.
 - Creating structures that encourage cross-initiative collaboration and support.
 - Changing language to reflect a commitment to supporting youth and young adults and the values emphasized through Healthy Transitions.
- Mandating training and professional development around youth and young adult topics at the state level.
- Requiring that components of Healthy Transitions be incorporated into other state initiatives and grants.

Building Youth and Young Adult Choice Into Service Selection in Massachusetts

The Commonwealth of Massachusetts is instituting a regulation change that will allow 18-22 year-olds with mental health needs to choose services based on their individual needs and preferences from both the adult and the children's mental health systems. Services will now be based on need rather than a birthdate. This pivotal change is a result of multiple decision-makers taking note of key lessons learned over time and supporting critical shifts needed to improve services for youth of transition age. In particular, the Healthy Transitions and Systems of Care grants played a role in focusing more attention on youth of transition age and providing Massachusetts a critical opportunity to pilot new ideas around engaging and serving this population.

Funding Healthy Transitions Services in Rhode Island

Rhode Island Medicaid included in its 1115 waiver application to the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) the ability to reimburse its Healthy Transitions service delivery model. An actuary examined the data from Healthy Transitions Rhode Island to assist in the development of bundled case rate. If CMS approves this waiver and the Rhode Island General Assembly approves general revenue matching, the availability of RI Healthy Transition services for youth and young adults will be expanded across the state beyond the life of Rhode Island's Healthy Transitions Grant.

Developing Cross-System Collaboration Agreements in Utah

Utah YES has created a formalized process for cross-systems collaboration around youth-in-transition services in Utah that expands beyond Healthy Transitions. Utah YES first completed a comprehensive literature review and data collection process, including youth, family, and stakeholder interviews and surveys. Using these data, they developed a set of guidelines that direct youth-in-transition services across the child-serving divisions within Utah's Department of Human Services. Child-serving divisions within Utah, representing child welfare, disabilities, juvenile justice, mental health, and substance abuse, have completed MOUs endorsing their commitment to implement these guidelines. These divisions are currently receiving training to develop a plan for strategic implementation.

Submitting State Medicaid Plan Amendments and Waivers

One strategy to promote sustainability of services and supports is to submit a Medicaid plan amendment or waiver. A Medicaid plan amendment can include increasing provider payment rates for critical services, adding a reimbursement rate for new services, or changing eligibility and/or benefit structures. Several Healthy Transitions sites have submitted or are working to submit amendments to create or increase reimbursable rates for young adult-specific services, such as coordinated specialty care or youth peer support services. Medicaid waiver programs can also be considered as an approach and are being used by Healthy Transitions sites to reimburse community-based services supports for youth and young adults experiencing first episode psychosis.

Formalizing Cross-System Collaborations

Healthy Transitions grantees have forged partnerships with a range of organizations. Several sites have worked to formalize these relationships by establishing policies that govern the partnership at the state and local levels. These agreements have often taken the form of a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) to create formal commitments from several organizations or state departments defining how they will work together to best serve youth and young adults in their state or community.

Improving Youth Peer Supports

Healthy Transitions sites have initiated policy changes to build a developmentally appropriate array of services and supports available to youth and young adults. Much work has been done among grantees to build youth and young adult peer supports at the state level. Healthy Transitions grantees have created policies to:

- Guide and direct peer support supervision and coaching processes.
- Support hiring practices of youth and young adult peers.

- Adopt youth and young adult-specific training curricula.
- Develop a youth and young adult-specific certification process.
- Expand the age range for peer providers to serve youth and young adults aged 16-25 years old.
- Finance peer support services through Medicaid funding.

Changing Agency Policy

In order to effectively implement new or adapted services and supports that meet the needs of youth and young adults, Healthy Transitions local laboratory sites have also introduced changes to agency policy. These changes allow agencies to offer new and innovative services in a way that is flexible to meet unique needs of youth and young adults within their community. Some examples of changes to local agency policy that have occurred in Healthy Transitions local laboratory sites include:

- Changing hiring practices and introducing new roles, such as:
 - Establishing requirements to include young adults on hiring committees.
 - Changing hiring criteria (e.g., age criteria, education and experience requirements, and lived experience).
 - Introducing new agency positions (e.g., local youth coordinators, peer support providers, and education and employment specialists).
- Adapting communication processes, including:
 - Establishing social media policies.
 - Offering ways for providers to communicate with youth and young adults via text or nontraditional platforms.
- Changing service implementation requirements to align with young adult needs.
- Expanding eligibility and access to services and supports.

Expanding Youth and Young Adult Peer Supports in Tennessee

Through Healthy Transitions, Tennessee is in the process of developing a Certified Young Adult Support Specialist (CYAPSS) program. This change was informed through the development of a Statewide Young Adult Leadership Council and Core Management Team. Through a partnership with Youth MOVE Oregon/Youth Era, the Tennessee Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services developed a certification training infusing youth and young adult voice into its current Certified Peer Recovery Specialist training for adults. TDMHSAS is now working to develop and implement internal policies and procedures for the program. These policy and procedural changes ensure that young adult peer supports are embedded in the array of services available within the state of Tennessee and that youth and young adults have access to these supports beyond Healthy Transitions funding.

Increasing Access to Local Mental Health Services in Kentucky

One agency that partners with Kentucky TAYLRD has changed policies to expand eligibility criteria for youth and young adults receiving supported employment services. Previously, only adults with a serious mental illness (SMI) diagnosis could receive supported employment services through their agency. Pathways, Inc. recognized a need for supported employment from the young adults visiting their drop-in center and have since expanded this criteria to allow young adults with any mental health diagnosis to access services. Through this policy change, more young adults can access and receive supported employment services within this community.

- Requiring new training, coaching, and other professional development specific to working with youth and young adults of transition age.
- Expanding collaborations and establishing formalized MOUs between child- and adult-serving systems working with young adults locally.
- Requiring youth and young adult voice on local teams and/or advisory groups.

Developing Other Policy Recommendations and Guidelines

In addition to changing specific policies, Healthy Transitions sites are involved with informing policymakers by disseminating data and resources, delivering trainings and presentations, and developing and communicating recommendations for policy changes at the state and/or the community level.

Some examples of mechanisms Healthy Transitions grantees have used to make policy and support policy recommendations include:

- Forming state and local policy advisory workgroups.
- Including key Healthy Transitions staff on existing state and local policy boards and team.
- Creating a space for youth and young adults to participate on policy advisory teams.
- Identifying other opportunities to connect youth, young adults, and family members with policymakers.
- Compiling Healthy Transitions grant lessons learned and data points into policy and practice guidelines that their state and communities can adopt.
- Providing training and professional development opportunities on youth voice and leadership to policymakers.

Building a Community to Make Policy Recommendations in Pennsylvania

The Pennsylvania Healthy Transitions Partnership has created the “Bridging the Gap” Workgroup to help identify and implement needed policy changes that facilitate a smoother transition from child to adult service systems. This workgroup has identified several priority areas for needed collaboration and policy change in Pennsylvania, including: housing, peer support, justice, and creating a warm handoff between systems. Building upon these issue areas, Pennsylvania is in the process of transitioning their workgroup into a statewide Community of Practice that will connect Bridging the Gap to other initiatives and projects across Pennsylvania. This will create a process where practice and policy change can inform each other, and expand the reach of policy recommendations to the field. Through this work, Pennsylvania is creating a process for developing infrastructure and recommending policies to support youth in transition beyond their Healthy Transitions grant.



Toll-Free Phone: (844) 856-1749

Email: NITT-TA@cars-rp.org

Website: www.samhsa.gov/NITT-TA