



# Five Essentials for Healthy Adolescents

**The leading causes of death and disability for adolescents and young adults are largely preventable. The game plan is clear. Experts convened by the Office of Adolescent Health agree that adolescents flourish when they have:**

## **Positive connections with supportive people**

Adolescents thrive in safe, stable, and nurturing relationships with supportive adults, whether those are parents, coaches, neighbors, grandparents, teachers, program leaders, or mentors. These types of connections are important for all teens and may be difficult for at-risk youth to find and sustain.

## **Safe and secure places to live, learn, work, and play**

Schools, neighborhoods, and community settings can foster and support healthy adolescent development across the spectrum, including physical and mental health, social interactions, and cognitive growth. Adolescents also benefit from safe places to congregate, enjoy social, athletic, and other recreational activities, and just be with their peers.

## **Access to high-quality, teen-friendly health care**

Adolescents benefit from access to high-quality medical and dental care, mental and behavioral health services, and health care providers who understand adolescent health and development. Young patients prefer health services that are youth-friendly, culturally competent, affordable, convenient, and confidential. Health care that is adolescent-centered and involves parents, but allows for increased autonomy as adolescents reach their late teens, is ideal.

## **Opportunities to engage as learners, leaders, team members, and workers**

Active youth involvement with people and programs is important for promoting healthy adolescent development. This includes activities at school, at home, or in the community, such as school clubs, sports, music, visual and performing arts, or out-of-school time programs, volunteer or paid jobs, and activities at places of worship. Adolescents also benefit from opportunities to shape programs and activities, which can improve the programs, provide valuable leadership skills, and build confidence.

## **Coordinated adolescent- and family-centered services**

Adolescents enter health and social service systems in many ways and at different stages. Integrated and coordinated services can help ensure better health outcomes and support healthy development for adolescents. Unfortunately, the systems for providing services and supports to adolescents are often fragmented, spread across government agencies, nonprofit organizations, health care providers, businesses, and faith-based organizations. A more coherent, integrated approach to fostering health and healthy development would benefit all teens.