

## Iowa PCA + PHC Adolescent Health Youth Focus Group Discussion Summary Findings

On Sunday October 6<sup>th</sup>, 2024, Iowa PCA staff (Tiffany Conroy) attended Primary Health Care (PHC)'s Youth Advisory Committee meeting to conduct a focus group on adolescent health. The focus group was an activity of the Iowa PCA's *Improving Adolescent Healthcare Outcomes Pilot Project*, in partnership with Iowa HHS, for which PHC will serve as the pilot site. This project is focused on updating the Iowa PCA's Adolescent Model of Care and aims to increase adolescent utilization of well visits and to improve outcomes across various quality measures. Lessons learned from this project will be disseminated to health centers across the Iowa PCA network to support the broad adoption of the updated model.

### Demographics of Participants

Number of youth in attendance: 9

Ages: 14-18 years old

Gender Identity: 2 cisgender male, 6 cisgender female, one chose not to respond

Sexual Orientation: 7 heterosexual, 2 chose not to respond

Racial Identity: 4 Asian, 2 Black/African American, 2 White, 1 more than one race

National Origin: 2 youth identified as being of Hispanic, Latino/a or Spanish origin

Below is a summary of responses from the discussion.

### Q1: How do you take care of your health?

- Physical activity:
  - Running
  - Making sure to be active every day
  - Being outside & moving body
- Nutrition:
  - Eating healthy when at home and have more control over food than when out to eat
  - Try to balance how often meals are eaten out of the house
  - Be mindful of nutrition & incorporate more fruits and vegetables
  - Drink “at least 2 Stanley cups of water per day” to help with hydration
- Stress Management:
  - Take care of mental health by taking a break before starting a new task (e.g., take a break when getting home from school before starting homework)
  - Make sure to get everything done ahead of time/before the next day
- Prioritize Sleep:
  - “Sleep is most important”

### Q2: What is your understanding of preventative health care, like well visits (vs. going to the doctor when you're sick)?

- Getting a physical to play sports

- Saw a TikTok from a nurse who said that the US healthcare system isn't about prevention, it's more focused on sickness
- Preparation for international travel (e.g., getting required vaccines before traveling)
- It's important for learning about things you're not aware of with your health (e.g., finding out about a sickness before you have symptoms).
- Knowing your family history is important so you know what disease you're at risk for and can do things to minimize risk. Not everyone's family knows their history or is willing to talk about it.

**Q3: What is an example of a time when a doctor or medical professional made you feel comfortable, or like they were someone you could trust?**

- Feel most comfortable when they're the same gender
- Helpful when they talk things through and explain it vs. talking at them (e.g., talking through the process of getting a shot and being slow and calm in delivery)
- "When the doctor talks to me specifically & not just my mom"
- When a doctor speaks their family's primary/preferred language it helps to make parents more comfortable with and trust the doctor
- When the provider is "easy going and calm," and makes issues not feel as scary or bad as they are.
- Asks if they have more questions & gives them attention even though the schedule is booked (it makes them feel seen & like the doctor cares about their health)
- Asks interactive questions that youth know how to answer

**Follow-Up Question: How do you feel about having 1-1 time with a provider?**

- It feels overwhelming when the provider asks to meet 1-1 during physical
- Feels comfortable 1-1 with provider once relationship is established, unsure how this would feel with a new provider
- Would like to meet 1-1 but parent(s) would be skeptical about why they need to see them alone
- Would feel uncomfortable without family there and would probably stay more quiet
- Teens with close relationships with their families might feel more comfortable with them in the room
- Everyone is different on what's too personal to discuss in front of their parents/family/others
- It takes time to build trust and can take seeing the provider multiple times vs. just 1-time visit

**Q4: What do you think is the biggest reason adolescents don't want to go to the doctor or another medical provider?**

- Scared to talk to people in general
- Scared to talk because of lots of rules of what has to be reported back to parents

- Some people's parents think that doctors and the government can't be trusted & they stick to their own culture's medicine
- People don't know why they need to go to the doctor or what they need to get care for
- If they don't do a sport and you feel healthy, they may not see much of a reason to go to the doctor
- Some people are scared to go alone and if they don't have someone to go with them it prevents them from knowing what to do, where to go, how to get care, etc.
- Some people are in denial & going to the doctor might tell them things they don't want to know or make them talk about things they don't want to talk about (e.g., depression)
- Some people are scared to accept help or feel like a burden
- High schoolers are busy with school & other extracurricular activities
- Preventative care isn't as advertised so teens don't know to go to doctor before they're sick

**Q5: How do you get information about your health or get answers to your health care questions?**

- TikTok and other social media
- Other people (e.g., family, neighbors, friends)
- Search info online
- School (e.g., flyers, assemblies, posters, etc.)

**Q6: What do you wish healthcare providers knew about adolescents and taking care of their health?**

- They need more education on why prevention is important.
- Feeling like they have a voice & choice during the appointment is important.
- Rapport is essential
- Use social media to reach them
- Some youth prefer to receive info about their health and healthcare options in person (e.g., flyers, etc.)
- Have healthcare providers come and talk to youth at school assemblies, career fairs, etc.
- Tell stories to make information more personal (e.g., use stories of someone who got hurt of sick and the impact it had) and make the info relatable and not "just stats"

**Q7: What barriers to getting care do you see for youth who need help with their mental health?**

- Stigma, assumption of older generations that "it's all in their heads"
- People don't want to feel like a burden or have people worry about them
- Some people don't want to come to terms that they have something going on with their health
- The environment where people grow up can influence your perception of mental health (e.g., if people think it's a waste of time or not real and don't take it seriously)

- If the provider talks about mental health in a harmful way it “makes you feel bad about yourself,” vs. if they talk about it in an empathic way
- Some people normalize signs of depression or anxiety and they don’t know to get help if “that’s your normal”
- Some people may have already had the symptoms & don’t realize it’s an issue and they don’t believe others because “they know themselves better”

Key Takeaways:

1. Youth expressed a desire to have voice and choice in their interactions with medical providers. This includes the choice of whether they meet with a provider 1-1, being asked questions in a manner they understand and can respond to and being informed of their rights and options during interactions.
2. There is no one way that youth want to receive information about their health and healthcare options. Strategies should include social media and other written forms of communication, as well as in-person during school events and medical appointments.
3. Youth reported limited awareness of the purpose and benefits of preventative care. Tailored outreach and educational materials for adolescents will be an important component of this project’s efforts to increase participation in adolescent well visits.
4. Receiving services from providers with shared identities or experiences (gender, race or country of origin, language, etc.) can lead to an increased sense of comfort and trust between the youth and the provider, as well as the youth’s family and the provider.