

Statewide Youth Development Plan



2025-2026



COLORADO
Office of Children,
Youth & Families
Department of Human Services

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The 2025-2026 Statewide Youth Development Plan (SYDP) marks the ten-year anniversary of Colorado’s concerted efforts to address youth challenges and promote youth thriving through a coordinated approach. Initiated by House Bill 13-1239, the first SYDP launched in 2014, and every two years since then has laid out goals and recommendations to strengthen Colorado’s youth development ecosystem.

The SYDP emphasizes the importance of collective action across state agencies while also underscoring the need for a collaborative framework that includes families, local communities, nonprofits, and other stakeholders essential to youth success, with youth voice at the center and guiding all work.

By promoting shared vision and language, a commitment to Positive Youth Development principles, and sustainable governance and accountability structures, this SYDP represents a foundational step toward interagency collaboration and a Colorado where youth are safe, healthy, educated, and empowered to thrive.

The SYDP identifies five key domains impacting youth that require a coordinated, cross-agency approach, and highlights current work happening to address these issues/domains in the coming years.

Five Key Domains Impacting Youth:

01

Behavioral Health and Health Promotion: Youth mental health has declined sharply, particularly post-pandemic, with suicide now a leading cause of death among young people ages 10-24.

02

Social Connectedness: Social isolation has become a significant challenge for youth, exacerbated by the shift toward digital interactions.

03

Youth and Family Economic Mobility: Economic barriers impact youth's ability to thrive, with homelessness and poverty rates still affecting many.

04

Safety and Physical Wellbeing: Risks such as exposure to violence, lack of access to nutritious food, and low physical activity rates threaten youth well-being.

05

Multi-System Involvement: Youth engaged in multiple systems often face additional challenges, making them especially vulnerable.

In addition to addressing these overarching issues, the SYDP prioritizes equitable, culturally responsive support for historically marginalized groups, including BIPOC, LGBTQIA2S+, rural, and refugee youth. By fostering a collaborative approach, the plan aims to ensure that all Colorado youth, regardless of background, have the resources and support necessary to thrive.

To address the domains above, the SYDP outlines three goals, alongside projected outcomes and strategies. These goals will help guide state agencies and stakeholders in both short and long-term planning to enhance and connect the youth development landscape in Colorado.

INTRODUCTION: Ten-Year Anniversary of the SYDP

In 2013, the Colorado General Assembly passed [House Bill 13-1239](#), calling for a Statewide Youth Development Plan (SYDP) to be coordinated and administered by the Colorado Department of Human Services (CDHS). The legislation cited high rates of truancy, juvenile arrests, and unemployment among youth in Colorado. The first SYDP was subsequently released in 2014, responding to these issues and identifying additional gaps, themes, and recommendations to strengthen Colorado's youth ecosystem.

A lot has changed over the last 10 years - from the long-lasting effects of the COVID-19 global pandemic, to an explosion of social media platforms and artificial intelligence. Following the murder of George Floyd, there was a resurgence of social justice movements, alongside continued racial tensions and disparities in our systems.

While the context for youth development continuously evolves, the SYDP has been an anchor over the last decade, consistently calling attention to the priority issues facing youth and advocating for a unified youth system response.

On this 10th anniversary of the SYDP, we celebrate the work of countless partners who contributed to building the robust foundation upon which this current plan is grounded - including previous SYDP advisory committees, youth advisors, and state and community organization staff. See **Figure 1** for a summary of key milestones over the last decade.

At the same time, there is still a lot of work to do. The initial SYDP in 2014 called for a legislatively recognized Council dedicated to youth development, and the creation of structures to coordinate funding and programmatic efforts between state agencies. While the CO 9to25 Youth Development Council took on this role for a time, the state does not currently have a formal system in place.

This 2025-2026 SYDP represents a reinvigorated commitment to the vision of **aligned and coordinated state-level agencies, programs, and policies providing an enabling environment for communities to ensure all young people are safe, healthy, educated, connected, and contributing**. This is the only way to make progress on the complex priority issues presented in this report.

The SYDP provides a roadmap towards the vision above with three overarching goals for building a unified youth system that supports the overall well-being of youth in Colorado and addresses urgent issues across the following domains: Behavioral Health & Health Promotion, Social Connectedness, Youth and Family Economic Mobility, Safety and Physical Wellbeing, and Multi-System Involvement.

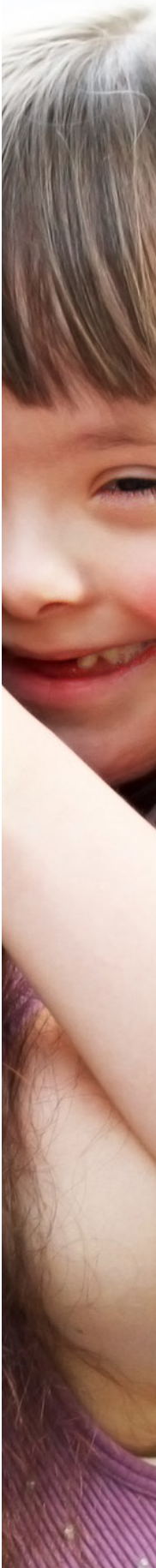
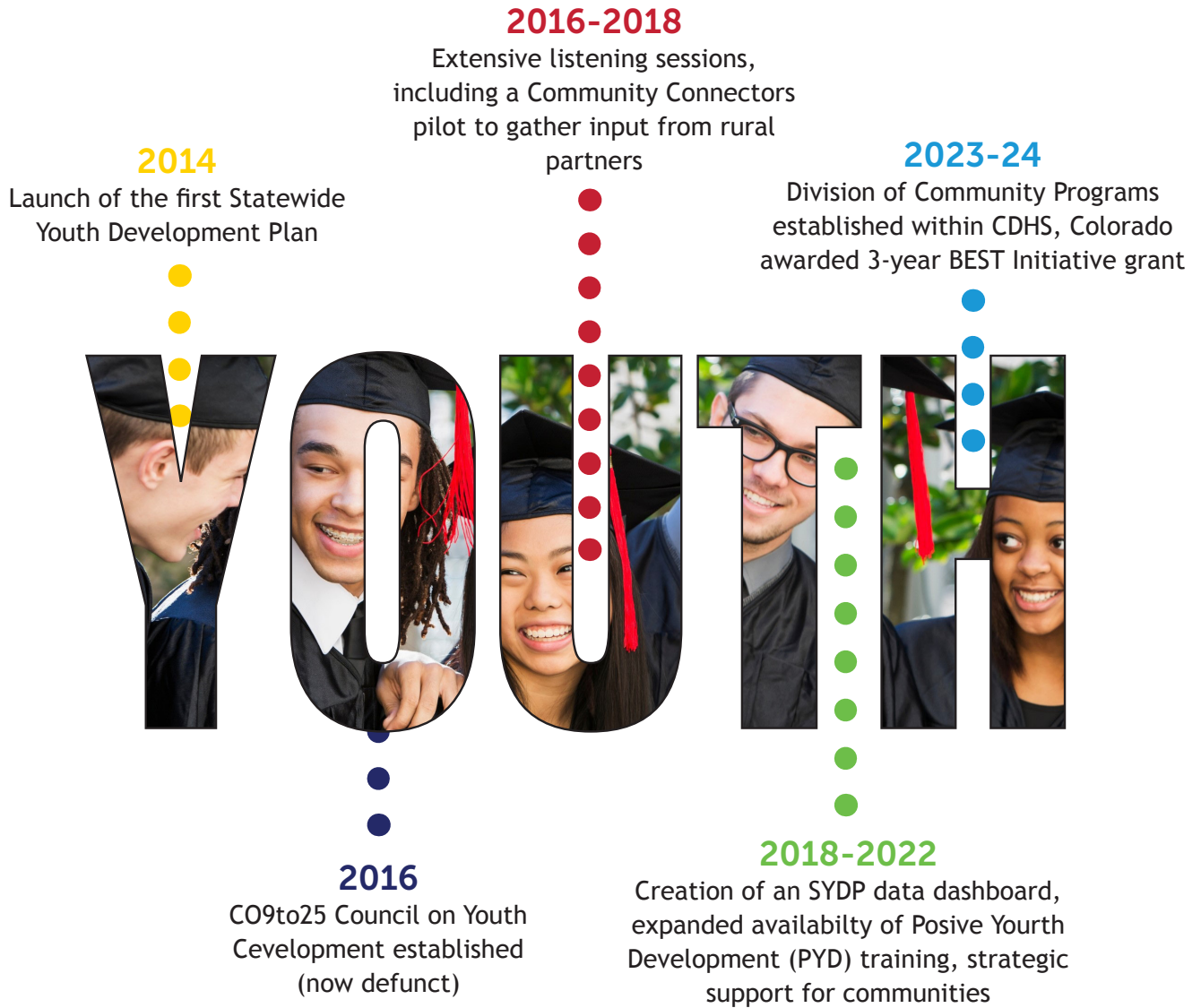


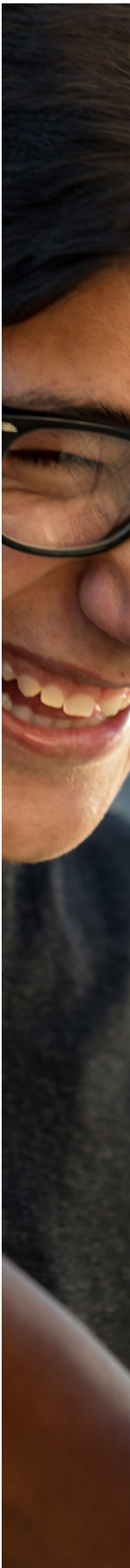
Figure 1. SYDP Key Milestones



Goal 1: Promote alignment across state agencies/systems with a shared vision, goals, and sustainable governance structure.

Goal 2: Increase saturation of the Positive Youth Development (PYD) approach across state agencies and community-based organizations.

Goal 3: Understand the current landscape of youth-serving programs and leverage existing data to identify opportunities and



CALL TO COLLECTIVE ACTION

This plan satisfies the recommendation from the 2023-2024 SYDP to develop a strategic plan and goals. It outlines three long-term goals, with shorter-term strategies, that will help Colorado move beyond siloed state programs and initiatives, toward a coordinated statewide system that promotes youth thriving and responds to current priority issues.

By statute, CDHS is the lead agency providing oversight for the SYDP. While CDHS is committed to being a leader and convener in this space, in order to be truly impactful, every state agency with youth-serving functions must play a role.

By its very nature, creating a unified youth system and advancing holistic approaches to complex issues necessarily involves the collective efforts of multiple entities. At the same time, even if there is a will, interagency coordination does not happen entirely naturally. This SYDP therefore focuses on concrete strategies to create sustainable structures and governance and help catalyze interagency alignment.

The BEST Initiative as an SYDP Activator. In July 2024, Colorado was one of five states selected to be part of the three-year [*Building Ecosystems Statewide for Thriving \(BEST\) Youth Initiative*](#), administered by the Forum for Youth Investment (the Forum). As part of this project, youth and adults with lived experience - diverse people who are/were directly involved with state systems - will work alongside state agencies to increase youth thriving in Colorado. CDHS is the lead state agency for the initiative, partnering with the Colorado Departments of Education (CDE), Labor and Employment (CDLE), and Public Health and Environment (CDPHE), and with support of the Attorney General and Governor's Office.

The BEST Initiative's priorities are closely aligned with the SYDP goals around building statewide infrastructure. Over the next three years, Colorado will leverage the BEST Initiative and support from the Forum to help accelerate implementation of goals and strategies laid out in the SYDP. The BEST Initiative can serve as an "activator" to bring key partners together, provide additional capacity and resources, and elevate best practices and innovation in the youth thriving field.



While collective action across state agencies is essential, a collaborative framework must include families, local communities, nonprofits, and other stakeholders essential to youth success, with youth voice at the center and guiding all work. This plan gives state agencies a roadmap for working together, building a foundation for engaging with broader community-level partners more effectively and cohesively.

Project AWARE. *[Project AWARE](#)* is a successful example of multi-agency coordination to support school-based youth mental health services and programs across Colorado. Colorado's Project AWARE works to build a comprehensive, coordinated, and integrated school behavioral health services system that supports every student in Colorado in reaching their fullest potential in school and life. In addition to local education partners, CDE collaborates across state agencies, including CDPHE's *[Violence Injury Prevention and Mental Health Promotion Branch](#)*, CDPHE's *[Office of Suicide Prevention](#)*, and the *[Behavioral Health Administration](#)* to improve mental health awareness and coordinate response. Project AWARE also supports the facilitation of a Statewide School-Based Mental Health Advisory Board, which includes representatives from multiple state agencies, local education agencies, and community partners. The Advisory Board meets bi-monthly to coordinate and align initiatives to support improvement in school-aged youth and family-serving school-based mental health systems.



DEFINITIONS, PRINCIPLES, & FRAMEWORKS

Central to ensuring alignment across state agencies is creating shared language, core principles, and frameworks. The SYDP is a living document and because of this, these definitions and principles will be refined over time and adapt to changing circumstances and priorities. Indeed, this is the focus of Goal One in this plan.

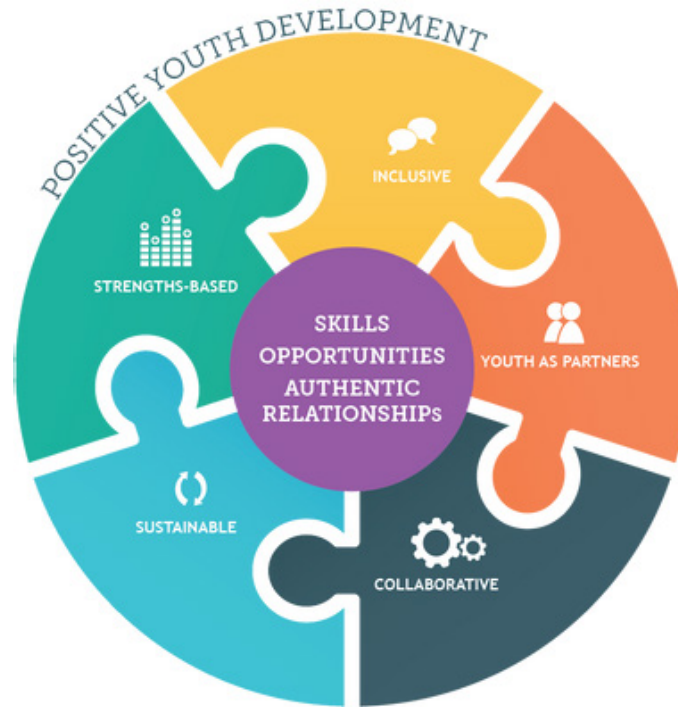
Defining Youth. The target population for the SYDP is young people in Colorado ages 5 to 25 and their families/caregivers.

There is no universally-accepted definition of “youth”. Federal law generally defines youth as a person who is 11 to 24 years old. The state legislation creating the SYDP presented a range of 9 to 21 years old. Definitions also vary across state agencies and programs. For host home programs, a youth is someone under 23 years old, while the Colorado Youth Employment Opportunity Act defines a minor as someone under 18.

After consulting with diverse partners, this SYDP created an intentional definition of youth, taking into account important considerations for creating a robust youth system. The age range of 5 to 25 is inclusive of the full K-12 education system, and starting younger lends itself to a more comprehensive prevention and health promotion approach. Ages 5 to 25 also covers major developmental milestones and transition times for children, youth, and young adults. This is in line with the initial 2014 SYDP, which identified the need for attention to youth as they navigate key life changes, such as transitions between levels of education, including higher education and/or workforce.

Including families and caregivers in the definition is also intentional and aligns with the commitment to multi-generational engagement, as discussed below.

The early stages of life, ages 0-5, represent a critical window for early development that has life-long impacts. The [Colorado Department of Early Childhood \(CDEC\)](#) is focused on developing an early childhood system that supports the care, education, and well-being of all Colorado's young children and their caregivers. State leadership will need to ensure that the SYDP and other youth plans align with and add continuity to efforts focused on the earlier years.



Positive Youth Development (PYD) Framework. Simply stated, PYD is an approach that elevates youth as active agents in their own lives and experiences. In practice, this means that youth are valued and participate in the design, delivery, and evaluation of services. Using a PYD approach helps ensure that programs intentionally incorporate opportunities for youth to develop skills, contribute in meaningful ways, and build authentic relationships.

PYD was and remains a core element of many state agencies' work with youth and it is a common thread among youth-facing programs and services that can be built upon. While PYD is a critical framework, state agencies need support in fully operationalizing its principles.

The original SYDP in 2014 called for a strengthened PYD training and technical assistance system. This plan has strategies to help ensure the PYD framework is actively embedded across youth-serving state agencies, and that PYD resources are updated to be responsive to changes in the youth experience.



Centering Youth and Families. While this plan is focused on the youth experience, we know that youth are inextricably linked to various familial and caregiver structures. Thus, **multi-generational engagement** must be at the core of a unified youth system, and can look different for youth and families at different stages of development.

There are excellent current efforts in state government to include and engage youth and families, and this SYDP reaffirms its commitment to a youth- and family- centered plan and approach. In coordinating the implementation of this SYDP, CDHS will ensure that it taps into the many existing youth advisory and family voice groups, and continue to build capacity to engage authentically at the state level. The BEST Initiative currently has three Youth Advisors ranging in age from 14 to 24 and they are actively recruiting for diverse youth statewide to participate in the project.

One model of youth engagement is [*Roger Hart's Ladder of Participation*](#). It shows a continuum of levels and types of youth engagement, ranging from manipulation to youth-led activities and shared decision-making.



Commitment to Equity, Inclusion, and Cultural & Identity Responsiveness.

Gaps exist and are widening on several fronts for historically marginalized communities. People of color in the United States have consistently poorer health outcomes than white people so much so that the [American Public Health Association](#) and [CDPHE](#) declared racism to be a public health crisis. Research has shown that [LGBT youth](#) experience more mental health problems than their non-LGBT peers, including depression, suicidal ideation, substance use, and PTSD. And linguistic isolation often leads to social isolation, which can negatively impact access to needed services.

The SYDP approach to addressing these gaps is to directly engage youth and families in identifying challenges, and designing and implementing equity-focused, culturally-responsive, and identity-affirming programs and policies. CDHS and its state agency partners are committed to listening, learning, and improving so that all youth in Colorado have the opportunities and tools to be successful.

Youth Thriving. In addition to aligning programs and policies, the SYDP can be a catalyst to change the narrative about youth in Colorado. It is easy to find data and stories about the decline of youth mental health, increase in negative outcomes, and how an entire generation is in crisis. This plan, while acknowledging the critical issues facing some youth, seeks to look at youth as whole, capable, and complex. The SYDP will promote the use of asset and strengths-based language when discussing youth in Colorado and the youth ecosystem. At the heart of this “movement” is transformation in our culture, norms, and ingrained beliefs about young people – from seeing them as problems to fix, to advocates to be engaged and amplified.

Data, Measurement, Accountability, and Transparency. It is of utmost importance that the goals and strategies in the SYDP, as well as existing youth programs and policies, include public-facing data and accountability systems. The youth and families of Colorado, as well as policymakers, program staff, state agency staff, and Colorado residents, are the consumers of these programs and should see the outcomes and trends in state data.

State agencies all have data gathering mechanisms, but this plan seeks to find a way to compile and “make meaning” of the data. The initial 2014 SYDP called for an alignment of data systems, and investment in evaluation and continuous quality improvement to ensure that youth-focused efforts are efficient and effective. Goal Three of this plan includes strategies to identify and address gaps in state data, and to build a more comprehensive understanding of Colorado’s youth development landscape.

SYDP Planning Process

An SYDP Advisory Group convened in Summer 2024 to inform the goals and strategies in this 2025-2026 SYDP. The Advisory Group included several Board members from the Tony Grampas Youth Services (TGYS) Program, including a youth board member. There was also intentional overlap with partners involved in the BEST Initiative in order to ensure alignment. The **Appendix** includes a full list of SYDP Advisory Group members. Moving forward, CDHS will provide leadership and coordination support to implement this SYDP in partnership and plan for future iterations.





KEY ISSUES AFFECTING YOUTH

In consultation with Advisory Group members and BEST Initiative partners, as well as stakeholder conversations and a review of current youth data, five issues affecting youth rose to the top. All five areas are complex and do not neatly align with the structure of individual state agencies. The nature of these issues reinforces the need for a comprehensive, aligned approach to serving youth and families. At the same time, there is important work happening to address each of these areas at the state level, and examples are highlighted below.

The data presented here only tells part of the story. The experience of youth in Colorado varies greatly and the tremendous internal and external assets that youth have can drastically change their outcomes.

<p>01</p> <p>Behavioral Health and Health Promotion: Youth mental health has declined sharply, particularly post-pandemic, with suicide now a leading cause of death among young people ages 10-24.</p>	<p>02</p> <p>Social Connectedness: Social isolation has become a significant challenge for youth, exacerbated by the shift toward digital interactions.</p>	<p>03</p> <p>Youth and Family Economic Mobility: Economic barriers impact youth's ability to thrive, with homelessness and poverty rates still affecting many.</p>	<p>04</p> <p>Safety and Physical Wellbeing: Risks such as exposure to violence, lack of access to nutritious food, and low physical activity rates threaten youth well-being.</p>	<p>05</p> <p>Multi-System Involvement: Youth engaged in multiple systems often face additional challenges, making them especially vulnerable.</p>
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Behavioral Health and Health Promotion

The data around youth mental health outcomes since the pandemic are concerning. In May 2021, [Children's Hospital Colorado](#) declared a "State of Emergency" for Colorado youth mental health. [Rates](#) of anxiety and depression doubled during the pandemic among Colorado youth, and suicide is now the leading cause of death for young people ages 10 to 24. While building up behavioral health treatment options for youth is critical, the goal is to develop a comprehensive continuum of services that meets the needs of children and youth in the right place, at the right time, to achieve whole person health and wellbeing.

Data: From the [Healthy Kids CO 2023](#) High School Survey:

- 28% of students "most of the time" or "always" had poor mental health during the past month, while 58% agreed that their stress level is manageable most days.
- 26% of students reported persistent feelings of sadness or hopelessness in the past year, but this represents a marked decrease from 40% in 2021
- 21% of students drank alcohol within the past month, and 12% binge drank one or more times in the last month. At the same time, 71% of students think it is wrong for someone their age to drink alcohol regularly, which is an increase from 65% in 2021.



Agency Highlight:

The Colorado Behavioral Health Administration (BHA) launched in July 2022 and is designed to be the single entity responsible for driving coordination and collaboration across state agencies to address Coloradans' behavioral health needs. In 2024, the BHA released the [Children and Youth Behavioral Health Implementation Plan](#), which lays out a vision and priorities for a children and youth behavioral health system in Colorado. The plan acknowledges that "Children and youth have unique needs, experience unique challenges, and require unique supports and interventions; behavioral health services for children and youth cannot be a mirror of adult services".

Social Connectedness

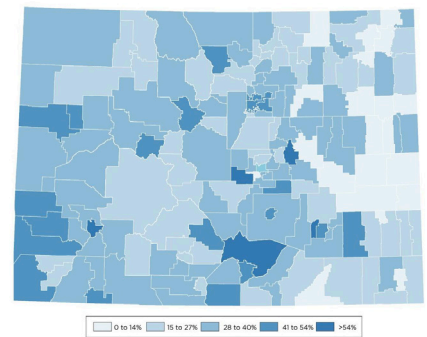
In 2023, the U.S. Surgeon General issued an advisory on [“Our Epidemic of Loneliness and Isolation”](#) detailing the impact of the lack of social connection. The advisory identifies young people as one of the most vulnerable groups impacted by social isolation, particularly those between 15 and 24 years old. The shift towards digital interactions, exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, has contributed to increased feelings of loneliness and disconnection. In response, it is important to foster social connections in schools, communities, and families. Increased social connectedness has been linked to a number of positive youth outcomes across domains such as mental health and emotional wellbeing, academic achievement, resilience and coping skills, and physical health.

Data: From the [Health Kids CO 2023](#) High School Survey:

- 67% of students “agree” or “strongly agree” that they belong at their school, but over one-quarter of students did not participate in any organized activity through their school or community in the past 12 months.
- 75% of students reported that they have an adult to go to for help with a serious problem.
- 92% of students feel safe at school, yet 10% of students did not go to school on one or more days in the past 30 days because they felt they would be unsafe at school or on the way to school.

IN SOME COLORADO SCHOOL DISTRICTS, MORE THAN HALF OF STUDENTS MISSED AT LEAST 10% OF SCHOOL DAYS IN 2022-23

CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM BY SCHOOL DISTRICT, 2022-2023



Source: Colorado Department of Education, Chronic Absenteeism

Ref: Kids Count Colorado, 2024

Agency Highlight:

The Surgeon General’s advisory encourages schools to adopt frameworks that promote belonging, such as the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s (CDC’s) [Whole School, Whole Community, Whole Child \(WSCC\) model](#). CDE administers the [Colorado Healthy Schools Program](#) (funded by the CDC), which integrates the WSCC model to improve the wellbeing of students. The Department has also created the [Landscape of Wellbeing and Belonging](#), an online resource for education professionals who are interested in increasing student and adult wellbeing and belonging. The goal of the Landscape project is to blend guidance, resources, systems, and best practices to improve outcomes for students, staff, and families across all PK-12 schools in Colorado. The Department provides training and technical assistance to school communities around the five features of wellbeing and belonging.

Youth and Family Economic Mobility

Many young people face significant barriers to upward economic mobility, including access to education, job market entry, and economic stability. These challenges are heightened for youth from historically marginalized backgrounds, perpetuating cycles of inequality. Too many youth and families in Colorado struggle to meet their basic needs. For example, Colorado school districts identified nearly 20,000 [children and youth experiencing homelessness](#) during the 2022-23 school year, a vast majority of which were “doubled-up” with another family due to economic hardship. Equitable opportunities to gain economic security and mobility are critical for positive youth outcomes because they influence multiple dimensions of well-being, including health, education, and social development.

CDHS and the Department of Local Affairs (DOLA) collaboratively implement the [Fostering Success Voucher Program](#). The program provides rental assistance in the form of housing vouchers to 100 former foster care youth to prevent them from experiencing homelessness during their transition from foster care to independence.



Data: From [Kids Count in Colorado](#):

- 11% of Colorado children under 18 experienced poverty, which has remained relatively unchanged since 2017. Approximately 66,000 Colorado children (6% of all kids in the state) experienced extreme poverty, defined as an annual income of less than \$13,875 for a family of four.
- Nearly one in three Colorado kids — and more than two in three kids in low-income families — lived in a household that was “housing cost burdened”, meaning they spent more than 30% of their income on housing.
- From the [Annie E. Casey Foundation](#): 6% of Colorado youth aged 16-19 are not connected to school or work (this group is often referred to as “opportunity youth”). Nationally, the share of adolescents who are neither in school nor high school graduates has fallen dramatically from 11% in 2000 to 4% in 2022.



Agency Highlight:

The [2024-2027 Workforce Innovation & Opportunity Act \(WIOA\) State Plan](#), facilitated by the Colorado Workforce Development Council (CWDC), provides strategic direction for the state’s workforce programs at the Department of Labor and Employment (CDLE) and beyond. The north star focus is that every learner can attain the skills and knowledge needed to find a job that supports them. The plan emphasizes that the key element to successful implementation is “understanding that workforce development is truly a multi-faceted approach harnessing workforce, education, economic development, and business”. One priority is to increase affordability of career-connected education and training, with a targeted population group being youth who have completed high school but are not connected to work or education.

Safety and Physical Wellbeing

We want to ensure that youth grow up in environments that support their health, protect them from harm, and promote positive development. Today's youth face several risks to their wellbeing, from exposure to crime and violence, to poor diets and lack of physical activity, to cyberbullying and climate change. Countering these risks requires state government, communities, schools, and families working together to promote safe environments and encourage healthy lifestyles.

- Data:**
- In 2022, 5% of Colorado children did not have [health insurance](#).
 - 11% of Coloradans lack reliable access to [nutritious food](#), and 17% of Colorado households with children are not eating enough because food was unaffordable.
 - 27% of Colorado youth ages 10 to 17 are [overweight or obese](#); and 49% aged 6 to 17 reported not exercising regularly (engaged in less than 4 days of vigorous physical activity in the past week).
 - 19% of youth reported that they could fire a [loaded gun](#) without adult permission in less than an hour.
 - 33% of youth texted, posted, or used their phone in some other way while driving in the past month.



Agency Highlight:

In 2024, the [Colorado Interagency Working Group on School Safety](#), housed at the Department of Public Safety (CDPS), issued a report and plan on how state agencies can collaborate more effectively to improve school safety. The report identified more than 160 programs relating to school safety that the state currently manages, including those within the [Colorado Office of School Safety](#) at CDPS. A key recommendation is the creation of a perpetual standing committee on school safety to ensure coordination and collaboration across agencies.

Multi-System Involvement

We want to ensure that youth grow up in environments that support their health, protect them from harm, and promote positive development. Today's youth face several risks to their wellbeing, from exposure to crime and violence, to poor diets and lack of physical activity, to cyberbullying and climate change. Countering these risks requires state government, communities, schools, and families working together to promote safe environments and encourage healthy lifestyles.

LINC is a partnership among the Colorado Governor's Office, its Office of Information Technology, the Lieutenant Governor's Office of eHealth Innovation, and the Colorado Evaluation and Action Lab.

Data: ● Colorado has limited data regarding youth in multiple state systems. In order to identify and more effectively respond to their complex needs, data across multiple entities is often required. The [Linked Information Network of Colorado \(LINC\)](#) was developed to create a more streamlined and trusted approach for connecting data sets across government partners. An example is the Crossover Youth project, which uses LINC to connect child welfare and court system records to inform policies and practices aimed at youth with two types of court cases (dependency & neglect and juvenile justice).



Agency Highlight:

The [Collaborative Management Program \(CMP\)](#), administered by CDHS, was created in 2004 and establishes a collaborative approach at the county level to improve outcomes for children, youth and families involved with multiple systems. Through incentive funds and grants, local CMPs improve service delivery by facilitating cross-agency coordination and creating a tailored collective community approach to serving children and youth with complex needs. CMP has 10 mandated system partners, including human services, courts, probation, school districts, public health, mental health centers, domestic violence providers, managed service organizations for the treatment of drugs and alcohol, and behavioral health organizations.



Focus Populations

In addition to this high-level overview of the key issues within Colorado's youth development landscape, the data show that certain populations are significantly more impacted due to societal and institutional barriers. These populations include youth who identify as BIPOC or LGBTQIA2S+; rural youth or youth in areas with limited youth engagement programs/ services, and refugee, asylee, and newcomer youth. The SYDP aims to address and honor the experience of marginalized youth by centering diverse youth voices, being data-driven, and ensuring adherence to equity principles.



Statewide Infrastructure and Systems Building

If we view youth as whole, capable, and complex, then our state systems must reflect this as well. Increased alignment and coordination at the state level creates the necessary conditions for community organizations to be supported in their efforts to promote youth and family thriving in Colorado. Furthermore, state alignment helps ensure a more streamlined and cohesive experience for youth and families as they engage in state services and programs.

The goals and strategies below provide a roadmap to strengthen the youth development ecosystem in Colorado. Systems building takes time. The goals represent a longer-term vision with shorter-term strategies to build momentum and progress, which will be reported through updates to the SYDP every two years.

This plan is only the first step and a guiding document to help support a direction for youth development work in Colorado. State agency leaders will need to develop an accompanying action plan, as well as assignment of accountability and measurement to ensure progress.

By design, the SYDP is updated every two years. As programs and services are evolving at the state, there may be gaps and existing work that are not reflected here. This should be considered a “living” document that is both proactive and responsive in understanding and activating the youth development ecosystem at the State of Colorado



GOAL 1:
Promote alignment across state agencies/systems with a shared vision, goals, and sustainable governance structure.

Desired Outcomes:

- By 2027, there is a statewide common vision, shared framework, and aligned state plans around youth development.
- By 2028, there is state legislation passed, creating a collaborative, youth-centered, permanently funded structure that coordinates youth-facing programs across state agencies.
- By 2029, youth and families report a significant positive increase in their experience accessing youth services and programs across the state.

Objective 1.1: Establish a broad, inclusive coalition across state agencies with shared vision and language ensuring a coordinated approach and continuity for youth and families as they access state services.

2-year strategies:

- Map the agencies, offices, and programs across state government with youth-serving functions.

While certain agencies are more often associated with youth work (CDE, CDPHE, CDHS, BHA, for example), there are exciting youth initiatives and programs across many state agencies. There is currently no comprehensive compilation of all the youth-focused efforts happening across the state and where they are housed. This awareness is essential to identifying opportunities for innovative partnership, avoiding duplication and redundancy, and building a strong coalition of diverse leaders.

The [*Governor's Summer Job Hunt*](#), administered by CDLE, provides job training and placement support for 16 to 24 year olds. This program works closely with statewide Workforce Centers to ensure demographically and geographically diverse young people have equitable access to job opportunities across the state.

- Crosswalk existing state agency youth plans to identify opportunities for alignment and shared action.

In addition to numerous programs and initiatives across state agencies, there are also several youth-focused plans that outline the goals, priorities, principles, and frameworks of various entities. Crosswalking these plans will create a baseline for how aligned state programs are currently, as well as the gaps and opportunities.

- Develop a shared vision, framework, language, measurement, and goals across youth-serving state agencies.

After mapping and crosswalking, agency representatives need to come together to discuss areas of overlap and opportunities for increased coordination. This starts with developing a shared foundation of common language and direction.

2-year strategies:

- Explore potential governance structures for statewide youth system coordination.

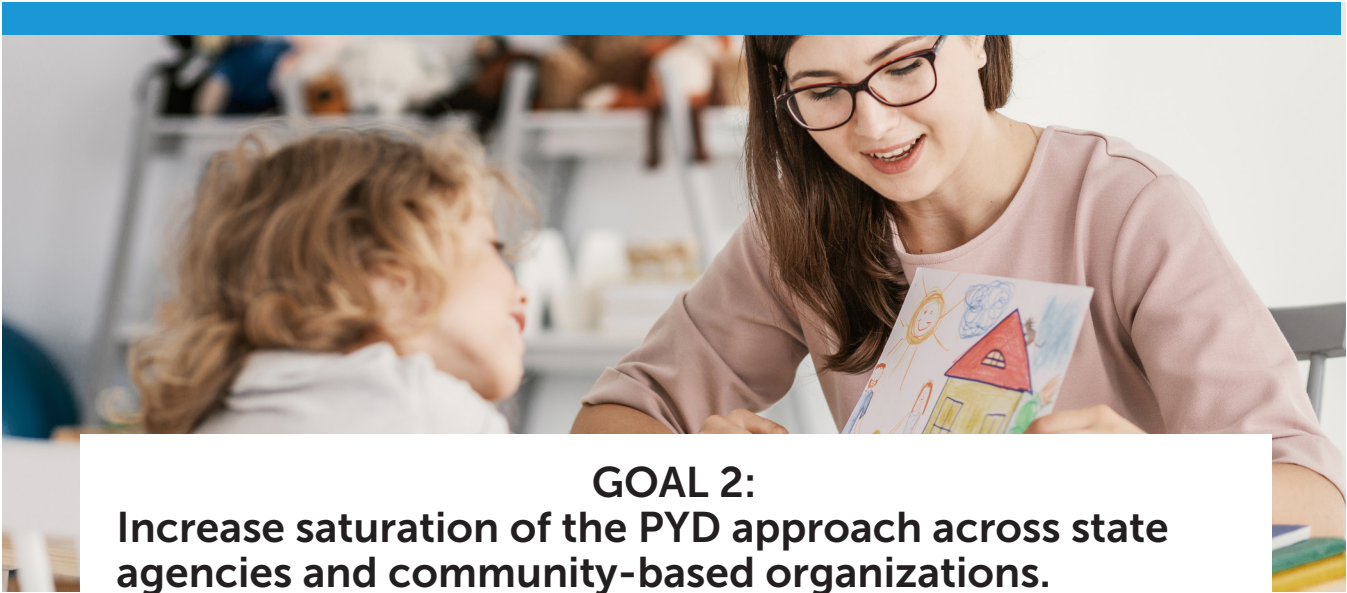
There are several models and potential governance structures to consider, and with support from the BEST Initiative, state leadership can review promising practices from other states and sectors.

The Forum for Youth Investment runs the [*State Children's Cabinet Network*](#), a national network of states that have or are interested in developing children's cabinets. A children's cabinet is one way to bring agencies together to coordinate services, develop a common set of goals and outcomes, and collaboratively determine and implement strategies, plans, and initiatives. Children's cabinets typically include the heads of child-and youth-serving government agencies, who may be joined by other representatives from nonprofits, business, and/or youth and families. Minnesota passed legislation in 2019 to establish the [*Minnesota Children's Cabinet*](#). The Cabinet is co-chaired by the Governor and Lieutenant Governor with participation from a wide range of state agencies, including the Departments of Corrections; Education; Employment and Economic Development; Health; Human Services; Public Safety; and Transportation.

- Develop criteria and principles for a governance structure and identify a most promising model.

Potential criteria/principles could include the following: Youth/adult co-leadership model and partnership-based; accountable to the Governor's Office with executive-level representation from across youth-serving agencies; clear structure and authority to oversee implementation of the SYDP and other youth plans; and sustainable, permanent funding to support the governance body.





**GOAL 2:
Increase saturation of the PYD approach across state agencies and community-based organizations.**

There is a history of commitment to PYD at the state level. CDPHE led the PYD work for many years, with CO 9to25 as an intermediary and partner organization with dedicated staff. As of 2025, CDHS will “own” the state’s PYD training plan, but will continue to partner collaboratively across youth-serving agencies at the state, with community organizations, and with youth themselves.

Desired Outcomes:

- By 2027, the PYD is embedded within state youth-serving agencies/ programs, with 100% of staff receiving training and resources.
- By 2027, youth-serving state agencies have policies in place to operationalize best practices related to youth and family engagement.
- By 2027, community-based organizations and youth professionals have access to an online platform of current PYD training and resources.
- By 2029, youth participation and youth/family voice are significantly increased within state agencies and programs.

Objective 2.1: All state employees overseeing youth-serving functions or who might engage with youth receive PYD training, up-to-date resources, and technical assistance.

2-year strategies:

The following strategies will help ensure PYD resources are current and responsive to changing needs, used broadly across state government, and sustainable over time.

- Update the existing PYD toolkit to a web-based suite of current and responsive resources.
- Provide training opportunities and implement a train the trainer model to build PYD expertise and champions across state government.
- Understand the staffing and funding needs at state agencies in order to fully train and support state employees in the PYD model sustainably.

Objective 2.2: All state agencies with youth-serving functions have embedded structures and policies to operationalize PYD principles around youth and family engagement.

2-year strategies:

- Establish written guidance and best practices for state agencies to operationalize PYD principles around youth and family engagement.

While many state agencies have the will to incorporate youth and family voice, operationalizing this value requires intentionality and resources. Some potential guidelines could include the following: How to assess youth/young adult engagement at the agency level; best practices around fair compensation and reimbursement policies for youth and family members; existing models and methods for including youth and family engagement in youth-serving work; and implementing “early and often” youth voice measures within policy and rule development processes.

The [*Family Voice Compass*](#) is a resource that was informed and named by the CDHS’s Family Voice Council. It provides useful information, tools, and resources to help entities create their own family voice structure.

- Understand the staffing and funding needs at state agencies in order to more fully integrate meaningful engagement of people with lived experience.

The [Tony Grampsas Youth Services Program](#) employs part-time Youth Advisors that support TGYS by providing youth perspective and recommendations to TGYS staff, TGYS grantees, the TGYS Board, and community partners on program practice, policy, procedure, and processes. They also provide direction, planning, and co-facilitation of site visits to TGYS grantees and feedback post-site visit, among many other duties.

Objective 2.3: Expand PYD resources, funding, coaching, and training to youth-serving community organizations across the state.

2-year strategies:

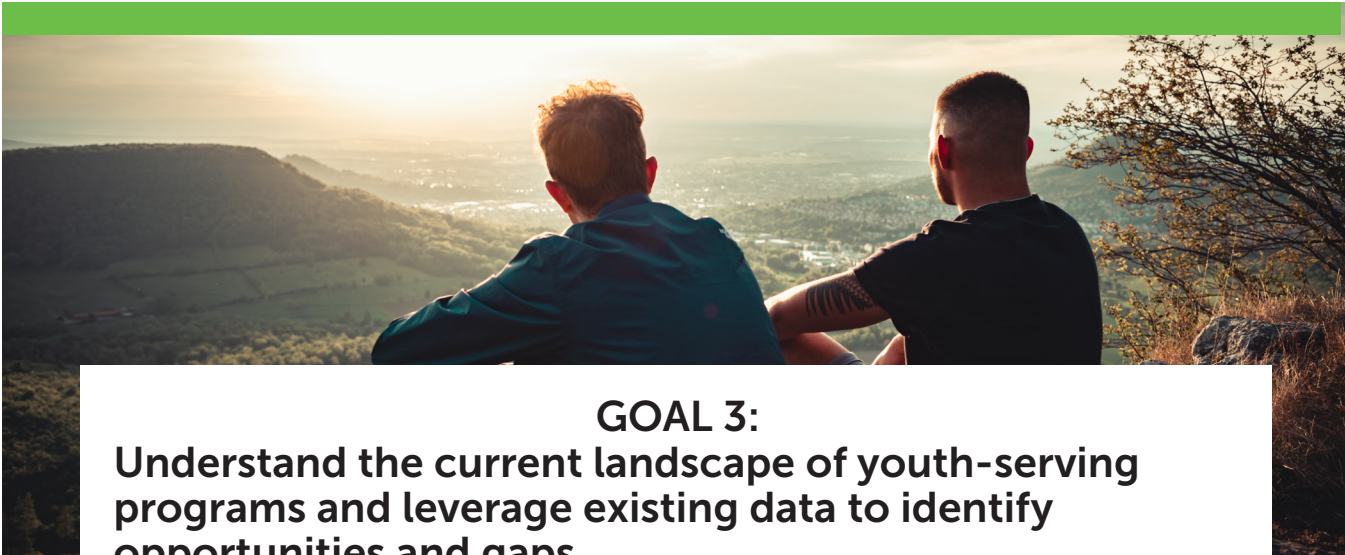
In addition to ensuring that state staff receive training and resources, the following strategies are focused on building capacity and being responsive to the needs of community-based organizations and youth-serving professionals.

- Ensure communities have access to PYD resources that are relevant, up-to-date, actionable, and user-friendly.
- Explore innovative youth-adult training partnership models for delivering PYD training.
- Understand the staffing and funding needs at state agencies in order to more fully support PYD in community organizations.

2 to 5-year strategies:

The following strategies represent longer-term actions that will help elevate PYD in Colorado to the next level.

- Analyze and evaluate the state's approach to PYD training to inform future revisions and ensure efficacy and efficiency..
- Build out PYD 201 and a plan for future PYD training iterations focused on specific populations; ensure that evaluation and CQI are integrated.



**GOAL 3:
Understand the current landscape of youth-serving programs and leverage existing data to identify opportunities and gaps.**

Desired Outcomes:

- By 2027, there is a plan in place to create a central repository for all state agency youth programs in Colorado.
- By 2027, a comprehensive data map exists showing how existing youth data sources combine to create a more complete picture of the youth development landscape.
- By 2029, youth and families report an increase in positive experiences in accessing youth programs and services across the state.
- By 2029, state agency staff consistently use centralized data to coordinate and evaluate their youth-serving programs and services.

Objective 3.1: Create a one-stop shop of youth resources, programs, and services across the state.

2-year strategy:

- Explore the feasibility of a public-facing central repository for all state agency youth programs and services.

The initial SYDP in 2014 called for increased public awareness and the creation of a comprehensive consumer-focused map of available services for youth and families. This continues to be a need, and the first step is to map state-level programs and consider resources needed for proper oversight and maintenance.

2- to 5- year strategies:

- Expand the mapping project from above to include community-based youth programs and organizations across the state.

This could include a layer of crowdsourcing, where youth-serving organizations (or those funded by state programs) can easily keep their program information up to date based on website or other public data.

Over the years, different entities like Colorado 9to25 have attempted to map youth programs based on location, program elements, and more. A centralized approach to mapping the landscape of the youth development ecosystem that is funded, consistent, and updated regularly is necessary to connect disparate data collection and landscape analysis efforts.

- Increase awareness and utilization of available youth services and organizations.

Efforts should include youth input to ensure increased youth uptake, and evaluation to measure effectiveness. This may also include identifying opportunities to highlight and share examples of excellent youth programs both at the state and community levels, chosen by youth.

Objective 3.2: Compile existing youth data to build a comprehensive understanding of priority issues, themes, strengths, and gaps.

2-year strategies:

The following strategies are aimed at gathering all of the existing youth development data sources and understanding how they can be pieced together to create a more comprehensive understanding of key issues.

- Identify and document relevant existing data systems and sources on youth development (quantitative and qualitative).
- Identify gaps within and across those data systems.
- Create a data map to show how existing data sources fit together to build a comprehensive picture.
- Identify data efforts underway that could accelerate efforts at data sharing and integration.

2 to 5-year strategies:

These longer-term strategies are focused on making meaning and acting on youth development data.

- Perform an in-depth analysis of existing state data to inform plan updates, funding requests, and needed partnerships.
- Create a structure to regularly gather, review, and analyze youth data at the state level to set future goals/priorities.

Objective 3.3: Develop a data and measurement plan to ensure state youth plans and the work of the Children’s Cabinet or other governance structure are measured, transparent, and meaningful to youth and families.

As part of this comprehensive data plan, at a minimum, ensure that SYDP statutorily-required data elements are included: Unintentional injury and violence; leading causes of death and disability; sexual behaviors; alcohol and tobacco use; and diet and physical activity.

The [Youth Scan Project](#) is an innovative way to gather youth data by the youth themselves with the support of adults. Youth Scan not only identifies the issues that are most pressing for youth, but also provides solutions from the youth themselves. Susie Roman, Project Director of Youth Scan, noted that youth can identify the issues their peers will be facing 3 years before these issues are on the radar of adults. Using youth-led data collection to help make state agency decisions is vital to ensuring a coordinated, youth-informed, data-driven approach to supporting young people in Colorado.





CLOSING

The Statewide Youth Development Plan builds on the incredible work of past plans and is responsive to the current youth experience. As noted, this plan is meant to serve as a roadmap for state agencies to better coordinate and serve youth and families in Colorado. While the plan “lives” at CDHS, no one agency can, or should, provide oversight of all youth programs and services. The SYDP ideally should be owned by all youth-serving agencies and the youth they serve.

The SYDP is designed to evolve over time with input, insights, and innovation from state agency staff, youth and families, youth-serving organizations, and other youth-facing stakeholders. If you have feedback on this plan, or would like to become more involved, please contact us at cdhs_tgysprogram@state.co.us.



Acronyms

AG: Colorado Attorney General

BEST: Building Ecosystems Statewide for Thriving Youth Initiative

BHA: Colorado Behavioral Health Administration

BIPOC: Black, Indigenous, People of Color

CDC: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

CDE: Colorado Department of Education

CDEC: Colorado Department of Early Childhood

CDHS: Colorado Department of Human Services

CDLE: Colorado Department of Labor and Employment

CDPHE: Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment

CDPS: Colorado Department of Public Safety

CO: Colorado

CQI: Continuous Quality Improvement

DYS: Division of Youth Services, Office of Children, Youth, and Families, CDHS

FYI: Forum for Youth Investment

HCPF: Department of Health Care Policy and Financing

LGBT: Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans

LGBTQIA2S+: Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, Queer, Intesex, Asexual, Two-Spirit, and other identities

PWLE: People with Lived Experience

PYD: Positive Youth Development

SYDP: Statewide Youth Development Plan

TA: Technical Assistance

TGYS: Tony Grampsas Youth Services Program, CDHS



COLORADO

Office of Children,
Youth & Families

Department of Human Services

Appendix: Members of the 2024 SYDP Advisory Group

Aaron Miltenberger, Boys and Girls Clubs of the San Luis Valley, TGYS Board

Allison Daley, Colorado Attorney General's Office

Ana Soler, Gates Family Foundation

Betsy Fordyce, Upstream Shifts, TGYS Board

Cary L. Lynch, Office of School Safety, CDPS

Chauncey Stephens, CDE

Elizabeth Newton, Family Advisor, CDHS

Julia Hughes, Colorado Youth for a Change

Kyle Pacqué, CDPHE

Mary Zanotti, Colorado Youth for a Change, TGYS Board

Meghan Stidd, Division of Community Programs, CDHS

Nancy Chittick, Division of Community Programs, CDHS

Owen Mantelli, Student/ Youth Representative, TGYS Board

Rose Green, The Colorado Health Foundation, TGYS Board

Sara Nadelman, Gary Community Ventures

Shea Anderson, Community Liaison, CDHS

Steve Wright, CDLE

Steven Lewis, Community Partnership for Child Development, TGYS Board

