

Office of Adolescent Health (OAH) Podcast Series

Roles and Functions of National Network of State and Adolescent Health Coordinators

TARA RICE, OAH: Welcome to the Office of Adolescent Health Podcast Series. Today we will be speaking with Rachel Samsel, President of National Network of State Adolescent Health Coordinators (NNSAHC). She was the Texas Adolescent Health Coordinator from 2008 to 2012 and in 2012 she began serving as President of NNSAHC. The National Network of State Adolescent Health Coordinators ("The Network") is a national volunteer lead organization that unites Title V State Adolescent Health Coordinators who are responsible for coordinating an adolescent health program and policy direction. Ms. Samsel, please provide us with some background on the National Network and its purpose.

RACHEL SAMSEL: The national network of state adolescent health coordinators is a national network comprised of public health professionals working in or with state Maternal Child Health (MCH) and family health programs as the designated state adolescent health coordinator. The Network's goals are to: provide leadership, advocacy and consultation on adolescent health; formally support and strengthen sharing of ideas and strategies among state adolescent health coordinators; and strengthen the capacity of state adolescent health coordinators and partners to effectively support healthy youth and their development. With original funding from the MCH Bureau (MCHB) for Special Projects of Regional and National Significance (SPRANS), the coordinator position has been enhanced and expanded so that currently nearly every Maternal Child Health and family health program includes or is linked to an adolescent health coordinator position. Formerly known as the State Adolescent Health Coordinators Network, the Network changed its name in March 2005 to reflect the national leadership and support provided by the Network's structure for state level adolescent health coordinators as well as national adolescent health partners and initiatives.

TARA RICE, OAH: What are some of the accomplishments of the NNSAHC as an organization?

RACHEL SAMSEL: In 1990 the Network provided recommendations for MCH/SPRANS grants as well as advocated for dedicated funding for adolescent focused MCH programs and resources. Coordinators have served on advisory bodies for national organizations and other MCHB funded programs and provided input into pivotal adolescent focused initiatives, for example: Healthy People 2010 and 2020 critical objectives for adolescents and young adults.

Our partnership with the Association of Maternal and Child Health Programs and the State Adolescent Health Resource Center at the University of Minnesota generated key guidance documents for Adolescent Health Coordinators and Title V and Maternal Child Health programs such as the Conceptual Framework for Adolescent Health, the System Capacity Tool for Adolescent Health, and the Comprehensive Systems Approach for Adolescent Health.

TARA RICE, OAH: How would you describe the role of an individual adolescent health coordinator?

RACHEL SAMSEL: While the job description of the adolescent health coordinator varies from state to state, the role is very much in keeping with and should be informed by the “Conceptual Framework for Adolescent Health” a collaborative project of the Association of Maternal and Child Health Programs (AMCHP) and the National Network of State Adolescent Health Coordinators that was supported by the Annie E. Casey foundation in 2005. Leadership from the Network and AMCHP came together to create a common vision for adolescent health, and to provide the theoretical framework for addressing adolescent health within public health agencies. The document also provides strategies and resources for implementing the framework in states. In addition, the Network believes that the health needs both of adolescents and the broader MCH population can best be served by designating an adolescent health coordinator who has the expertise and the responsibility to work closely with others in the MCH program in order to: integrate and/or coordinate existing public health efforts that address adolescents; promote and develop new public health policies, programs, and services that address additional adolescent health issues; provide expertise in adolescent health and development as well as positive youth development to inform broader policies, programs and services that include adolescents in the target population; and forge partnerships within public health, with other state agencies, and with a broad array of other societal institutions, as well as with youth and families, in order to develop comprehensive, coordinated state and community efforts to address the needs of youth. The majority of coordinators across the country are responsible for multiple content areas including sexual health, injury prevention, school health, obesity prevention, and more. Coordinators are often making connections with other youth serving organizations such as education, juvenile justice, and child welfare, to ensure that the specific needs of these populations are also met and address the unique developmental needs of adolescence.

TARA RICE, OAH: How are the coordinators unique in addressing adolescent health issues?

RACHEL SAMSEL: Long-term experience both within the U.S. and internationally has shown that when public health infrastructure includes an individual unit or focal point for a specific population group, policies, programs, services and supports for the designated group are greatly enhanced. By designating an adolescent health coordinator, states can greatly enhance efforts to address adolescent health, including ensuring that programs, policies and practices are supportive of the developmental needs of young people.

TARA RICE, OAH: Thank you for joining us for today's podcast about a national network of adolescent health coordinators in each of the states. To learn more about the Network, the role of the adolescent health coordinator, or if you would like to get in touch with the adolescent health coordinator in your state, email the Network at nnsahc@gmail.com. To access more resources about the Office of Adolescent Health, please visit us at <http://www.hhs.gov/ash/oah/>.

RESOURCES:

System Capacity Tool for Adolescent Health

<http://www.amchp.org/MCH-Topics/A-G/AdolescentHealth/Pages/SystemCapacityTool.aspx>

Crosswalking the Ten Essential Public Health Services for Adolescent Health

<http://www.amchp.org/programsandtopics/AdolescentHealth/projects/System-Capacity-Tool/Documents/cfah-crosswalk.pdf>

Conceptual Framework for Adolescent Health

<http://www.aecf.org/upload/publicationfiles/ar3622h421.pdf>

Comprehensive Systems Approach to Adolescent Health

<http://www.amchp.org/programsandtopics/AdolescentHealth/Documents/AHWG%20White%20Paper%20FINAL.pdf>