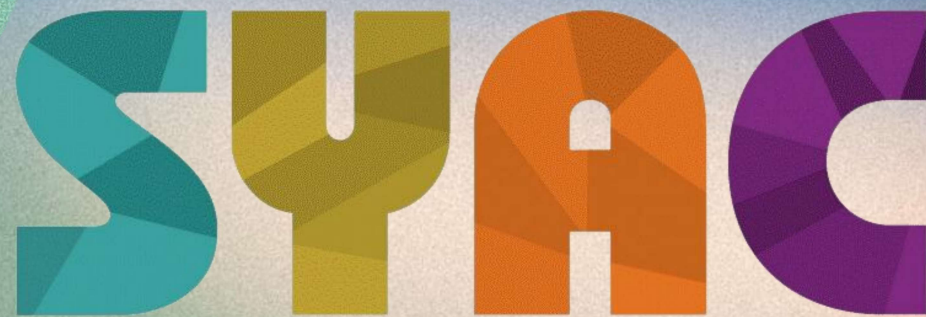




Statewide Young Adult Council

**Statewide Young Adult Council of the State
Mental Health Planning Council
October 9th, 2025**

SYAC Co-Chairs



Colby
Mills



Ashley Smith,
Youth MOVE Massachusetts



Micah
Webster

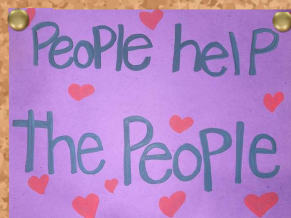
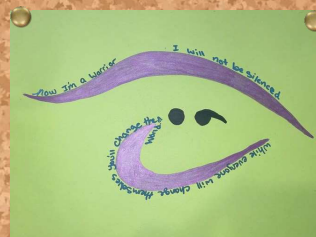
Mission and Vision

SYAC brings together youth, young adults, and providers to advise the Department of Mental Health and other young adult service organizations. We are a collective group who work together to find equity and to advocate for each other. We represent youth and young adults with mental health needs in the state of Massachusetts through personal experience as peers. We believe that mental health is an aspect of character and therefore does not define us.

Current Advocacy Efforts

- Listening sessions
- Young Adult Advocacy Day
- Outreach with DMH, DPH, BSAS, and community partners
- Workgroups focusing on specific topics
- Urgent advocacy items

Young Adult Advocacy Day



Youth-Identified Topic: Awareness of Services

- Community-based supports, such as collaborating with schools
- Lack of trust in services is a significant barrier
- More networking between service providers for appropriate referrals
- More community education, especially in BIPOC communities
- “The first step is the DESIRE to learn more”
- More digital marketing on social media about available supports, specifically peer supports
- Action: Workgroup assembling digital resource of peer-based, mental health resources specific to youth and young adults

Youth-Identified Topic: Stigma

- “There is more awareness now, the mental health crisis has begun feeling collective and less individual.”
- Collaborate with libraries and peer-run services. Young people see libraries as non-stigmatizing spaces and trust peers.
 - “Space of learning, open to new ideas”
 - Other spaces characterized as non-stigmatizing were identity-based organizations that involved conversations where “they touched on hard topics, normalizing heavy conversations” or facilitators were “lived experience professionals, making it known that [they] are peers.”
- Cultural shifts
 - “Over self-diagnosis delegitimizes genuine diagnoses.”

Youth-Identified Topic: Peers

- Access to young adult peer supports
 - Integration of peer support in schools
 - Increase awareness of available peer support in the community
 - Increase funding for young adult peer-based organizations, such as Young Adult Access Centers.
- Support for the young adult [peer support workforce](#)
 - Increase wages for young adult peer support workers.
 - Subsidize transportation for peers
 - Recruit and retain young adult peers.
 - Recruit and retain diverse peers, including LGBTQ and BIPOC peers.
 - Retain peers by investing in supportive colleagues
 - Educate peers about career growth trajectories

Youth-Identified Topic: Transportation

- Transportation services should support access to any location or activity which supports wellbeing (not just clinical care).
- Safe for all
- Towns (not just cities) need public transportation and sidewalks
- Need for more discounts on transportation

Urgent Advocacy Topic: TAY Housing

DMHRSP Background

- Until recently, people with DMH services were eligible for the Department of Mental Health Rental Subsidy Program (DMHRSP).
- This opportunity would arise when you were doing well enough to maintain an apartment and achieve independence.
- In many cases, these vouchers were the **plan and ultimate goal** for clients. Young adults were being **promised** these vouchers once graduating from group homes/transitional age housing.

DMHRSP includes two voucher programs:

- **Sponsor-based vouchers**
- **Tenant-based vouchers**

Urgent Advocacy Topic: Housing

Fiscal Year 2026 Budget

- **Most proposed cuts to DMH services were reversed/not implemented.** The FY26 State Budget, which the Governor signed, restores almost all these proposed cuts.
- There was never any formal indication that DMHRSP would be cut from the budget at the time these cuts were restored

What happened next?

- DMHRSP continued to be promised to clients.
- In **July**, an email was sent out stating that the DMHRSP was to **halt** and no vouchers were to be offered. There was no further information given at this time.
- It has now been more than two months since vouchers were cut, and there has still been no public statement made.
- What we now know: **DMHRSP has been paused effective July 8, 2025.** If a client did not already have a lease signed prior to the abrupt cut in July, they will not receive a voucher.

Urgent Advocacy Topic: Housing

What is happening now?

- DMH clients who were on deck to receive vouchers from the DMHRSP are being **pressured to discharge from programs, regardless of whether they have found housing**, and even if that means exploring homeless shelter options.
- The plan is to discharge clients who have vouchers, then for the agency to pursue a Mutual Termination Agreement or otherwise pay off the remainder of the lease and close it. Providers are being pushed to do so.
- Some clients are being given dates by which they need to be out, which are only a few months away; otherwise, they will receive a Notice to Quit.
- Seemingly, clients do not qualify for priority status on these applications due to technical reasons.

Urgent Advocacy Topic: Housing

Proposed housing options for those who were in line for DMHRSP services:

- Project-Based Units: CHAMP/ HUD 811
- DMH Set-Aside Units
- FCF (Facilities Consolidation Fund) Units
- Discharge from services (fully independent living)
- Homelessness/shelters

Data

According to data collected in 2024 by the Housing Subcommittee of the SMHPC, **2,254 individuals were housed in FY23 through DMHRSP, and 107 additional people were housed in FY24.**

According to DMH, **DMHRSP currently supports about 2,600 leased units.** This also shows the fallout that this cut will cause.

Urgent Advocacy Topic: Housing

Impact

- DMH clients in line for a voucher
- DMH clients living in a voucher based housing program
- All DMH clients from this point forward who may need to utilize transitional housing support through DMH



Quotes from Young Adults Being Impacted

"The cuts to the DMHRSP have left me feeling completely discouraged. I'm being pushed out of my program because there aren't adequate options without these vouchers, and I'm facing impending homelessness. Massachusetts is one of the most expensive states to live in, and being given such short notice to find housing makes this situation impossible, even for someone without mental health challenges. We were never given information to plan ahead before vouchers were abruptly cut, and months later, there are still no answers."

"I was really looking forward to receiving a voucher because it meant independence, a chance to finally build a life for myself outside the system. Now, my goal of becoming self-sufficient has been put on hold. I can't even apply for jobs because I don't know what's going to happen or where I'll end up. Since July 8th, I've cried myself to sleep every night from the fear of losing everything. I don't want to be homeless."

"Making unwell people unhoused will create a crisis, not just in homelessness, but in mental health, and it could take decades to repair. Losing my voucher felt like a punch to the gut. I know this may not be entirely in your hands, but if there's any way to restore even a limited number of vouchers, it could make a real difference. Governor Healey needs to address this directly. Cutting housing and other supports is not reform, it's neglect."

Urgent Advocacy Topic: Housing

What are young adults asking for?

- **Clarity and transparency** for all people served and providers.
- A **public statement** to be released.
- Other feasible **housing options**.

What can you do?

- Connect to Housing Subcommittee of the SMHPC here:
housingsubcommittee@gmail.com
- Connect to the Massachusetts Association for Mental Health:
katealicante@mamh.org
- If you are a young adult, come to SYAC!

Upcoming Meeting Topics

- Substance Use/Harm Reduction
- Talk Saves Lives (Suicide Prevention)

Contact Us

youthmovema@ppal.net

Co-Chairs

- Micah Webster: micahwebster@brandeis.edu
- Ashley Smith: asmith@ppal.net
- Colby Mills: cmills@ppal.net



Statewide Young Adult Council

Join us for a monthly virtual gathering **hosted by youth for youth** (16-30) who are **passionate about mental health and advocacy**. Come for networking, guest speakers, feedback spaces, and open conversation!

an opportunity to provide input regarding mental health services and policies that impact youth & young adults



**Every Fourth
Tuesday
3:30-5 PM**

NEXT MONTH'S SYAC GATHERING

NEW

October 28th
3:30 - 5 PM EST
Virtual

youthmovema@ppal.net