

APA Official Actions

Position Statement on Transitional Aged Youth

Approved by the Board of Trustees, December 2019

Approved by the Assembly, November 2019

“Policy documents are approved by the APA Assembly and Board of Trustees. . . These are . . . position statements that define APA official policy on specific subjects. . .” – *APA Operations Manual*

Issue:

The transition from adolescence to adulthood, typically ages 16 to 25 years, is a critical period during which many mental illnesses initially present or worsen. In fact, 75% of lifetime psychiatric disorders develop by age 24 [Kessler 2005]. Yet, engagement in mental health services is disproportionately low.

This period of development is characterized by changes in social roles and function, family and peer supports, exposure to substances, unfamiliar educational and vocational exposures, and changes in healthcare providers from the pediatric to adult setting.

Transitional aged youth (TAY) are particularly vulnerable to poor outcomes, particularly those individuals with emotional, intellectual or medical disabilities, those aging out of foster care, those with special educational needs, juvenile justice exposure and minority populations. The potential for these TAY to diverge from the expected developmental trajectory may have severe adverse impacts on their future potential.

It is critical for community psychiatrists to gain familiarity with this developmental phase and to know strategies to improve the outcome of transitional age youth under our care. Both adult and child psychiatrists play a vital role in ensuring the successful transition of transitional aged youth from child and adolescent to adult mental health services.

APA Position:

The American Psychiatric Association (APA) position is that transitional aged youth are underserved in current mental health systems. The APA agrees with the clinical report and guidelines (White and Cooley 2018) regarding health care transitions published by the American Academy of Pediatrics. To specifically address the mental health needs of transitional age youth, the APA advocates for:

- 1. Early discussions about health care transitions both in the clinic and between child and adult clinicians as a routine part of mental health assessments for all adolescents and their families to ensure transition of care planning**
- 2. Adult and child mental health treatment that is informed by TAY developmental needs**
- 3. Educational opportunities and interventions to prepare trainees in adult and child mental health, to include clinical opportunities for engagement and familiarity with this population, knowledge and understanding of the transition process, and tools to apply these skills after completion of their training**

4. Policies that reduce and/or remove financial barriers to access of mental health care for transitional age youth, such as the provision under the Affordable Care Act allowing youth to remain on their parents' insurance until age 26.
5. Reimbursement for time spent facilitating these transitions through actions such as outreach to new providers, case management services and referrals to educational or vocational organizations

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