

# Promoting Equity and Leadership Opportunities for (Black, Indigenous, People of Color) BIPOC Adolescents and Young Adults



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## Overall Information

### Description

The New Jersey Department of Health (NJDOH) Child and Adolescent Health Program (CAHP) has an extensive statewide youth engagement initiative which began in 2016. Through continuous quality improvement practices, the CAHP youth initiative started with the creation of Youth Advisory Boards (YABs) operated by PREP and SRAE sub-awardees and evolve/expanded to include leadership opportunities for adolescents and young adults (AYAs) who had participated in CAHP programs and were entering or planning a future career in the public health sector and related fields. This poster provides concrete examples of inter-professional collaboration and mentoring through leadership opportunities, employment and engagement of diverse populations. Serving as a key strategy to improve health equity and inclusion, NJ's youth engagement initiative highlights the endeavors of BIPOC youth in leadership roles within NJDOH and efforts to promote diversity, equity, and inclusion.

### Objectives

After reading this poster, participants will be able to:

1. Identify the steps needed to build an infrastructure that can elevate youth voice throughout a state.
2. Compare practices and policies to strengthen partnerships with youth serving organizations and prepare them to mentor and engage youth authentically.
3. Recognize new strategies to effectively mentor adolescents and young adults in a leadership capacity.
4. Explain how promoting diversity, equity, inclusion and belonging through leadership opportunities for adolescents and young adults is essential to creating authentic youth engagement initiatives that is successful in elevating youth voice.

### Contact

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### Building Infrastructure and Strengthening Capacity

Elevating youth voice did not happen overnight, in a vacuum or without youth. The CAHP tagline states, "nothing about them, without them" and is essential to providing meaningful opportunities for youth to lead authentically. In 2016, New Jersey participated in an Adolescent and Youth Adult Health Collaborative Innovation and Improvement Network (AYAH-CoIIN) that helped provide an opportunity to hire a young adult who had participated in our PREP Teen Pregnancy Prevention (TPP) programs. Izzy Gonzales was the first paid youth intern of the CAHP and was instrumental in designing and launching the system of local Youth Advisory Boards (YABs) that would help guide the work of NJDOH grantees. As an intern, Izzy worked with CAHP and sub-grantee staff, provided feedback on the TPP programs, helped conceptualize YABs and advocated for their need within CAHP grants. The YABs were piloted in our PREP and SRAE grant program in 2016 and officially launched as a required activity in 2017.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, through the work of an ambitious group of current and former YAB members, AYA engagement grew into the creation of the NJDOH Voice of Youth Planning Committee (VYPC). Highlighting the needs of AYA in Maternal and Child Health, the VYPC hosted town halls and listening sessions that spotlighted issues of race, equity and social justice, reproductive justice, menstrual equity, mental health and sexual orientation and gender identity (SOGI) microaggressions. NJDOH hired our second paid youth intern, Schneider Juste, who had a strong background in community organizing around issues of race and equity. Since 2020, the VYPC and local YABs have hosted events such as a BIPOC Youth Leaders Series "Bringing Your Voice to the Table," podcasts on race, birth control/sexual health and social media.

Currently, NJDOH has grown our internship program with two paid interns, Jasmin Langomas and Sabih Hasan, who started in January of 2023. Each intern is paired with a professional mentor from our CAHP team and promotes health initiatives important to NJ AYA. With the addition of Jasmin and Sabih, the VYPC is now 100% youth led. Most recently, Jasmin and Sabih planned and facilitated our Annual Youth Advisory Board Meeting where youth from across the state came together to share their successes and start to plan for 2024.

## Success Stories from Current NJDOH Interns, Youth Development Specialists

### Jasmin Langomas



Selfie courtesy of J. Langomas

I am a college sophomore majoring in Business Management with a minor in Communications. I was a member of a YAB from 2018-2022, a member of the VYPC from 2020-2022, and a NJ DOH youth intern since 2023. I love being able to work this internship asynchronously while being a full-time and involved student on and off campus.

Over the years, I have had an informative and impactful experience with the advisors, youth, and co-workers. Specifically, the internship has allowed me to review grants, plan statewide events, host panel discussions, and learn about the New Jersey Justice Collaboratives for Girls. Regarding leadership, I have become more comfortable in using my voice during focus groups, VYPC meetings, in-person events, and staff meetings.

### Sabih Hasan



Image courtesy of S. Hasan

I am currently studying Information Technology & Informatics at Rutgers University. Prior to being an intern at the NJ DOH, I was a part of the NJDOH (VYPC), and while in high school I was a member of a YAB.

My internship with the state has opened so many doors to opportunities. I love working with youth on topics regarding mental health, drugs/alcohol, and pregnancy prevention. In the internship, I've learned how to be a true leader when it comes to organizational projects. I've also learned to follow health trends in youth development and use that information to make more engaging opportunities.

## Success Stories from Previous NJDOH Interns and VYPC Leaders

### Schneider Juste



Image courtesy of S. Juste

I was the CAHP NJ DOH intern from 2020-2023. Initially coming in as a social work major, the internship gave me insight to some of the mental health issues within the male, female, white, minority and LGBTQ+ community.

When I changed my major to law and legal, the staff transitioned my work to help me recognize some of the stigmas within the world that are sometimes hidden in the legal profession. Prior to the internship, I struggled to speak in big settings with people younger than me. NJ DOH let me lead youth virtual town halls, which showed me I could do it, I just had to trust in myself and the people around me. I am currently waiting to begin my first semester of school at Delaware Law in the fall.

### Izzy Gonzalez



Selfie courtesy of I. Gonzalez

From 2013-2016 I was a part of the 2nd cohort of the AMCHP and Child Trends AYAH CoIIN and worked with the NJDOH CAHP as their first paid intern. While there, I helped design and launch

the NJDOH Statewide Youth Engagement Initiative and worked with AMCHP to help create Youth Voice Amplified. Being a part of a YAB in high school and interning with NJDOH was a fulfilling, life changing, career starting opportunity, that helped me find my voice, grow and establish myself. Being a leader means emphasizing intersectionality, uplifting others, and being open to learning.