



Youth-Led Advocacy Platform

As the PA Youth Advocacy Network, we are committed to mental health and establishing an environment that embraces equity and inclusion for all. With the understanding that accessibility to services is not always available, we vow to continue fighting against the barriers and obstacles in society. We are committed to learning from others, especially youth, and maintain that this document and our priorities are youth-driven and open to community feedback.

Land Acknowledgement

Today and moving forward, we acknowledge that we are on Indigenous land. We pay our respects to the traditional keepers of this land: the Adena, Erie, Honniasont, Hopewell, Monongahela, Delaware Nation, Saluda, Saponi, Shawandasse Tula (Shawanwaki/Shawnee), Susquehannock (Andaste), the Iroquois people, Seneca Nation, Tuscarora, Tutelo, the Osage Nation, and Wenrohronon. We reflect upon the Indigenous peoples whose land was violently stolen from them, the land which we now occupy. We honor Native land to recognize that they were here first, to recognize what colonizers took, because colonizers drove Indigenous people out and that is not fair. We do this to show respect to them and the land, to remind us that Indigenous people are still here and we would not be here right now if it was not for them. The work we do would not be possible without the borrowed "place" that we call home. We recognize our own settlement continues to be at the detrimental expense of these nations, and we extend our respects to their members, elders and ancestors. We acknowledge that sovereignty was never ceded and it is our duty moving forward to continue to do the work to decolonize our lives in word and deed.

Implementing Mental Health Curriculum

- Encourages school districts to implement mental health education into their health curriculum.
- Increases awareness of mental health issues for teenagers and eliminates stigmas surrounding preventative mental health measures.
- Petitions school districts into adopting or further developing a mental health curriculum.
- Promotes the focus of equity within the mental health curriculum.

Increasing School Counselors

- Acknowledges the national recommendation to have one guidance counselor for every 250 students; yet in Pennsylvania, there are 380 students per one guidance counselor.
- Resolves to get as many schools as possible to the national recommendation.
- Supports hiring practices of counselors and other mental health professionals that are reflective of the school district's diverse student body.
- Values building the capacity of all school staff through mental health trainings, especially when counselor numbers are low.

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Prioritizing Substance Use Prevention Efforts

- Sees the intersectionality of mental health and substance use disorders.
- Recognizes that high incarceration rates related to substance use disorders in low-income, BIPOC communities are due to overpolicing and a lack of resources; we support more resources in such communities.
- Supports efforts to increase the availability of Naloxone (Narcan) and other safe use and harm reduction practices.
- Promotes Pennsylvania treatment programs, support groups, and community-based organizations and their efforts to curb substance use disorders; we especially promote these resources in rural communities that have historically been excluded from substance abuse prevention efforts.

Establishing School Mental Health Days

- Supports the addition of mental health as a viable school excuse to the Public School Code of 1949.
- Works to update outdated school excuse criteria as scientific, political, and social perceptions on mental health shift.
- Embraces the fact that mental health is as valid as physical health.
- Relieves unprecedented stress levels due to COVID-19 and academic pressure placed on youth who, without excused mental health absences, would be punished for missing school.

Raising Awareness

- Embraces any and all efforts that increase awareness related to mental health and substance use disorders, including but not limited to Pennsylvania's initiatives to establish: Eating Disorder Awareness Week, Trauma Awareness Month, Overdose Awareness Day and May as Mental Health Awareness Month.
- Realizes the importance of mental health awareness and the need for accessibility to building an equitable future for people of all identities, including, but not limited to: Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC), Latinx, Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI), and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer/questioning (LGBTQ+) communities.
- Recognizes burn-out and the intersection of mental health, politics and everyday life, and emphasizes healing as a part of our path to collective liberation.

Embracing Everyday Activism

- Promotes person-first language and eliminates stigmatizing language from vocabularies.
- Advocates for accessible school activities for students with mental and physical exceptionalities.
- Amplifies the voices of those with lived-experience of mental health or substance use disorders, and of marginalization, without overpowering their voices.
- Advocates for readily-available cultural competency and LGBTQ+ resources and training in schools, especially to support students from marginalized communities.
- Support school administration, teachers, and staff in a collective, ongoing effort to mitigate student stress, treat mental health with compassion, establish equitable practices, and dismantle cultural stigma related to mental health.