



System Capacity for Adolescent Health: Public Health Improvement Tool

A collaborative project of the Association of Maternal and Child Health Programs and the State Adolescent Health Coordinators Network with support from the Annie E. Casey Foundation

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.

Maternal and child health (MCH) programs provide a logical home for adolescent health within state health agencies, bringing expertise in a variety of programs affecting families, as well as strong collaborative relationships with providers, families and others.

A Conceptual Framework for Adolescent Health

To collaboratively strengthen the capacity of U.S. states and territories to support effective adolescent health initiatives, the Association of Maternal and Child Health Programs (AMCHP) and the State Adolescent Health Coordinators Network (SAHCN) established a formal partnership with support from the Annie E. Casey Foundation. Through this partnership, AMCHP and SAHCN worked collaboratively with national and state experts in the field of adolescent health, including AMCHP and SAHCN members, to establish a common vision for adolescent health. This vision is established in the *Conceptual Framework for Adolescent Health*¹, a theoretical basis for the partnership and for state maternal and child health programs to address adolescent health.

System Capacity for Adolescent Health: A Public Health Improvement Tool

Today, most state and territorial MCH programs support adolescent health through the appointment of an adolescent health coordinator.

Recognizing that MCH programs must have capacity in certain areas to support adolescent health focused staff and programs, this tool provides a process for assessing key areas of capacity and identifying priority areas for 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 responsibility of state or territorial adolescent health programs and initiatives should not, however, fall entirely on an adolescent health coordinator or any one person, but should be the responsibility of a network of organizations, agencies and individuals from the local, state levels. This network of support should provide assistance and opportunities for developing effective adolescent health policies and programs. This tool also emphasizes the role of a network of systems and partners to build and coordinate state capacity to effectively address adolescent health.

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Relationship of the System Capacity Tool to Other Assessment Tools

The System Capacity Tool identifies 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. It 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) tool², 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*³

Unlike CAST-V, 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 also designed to support the National Initiative to Improve Adolescent Health by the Year 2010, to provide a focus on state system and infrastructure needs and achieve critical objectives for adolescents, and compliment other resources to assist state and local agencies and organizations in planning around Healthy People 2010 objectives, including *Improving the Health of Adolescents & Young Adults: A Guide for States and Communities*, the official companion document to the *Healthy People 2010* 21 Critical Health Objectives.⁴

Purpose of the System Capacity Tool

From a public health perspective, assessment leads to action and action leads to quality improvement. Documenting capacity also allows for a historical record of where a 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 with special health care needs (CSCHN) 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 wide variety of audiences no matter what level of capacity or effort they are starting with.

Using the System Capacity Tool

There are many ways to use this tool, from full-day meetings, to multiple meetings, to getting input via e-mail and mail. There are also a variety of scenarios for who should participate in an assessment of adolescent health capacity in maternal and child health programs. Accompanying worksheets and components of the System Capacity Tool provide considerations for determining participation as well as intended outcomes for the System Capacity Tool.

This set of tools is 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 out at the level of the governmental MCH system (including non-Title V partners) or the level of the adolescent health program. Each reader will need to determine the best combination of methods and participants for using this tool.

System Capacity for Adolescent Health: Public Health Improvement Tool - Worksheets and Components on the Web at www.amchp.org/syscap.

- **Preparing for using the System Capacity Tool – Worksheets and considerations for determining *Who* and *How*.**
- **System Capacity for Adolescent Health – Measurement tools, worksheets, and instructions for assessing capacity in six key areas.**
- **Action Planning Guidance – Using the results of your assessment**
- **Sharing Lessons Learned – Evaluating your efforts and these tools**
- **Conceptual Framework for Adolescent Health**
- **Links to CAST-V, Healthy People 2010, and other assessment and planning resources.**

System Capacity for Adolescent Health: Public Health Improvement Tool Content and Tool Development

The AMCHP/SAHCN Partnership and the System Capacity for Adolescent Health: Public Health Improvement Tool is a collaborative project of the Association of Maternal and Child Health Programs (AMCHP) and the State Adolescent Health Coordinators Network (SAHCN), 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 state, 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.



The System Capacity for Adolescent Health: Public Health Improvement Tool was prepared and coordinated by Rena Large, M.Ed., CHES, Senior Program Director with the contributions of Danielle Sollers, Administrative Assistant, and Jameta Barlow, MPH, former Project Assistant, AMCHP Center for Best Practices. For more information contact 202-775-0436, or visit www.amchp.org.

Endnotes

¹ Association of Maternal and Child Health Programs, State Adolescent Health Coordinators Network Conceptual Framework for Adolescent Health (December 2002). Available at www.amchp.org.

² Ruderman, M. Grason, H, 2004. Capacity Assessment for State Title V: Second Edition, Association of Maternal and Child Health Programs (2004). Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health; and Washington DC; Association of Maternal and Child Health Programs. www.amchp.org/cast5.

³ Grason, H, Guyer, B (1995) Public MCH Program Functions Framework: Essential Public Health Services to Promote Maternal and Child Health in America, Maternal and Child Health Bureau, Bethesda, MD. Adapted from The Future of Public Health (1998) Institute of Medicine.

⁴ *Improving the Health of Adolescents & Young Adults: A Guide for States and Communities* is the official companion document to the *Healthy People 2010* 21 Critical Health Objectives. It offers guidance and resources for national, state and local adolescent health leaders to undertake the initiatives related to the 21 Critical Health Objectives. <http://nahic.ucsf.edu/index.php/companion/index>

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