

Adolescent Health Annual Plan

North Dakota Maternal and Child Health Priority Goal: Identify, reduce, or eliminate barriers preventing adolescents from receiving mental health treatment and counseling (October 1, 2026-September 30, 2027).

Adolescence is a time of incredible growth and serves as a crucial period for physical, psychological, and social development. The habits formed and the support received during this stage can have lasting effects on lifelong health. As adolescents move from childhood to adulthood, they begin to take personal responsibility for their health and, for those with chronic conditions, a greater role in managing their care. While physical health remains essential, mental and behavioral health have emerged as equally critical components of overall well-being, especially in North Dakota, where youth mental health challenges are becoming increasingly prevalent. Depression, anxiety, and behavioral health conditions can interfere with academic performance, social relationships, and long-term stability if left unaddressed. To improve the health and well-being of adolescents and young adults, it is essential that they have access to timely, developmentally appropriate physical and mental health services, no matter where they live in the state.

The 2024 National Survey of Children's Health (NSCH) indicated that 93.7% of North Dakota children, ages 12 through 17, reported having excellent or very good health. North Dakota strives to reach 90.0% of children and adolescents who report excellent health, which they met as North Dakota is currently trending above the national average at 89.8% in this area for physical health. However, according to the 2023-2024 NSCH, 25.8% of North Dakota children aged 3-17 years have one or more reported mental, emotional, developmental, or behavioral problems.

North Dakota's 2025 Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) indicated that 29.5% of adolescents reported experiencing depressive symptoms, which is a decrease from the 2023 YRBS of 35%. The YRBS also indicated that 8% of North Dakota adolescents reported attempting suicide in 2025, which is a slight increase from the 2023 survey. The North Dakota YRBS will be administered once again in March 2027 to North Dakota middle school and high school students to further assess and compare data trends.

The Evidence-Based Strategy Measure (ESM) selected for Year 1 will be the number of adolescents, age 12 through 17, with a reported visit to an emergency department (ED) involving depression within the last year. According to the 2025 Electronic Surveillance System for the Early Notification of Community-Based Epidemics (ESSENCE) data, 199 adolescents were seen in the ED, urgent care, and walk-in clinics for depression within the last year. This is an 18.5% increase from 2024. Therefore, Title V has a mission to improve access to mental/behavioral health services for adolescents.

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), multiple factors determine mental health outcomes. The more risk factors adolescents are exposed to, the greater the potential impact on their mental health. Since 29.5% of adolescents reported depressive symptoms in the 2025 YRBS, Title V staff will partner with other organizations regarding mental health and suicide prevention efforts for adolescents and continue to expand collaboration with other behavioral health partners to address challenges and provide education around healthy adolescent behavioral health. Staff plan to identify obstacles and challenges that adolescents face when accessing mental and behavioral health services. Title V staff will partner with the NDDHHS Behavioral Health Division on various projects and initiatives around adolescent mental health. For example, the Title V Director will continue to take part in meetings for the Pediatric Mental Healthcare Access Grant and work towards expanding the utilization of these services. Title V team members will also attend meetings with the Behavioral Health Unit to explore opportunities for collaboration on projects that are applicable to adolescent mental health. The State School Nurse Consultant has begun attending meetings for the unit's B-Hero Advisory group and will continue to use this as an opportunity to collaborate for behavioral health initiatives in North Dakota schools and communities.

Title V has contributed to the annual suicide prevention conference held in North Dakota through the North Dakota Suicide Prevention Coalition. A Title V team member currently sits on the planning committee for this conference. In the upcoming year, it is hoped that Title V will increase its participation even further and ensure that adolescent mental health is a topic being explored in the planning process.

Title V staff will also partner with school-based entities to enhance adolescents' access to mental health resources. State Title V will organize and lead quarterly meetings with school nurses to inform them about available mental health resources for students. Partners from various entities will be asked to attend and present at these meetings to share resources, discuss the services they offer, and answer questions from the school nurses from around the state who are working directly with adolescents in schools. Additionally, training sessions addressing adolescent mental health will be disseminated through a School Nursing listserv as they become available.

Next, youth involvement remains a core component in strengthening the infrastructure needed for comprehensive adolescent healthcare. Title V staff will continue to identify opportunities to collaborate directly with adolescents to ensure their voices help guide program development and messaging. The North Dakota Multi-Partner Health Collaborative (MPHC) recently established the “Next Gen Group,” a cohort of North Dakotans ages 15–25. Previously, Title V partnered with the Youth Advisory Board (YAB) within Health and Human Services; however, that group has since dissolved. Moving forward, Title V staff will seek guidance and feedback from the Next Gen Group on adolescent needs, priorities, and communication strategies.

The MPHC is a statewide public–private partnership composed of organizations and individuals committed to working together to help North Dakota reclaim its status as the healthiest state in the nation. Guided by North Dakota’s State Health Improvement Plan (SHIP), the MPHC focuses on four priority areas: 1) building community resilience 2) cultivating wellness 3) expanding access and connection and 4) strengthening the workforce. To support this work, the MPHC has established four Goal Groups that align with each SHIP priority area, which Title V staff are a part of. The Next Gen Group provides a crucial youth perspective that was previously missing from both MPHC governance and Goal Group efforts. Members have the flexibility to develop their own projects that reflect issues important to their age group while remaining aligned with SHIP goals. They also serve as a resource for Goal Groups, MPHC leadership, and external organizations seeking youth input.

Additionally, although Title V already has close working relationships with several programs that serve adolescents (e.g., Title V partners, North Dakota Family Planning Clinics, North Dakota Women’s Way, North Dakota State University Extension Services, North Dakota Immunization program, the North Dakota Pediatric Mental Health Assess Grant, local public health tobacco prevention programs, etc.), these will continue to be strengthened even further. The NDDHHS will continue evaluating potential opportunities to braid and layer funding as the Title V adolescent health domain begins to incorporate behavioral health components into its work efforts.

Title V will also be working towards increasing the number of schools implementing data-driven programs to promote student involvement for students at risk (poor attendance, behavioral/mental health issues, low grades, etc.). This will be accomplished through releasing Request for Proposals (RFP) to facilitate the implementation of such a program. One example is the Check and Connect program (C&C), a mentoring program that is targeted for at-risk youth in need of support to improve attendance, grades, and behavior. Using caring adults as mentors, the students will have weekly check-ins to review their personal data, set positive goals, and build healthy decision-making skills with a trusted adult. Using the web-based C&C

App, mentors will document, monitor, and report on student progress using their tablets or laptops to collect and interpret "Check" data, look for patterns of student involvement, track "Connect" data, and monitor progress. For administrators, the C&C App automates the processes of assessing fidelity of implementation and determining program impact. Student attendance, GPA, Failing Classes grades, and behavior incident reports/referrals will be monitored. Using the data, students can identify, alongside the support of their mentor, areas to focus on for improvement. Setting healthy goals together, the student and mentor will partner with the family to celebrate the positives. If needs come up, the mentor will guide the student and the family in accessing resources to meet the need. The goal is to ensure all students make progress and are on track for a healthy life and positive school outcomes. The targeted age group for this intervention is grades 5 through 10. Research shows early intervention at these grade levels will increase the success and overall healthy decision-making skills of students near graduation.

Lastly, the importance of collaboration is acknowledged as a vital component in the development of innovative initiatives aimed at ensuring adolescents receive adequate preventive healthcare. Integrating elements of the medical home model is essential for enhancing the quality, effectiveness, and efficiency of care provided, while also addressing the unique needs of each patient. It is crucial that every individual, including children and adolescents, has access to a designated medical home. While the universal measure for the medical home will be incorporated within the CSHCN domain, the collaborative efforts of Title V staff overseeing the CSHCN, Adolescent Health, and Child Health domains will be instrumental in ensuring that all future medical home projects encompass every child, including those with special healthcare needs. To advance these medical home initiatives, domain leaders will integrate resources and collaborate effectively to enhance the overall system of care for all children.