2017 Young Adult Access Issues and Priorities

Background

It is commonly known that accessing mental health services can often be difficult. But for young adults and transition-age youth, there are additional challenges that we have highlighted below. Housed within NAMI Virginia, Youth MOVE Virginia, the statewide youth network, has conducted a 20 question survey targeting young adults aged 18-30, across the Commonwealth who have experience accessing mental health services. The purpose of this survey is to inform community members, practitioners and policy makers with a better understanding of the barriers and complications that young adults face when accessing mental health care. The sample size of the survey is 140 and was offered to young adults with broad-based systems experience. In addition to the mental health system, this includes young adults with experience in child welfare, education, juvenile justice, and substance use and recovery service systems.

Challenges to Accessing Services

Similar to the 2017 NAMI Virginia Membership Survey on Access Issues and Priorities, the number one barrier to accessing mental health services among young adults is long wait times for an initial appointment. While an overwhelming majority feel that accessing services in general is moderately to very difficult.

Top Barriers

1. Long wait times for initial appointment
2. Inconvenient appointment times and lack of appropriate mental health providers (tie)
3. Lack of understanding around navigating mental health system

“Hearing long wait list times is extremely upsetting when you feel like you are in a life or death situation.”

What do Young Adults Want?

MORE
- Peer support
- Visibility of services
- Resources in college
- Access in rural areas
- Culturally competent practitioners

LESS
- Stigma around seeking support
- Out of pocket expenses
- Waiting for initial appointment
- Barriers to care (i.e. transportation)
- “Red Tape” (i.e. visitation limits and insurance restrictions)

“We need affordable, accessible mental health care and currently that does not exist. I’m lucky to have a bit of family financial support which is what allowed me to eventually get the help I needed when it became available. Most people my age can not afford the mental health care they need and therefore do not have their mental health needs met”.

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What Services Are Young Adults Utilizing?

**TOP 5 Mental Health Services Utilized**
1. Outpatient Therapy/Counseling
2. Medication
3. Psychiatry
4. College-based Services
5. Inpatient Hospitalization

**TOP 5 Most Helpful Services**
1. Outpatient Therapy/Counseling
2. Medication
3. Psychiatry
4. Peer Support Services
5. College-based Services

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**Most Utilized Systems**
The overwhelming majority of young adults report using private insurance and/or private mental health providers. This is subsequently followed by use of the Emergency Room and Community Service Boards. It is important to note the polarizing nature of these figures; as the majority of individuals surveyed either have the means to access private providers and insurance or must resort to services on the opposite end of the spectrum such as Emergency Rooms or Community Service Boards crisis services. This indicates that the current state for accessing the mental health service system is largely between those that have independent means and those who do not.

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**Where do we go from here?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Top Three Desired Services</th>
<th>Per Support Services</th>
<th>Outpatient Therapy/Counseling</th>
<th>Mental Health Skill Building</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>36.56%</td>
<td>37.63%</td>
<td>43.01%</td>
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**Recommendations For Providers and Policy Makers**
A reoccurring theme among respondents is the sentiment that their needs could be better met and understood by providers. Transition-age youth and young adults possess their own unique needs with distinct characteristics and manifestations of mental health symptoms. It would be helpful for providers to receive training around cultural competency so they could better respond to the specific needs of this age group. Accessibility and affordability are two other major themes. Not knowing where or how to find services, in conjunction with not being able to afford them, make young adults’ experiences especially problematic. It would be beneficial for practitioners and policy makers to work towards finding comprehensive solutions that address both the financial and social barriers faced by young adults when seeking mental health services and support.