

# ADOLESCENT HEALTH SYSTEM CAPACITY ASSESSMENT TOOL



# SECTION 1: INTRODUCTION



# Adolescent Health System Capacity Tool: A state public health quality improvement process

## Overview

Adolescence is a crucial developmental period characterized by marked physical, emotional and intellectual changes, as well as by changes in social roles, relationships and expectations, all of which are important for the development of the individual and provide the foundation for functioning as an adult.

Supporting the health and development of adolescents is a role taken on by state public health agencies. And within these organizations, maternal and child health (MCH) programs provide a logical home for this work bringing expertise in a variety of programs affecting families, as well as strong collaborative relationships with providers, families and others. State and territorial MCH programs address adolescent health in many ways. First is an appointment of a State Adolescent Health Coordinator to provide leadership, oversight and or assistance to adolescent-focused efforts. Second are MCH programs that focus on adolescents, either as their primary focus or as an important population within a lifespan focus. Third is partnership with diverse programs within and outside of the state health agency as they address youth health and development issues.

## System Capacity for Adolescent Health: A Public Health Improvement Tool

Recognizing that MCH programs must have the organizational capacity to support adolescent health focused efforts (e.g. staff and programs), this tool provides a process for assessing key areas of capacity and identifying areas for organizational improvement.

### THE SIX KEY SYSTEM CAPACITY AREAS ADDRESSED IN THIS TOOL ARE:

1. **Commitment to Adolescent Health**
2. **Partnerships**
3. **Planning & Evaluation**
4. **Policy & Advocacy**
5. **Education & Technical Assistance**
6. **Surveillance & Data Systems**

The System Capacity Tool identifies these as the six areas of capacity that must be in place in public health agencies, specifically maternal and child health programs, to provide the 10 essential public health services to support effective state adolescent health programs.

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## Purpose of the Tool

From a public health perspective, strategic assessment leads to action and action leads to quality improvement. Documenting organizational capacity also allows for a historical record of where an MCH program started to provide consistency for staff and partners and establish a baseline for measuring system improvement over time. And finally, assessing MCH program capacity in the context of other state level adolescent health efforts can also help define the role of the MCH program and the adolescent health coordinator as a vital piece of the network necessary to improve adolescent health.

The intended outcome of this tool is an assessment of a program's existing capacity and the organizational and environmental supports needed to improve that capacity. These discussions provide a picture of where an MCH program stands and where it wants to go and leads users through a process of considering which changes are a priority and feasible. The primary audience for this tool is state and territorial MCH program staff, including MCH and children and youth with special health care needs (CYSHCN) directors, adolescent health coordinators, and other program managers. However, the concepts presented within this tool, and the process of documenting capacity to plan for quality improvement, will prove useful to a diverse audience no matter at what level of capacity or effort they start.

## Tool Content and Development

The tool is a collaborative project of the Association of Maternal & Child Health Programs (AMCHP) and the National Network of State Adolescent Health Resource Coordinators (NNSAHC), supported by a three-year investment from the Annie E. Casey Foundation.

This tool was developed through a national collaborative effort of more than 50 states, national and federal partners. We would especially like to thank the tireless efforts and contributions of the core leadership group, who facilitated workgroups, reviewed content areas, developed measurement tools, and planned and implemented three state pilot projects to test the use of this tool.

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## Relationship of the System Capacity Tool to Other Assessment Tools

The System Capacity Tool was designed in collaboration with the Johns Hopkins University Women's and Children's Health Policy Center in order to compliment the Capacity Assessment for State Title V (CAST-5) tool, organized around the 10 Essential Public Health Services, articulated in the Public MCH Program Functions Framework: Essential Public Health Services to Promote Maternal and Child Health in America.

Unlike CAST-5, the System Capacity Tool is not organized around the 10 Essential Public Health Services, but around systems necessary to promote adolescent health. In doing so, this tool recognizes the need to emphasize essential services differently for adolescent health than the general public.

The System Capacity Tool is designed to support national initiatives such as the National Initiative to Improve Adolescent Health and Healthy People 2020 by providing a focus on state system and infrastructure needs to achieve critical objectives for adolescents.

## Using the System Capacity Tool

There are many ways to use this tool as it was designed to be used flexibly to meet varying needs. It can be used as a complete tool or individual components can be selected. The assessment can be carried to assess the state MCH program or the state adolescent health program or the entire health agency. Involvement of partners, both within and outside of the program/agency being assessed, is another important component of the assessment and there is great flexibility here too. Lastly, how the tool is used (depth, participation, number of meetings) can be designed to meet unique needs. Each reader will need to determine the best combination of methods and participants for using this tool. Accompanying worksheets and components of the System Capacity Tool provide considerations for determining participation as well as intended outcomes for the System Capacity Tool.

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### **Expected Benefits of Using the Tool**

There are a number of benefits that can be expected as a result of conducting an adolescent health system capacity assessment and quality improvement process. Among the states that have used the tool, the following results have been reported:

- 1. stronger program coordination and leadership**
- 2. stronger internal partnerships and cross agency collaboration (e.g., education, human services)**
- 3. increased integration of adolescent health across state health department programs**
- 4. stronger communication about adolescent health and issues**
- 5. increased youth development focus**
- 6. strengthened and refined advisory committees and task forces for adolescent health**
- 7. enhanced direction in use of resources, training and technical assistance**
- 8. increased training on adolescent health issues to strengthen the local workforce**
- 9. development of an adolescent health strategic plan and data report**
- 10. strengthened local public health capacity for adolescent health**

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