

Youth Mental Health and Substance Use in King County: Needs Across a Continuum



Department of Community Health Services and
Public Health – Seattle & King County
King County Board of Health
April 17, 2025

Agenda

- Youth behavioral health data brief
- Continuum of supports for youth mental health and substance use
- Update on policy and strategic planning efforts
- Future policy strategies
- Questions and discussion



Future Aims

All young people need access to the appropriate supports and services to help develop their strengths and identities, build healthy relationships with adults and peers, and access a range of developmentally and culturally appropriate supports when they experience challenges.

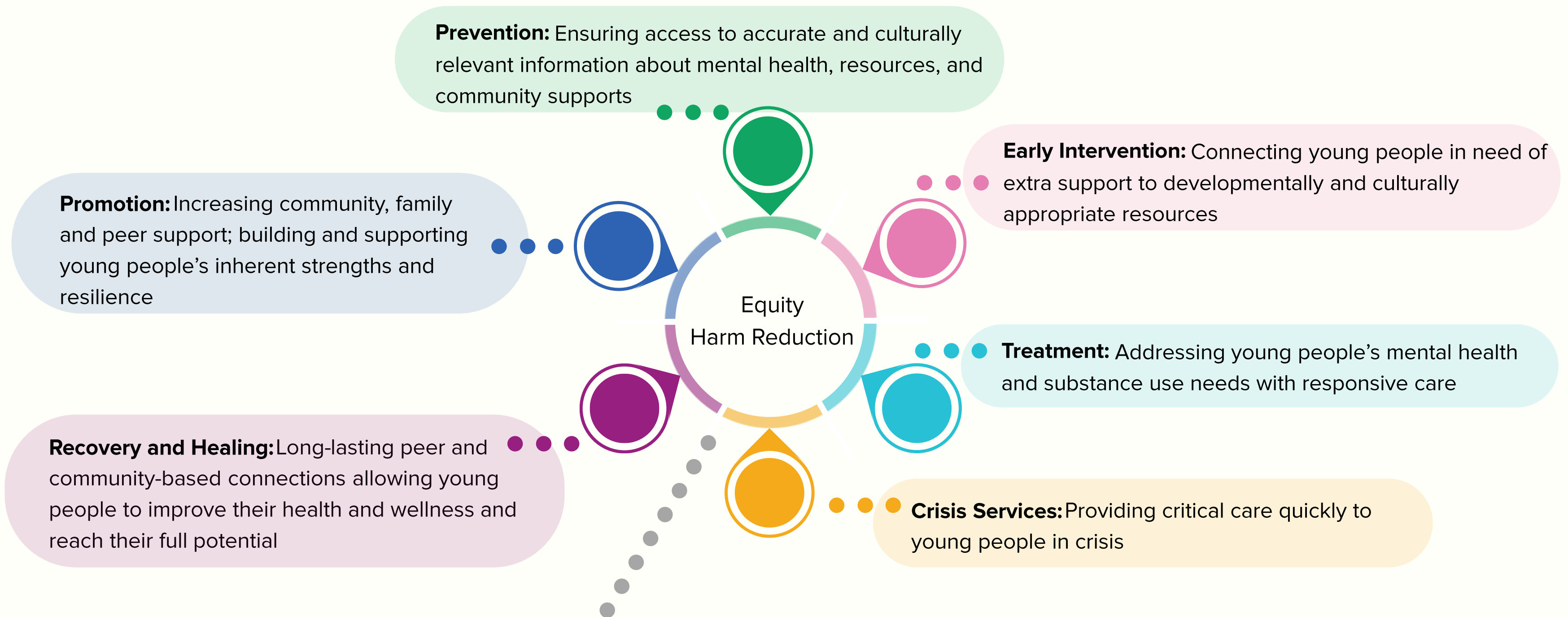
Current reality:

Young people are still experiencing youth mental health and substance use challenges that need additional supports at the program, policy, and systems levels.

Mood disorders are the leading cause of hospitalization for King County youth

- 788 hospitalizations each year on average for mood disorders among King County residents ages 1-17 (2017-2021)
 - This is a rate of **186 hospitalizations per 100,000** King County residents in this age group
 - This rate is **3 times higher** than the second most common cause of hospitalizations for youth (unintentional injury: 60 hospitalizations per 100,000)
 - This is about **16% of all hospitalizations** for this age group.
 - This rate is even higher among girls in this age group (277 per 100,000)

Data source



Equity and harm reduction are values held across each domain. Valuing equity means promoting culturally relevant approaches meeting the specific needs of diverse communities. Harm reduction means providing developmentally appropriate information and resources to help young people stay as safe as possible when experimenting, taking risks, or experiencing more significant challenges.

[To access the full data brief, with citations, click here.](#)

Recovery and Healing

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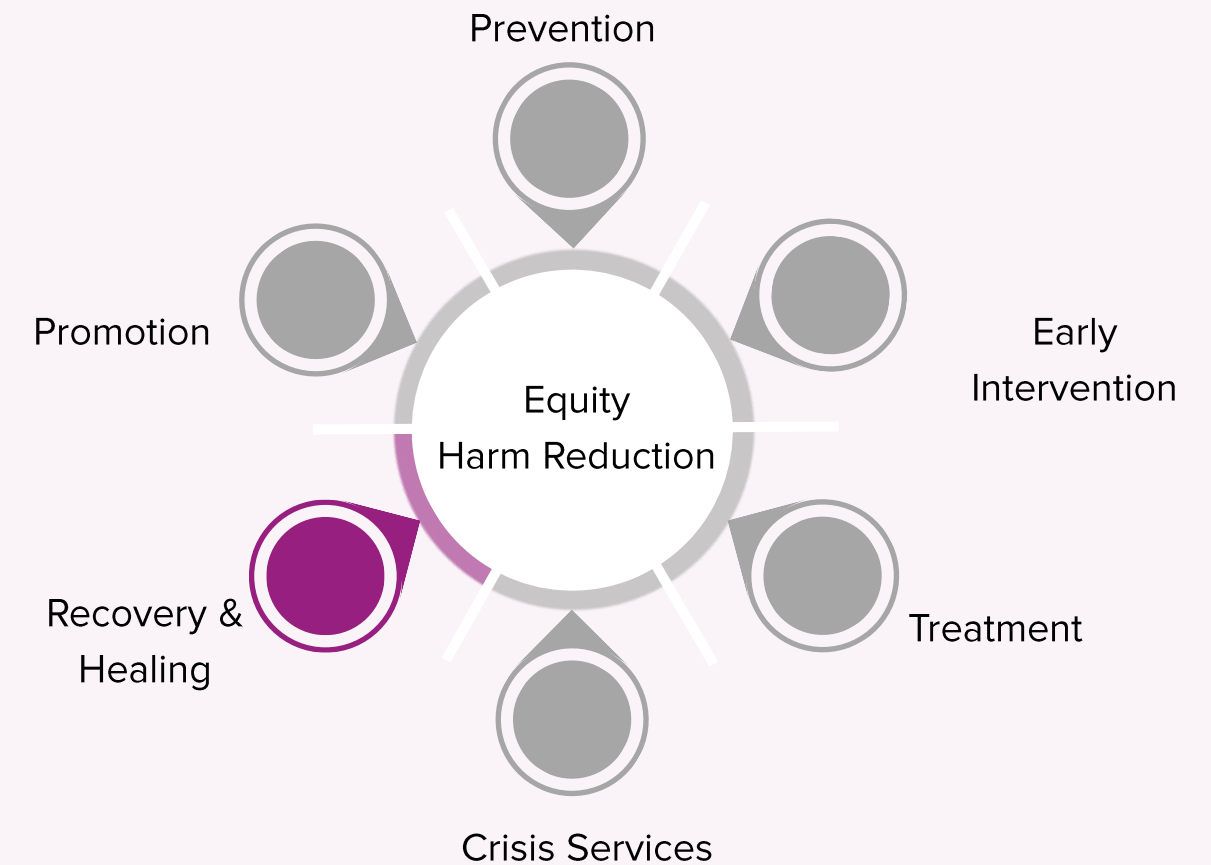
“We believe that healing doesn’t happen in isolation. Healing happens in community, with connection, joy, art, food, and music...”

- [Youth Healing Project](#) participant

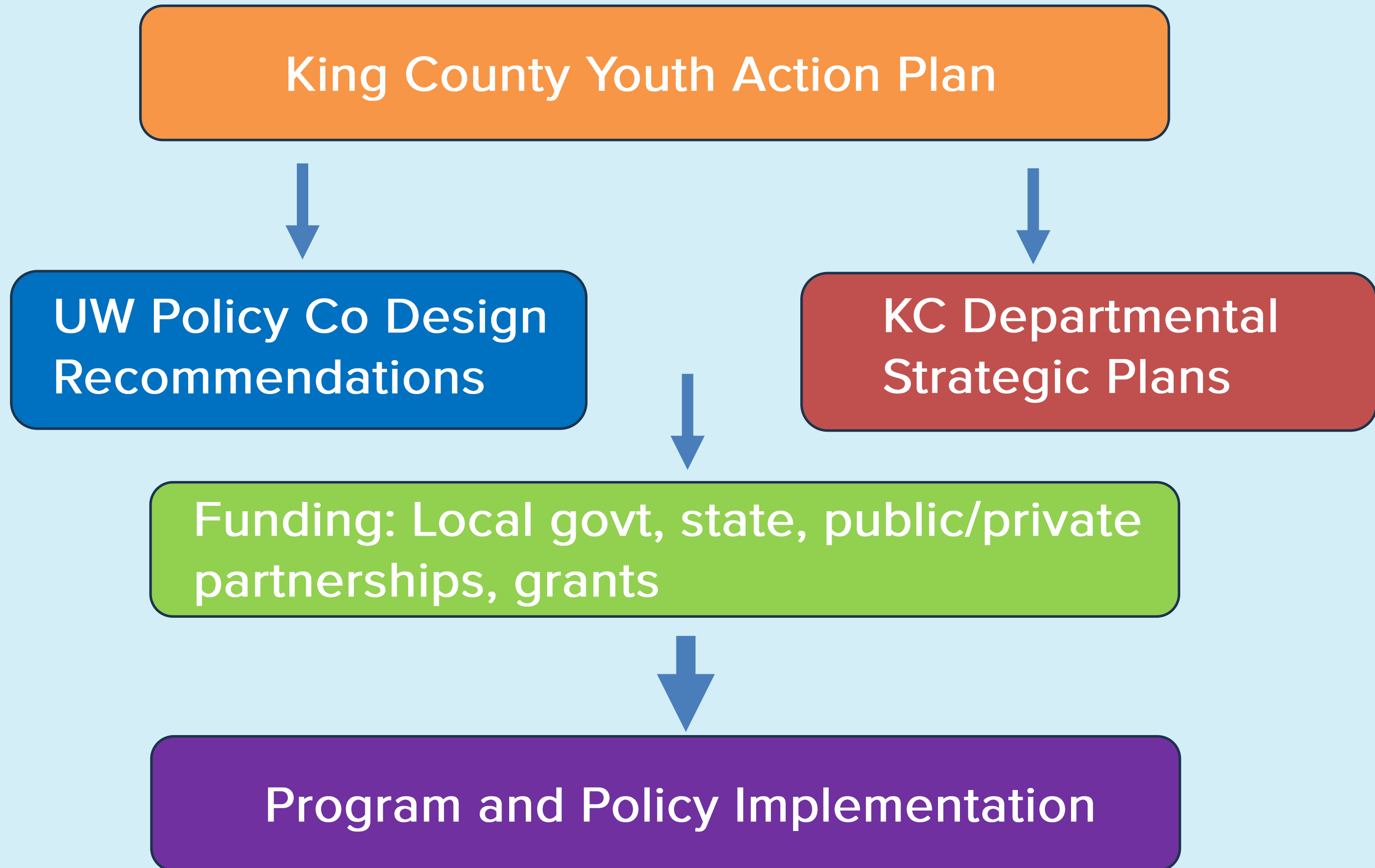
*“The Recovery Campus gave me a place to fit in and find comfort in a sober lifestyle that not many people my age were doing. It gave me an environment **where my ideas were valued, and my problems met with solutions rather than dismissal.**”*

- Seattle Public Schools [Interagency Recovery Campus](#) student

[For full brief with citations, click here](#)



Youth Mental Health and Substance Use Policy and Systems Components



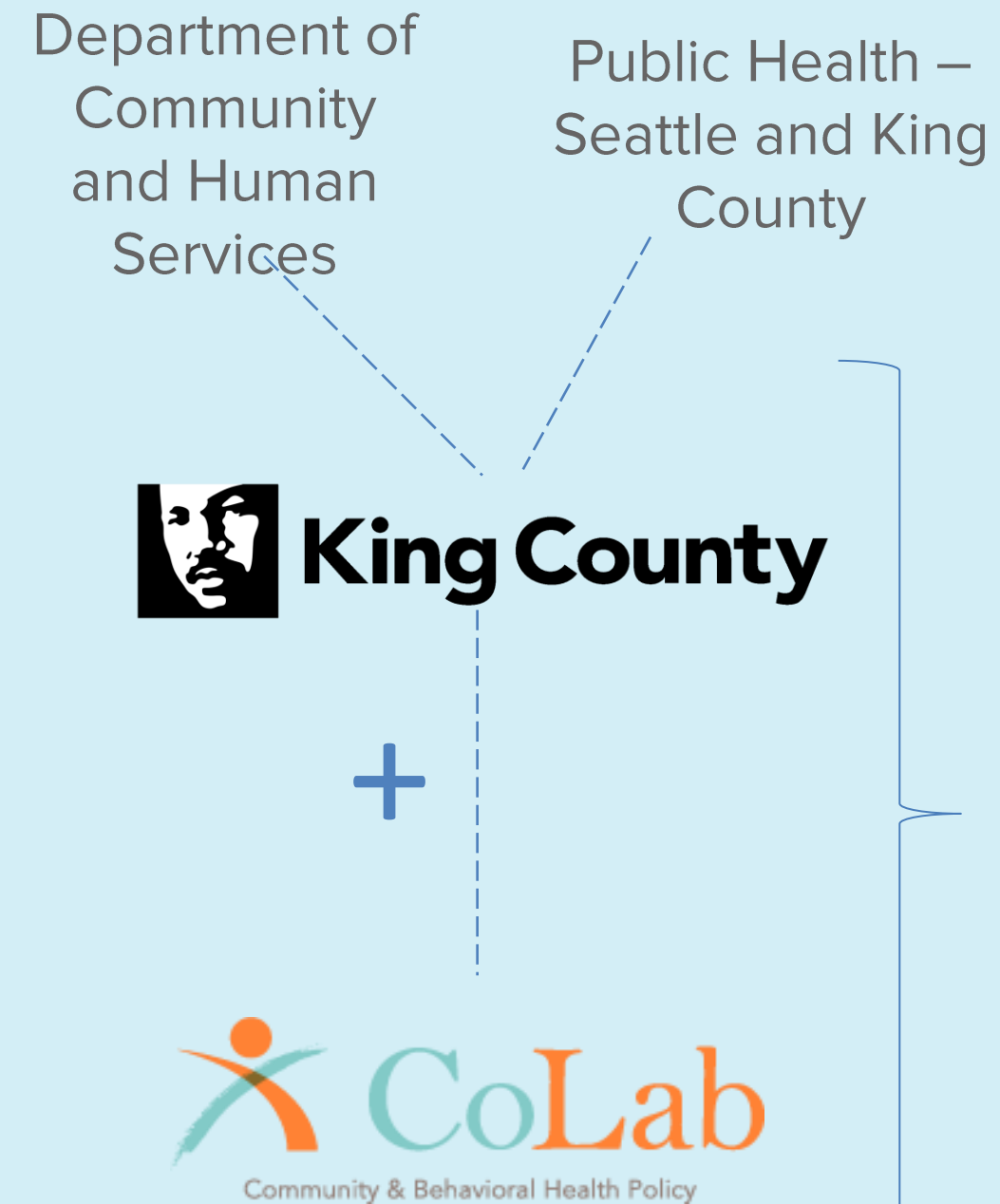
King County Youth Action Plan

- [First iteration of the Youth Action Plan \(YAP\) was adopted in 2015](#)
- DRAFT youth behavioral health recommendations from updated YAP, to be transmitted to Council later this year:
 - Expand definition and delivery of youth behavioral health supports
 - Foster youth empowerment and leadership in behavioral health & create “By and For” opportunities for BIPOC and LGBTQ youth
 - Ensure a range of treatment options for mental health and substance use disorders are available
 - Develop and support places and services for recovery, healing, and reentry

University of Washington CoLab Policy Co-Design

Recommendations

- Participatory, creative community policy co-design process aiming to improve youth mental health and substance use prevention
- Recommendations focused on:
 - County government strategies
 - Network contracts and relationships
 - Local programs and services
- Two-page policy brief and full report available [here](#)



**Policy
Codesign**



Public Health — Seattle & King County 2024 – 2029 Strategic Plan



Public Health
Seattle & King County



Community Well Being and Youth Behavioral Health

- Policy and program planning
- Communications strategy
- Workforce development
- Implement strategies

[PHSKC Strategic Plan](#)

Funding streams: potential supports for youth behavioral health programs

- MIDD Behavioral Health Sales Tax
 - Renewal process underway through 2027 for implementation starting in 2028
- Best Starts for Kids (BSK) Levy Renewal
 - Expected on ballot 2027, implementation starting in 2028
- Seattle Families, Preschool, and Promise (FEPP) Levy
 - Expected on ballot Nov 2025, implementation starting in 2026
- State funding (ongoing)
- Private or philanthropy (ongoing)

APPLYING POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS TO KING COUNTY INVESTMENTS

- Investment across the continuum – we need focus and resources from promotion to crisis, to meet young people where they are with the support they need
- Focused investments for BIPOC and LGBTQ young people who are disproportionately experiencing disparities
- Intentional investment in school-based health services to effectively meet young people where they are
- Flexible and youth-valued approaches to talking about substance use informed by prevention, harm reduction, and recovery

Questions and Discussion



For any follow up questions or
comments please email
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