

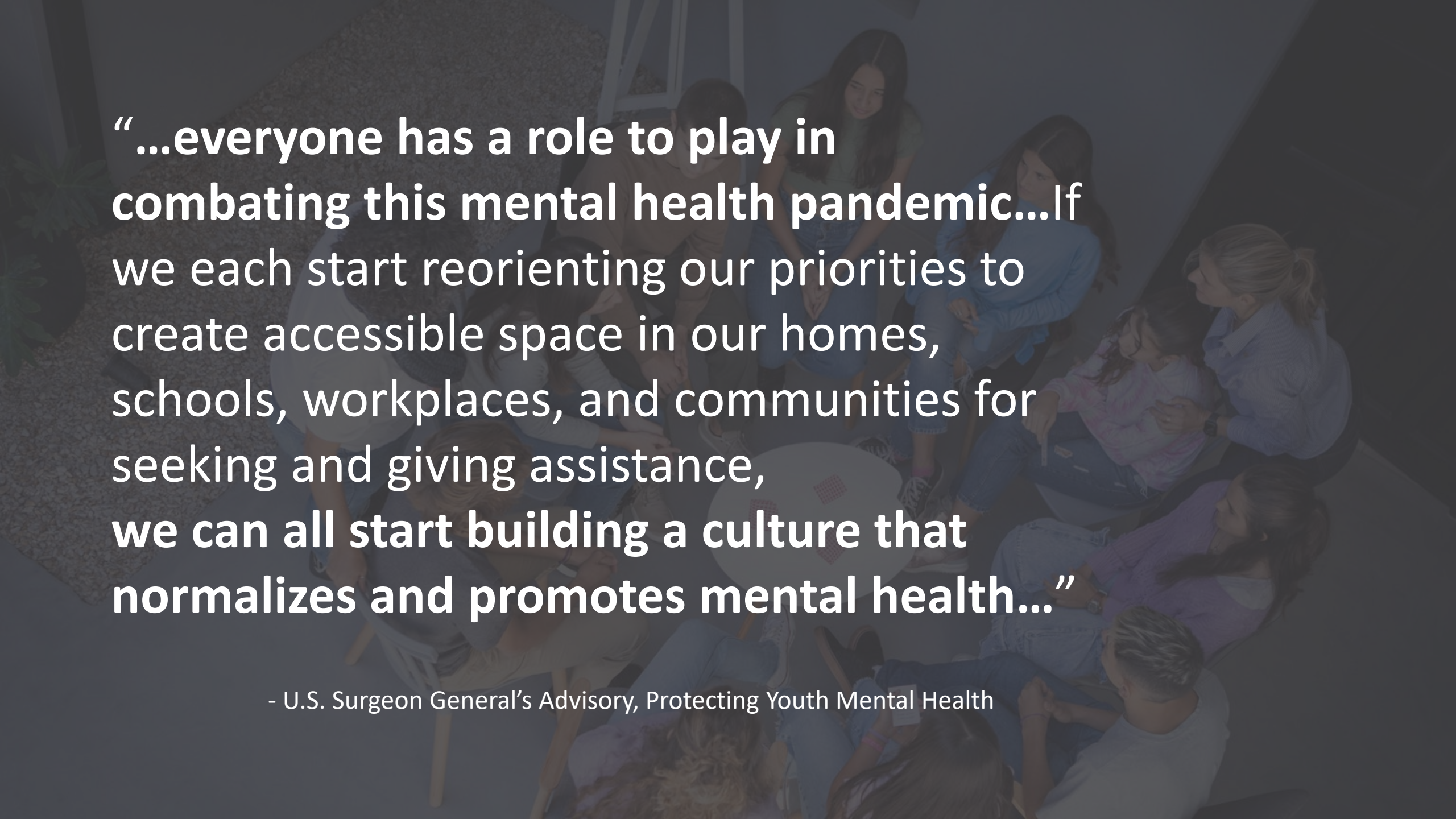
# Taking Action to Support Our Youths' Mental Health

Youth Mental Health Roadmap for Western Massachusetts

**November 1, 2023**

Kathy Mague, PhD

Kathleen Szegda, PhD, MPH, MS

A group of diverse young people, including men and women of various ethnicities, are sitting in a circle on the floor. They appear to be engaged in a group activity, possibly a game or a discussion, as they are looking towards the center. The background is a simple, brightly lit room with a white wall and a window. The overall atmosphere is one of community and support.

**“...everyone has a role to play in combating this mental health pandemic...If we each start reorienting our priorities to create accessible space in our homes, schools, workplaces, and communities for seeking and giving assistance, we can all start building a culture that normalizes and promotes mental health...”**

- U.S. Surgeon General's Advisory, Protecting Youth Mental Health

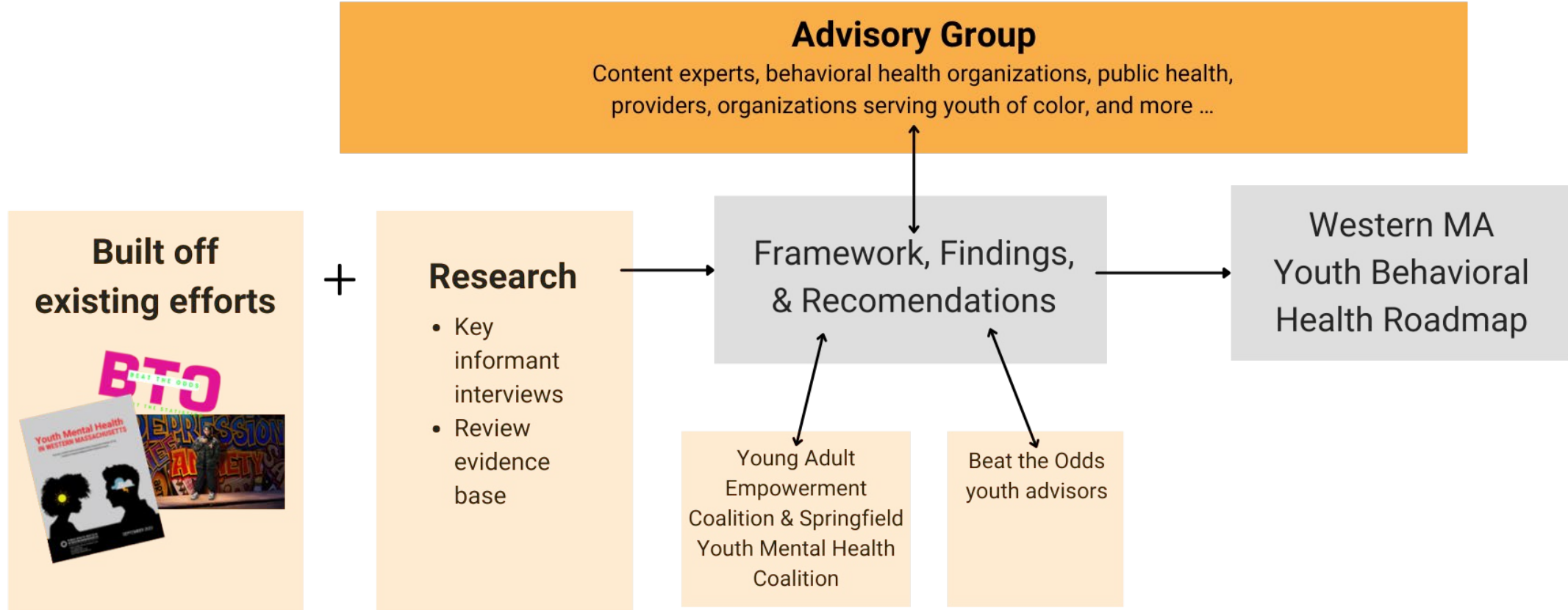
# Youth Mental Health Roadmap for Western MA

“Healthy mental health comes when you feel seen and heard, when you feel connected to something bigger than yourself- you belong at school, in your family, faith community, sports team, whatever. Healthy mental health comes when you move, when you get fresh air. Healthy mental health comes when you feel that your gifts align with the world's needs, when you're engaged in things you are passionate about.”

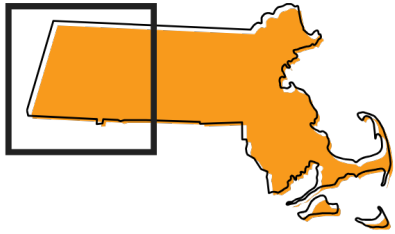
- Mental Healthcare Provider, Key Informant Interview, Community Health Needs Assessment, Coalition of Western Massachusetts Hospitals and Insurer, 2022



# Roadmap Process



# Roadmap Focus



- **Geography:** Four Western MA counties with particular focus on Hampden County and Springfield



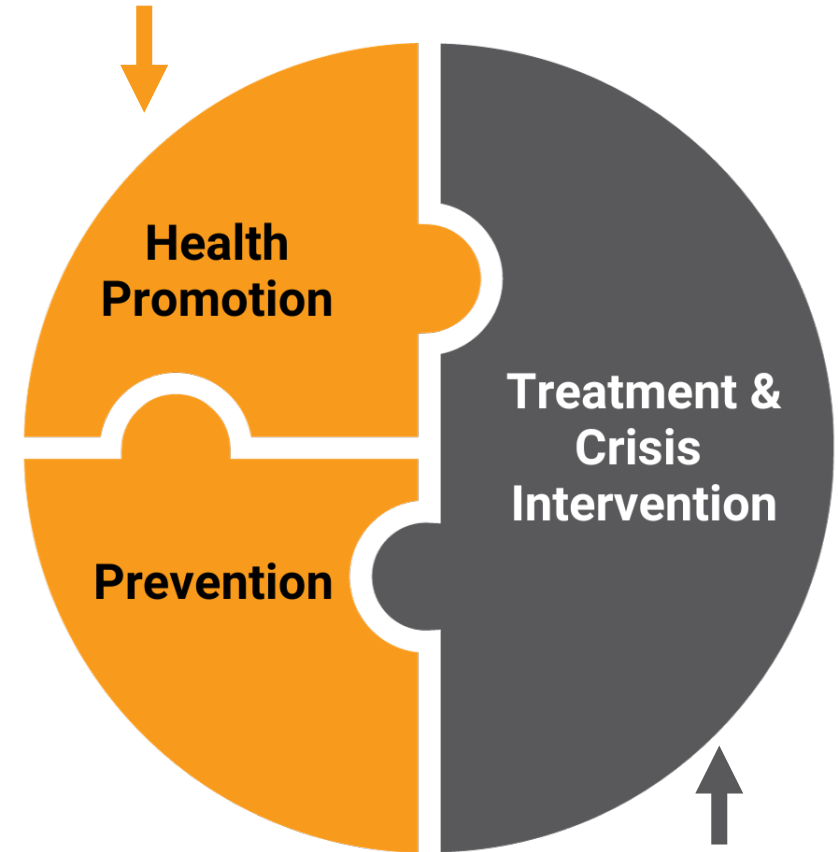
- **Youth and young adults:** middle school, high school, young adult/transition age youth



- Acknowledging inequities exist, focus on Black and Latine youth

mental health → behavioral health

## Youth Mental Health Roadmap for Western MA



MA 2021 Roadmap for  
Behavioral Health Reform

# Findings and Recommendations



Social Connection



SEL-Skills Building



Social Media



Destigmatizing &  
Normalizing



Community-Clinical  
Linkages

Health Equity  
Data Driven  
Youth and Family Centered

**"Always keep in mind that it is important to find out directly from youth what is impacting them, what challenges they are facing, keep them in the forefront, keep them in the decision-making process."**

-mental health provider

# Destigmatizing and Normalizing Mental Health



Mental health stigma has been improving over time, though it remains

- Generational differences
- Cultural differences
- Gender differences

## Affects

Ability to acknowledge own mental health challenges

Willingness to talk about mental health and mental health challenges

Willingness to seek help



# Destigmatizing and Normalizing Mental Health

## Recommendations



Center youth and parents/caregivers

Multiple strategies in multiple settings

Partner with media

Partner with the faith community

★ Acknowledge how oppression and racism impact how stigma shows up today



Thorncraft et al. The Lancet Commission on ending stigma and discrimination in mental health. *Lancet* 2022;400:1438-80  
National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine. 2016. Ending Discrimination Against People with Mental and Substance Use Disorders: The Evidence for Stigma Change. Washington, DC: The National Academies Press.





# Social Connection

## Studies have shown

Among children and teens, social isolation increases risk of depression and anxiety, and the risk remains high up to nine years later.

More than half of U.S. adults report loneliness → some of the highest rates are among young adults

Youth are still recovering from the effects of social distancing and online schooling during COVID-19.

**WE ARE  
BIOLOGICALLY WIRED  
WITH THE NEED FOR  
SOCIAL CONNECTION.**

 [Click to watch!](#)

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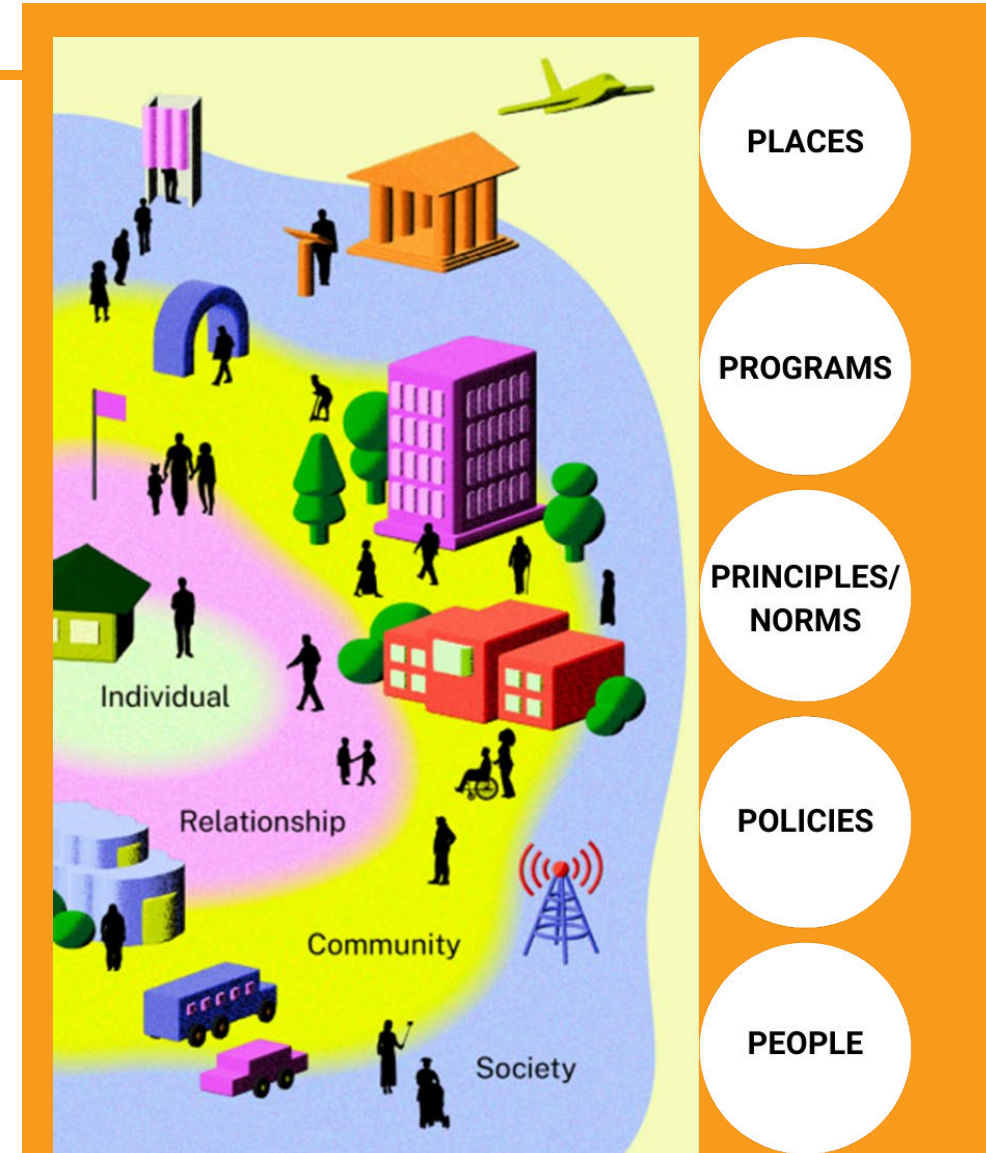




# Fostering Social Connection

## Recommendations

- Make social connection a priority in our local governments, organizations, schools and healthcare
- Design for social connection in all environments, policies, programs and practices
  - Think about both peer and intergenerational opportunities
- Create and support more programs that connect youth
  - Mentoring and peer mentoring
  - Meet youth where they are at and consider culture, customs and traditions
- Education – parents/caregivers, youth, broad-based community efforts



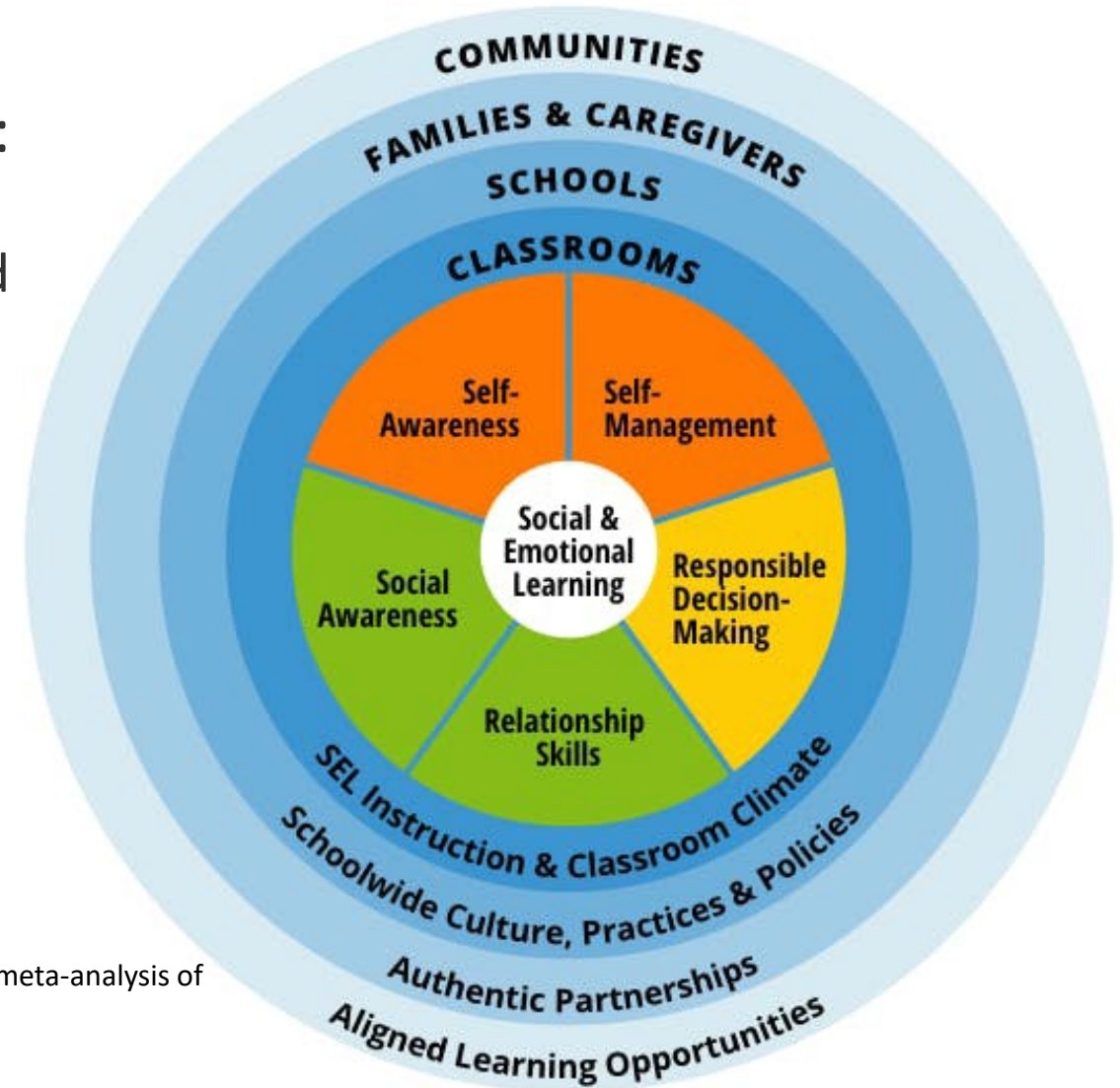
U.S. Surgeon General Advisory. *Our Epidemic of Loneliness and Isolation*, 2023

Image adapted from: <https://healthyplacesbydesign.org/socially-connected-communities/> and <https://www.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/surgeon-general-social-connection-advisory.pdf>



# Social and Emotional Learning (SEL)

- Learn knowledge, skills, and attitudes to:
  - Develop healthy identities,
  - Manage emotions and achieve personal and collective goals,
  - Feel and show empathy for others,
  - Establish and maintain supportive relationships,
  - Make responsible and caring decisions.
- Shown to improve social and emotional skills, mental health, behavior, school functioning, and more...



Cipriano C et al. The state of evidence for social and emotional learning: A contemporary meta-analysis of universal school-based SEL Interventions. *Child Development* 2023; 94:1181-1204.

Image source: Interactive CASEL Wheel

Source: <https://casel.org/fundamentals-of-sel/what-is-the-casel-framework/>



 [Click to watch!](#)

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# Social and Emotional Learning

## Recommendations

SCHOOLS	COMMUNITY	PARENT/CAREGIVER EDUCATION	POLICY
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Structures to support implementation</li><li>• Utilize existing resources – BIRCH, DESE funding</li><li>• Non classroom SEL</li><li>• Incorporate transformative SEL</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Offer SEL in youth programs</li><li>• Work with faith-based community</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Educate parents/caregivers about SEL</li><li>• Meet parents where they are at</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• More state funding to support SEL and parent/caregiver education</li><li>• Align school-based policies and overlapping regulations</li></ul>

★ Acknowledge cultural differences and approach with cultural humility



# Addressing Social Media

**95%** of youth aged 13-17 use social media



more than a third use it “almost constantly”

- Has both benefits and harms, including...



## **BENEFITS:**

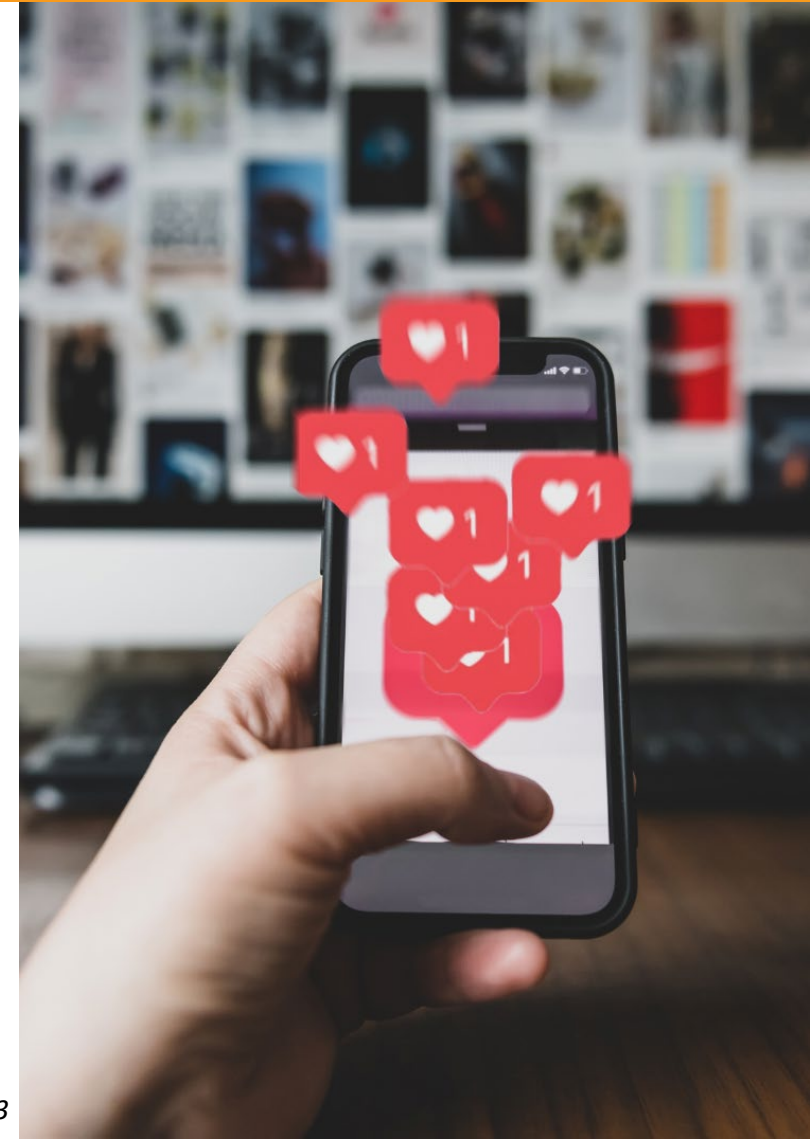
social support among youth who feel marginalized, such as LGBTQ+ youth and youth of color



## **HARMS:**

impacts self-esteem and mental health; cyberbullying; reduces in-person interactions; excessive use because platform algorithms designed to maximize user engagement

- Currently minimal legislation to regulate companies.
- There are some school policies in place locally limiting use.





[Click to watch!](#)



Stephanie Marrero

Beneath the Healing

Josiah

Beat the Odds



Module

Beat the Odds





# Addressing Social Media

## Recommendations

### EDUCATION

- Students, parents, caregivers
- Through schools and through Community-Based Organizations

### COMMUNITY

- Raise awareness of risks of social media and strategies to address
- Creating safe spaces where youth can talk about their experiences and challenges

### POLICY

- Collaborate on federal policies, e.g. COPPA 2.0, KOSA

## Keep in mind equity!

- ★ Be mindful that social media can be a way for youth to get social support they wouldn't otherwise have
- ★ Ensure tech-free schools' policies (no phones) aren't an additional opportunity for disproportionate discipline, especially for Black and Latine youth

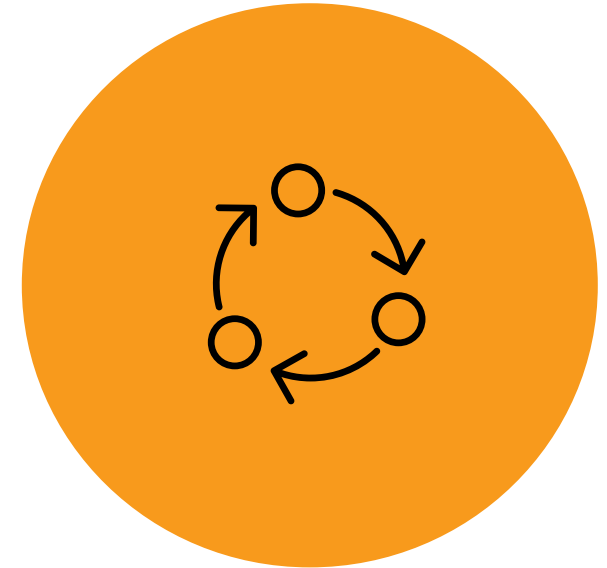
# Community-Clinical Linkages



Embed prevention  
in clinical



Embed clinical in  
community spaces



Coordinate efforts  
between community,  
schools, and clinical  
services

# Moving to Action

Our youth are resilient.  
They need our support.  
Together we can make change.

The roadmap can be used to support:

- Collaborative regional change
- Policy advocacy
- Funding advocacy

# Thank you!

- PHIWM Team
- Reviewer Groups – YMHC, YAEC, BTO
- Interviewees
- Advisory Group
  - Baystate Health
  - Behavioral Health Network
  - Berkshire Community College
  - Center for Human Development (CHD)
  - Clinical and Support Options Inc. (CSO)
  - Community Action Pioneer Valley
  - Community Foundation of Western MA
  - Estoy Aquí
  - Franklin Regional Council of Governments
  - Gándara Center
  - Holyoke Medical Center
  - Mercy Medical Center, THofNE
  - MiraVista Behavioral Health Center
  - National Association of Social Workers – MA Chapter
  - River Valley Counseling Center
  - SPIFFY Coalition (Strategic Planning Initiative for Families & Youth), CES
  - Springfield City Council
  - Springfield Public Schools School Committee
  - Square One
  - The Brien Center
  - The Massachusetts Health Policy Forum
  - Tools For Success Counseling Service
  - BIRCh Project, UMass Amherst
  - Volunteers in Medicine- Berkshires

