



Investing in Generational Wellness: Policies to support transition-age youth

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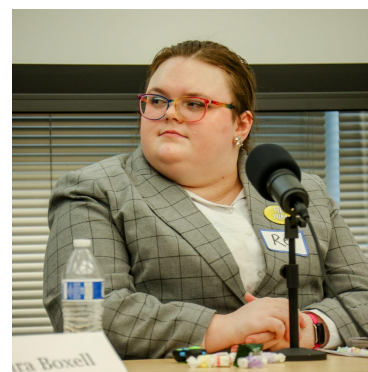


Introduction

Young people, especially transition-age youth (ages 16-25) face myriad issues as they transition to adulthood, including high rates of being uninsured, a shortage of youth-friendly providers, a lack of integrated care, and service cliffs as they transition from the child-serving to the adult-serving system. Policymakers at the national, state, and local levels have proposed policy solutions to improve access to care for transition age youth (TAY); however, many of their policy proposals are missing one key ingredient – youth voice.

The Transition Age Youth Policy Summit sought to change that...

On April 30 and May 1, 2024, The Utah Office of Substance Use and Mental Health (SUMH), The Center for Law and Social Policy (CLASP), and the National Alliance on Mental Illness, UTAH (NAMI Utah) hosted the second annual Transition-Age Youth Policy Summit. The summit highlighted five policies focused on meeting the needs of transition-age youth. The summit was presided over by a panel of youth experts who facilitated the policy presentations, evaluated each policy, and offered suggestions to the panelists on how to improve their policies to better meet the needs of young people. The summit also welcomed back three of our 2023 youth panelists as keynote speakers.



Throughout the summit, the youth panelists emphasized the importance of youth voice and lived experience. Youth panelist Keira Boxell opened the conference by stating, “youth know what the world they want to live in looks like.” Over the course of the two days, policy presenters shared how their policies worked towards creating the world young people envisioned because, in the words of youth panelist Cadon Sagendorf “change starts with lived experts advocating for policy.” This year, four of the five policy presentations featured youth speakers with one presentation featuring only youth speakers. In hearing directly from young people, attendees learned what it takes to create youth-led policy change and how those policies changes were directly impacting young people. As youth panelist Mohammad shared, “young people are taking a stand which should be scary to those in power because when we get mad, when we don’t like something, we’re going to try and change it. We’re not going to stand down.”

Policymakers must listen to young people, actively seek out their lived expertise, and follow their lead when it comes to advocating for policy change. Young people should not just be impacted by systems and policies – they should be changing, implementing, and creating those systems and policies. By putting youth at the center of policymaking, we can, in the words of Brandon Bond, create “generational wellness.”

“I had never seen anyone look like me be the main character, until I was a freshman in high school. That was the first time I read a book with a Haitian as the main character and that fueled the passion in me. I realized I could be the main character, I realized I could write my own stories. I’ve seen what a transformation in me it was to have representation in literature.” - Jully Myrthil, Keynote Speaker

2024 Summit Overview

In April 2023, the Utah Department of Health and Human Services in collaboration with the Center for Law and Social Policy and the National Alliance on Mental Illness Utah Chapter hosted the first annual Youth in Transition Policy Summit in Salt Lake City, Utah. The Youth in Transition Policy Summit was very successful for its first year. We had over 200 people register for the event. Participants in the policy summit included people from 27 states and one territory and transition-age youth comprised 20% of the participants. People who gave feedback for the event were largely positive. Participants immediately requested that we do it again the next year. Due to the first year's success, we hosted the second annual Transition Age Youth Policy Summit in 2024.

The dual purposes of the policy summit were: 1) to showcase recent system-level policies designed to improve services for transition-age youth (ages 14-26), and 2) to examine the levels of youth engagement in the development and implementation of these policies. We hoped that through a careful analysis of these policies, we would learn valuable lessons on developing transition age youth policies and ways to improve youth engagement in that process.

The desired outcomes of the policy summit:

- ✓ Encourage policymakers and influencers to understand the importance of transition-age youth related policy work and shift their thinking about youth engagement.
- ✓ Improve the visibility of transition-age youth and youth-driven policies and processes.
- ✓ Demonstrate the importance of authentic youth voice and how it can be used to impact change.
- ✓ Influence policymakers to adjust their actions regarding how they engage young people in policy change that impacts them.



A key element in facilitation of the summit was to engage youth and young adults in policy analysis. Youth across the country were encouraged to apply to participate in the youth panel. Youth coordinators with DHHS created the application for the youth panelists to ensure it was youth-centric. Information about the application was sent to local organizations in Utah, SAMHSA grantees that involve transition-age youth, Youth MOVE national contacts, and CLASP contacts. For the 2024 Transition Age Youth Policy Summit we had 26 youth panelist applications from all around the United States. We selected five youth panelists from Rhode Island, Pennsylvania, Utah, Ohio, and Michigan. We also had three youth keynote speakers who were some of last year's youth panelists.

Youth Panelists



Brandon Bond (he/him):

Brandon is the LSA Mental Health & Well-Being Student Advocate at the University of Michigan. He is focused on driving systemic changes by integrating DEI and public mental health strategies into policies, programs, and structures.

Mohammad Shedeed (he/him):

Mohammad is a freshman at the University of Pittsburgh studying neuroscience. He is motivated by his Egyptian background to create educational resources and promote mental health equity, especially among marginalized communities.

Kiera Boxell (she/her):

Keira is a social justice advocate and Co-founder of Shades of Knowledge, a youth-led nonprofit dedicated to improving literacy and comprehension rates. She is focused on providing her fellow young people with the opportunities they need to thrive.

Cadon Sagendorf (he/him)

Cadon is a human rights advocate focused on addressing the mental health disparities within the child welfare system. He is dedicated to policy reforms and programs that aim to improve mental health outcomes for youth impacted by the child welfare system.

Rei Scott (he/xe):

Rei is President of the Students With Psychosis Executive Board. As someone who is transgender, disabled, and Jewish, he is very passionate about the lived experience perspective and the inclusion of minorities and intersectional identities in mental health research.

Agenda at-a-glance:

Day One

Opening keynote: Tyren Boyd, “A Seat at the Table”

Policy presentation: Medicaid and Reimagining the Behavioral Health Workforce: the LA Certified Peer Demonstration

Lunch keynote: Jully Myrthil, Shades of Knowledge: “Empowering Youth, Enhancing Literacy”

Policy presentation: Consent to Shelter: Youth Advocacy to Expand Rights of Minors Experiencing Homelessness in Maryland

Policy presentation: SLCo Youth Services: Salt Lake Valley Coalition to End Homelessness Governance Charter



Day Two

Policy presentation: Reframe the Age: Changing Policy to Enhance Support for Young Adults in Massachusetts Department of Mental Health

Keynote Speaker: Trace Terrell, “Watch and Follow: Plausible Instance of United State Influence on Canada’s 988: Suicide & Crisis Helpline

Policy Presentation: Building an Income Floor: Investing In and Supporting Young Adults through Guaranteed Income



Agenda at-a-glance:



Participants in the policy summit included 135 people from 14 states and 1 tribal community. Participant expertise included youth workforce development, education, health and human services, child welfare and juvenile justice, behavioral health, youth advocacy, youth homelessness, peer support, and national agencies focused on youth policy. Five organizations were selected from around the country to present their policies.

They completed a rubric (see appendix) to self-rate youth engagement in the various stages of the policy development and implementation process. Each presentation lasted 60 minutes with 30 minutes to present the policy and 30 minutes for a dialogue with the youth panel on the level of youth engagement. Descriptions of each of the 5 policies presented at the summit, along with an assessment of strengths, weaknesses, and recommendations follow.

Assessing authentic youth engagement

“We need people who are willing to advocate for policies and practices that ensure adequate representation of young people in decision making bodies at all levels of governance, including local, national, and international institutions. ”

-Tyren Boyd, Keynote Speaker

Offering opportunities for authentic youth engagement is essential to support adolescent development, and for the health of communities. In this context, understanding how young people have (or have not) been engaged in the process of bringing problems to the attention of policymakers, identifying solutions, developing policy proposals, championing adoption of new policies, policy implementation, and evaluation is critical. Authentically engaging young people in each stage of the policy change process is aligned with developmental science, and increases the likelihood of effective policymaking that meets the needs of young people. It also minimizes unintended consequences which are often the result of policy developed exclusively by people who have not experienced the issues to be addressed and will not be impacted by the proposed change.

Tools for Assessment

One tool to assess authentic youth engagement is Hart’s (1993) ladder. The ladder includes 8 rungs that describe different ways to engage young people. The first 3 rungs (manipulation, decoration, and tokenism) are harmful and are not considered authentic youth engagement in this framework. However, many well-meaning adults engage in these strategies, especially tokenism. Evidence of tokenism includes asking a single young person to represent all young people in a conversation without an analysis of power dynamics, asking young people to “share their stories” for the benefit of adults without engagement around solutions or providing appropriate support, and failure to fairly compensate young people for their expertise.

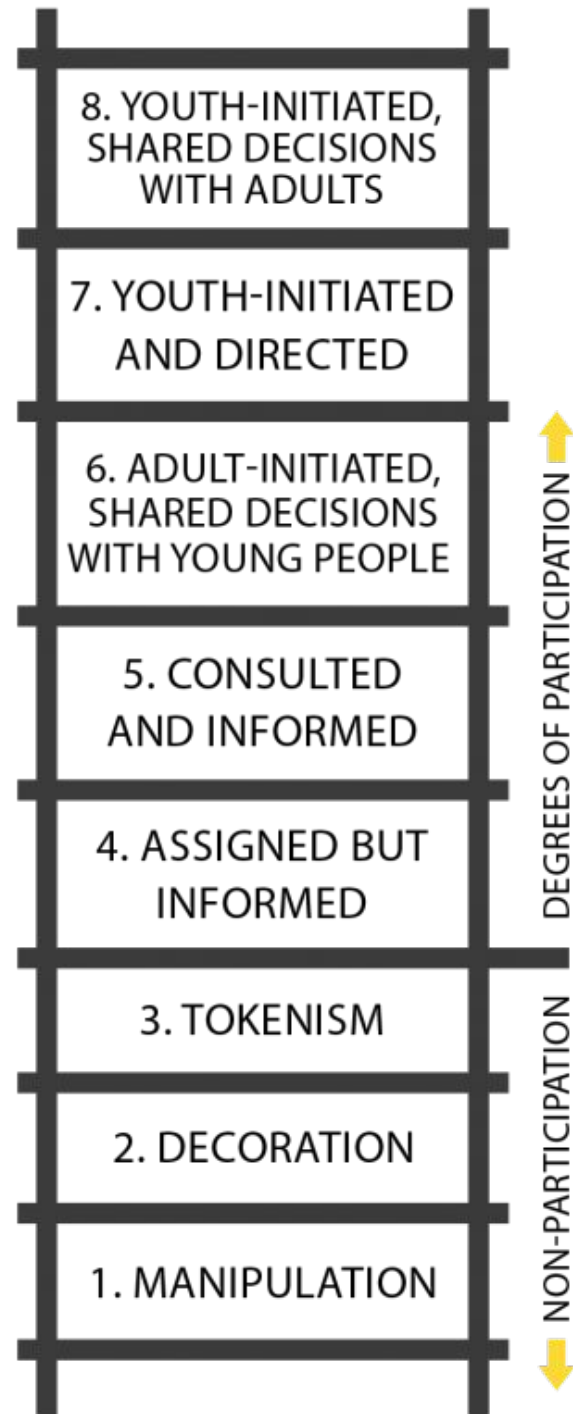


Image 1 - Hart's (1993) Ladder

Assessing authentic youth engagement

Rung	Definition	Example
4	Assigned but informed	Multiple young people are part of a panel; they receive the questions in advance but do not help shape them
5	Consulted and informed	Young people participate in a focus group; the subsequent recommendations are shared back by adults
6	Adult-initiated, shared decisions	A youth advisory board collaborates on the direction of a project initiated by adults
7	Young people initiated and directed	Young people plan a walkout to protest school shootings; often on this rung there is some distrust of adults that prevents young people from looping them in
8	Young people initiated; shared decisions with adults	Young people and adults engage in co-creation, power sharing, and full partnership that follows young people's lead.

Rungs 4 through 8 on the ladder all describe various levels of authentic youth engagement. Each step represents different levels of adult vs. youth leadership and different degrees of shared power and decision-making. Although achieving true shared decision-making is an important goal, different rungs on Hart's ladder can be useful or appropriate for different projects, different phases in the life of a project, and different levels of adult readiness. It is essential to be intentional about analyzing where an effort falls on this continuum and ensuring clarity and transparency with youth partners.

Reframe the Age: Changing Policy to Enhance Support for Young Adults - Massachusetts Department of Mental Health

The Massachusetts Department of Mental Health (DMH) implemented a policy change aimed at better serving young adults transitioning from youth to adult mental health services. Historically, the mental health services for youth and adults were siloed, causing many older adolescents to fall through the cracks. In 2018, DMH implemented a regulatory change allowing young people to remain in the child system until 22, while also accessing adult services. Prior to this policy change, child services ended at 19 years old, meaning young people had to transition to the adult system; however, many didn't meet the more stringent requirements for adult services. The policy aimed to address the gaps by ensuring young adults could transition smoothly and not be excluded. Key components included housing, education, and employment support, alongside clinical supports.

DMH formed a dedicated work group to develop an implementation strategy, seeking strong input from young adults and families. They developed five implementation plans, with a unique plan for each geographic service area in the state, but all plans focused on three main components: Service Authorization, Service Planning and Provision, and Service Completion. While there was robust participation in the regulatory change process, the presenters noted there was insufficient youth engagement during the implementation phase.

Because the regulatory change focuses primarily on improving access to clinical services, DMH created Young Adult Access Centers to address a broader range of needs. Developed through SAMHSA's System of Care (SOC) and Healthy Transitions grants, The Young Adult Access Centers provide a community-centered approach that does not require diagnosis or bureaucracy. These centers offer a welcoming environment with essential amenities like kitchens, washing machines, and showers. These centers also provide information and resources on food pantries and harm reduction, social and recreational activities, peer mentorship, and leadership opportunities.

The centers prioritize young people who have been systematically excluded, including BIPOC and LGBTQ+ youth. Staffed by young adult peer mentors with lived experience, the model emphasizes youth voice and choice. High satisfaction rates and engagement (13,079 visits in 2023) indicate the model's success.

Strengths:

- **Inclusive Environment:** The Access Centers provide a welcoming and inclusive environment with essential services, making them accessible to marginalized youth.
- **Youth-Centered Approach:** Emphasis on youth voice and choice in programming ensures that services meet the actual needs of young adults.
- **Community Building:** Peer mentorship and leadership opportunities foster a strong sense of community and support.
- **High Engagement:** The significant number of visits indicates that young people are highly engaged and find value in the services provided.

Opportunities for Growth:

- **Service Gaps:** There is a lack of sufficient services, especially for young adults with co-occurring Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and Substance Use Disorder (SUD) diagnoses.
- **Implementation Shortcomings:** Insufficient youth input during the implementation phase led to varied effectiveness across different service areas.
- **Funding Challenges:** Reliance on federal funding and the need for sustainable state funding pose ongoing financial challenges.
- **Age Transition Issues:** Despite extending the age limit to 22, young adults still face a service cliff, needing further developmental considerations.

Recommendations

- ✓ **Secure Diverse Funding:** States should look to secure a mix of federal, state, and private funds to ensure sustainable operations.
- ✓ **Engage Legislators and Agencies:** Proactive engagement can help garner support and funding.
- ✓ **Enhance Youth Engagement:** Continuously involve young adults in the planning and implementation phases to ensure services meet their evolving needs.
- ✓ **Develop Warm Hand-off:** Improve transition processes across state programs and services to support young adults beyond age 22.
- ✓ **Innovative Outreach:** Use creative outreach strategies to connect with young adults in their communities, such as through social media and local gathering spots.

Medicaid and Reimagining the Behavioral Health Workforce - The LA Certified Peer Demonstration

California passed a bill in 2023 establishing statewide requirements for counties to develop certification programs for the certification of peer support specialists. Peer support specialists are individuals who self-identify as having lived experience with the process of recovery from mental illness, substance use disorder, or both.

In response, LA County developed a pilot program that trains young people ages 18-24 to become peer support providers, supporting other youth. This program came out of a citywide strategic planning process, informed by a youth council, that asked young people what they needed. Two major concerns were access to mental health services and access to jobs.



Recommendations:

- ✓ Working with Medicaid: Implementation requires collaboration with Medicaid to address peer support program scope (what codes can you bill? Where can you work? Under whose supervision?) and credentialing (how do you become a certified peer counselor? How do you sign up to get paid? Which component of Medicaid pays for you? At what rates?)
- ✓ Plan for Scale: The hope is that the LA demonstration will expand beyond 14 initial youth centers; communities should be prepared to scale a successful demonstration
- ✓ Training Components: Certification training should include emotional CPR training and cultural sensitivity training to enable peer support specialists to interact with a wide variety of people and support them to the best of their ability.

The program design calls for hiring, training, and supporting 70-90 youth participants (ages 18-24). The participants will receive 80-100 hours of training and will provide 200 hours of peer-to-peer mental (P2P) health support. Participants provide P2P services in YouthSource Centers. In total, participants will receive 300 hours of paid work experience.

Per state law, the work of youth peer supporters must be supervised by a clinician. For every 5 hours of interaction with a young person, the youth peer supporter must review what they do with a licensed clinician. After completing the program, participants can take the statewide peer specialist certification exam, which will allow them to become Medicaid-reimbursable peer support providers.

The program focuses on securing a related part-time or full-time job as a peer specialist or a job in a mental health related field, choosing to continue in the mental health field either through employment or continued education, and employment durability one, three and five years after program completion.

Strengths:

- Career Exploration: The program allows youth that are interested in the mental health field to explore this career and gives them 300 hours of paid work experience
- Care Access: The program provides a critical mental health service that is requested by young people
- Youth Engagement: Heavy youth involvement in development and consultation of this project.
- Collaboration: Several organizations support the program including: El Centro de Ayuda, Westcoast children's clinic, YouthSource Center Staff, and LA Unified School District.
- Program Reach: Programs in 14 YouthSource Centers.

Opportunities for Growth:

- Curriculum Development: There was no specific approval from young people on curriculum because the curriculum was developed by the state
- Assessing Impact: To date there is no formal evaluation and analysis of the first cohort of 20 as the initial pilot program finishes in June 2024.

Building an Income Floor: Investing in and Supporting Young Adults through a Guaranteed Income - Mayors for Guaranteed Income

The Guaranteed Income programs initiated by the Mayor for Guaranteed Income (MGI) and Counties for Guaranteed Income (CGI) have significantly impacted financial stability for various vulnerable populations, particularly those transitioning out of the child welfare system.

Several guaranteed income pilots focused on young people, including: 1) The Net Growth Movement's, "Guaranteed Income for Former Foster Youth (GIFFY)" in Alameda County, CA providing recurring monthly cash payment to supplement existing social safety nets; and 2) Santa Fe's LEAP program targeting young parents to address barriers to education and career advancement due to financial instability.

Intention program design addresses systemic economic disparities and prevents further oppression. By targeting vulnerable populations, such as former foster youth, the programs aim to break cycles of poverty and provide equitable opportunities. The careful planning to ensure participants retain eligibility for other social safety net programs further mitigates economic oppression.

These programs directly address the basic physiological and safety needs of youth. By providing financial stability, these programs help participants secure essentials such as food and housing, creating a foundation for higher-level needs like belonging, self-esteem, and self-actualization.

The resulting improvements in mental health and well-being demonstrate the effectiveness of this approach. The guaranteed income initiatives challenge negative stereotypes, such as the "Welfare Queens" narrative, by showcasing positive impacts of unconditional financial support.

Participants have used the funds to achieve educational and career goals, improve living situations, and contribute to their communities, demonstrating the impact. The programs highlight the benefits of investing in individuals' agency and dignity. Participants reported increased well-being, reduced stress, and enhanced community engagement. By providing financial support without stringent conditions, the programs empower individuals to make choices that best suit their needs and aspirations, promoting self-reliance and confidence.

These programs emphasize the importance of humanizing data by integrating qualitative stories with quantitative outcomes. Personal narratives from participants illustrate the transformative impact of the programs. This approach not only validates the experiences of participants but also strengthens the case for expanding such initiatives.

Strengths

- **Improved Well-being:** Participants reported enhanced well-being, reduced stress, and improved mental health due to financial stability.
- **Community and Support:** The programs fostered a sense of community, housing stability, and allowed participants to pursue opportunities such as internships.
- **Youth Leadership:** The design and implementation processes were led by individuals with lived experiences, ensuring the programs were tailored to the needs of the target population.
- **Public Funding:** The shift from private to public funding has allowed for larger-scale implementation and sustainability of the programs.

Opportunities for Growth

- **Initial Hesitation on Public Funding:** Early reluctance to use public funds delayed broader implementation.
- **Challenges in Outreach and Implementation:** Reaching a frequently changing population and navigating the approval processes posed significant challenges.
- **Benefit Coordination:** Ensuring participants did not lose eligibility for other social safety net programs required careful planning and coordination.
- **Pilot Duration:** Feedback from participants suggested that the pilot duration should be extended beyond one year to provide more sustained support.

Recommendations

- ✓ **Extend Pilot Duration:** Provide longer-term support and stability for participants.
- ✓ **Improve Outreach:** Enhance strategies for target populations, including better communication methods.
- ✓ **Policy Advocacy:** For federal waivers for Medicaid, SNAP, SSI, and SSDI to prevent loss of benefits for participants.
- ✓ **Broaden Funding Sources:** Expand usage of public funds and explore additional sources.
- ✓ **Emphasize Storytelling:** Focus on personal stories and qualitative impacts of the programs alongside quantitative data to build a compelling case for broader implementation.
- ✓ **Address Economic Marginalization:** Reframe the narrative around guaranteed income programs to counteract economic marginalization and promote social equity.

Consent to Shelter: Youth Advocacy to Expand Rights of Minors Experiencing Homelessness in Maryland - Prince George's County

Maryland passed two significant bills focused on young people experiencing homelessness.

1) **Minor Consent:** Maryland took a significant step to expand the rights of minors experiencing homelessness, led by advocates in Prince George's County. Passed in 2020, the new statute allows unaccompanied minors to consent to emergency shelter and receive services without the physical custody of a parent or guardian. This policy addresses the urgent need for accessible and safe housing for vulnerable youth, aiming to reduce exploitation and negative outcomes associated with homelessness.

Before the law, Maryland had identified thousands of unaccompanied homeless students in public schools, but only three youth-serving shelters were available, all federally funded and insufficient in capacity. The law was silent on the rights of minors to consent to shelter and the liability of shelters serving them, leading to risk-averse behavior among service providers. Service providers' need for legal clarity drove the legislative change. Youth played a crucial role in lobbying for the bill. Their testimonies influenced legislators, contributing to the bill's unanimous passage. Youth engagement, although late in the legislative process, highlighted the importance of their voices in shaping policies affecting them.

Recommendations

- ✓ Increase Resources + Shelters: Specifically for unaccompanied minors.
- ✓ Continuous Youth Involvement and Training
- ✓ Holistic Support Systems: Develop integration of mental health services, education, and long-term housing solutions.
- ✓ Preventive Measures: Address root causes of homelessness by early interventions.

2) **Tuition Waiver for Homeless Youth:** In 2021, it was amended to broaden eligibility and improve support, such as prioritizing on-campus housing and appointing liaisons for homeless students. This amendment was driven by the lived experiences of youth, who actively participated in the legislative process from the start. The policy's implementation includes large-scale trainings for state colleges and universities to inform them of the updates and educating youth in shelters and transitional housing about the tuition waiver. The continuous engagement and education efforts aim to ensure that homeless youth can access educational opportunities tuition-free.

The policy underscores the importance of youth agency, choice, engagement, and leadership. Despite progress, challenges remain, particularly in addressing the needs of youth not served by the child welfare system. The policy does not supersede mandatory reporting laws for abuse or neglect, necessitating co-training for staff in both youth homelessness and child welfare systems. Efforts include safety planning, reunification work, and identifying fictive kin for immediate placements.

Strengths:

- **Legal Clarity and Rights:** The policy provides clear legal rights to consent to shelter, ensuring they have access to safe housing.
- **Youth Involvement:** Empowered youth to successful advocacy and policy changes.
- **Educational Support:** The tuition waivers broaden access to higher education, supporting long-term stability and success.
- **Collaborative Approach:** Diverse representation ensured comprehensive perspectives.

Opportunities for Growth:

- **Initial Exclusion of Youth:** The initial exclusion of youth with lived experience from the workgroup was a significant oversight, though it was later addressed.
- **Limited Resources:** There are still not enough resources and shelters specifically designed for unaccompanied minors, and many areas lack adequate support services.
- **Child Welfare Gaps:** The policy does not address all the issues related to the child welfare system, particularly for LGBTQIA+ and Latinx youth.

Salt Lake Valley Coalition to End Homelessness: Governance Charter - SLCo Youth Services

The Salt Lake Valley Coalition to End Homelessness (SLVCEH) aims to end homelessness in Salt Lake County, UT. Members of the Coalition aim to achieve this vision by: identifying gaps in the system; utilizing data, research and resources to establish creative, effective strategies to address gaps; supporting, informing, and collaborating on funding; and educating the public and stakeholders regarding homelessness prevention and solutions. Participation in the work of the Coalition is open to any agencies, organizations, and individuals with expertise or interest in rendering homelessness brief, rare, and non-recurring. Membership is also open to those who have experienced homelessness. Members meet on a monthly basis to provide input regarding homeless system issues.

The Salt Lake County Youth Action Board (YAB) pushed the SLVCEH to amend their bylaws to ensure youth voice in the SLVCEH. The President of the YAB is now a voting member of the SLVCEH as the Youth Lived Expert Advisor.



Recommendations

- ✓ Information Sharing: Share how the youth were able to get involved and the conversations that occurred so that more organizations have the knowledge and capacity to do the same.
- ✓ Documentation and Dissemination: Release a report every year on accomplishments, lessons learned, future plans, and how involved youth are with the work to end homelessness.
- ✓ Holistic Supports: Expand to address other issues with homelessness such as mental health issues, disabilities, trauma, race, and socioeconomic difficulties.

Before the YAB joined the coalition, SLCo applied and was denied for a Youth Homelessness Demonstration Project (YHDP) grant. This denial sparked conversations about why youth need to be involved. In 2023, Salt Lake County applied again. This time, the YAB wrote the YHDP Grant in collaboration with the community, to ensure the project was led by youth voice and youth experience. Salt Lake County was awarded a \$2,768,061 YHDP grant.

In addition to securing YHDP funding for the county, the YAB is integrated into the coalition, with the YAB housed under the Youth Experiencing Homelessness Task Force, and the SLVCEH created a Lived Expert Task Group. Youth Homelessness is now mentioned 11 times in the SLVCEH strategic plan. As one presenter shared “as soon as you get youth with lived experience to the table, we’re all over the document.” Finally, members of the YAB have been invited to join other task forces.

Strengths:

- Leadership Structure: The Steering Committee is composed of youth with lived experiences.
- Evolving Mission: The mission continues to grow and evolve from its inception in 1989.
- Clear Organizing Document: The Governance Charter is very detailed and lays out membership terms, how to be elected, and addressing conflicts of interest.
- Youth Leadership: The Vice President of the Youth Action board filled out the application for the TAY Summit.
- Funding Success: The positive outcome is SLVCEH (Salt Lake Valley Coalition to End Homelessness) was able to apply for YHDP funds with the SLCo YAB leading the request and was ultimately awarded 2.78 Million dollars for youth experiencing homelessness in our community.

Opportunities for Growth:

- Sustainable Funding: Currently, receiving funding relies on a single program - the Emergency Solutions Grant Program.
- Measuring Impact: The Steering Committee has been present for only one year so there has not been enough time to analyze and observe the impact it has and how involved youth are overall.

Policy levers for transition-age youth

As these policies demonstrate, policymakers have used several policy levers to achieve policy changes on behalf of transition-age youth. Key levers used by the featured policy efforts include:

State Legislation

One lever to achieve policy change on behalf of transition-age youth that is familiar to many advocates is state legislative change. State legislatures regularly introduce legislation on a variety of topics during each legislative session and advocates can meet with state legislators to advocate for and against legislation that has been introduced. Maryland's minor consent to shelter and tuition waiver laws and the California legislation implementing a youth peer support provider category are examples of state legislative change that youth can be involved in.

State Administrative Change

A lever to achieve policy change on behalf of transition-age youth which is less familiar to many advocates is state-level administrative change. Administrative changes can be made outside of the legislative process, usually at the discretion of state agency leaders or the governor's office. These changes can include:

- ✓ **Regulations:** these are the rules that define how a law is implemented. This is 1 of the more formal processes for administrative change, often called for by underlying legislation and includes requirements for periods of public comment.
- ✓ **Guidance:** further explains a law or regulation. Guidance cannot change anything about the underlying law or rule, but can clarify confusion, provide examples of best practice for implementation, or emphasize the opportunities within a law or set of regulations.
- ✓ **Budgets:** although there is a legislative component, agencies can use their discretion to direct funding to specific programs or populations, or to allocate cost savings. State agencies cannot change the total amount allocated by the legislature, but can make decisions about priorities and allocations for specific programs.
- ✓ **Practice:** sometimes, barriers are created by a long-standing practice that is not actually required by any law or regulation. As a result, meaningful change can be achieved by changing "ways of doing business" that do not require formal policy change.



Each of these tools provides an opportunity to improve services on behalf of transition-age youth. Massachusetts made a regulatory change to "reframe the age," coupled with significant practice changes across their child and adult serving systems. The Salt Lake Valley Coalition to end Homelessness amended their bylaws to increase youth leadership in their governance structure.

Policy levers for transition-age youth

As these policies demonstrate, policymakers have used several policy levers to achieve policy changes on behalf of transition-age youth. Key levers used by the featured policy efforts include:

Braided Funding Streams:

Another lever available to policymakers interested in meeting the needs of transition-age youth is braiding funding to resource policy initiatives.

Braiding funds can involve leveraging multiple federal funding streams:

- Funding from multiple federal grants or agencies
- Multiple levels (federal and state or local funds)
- Multiple sources (funding from public/government and private/philanthropic sources).

It is rare for a single funding source to provide sufficient financial resources and sufficient flexibility to support innovative programs.



Braiding multiple funding streams can help state or local policymakers to demonstrate the impact of promising investments on the path to longer term fiscal sustainability.



The Mayors for Guaranteed Income pilots braided public and private dollars to support the guaranteed income pilots for transition age youth.



The LA Peer support program braids federal and state funding streams, drawing on Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) funding to support training for peer supporters, and Medicaid dollars to make the positions sustainable in the long term.

Updates from 2023 Policy Summit Presenters

Policy presenters from the 2023 Policy Summit provided updates on their efforts since the last summit. They shared policies focused on supporting the mental health of young people of color (H3 Collective), integrated care (NC Integrated Care for Kids), peer support (Youth Move PA), community-based care (Wraparound Milwaukee), and continuity of care (UT JJYS). The updates reflect the impact of the policy summit on the presenters and their work in state legislation, administrative advocacy, youth engagement, and new initiatives.



Legislative Wins

The Children's Partnership: Hope, Healing, and Health Collective: H3C shared that since the Policy Summit, Governor Newsom of California has signed into law the co-sponsored bill, AB 665 - Minors: Consent to Mental Health Services, which allows youth aged 12-18 to access mental health services through the state's Medicaid program without the need for parent or guardian approval.

As co-sponsors and subject-matter experts, The Children's Partnership is currently communicating with providers, young people, and California's public program administrators to gain a deeper sense of what is needed in the field to ensure the appropriate implementation of this legislation. The Children's Partnership also co-sponsored AB 289- Mental Health Services: Representation, which requires youth and youth-serving organizations to be a part of local mental health service planning boards and commissions.

Both AB 66 and AB 289 were a part of the Hope, Healing, and Health Collective recommendations in which youth shared a desire to have improved access to confidential mental health care as well as a desire to be more actively engaged in co-creating the programs, interventions and community conditions that support their well-being.

Administrative Advocacy

Two of our 2023 policy presenters shared updates on administrative advocacy efforts. NC Integrated Care for Kids (NCInCK) has established a team of Juvenile Justice leaders who meet monthly to plan and prepare for the automated reinstatement of Medicaid for youth released from a Youth Development Center (YDC). They are also partnering with Medicaid to implement a partial waiver of the Inmate Exclusion Policy, which will allow certain services to be covered by Medicaid up to 90 days before YDC release. This change will be implemented in January 2025.

Youth MOVE Pennsylvania has been working with the Office of Mental Health & Substance Abuse Services (OMHSAS) in Pennsylvania to identify the unique challenges faced by young adults and adolescents. Youth Peer Support Programs are rooted in the belief that everyone deserves the opportunity to achieve wellness and lead fulfilling lives. Youth Peer Support Services (YPSS) are available to individuals aged 14-27 in Pennsylvania. Youth MOVE PA worked with the state in identifying that Youth Peer Support is established in 19 out of 67 counties in Pennsylvania, with 35 service providers operating within those counties. Despite its presence, Youth Peer Support remains significantly underutilized in the state.

As a result of this advocacy, the state has acknowledged the need to revitalize the Youth Peer Support workforce. To achieve this goal, the Pennsylvania Certification Board will soon introduce an endorsed credential specifically for Youth Peer Support. Currently, only enhancement training for Youth Peer Support is available. Introducing this endorsement will acknowledge individuals who focus on working with the youth demographic. The ongoing advocacy work, particularly focused on Youth Peer Support initiatives, has directly stemmed from this endorsement.

New Initiatives



- Wraparound Milwaukee opened another drop-in center to expand outreach and programming.
- UT JJYS is utilizing a second chance grant for employment and education services for youth in custody. Several youth in secure care participated in Peer Support Training with YouthMOVE National. This training provides skills to share their lived experience to help other young people.
- The National Black Women’s Justice Institute (NBWJI) launched “Creating Affirming, Responsive, & Equitable Schools” (CARES) Initiative in response to the Hope, Healing, and Health (H3) Collective. They provide training, tools, and resources to schools becoming spaces that Black girls and gender-expansive youth need to thrive. They created assessment tools to aid schools with creating mental health systems of care that are responsive to and reflective of the needs, expectations, and desires of Black girls, and they started piloting the tool in three New York City high schools. The CARES School Mental Health System Assessment will be publicly available later this year.
- NCInCK has implemented a community referral pathway, developed to accept direct referrals into care management from Juvenile Justice Court Counselors, school nurses, and social workers. Hopefully, this will create a pathway for trusted adults engaging with youth to refer youth directly into care management when a need is noticed or a request for support is expressed.
- Youth MOVE Pennsylvania pioneered an initiative around Youth Peer Support, utilizing the Peer Generation Youth Empowerment Training (PGYE) curriculum to empower pathways to employment. The program involves training 9th and 10th graders in the Foundations of Resiliency and Peer Support. Upon entering 11th grade, having undergone PGYE training, can become co-facilitators alongside trainers, guiding their peers within the school community. Once in senior year, graduate, and reach 18 years of age, they have the option to enroll in a Certified Peer Specialist Training and transition to the workforce. Youth MOVE PA has introduced two new cohorts of Peer Generation Youth Empowerment Training (PGYE) in the past year. This initiative involved 40 students from 10 schools. Additionally, thirty staff members from these schools received training in the same curriculum. Five more cohorts are scheduled over the next few years with school districts in this county.

Increased Youth Engagement

In line with a key theme from the 2023 summit, presenters reported efforts to increase authentic youth engagement. The Utah JJS Youth Coordinator implemented consistent meetings with the Youth Councils in secure care facilities to ensure feedback is gathered. Additionally, JJYS is working to incorporate more robust family voice and feedback through family night events. The Children's Partnership and H3C have supported two young people to present recommendations to a group of California advocates, service providers, and school administrators at the invitation of California's Children and Youth Behavioral Health Initiative Director, Melissa Stafford Jones. They have also partnered with GenUp in their advocacy efforts for AB 665. This included an Instagram Live with the bill's author, California Assembly Member Wendy Carillo and two youth advocates from GenUp. have supported two young people to present the H3C recommendations to a group of California advocates, service providers, and school administrators at the invitation of California's Children and Youth Behavioral Health Initiative Director, Melissa Stafford Jones. They have also partnered with GenUp in their advocacy efforts for AB 665. This included an Instagram Live with the bill's author, California Assembly Member Wendy Carillo and two youth advocates from GenUp



Wraparound Milwaukee shared that youth and family engagement has continued through events and groups held by Wraparound Milwaukee and their advocacy organization. One example is an upcoming art show whereby the art is on display for sale at their Youth Mental Health Awareness event and the youth artists keep all of the proceeds from this event.

At NCInCK, the summit feedback reinforced the need for continued youth voices in program implementation and evaluation. This establishing AYA and Juvenile Justice workgroups who regularly collaborate with the NCInCK Youth Council. The AYA workgroup attends monthly youth council meetings to share what NCInCK is working on for AYA and ask for their input. Increased commitment to the creation of AYA and Transition centered resources, many of which are mentioned above, including the TAY Resource Guide. This has had an impact on how they create materials across the board, focusing on key transition and/or tension points for not only youth but also families, caregivers, young children, etc. This reinforced the need for Medicaid covered services for youth in commitment status. Support for the implementation of a community referral pathway that captured the AYA population at key transition points. The AYA workgroup has established ongoing monthly collaboration with our NC InCK Youth Council. Their Juvenile Justice Integration Consultant, Judy Lawrence, has met with the NCInCK Youth Council on two occasions to provide an overview of our Juvenile Justice efforts and present documents/presentations for feedback.

This came directly out of requests from the NC InCK Youth Council members to learn more about the work and is in alignment with the lessons from the youth in transition summit. They also joined our State Juvenile Justice Behavioral Health (JJBH) Workgroup and the Youth and Family Voice Sub-group, which is dedicated to bringing these experiences and perspectives to the table, and providing adequate compensation for their contributions.

At NBWJI, young people continue to guide and inform their work. They assembled a youth advisory council of Black girls and gender-expansive young people ages 14-19 to help them develop the CARES Schools Mental Health System Assessment. Young people met monthly to discuss the most pressing issues affecting their mental health and recommend solutions schools should implement to support Black girls and gender-expansive youth. Youth engagement is vital to NBWJI's approach. Drawing on their experiences with the H3 Collective and the CARES advisory council, they are forming a youth advisory council to support a new project addressing the criminalization of survivors of abuse and exploitation. They are considering how to create a permanent youth advisory council to help inform NBWJI strategy, in addition to ad hoc councils for specific projects.

Lasting Impact

As predicted, the feedback from the 2023 youth panelists had a lasting impact on the policy presenters. Several shared specific ways that they have sought to incorporate youth panelist feedback since the summit. Based on feedback from the summit, Utah DHHS has increased efforts to ensure young people benefit from their policy, access to follow up services after exiting state custody. While the policy for Utah's Juvenile Justice and Youth Services (JJYS) system has stayed the same, there has been an increased effort to ensure youth sign the voluntary service agreement before they exit the system so they have easier access to follow-up services.

For The Children's Partnership, as a children's advocacy organization, it is essential to their mission that they not only engage with youth to gather feedback on advocacy efforts but that they also provide support and resources to these youth. The recommendation they received to continue to keep in touch with H3C youth to evaluate the ongoing impact of participating in this collective. Since then, adult allies of the H3C have written letters of recommendation for college admissions for two of the H3C youth and several of the young people have shared their professional goals to become policy advocates around youth mental health. Several of the H3C youth have also shared that being part of the youth policy council in 2021-2022 allowed them to process their feelings, including fear and frustration, during a time when physical distancing, distance learning, and unprecedented health and economic stressors, prevented them from leaning on their local peers and community supports as fully as they would have liked. The Children's Partnership continues to expand its capacity to engage with youth development and youth leadership programs like those we partnered with for the H3C to facilitate policy discussions and mobilize youth power to achieve our shared goals for greater youth well-being, especially for youth from marginalized communities and identities.

NBWJI has remained close with youth advisors. To continue to support H3C youth advisors leadership and advocacy around youth mental health, they continue to invite youth advisors to participate in related projects, like the CARES Initiative. Both the youth advisor and the adult mentor from Black Girls Smile, a H3C partner, were involved in creating the CARES School Mental Health System Assessment. They also support advisors in other ways, such as writing college and scholarship recommendation letters.

NC InCK has seen overall improvements in engagement for the adolescent and young adult (AYA) population. Engagement rates improved from 19% in 2022 to 30% in 2023 for AYA (ages 13-20). The young adult population (ages 18-20) continues to be a challenging group to engage so they are consistently working on new strategies to improve engagement and outcomes for this age group. They have developed a resource guide to assist care managers who work with Transition Aged Youth (TAY), with a specific focus on resources specific to Juvenile Justice-involved youth. They have also strengthened their collaboration with local Juvenile Justice/Behavioral Health (JJBH) partnerships.

Young people's perspectives had a lasting impact on policy presenters, a powerful example of the ways in which youth-adult partnership can lead to better outcomes for young people across the country.

Conclusion

“I have no doubt other countries will take notice of them, either on the state or federal level. Again, I want to emphasize what policies might be domestic in nature, their impact is global.”

- Trace Terrell, Keynote Speaker



The policy initiatives shared as part of the Second Annual Youth in Transition Policy Summit provide reason for hope. They are evidence of pockets of innovation around the country and the power of youth leadership to move us towards generational wellness. As noted by keynote speaker Trace Terrell, policy initiatives developed at the state or local level can ultimately have global impact. The summit uncovered three key themes that must guide policymakers as they work toward comprehensive and holistic support for transition-age youth:

- **Powerful role of youth councils:** increasingly federal funding streams are implementing requirements for youth and community engagement. State and local policymakers literally can't afford not to put infrastructure in place to support youth engagement, as they risk losing out on needed resources.
- **Meeting young people's basic needs is a mental health intervention:** access to shelter, guaranteed income, job training and education- all of these interventions have tangible mental health impacts. If we broaden our understanding of mental health in line with young people's understanding of the role of social determinants of health and root causes in shaping mental health outcomes, we'll be better positioned to make progress in the face of seemingly intractable youth mental health challenges.
- **Insufficient and restrictive funding:** In no case is a single federal funding stream or a single funding source sufficient to meet the needs of transition age youth. In fact, the restrictions associated with single sources of funding limit our ability to imaginatively and appropriately meet young people's needs. It will take both increased resources from all sectors and cross-sector collaboration to meaningfully address the challenges that young people face.

The updates from last year's policy presenters are also evidence of the lasting impact of events like the youth in transition policy summit. We heard consistently from policy presenters from the 2023 YIT policy summit that they were impacted by the feedback of youth panelists at the first summit. Many have identified policy next steps, including new legislation and administrative changes that will further advance efforts to address young people's needs. In some cases, past presenters have significantly expanded youth engagement efforts, demonstrating their understanding of the value of engaging young people to problem solve implementation challenges. Convening state and local policymakers, young people, practitioners, and advocates to learn from innovative sites around the country has the potential to change the trajectory of how we're meeting young people's needs.

For a second year, the youth in transition policy summit has affirmed that to achieve generational wellness, we must trust young people's leadership. As we consistently engage young people at all stages of the policy process, we can co-create the future that young people deserve.



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This work was made possible by the generous support of NAMI UT and the Center for Law and Social Policy (CLASP). The authors would like to thank TBD for editing, TBD for design assistance, and DB Productions for photography and videography. We also thank Maygan Martinez and Mina Koplín for their review. Finally, the authors also thank the Utah State Transition-Age Youth team, Youth panelists Keira Boxell and Rei Scott, Keynote Speakers Jullly Myrthil, Trace Terrell, and Tyren Boyd Jr., and the 5 policy presentation teams for participating in the second annual Utah Transition-Age Youth Policy Summit.



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Appendix

Policy Summit Rubric

Policy Summit Rubric			
Action	<p>Assign the best fitting score for YOUTH INVOLVEMENT and explain why it was selected:</p> <p>0 - Youth were not involved in any way 1- Youth were included but without a meaningful role 2- Youth were consulted but adults ultimately made the decisions 3- Adults initiated the action; youth and adults collaborated on decisions 4- Youth initiated the action; youth and adults collaborated on decisions 5- Youth initiated the action and ultimately made the decision, with or without adult consultation NA- Not applicable</p>	<p>List all underserved groups, potentially affected by the policy, that were involved in the action. Underserved groups may include racial or ethnic minorities; LGBTQIA+ folks; people who use drugs; religious minorities; sex-workers; incarcerated or formerly incarcerated; people with physical, developmental, mental or cognitive disabilities; recent immigrants; people with low income; individuals experiencing homelessness; etc.</p>	<p>Comments and follow-up questions:</p>
Bringing the problem to the attention of policy maker(s)			
Identification of potential policy solution(s)			
Creation of the policy proposal			
Championing adoption of the policy			
Implementation of the adopted policy			
Evaluation of intended and unintended impacts of the policy, as implemented			
Adaptation or amendment of policy based on evaluation results			