

Youth Advisory Councils and School-Based Health Centers

What is a Youth Advisory Council?

A **Youth Advisory Council (YAC)** is a diverse group of students who partner with school-based health center (SBHC) staff to provide youth voice, leadership, and lived experience to SBHC decision-making. YAC members serve as key informants on the health and wellness needs of their peers, help shape SBHC programs and services, and lead projects that address barriers to health, well-being, and access to care within their schools and communities.

Why are YACs important to SBHCs?

Youth are the experts of their own experiences and bring unique perspectives on the health, wellness, and educational needs of their peers, schools, and communities. Every young person, regardless of background, identity, or lived experience, has the potential to create meaningful change. By engaging students as authentic partners, SBHCs are better equipped to design programs, services, and outreach that are relevant, accessible, and responsive to youth needs. In turn, students develop lifelong leadership and advocacy skills that foster a stronger sense of belonging, civic engagement, and healthier school communities.

Hart's Ladder of Youth Participation is a valuable tool that can be used for intentionally designing and implementing YACs that meaningfully engage youth.

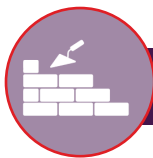
YACS can serve as valuable partners to SBHCs by:

- ▶ Providing youth voice and feedback to inform decision-making on SBHC programs, services, policies, and outreach
- ▶ Promoting awareness of the SBHC within the school community and encouraging peers to access SBHC services
- ▶ Identifying emerging health concerns, barriers to care, and unmet student needs
- ▶ Designing and leading peer-driven health education, wellness campaigns, and advocacy initiatives
- ▶ Advising on SBHC communication materials, social media presence, community-facing events, and messaging to ensure they resonate with their peers
- ▶ Building trust between students and the SBHC by serving as ambassadors and peer champions
- ▶ Supporting recruitment of diverse student voices to ensure the YAC reflects the school community
- ▶ Helping evaluate SBHC programming and recommending improvements based on student feedback

What is an SBHC?

SBHCs are an evidence-driven strategy that brings health care to where our youngest Ohioans spend most of their time — school. These centers are established through partnerships between schools and community healthcare providers to deliver, at a minimum, comprehensive primary care services on school campuses. SBHCs can also offer behavioral health, oral health, vision care, care coordination, social services, and other wraparound supports to meet the needs of students. The community healthcare provider, also referred to as the SBHC operator, is responsible for the day-to-day operations and management of the SBHC.

Five steps to forming a YAC



Step 1. Establish a foundation

Define the overarching purpose of the YAC and how it will support your SBHC's mission and goals. Identify one or more adult advisors who will champion the YAC, provide guidance, and help create opportunities for youth leadership. While advisors provide structure, resources, and mentorship, the YAC should remain youth-led, with students driving ideas, priorities, and projects.

Many successful YACs have advisors from both the SBHC operator and school district. Depending on the partnership, advisors may include SBHC staff, teachers, school counselors, coaches, after-school program staff, nurses, community health workers, behavioral health providers, or other SBHC or school district personnel. Advisors should:

- ▶ Foster a safe, inclusive, and supportive environment.
- ▶ Coordinate meetings, events, and logistics.
- ▶ Serve as a liaison between the YAC, SBHC, and school leadership.
- ▶ Help students navigate challenges and connect them with resources.
- ▶ Advocate for youth-led ideas while empowering students to make decisions and lead initiatives.



Tip: Launching a YAC often requires more time than maintaining one. Consider if advisor time will be supported through existing job responsibilities, dedicated work time, or a stipend, if applicable.



Step 2. Recruit a diverse group of youth

YAC members should reflect the student body in order to provide broader insight into the needs of the school community. Recruit students who reflect your school community across grade levels, backgrounds, identities, cultures, interests, extracurricular activities, and lived experiences.

While YAC members do not need to receive care through the SBHC or make it their medical home, they should become familiar with the SBHC's services, operations, and mission. Members should be enthusiastic about promoting the SBHC, educating peers about available services, and encouraging appropriate use of the center. Consider giving new members a tour of the SBHC, introducing them to staff, and explaining available services so they can confidently serve as ambassadors to their peers.

Recruitment considerations

- ▶ Aim for a council of 12–15 students, which is large enough to represent diverse perspectives while remaining manageable for discussion and decision-making.
- ▶ Host an informational meeting or recruit at school activity fairs, open houses, or SBHC events to introduce students to the YAC.

- ▶ Develop an application that collects basic information (e.g., grade level, interests, extracurricular activities, and why the student wants to participate). If interviews are conducted, an example set of YAC interview questions is located in **Appendix A**.
- ▶ Consider how members will be recognized for their contributions through community service hours, certificates, letters of recommendation, leadership awards, or other incentives.
- ▶ Work with school administrators to determine whether parent/guardian permission is needed for students to participate in the YAC or attend meetings and events outside the regular school day.



Tip: Consider meeting times, transportation, extracurricular schedules, and language needs when recruiting members. Making participation accessible helps ensure all students have an opportunity to engage.



Step 3. Establish how the YAC will operate

Developing the YAC's structure, expectations, and meeting processes early helps create a positive environment where youth can participate meaningfully and confidently.

Meeting logistics and space

- ▶ Determine meeting frequency, timing, and location. Consider meeting during an advisory period, study hall, lunch, or after school based on student and advisor availability.
- ▶ Select a meeting space that is comfortable, accessible, and supports collaboration, such as the SBHC conference room, school library, classroom, or other shared school space.

Communication, expectations, and culture

- ▶ Identify district-approved communication and document-sharing platforms for agendas, meeting notes, brainstorming, surveys, and member communication (i.e., Google Docs, SharePoint, Remind, or GroupMe).
- ▶ Establish member expectations, attendance guidelines, ground rules, leadership roles, and decision-making processes. Consider developing a YAC charter or operating agreement. Examples of YAC Meeting Guidelines can be found in **Appendix B**.
- ▶ Identify student leadership roles and encourage youth to facilitate meetings whenever possible. Advisors should coach and mentor student leaders before and during meetings to build confidence and leadership skills.
- ▶ Foster a welcoming, respectful, and youth-centered environment where all members feel comfortable sharing ideas and perspectives.



Tip: Involve youth in developing meeting norms, leadership roles, and operating procedures. Students are more invested when they help shape how the council functions.



Step 4. Set priorities and take action

With the YAC established, work with members to develop a shared vision for what they hope to accomplish. Consider creating a mission and vision statement to define the council's purpose and guide its work. Once a common direction has been established, engage members in identifying priorities and developing an action plan that addresses the needs of their school community. Projects should be youth-driven, informed by student perspectives, and aligned with the SBHC's mission and goals.

Needs and priorities

- ▶ Assess the needs of the school community by reviewing available data, gathering student feedback, and identifying health priorities, barriers to care, and opportunities to increase SBHC awareness and utilization.
- ▶ Encourage brainstorming and creative problem-solving before narrowing priorities. Advisors should guide discussion while empowering youth to generate ideas and make decisions.
- ▶ Select one or more annual goals based on identified priorities.

Action plan

- ▶ Identify projects that align with the council's goals and available resources. Projects may include peer education campaigns, awareness events, quality improvement initiatives, policy recommendations, advocacy efforts, or community outreach.
- ▶ Develop a work plan that outlines objectives, activities, timelines, responsibilities, and measures of success.
- ▶ For larger initiatives, establish student-led subcommittees to oversee specific projects or areas of responsibility.

Budget and resources

- ▶ Create a budget that aligns with the YAC's annual goals and planned activities. Budget considerations may include meeting materials, project supplies, incentives for student participation, event costs, marketing materials, or other operational expenses. An example YAC budget is provided in **Appendix C**.
- ▶ If additional resources are needed, identify potential funding sources to support YAC activities. While YACs can operate with little to no funding, grants, community partnerships, sponsorships, and donations from local businesses can expand opportunities and support larger initiatives.



Tip: Begin with one or two achievable projects during the first year to build momentum, strengthen teamwork, and demonstrate the value of the YAC.



Step 5. Evaluate, celebrate, and sustain the YAC

Regularly evaluate the YAC's progress and impact to identify successes, address challenges, and strengthen the council over time. Sharing accomplishments, recognizing members' contributions, cultivating partnerships, and planning for leadership transitions help sustain momentum and ensure the YAC remains an active, valued part of the SBHC.

Evaluation and impact

- ▶ Evaluate progress toward annual goals and assess the impact of YAC projects and activities.
- ▶ Gather feedback from YAC members, SBHC staff, school personnel, and other stakeholders to identify strengths and opportunities for improvement.
- ▶ Document lessons learned and update the council's goals and work plan for the following year.
- ▶ Celebrate accomplishments and recognize members' contributions through certificates, awards, service hours, letters of recommendation, school recognition, or other meaningful acknowledgments.
- ▶ Share the YAC's accomplishments with school leadership, partners, funders, students, and the broader community by communicating project outcomes, participation, and impact. Consider developing an annual summary or impact report that highlights successes, lessons learned, and future priorities.

Sustainability

- ▶ Develop and maintain partnerships with schools, community organizations, local businesses, government agencies, and funders to expand the YAC's impact, strengthen community engagement, and support long-term sustainability.
- ▶ Seek ongoing funding opportunities, when appropriate, to support future YAC activities and expand the council's impact.
- ▶ Recruit and mentor new members, intentionally develop future student leaders, and provide leadership transition opportunities for returning and graduating members to ensure continuity from year to year.



Tip: Sustainability begins early. Maintain organized meeting notes, work plans, and project materials throughout the year to ensure new members and advisors can build on previous successes rather than starting over each year.

Additional resources

About Youth Advisory Councils Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) Provides an overview of Youth Advisory Councils (YACs) and highlights how meaningful youth engagement can empower young people to influence programs, policies, and decision-making.

Creating & Sustaining a Thriving Youth Advisory Council: A Collection of Youth Experiences & Recommendations Michigan Department of Community Health (MDCH) & University of Michigan Health System's Adolescent Health Initiative (AHI) Offers practical guidance and youth-informed recommendations for establishing, growing, and sustaining an effective Youth Advisory Council.

Creating Youth Advisory Councils: Lessons Learned by Youth and Adults Kaiser Permanente & Colorado Education Initiative Shares lessons learned and practical strategies for creating Youth Advisory Councils, engaging youth, and successfully implementing youth-led initiatives.

Empowering Students through Health-Focused Youth Advisory Councils (YACs) Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), Division of Adolescent and School Health (DASH), & American Institutes for Research (AIR) Provides an overview of health-focused Youth Advisory Councils, including examples of student-led projects and strategies for meaningful youth engagement in school health initiatives.

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Example YAC member recruitment interview questions

The following questions may be used or adapted when interviewing prospective YAC members. Select the questions most appropriate for your school community and the goals of your YAC.

Motivation for joining the YAC

- ▶ Why are you interested in joining the YAC?
- ▶ What motivates you to become involved in improving the health and well-being of students at your school?
- ▶ How do you think serving on the YAC will allow you to make a positive impact in your school or community?

Personal growth and leadership

- ▶ What do you hope to gain from participating in the YAC (e.g., leadership skills, teamwork, communication, advocacy)?
- ▶ What strengths or experiences would you bring to the YAC?
- ▶ How do you think participating in the YAC will help prepare you for future academic, career, or personal goals?

Collaboration

- ▶ Tell us about a time you worked as part of a team. What role did you play?
- ▶ How do you approach working with people who have different opinions or experiences?
- ▶ What ideas or perspectives would you bring to help strengthen the YAC?

Student needs and school climate

- ▶ What do you think are the biggest health or wellness challenges facing students at your school?
- ▶ What do you think students need most to be healthy and successful in school?
- ▶ Are there any services or resources you wish were available or easier for students to access?

Awareness and outreach

- ▶ How can the YAC help increase awareness of the school-based health center and the services it provides?
- ▶ What types of activities, events, or campaigns would encourage students to get involved?
- ▶ How can the YAC help ensure all students feel represented and included?

Long-Term Vision

- ▶ If you could improve one thing about student health or wellness at your school, what would it be?
- ▶ What would success look like for the YAC one year from now?
- ▶ Why do you think student voice is important when making decisions that affect students?

Source: Modified from MetroHealth System. (2024). Example Interview Template for Member Recruitment.



Example YAC Meeting Guidelines

The following meeting guidelines may be used or adapted to establish shared expectations for YAC meetings.

Respectful communication

- ▶ Listen actively when others are speaking and avoid interrupting.
- ▶ Use respectful language and communicate with kindness, even when opinions differ.

Create a safe and inclusive space

- ▶ Help create a welcoming, judgment-free environment where everyone feels comfortable sharing ideas and experiences.
- ▶ Respect and value the diverse backgrounds, identities, perspectives, and lived experiences of all members.
- ▶ Respect the privacy of fellow members. Personal stories or sensitive information shared during meetings should remain confidential unless someone's safety is at risk.

Empathy and support

- ▶ Show kindness, compassion, and understanding toward others.
- ▶ Encourage fellow members to participate, share ideas, and advocate for themselves and their peers.

Active participation

- ▶ Come prepared and actively participate in discussions and activities.
- ▶ Be open to learning from others and considering new perspectives.
- ▶ Silence or put away phones and other distractions during meetings unless they are needed for meeting activities.

Provide constructive feedback

- ▶ Offer feedback that is respectful, thoughtful, and focused on improvement.
- ▶ Ask questions to better understand different viewpoints and ideas.

Attendance and accountability

- ▶ Attend meetings consistently and arrive on time.
- ▶ If you are unable to attend, notify the YAC advisor or council leader in advance.
- ▶ Follow through on commitments and assigned responsibilities between meetings.
- ▶ Take responsibility for your actions and words.
- ▶ Be willing to acknowledge mistakes, learn from them, and work toward positive solutions.

Have fun and be creative

- ▶ Enjoy working together, celebrate accomplishments, and bring creativity and new ideas to help make a positive impact.

Source: Modified from MetroHealth System. (2024). Example Youth Advisory Council Meeting Guidelines.



Example YAC Budget

The following budgets are examples only. Actual budgets will vary based on council size, meeting frequency, available funding, and local priorities. Many YAC activities can be implemented at low cost by leveraging school resources, school-based health center staff, community partners, local businesses, grants, and in-kind donations.

Table 1. Example Annual YAC Operating Budget

Budget category	Description	Estimated annual cost
Food and refreshments	Meals or snacks for monthly meetings	\$1,000
Member recognition	T-shirts, certificates, appreciation gifts, graduation recognition	\$750
Training and leadership development	Guest speakers, leadership workshops, conference registration	\$1,000
Meeting supplies	Printing, notebooks, name tags, flip charts, markers	\$300
Outreach and recruitment	Recruitment materials, flyers, social media promotion	\$250
Marketing and promotion	Posters, banners, promotional items	\$500
Community engagement	Volunteer activities, community events	\$500
Transportation support	Bus passes, mileage reimbursement, rideshare assistance (if applicable)	\$500
Youth-led projects	Mini-grants for YAC-led initiatives (10-15)	\$2,000
Miscellaneous/contingency	Unanticipated expenses	\$200
Estimated annual budget		\$7,000

Table 2. Example YAC Project Budget

Example Project: Mental Health Awareness Week

Budget item	Description	Estimated Cost
Posters and flyers	Printing promotional materials (50 copies)	\$150
Social media promotion	Graphic design or advertising	\$50
Giveaways	Stickers, wristbands, stress balls	\$300
Educational materials	Handouts and resource cards	\$100
Guest speaker	Honorarium (if applicable)	\$500
Student activity supplies	Art supplies, games, discussion materials	\$200
Refreshments	Snacks for participants (40 attendees)	\$250
Evaluation	Survey incentives and printing	\$100
Miscellaneous	Unexpected expenses	\$100
Total project budget		\$1,750



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info@osbha.com