

Shifting Services and Systems to Prevent Youth Housing Instability

WASHINGTON STRATEGIC PLAN
SEPTEMBER 2021

A collaboration
between

Steering Committee
on Prevention



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Executive summary

In January 2021, the Office of Homeless Youth, in collaboration with lived experts, community-based organizations, and state-level agencies, published the [Preliminary Strategic Plan for the Prevention of Youth Homelessness](#) as requested by the 2020 Washington state legislature in the [2020 supplemental operating budget](#) proviso. The report identified the need for lived experts to lead the strategy development process to ensure that solutions meet the needs of those not being served by existing interventions.¹

In November 2020, the [Communities of Color Coalition \(C3\)](#), the [Innovations Human Trafficking Collaborative \(IHTC\)](#), and the [Office of Homeless Youth \(OHY\)](#) started collaborating to identify communities in Washington who are least represented at state and local level decision making tables, and to create a trauma-informed, healing centered approach to co-design the strategy with lived experts and caregivers. Lived experts and caregivers were recruited to be a part of the Steering Committee on Prevention of Youth Homelessness based on their expertise, identity (race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation), availability, interest, and geographic representation. Our goal was to ensure diversity

representative of the youth and young adults (YYA) who are disproportionately represented in unstably housed populations.

The Steering Committee collaborated with IHTC, C3 and OHY for over 40 hours spread out over three months starting in February 2021. The collective identified four main prevention pillars:

- 1. Support whole family well-being²**
- 2. Universal support for basic human rights**
- 3. Eliminate racism in systems and supporting youth and families impacted by them³**
- 4. Shift resources to Black, Indigenous and people of color communities⁴**

Recommendations identified in this report to prevent youth and young adult (YYA) homelessness are from people who have experienced housing instability and caregivers on the Steering Committee. You can read all the recommendations that were collaboratively identified, [here](#).

¹⁻⁴ These recommendations are aligned with the following strategies in the [Dismantling Poverty in Washington](#) strategic plan, in the order that they appear on the page—Strategy 2, 6,1,2

High-priority recommendations

The high-priority recommendations are a smaller subsection of all the changes that are required to see transformational change in Washington state. See all recommendations sorted by thematic areas [here](#).

The following are the high-priority recommendations that the Steering Committee identified based on solutions that have the opportunity catalyze transformational change for Black, Indigenous and people of color, LGBTQ2+, rural and other marginalized youth and families.

- 1 Co-design with lived experts a single-entry point to a comprehensive, multigenerational, preventative well-being service system. Services should be available to youth and families before and during crises without Child Protective Services (CPS) or court involvement. Divert all CPS mandatory reporter, self-referral calls and court referrals through the well-being system to support families and youth as the initial entry-point to the intervention; only filter calls of abuse and endangerment to CPS.^{5,6}
 - The well-being service should include holistic, culturally informed prevention services, information and supports such as community-based family reconciliation, crisis resolution, mediation, LGBTQ2+ needs and support to meet employment, health, educational needs of older youth and their caregivers.
- 2 Require modification to local zoning laws across the state in urban, rural and sub-urban areas to increase different high density housing options to counter the lack of affordable housing in the state. Additionally, ensure new developments, whether they are for- or nonprofit, have 15–20% reserved for low-income people under 24 years or families. Low income can be defined as annual income levels under 80% of Area Median Income (AMI). Ensure 5–10% of the set aside is reserved for those with annual income less than 30% of AMI.⁷
- 3 Employ, train and support those who identify as BIPOC, LGBTQ2+, trafficked, young adult sex workers, neurodivergent, and/or experience physical, intellectual or developmental disabilities as peer specialists in service delivery and system navigation across behavioral health, health and human services, schools, housing systems, legal system.
- 4 Invest in stigma -free respite for caregivers or youth with no strict length of stay to enable family members to access services needed to heal such as temporary elective housing, models such as “house mom” or “Mockingbird Family” care constellation.⁸

⁵ See [Supporting whole family well-being](#) > Prevent separation of families and youth for detailed recommendation around mandatory reporting updates.

⁶ This recommendation aligned with Strategy 6 and 7 in the Dismantling Poverty in Washington strategic plan.

⁷ This recommendation reflect HB 1220 (laws of 2021).

⁸ This recommendation aligned with Strategy 5 in the Dismantling Poverty in Washington strategic plan.

- 5 Provide a variety of options for parental consent required in emergency housing, residential programs, host homes and other placements for minor youth when a parent is unreachable or unwilling to provide consent to provide housing to a minor.⁹
- 6 Require history, diversity, equity and anti-racism training for all state agency workers with an emphasis on judges, law enforcement and front-line staff. Identify and acknowledge harm that government systems, from the local to state level, have caused to communities of color. Require acknowledgment of previous and current harms caused. Prioritize individual and organizational learning so that state workers can work to dismantle racism within their agencies, policies and programs.
- 7 Reduce siloed requirements for funding disbursements from the state level to ensure people's whole health and well-being is supported and not just outcomes for different agencies. Divert the majority of the state funding to BIPOC grassroots organizations and to "By and For"¹⁰ organizations.
- 8 Create state-funded housing programs for pregnant and parenting teens and young adults and their partners that

are a combination of low-barrier, youth-centered transitional living programs, housing vouchers for market value rentals or motels, support to non-parental caregiver, or host home as applicable. Programs should include supportive services to help care for children and support to finish high school, access employment or trainings.

- 9 Improve comprehensive relationship education that is cross lifespan and includes information on adolescent body changes, desires, consent, sex, pregnancy, inappropriate behaviors, relationship boundaries, trafficking, contraception, internet safety, building protective factors, pregnancy and child caring for youths of all genders. This should be available in community centers, Family Resource Centers, and after-school programs. Make relationship education accessible to parents, grandparents, chosen family and other adults.
- 10 Build strong partnerships with private sector industries to create and increase entry-level positions in high growth industries across the state. Focus on opportunities for low income and housing unstable YYA, with a specific focus on trans women of color, pregnant and parenting, YYA engaged in sex work or experiencing trafficking and neurodivergent YYA as they are more severely impacted by stigma and lack of opportunities.

⁹ This recommendation aligned with Strategy 5 in the Dismantling Poverty in Washington strategic plan.

¹⁰ "A By and For organization is a part of a community of people that see themselves as unique and defined by the members' identities, traditions, and values. A By and For organization is one where leadership and staff belong to the same community they serve, promote, and work to preserve. By and For organizations build trust, advocate, respond, and solve problems specific to community members. By and For organizations have roots in their respective communities as change agents and providers of mitigating systems of community service. They invest in and work with community members to improve their quality of life."

Next steps

Next steps required to actualize the recommendations from this report include:

1. Set up and program manage a cross-system coordinating body that includes agency stakeholders, legislators, community-based organizations working in prevention and a steering committee of lived experts to analyze fiscal needs for the implementation of the recommendations.¹¹ Ensure lived experts are paid for their time.
 - a. Identify agency leads for each of the recommendations including stakeholders within the agencies to lead the work. Prioritize incorporation of high priority recommendations into agency ask to legislature.
 - b. Develop a plan of action for implementation. Coordinate across systems at the state and local level to implement recommendations. Conduct on-going accountability meetings with agency leadership, lived experts and the cross-system coordinating body to ensure that the recommendations are co-designed and implemented according to the vision of the Steering Committee.
 - c. Develop required legislative workgroups that include steering committee members and incorporate recommendations into existing workgroups to champion the transformative changes required to support whole family well-being.
2. Fund community-based preventative services across the state and fund the development of a call-in line and website to access the services.
3. Set up the data infrastructure with Research, Data and Analytics team at Department of Social and Health Services

to measure identified outcomes highlighted in this report. Incorporate outcome measure into Results WA dashboards.

For a comprehensive solution set to preventing youth and young adult homelessness from early crisis to post exit from systems, refer to the following content:

1. Universal, primary and early secondary prevention:
 - a. Understanding of the system gaps and existing evidence-based practices that can be utilized: [Preliminary Strategic Plan for the Prevention of Youth Homelessness](#).
 - b. Recommendations that span the continuum of prevention: Shifting Services and Systems to Prevent Youth Housing Instability (current report).
 - c. Department of Children, Youth and Families' 2019 report: [Families and Youth in Crisis](#).
2. Later secondary and tertiary prevention:
 - a. Child welfare, juvenile legal systems (state and county), behavioral health: [Improving Stability for Youth Exiting Systems of Care](#).¹²
 - b. Behavioral health systems: [Safe and supportive transition to stable housing for youth ages 16–25 years](#).

Alignment and coordination with the efforts of the Poverty Reduction Work Group's 10-year Plan to Reduce Poverty & Inequality, a Blueprint for a Just & Equitable Washington, also referred to as "Dismantling Poverty in Washington strategic plan" in this report, will also support the work to prevent youth homelessness.

¹¹ The cross-system coordinating body was identified as a recommendation in the [Preliminary Strategic Plan for the Prevention of Youth Homelessness](#).

¹² Improving Stability For Youth Exiting Systems of Care is the report pursuant to RCW 43.330.720 (SSB 6560).

Background

In January 2021, the Office of Homeless Youth, in collaboration with lived experts, community-based organizations and state-level agencies, published the [Preliminary Strategic Plan for the Prevention of Youth Homelessness](#) as requested by the 2020 Washington state legislature in the [Chapter 357, Laws of 2020, sec. 96](#). This follows closely after the 2018 Legislature passed RCW 43.330.720 (SSB 6560) which required the Department of Children Youth and Families (DCYF) to collaborate with the Office of Homeless Youth (OHY) to develop a plan to ensure that no unaccompanied youth is discharged from a publicly funded system into homelessness.

The preliminary prevention plan published in January 2021 focused on understanding the underlying root causes of youth and young adult (YYA) homelessness¹³ and system gaps and responses to the issues. Specifically, stated in the proviso language:

- (i) “How existing efforts in this area are coordinated;
- (ii) The demographics of youth involved in homelessness and other related negative outcomes;
- (iii) Recommendations on promising interventions and policy improvements; and
- (iv) Detail and descriptions of current prevention funding streams.”

¹³ The Office of Homeless Youth (OHY) defines homelessness or housing instability as—lacking a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence, including sleeping in emergency shelters, on the streets, in cars, in other unsafe or unstable places, or “couch-surfing” and “doubled-up” where a person has no legal right to stay. OHY focuses on housing and supportive services for youth and young adults between the ages of 12 and 24 who are unaccompanied by a parent or an adult caregiver.

The preliminary plan detailed three priority recommendations based on the first round of research:

1. Create and establish a coordinating body focused on preventing unaccompanied youth homelessness, unnecessary system involvement with child welfare, juvenile justice system and other negative outcomes. The coordinating body should include state agency representatives, legislators, practitioners, youth and caregiver lived experts.
 - a. Amend RCW 43.03.220 to allow compensation for lived experts’ participation in the coordinating body and related state-level advisory groups to allow for an inclusive, equitable approach to informing the government.
2. Build the data infrastructure to measure the prevalence of youth and young adult homelessness.
 - a. Develop a youth homelessness database with data sharing between the Office of Superintendent of Instruction (OSPI) and Research and Data Analysis (RDA) to ensure a comprehensive youth homelessness measure.
3. Provide funding to the Department of Children, Youth and Families to redesign their Family Reconciliation Service to be a community-based service for youth and families focused on primary prevention.

This report builds on the research and recommendations from Department of Children, Youth and Families' 2019 report—[Families and Youth in Crisis](#) and is aligned with many of the recommendations from the Poverty Reduction Work Group's 10-year Plan to Reduce Poverty & Inequality, a [Blueprint for a Just & Equitable Washington](#).

Prevention of youth and young adult housing instability happens along a continuum (see page 11 for illustration of the prevention continuum). There are multiple opportunities for communities, providers and state agencies to support youth and families to stay stably housed or easily access housing when in crisis. Previous reports have addressed different parts of the spectrum with recommendations that are either co-designed or deeply informed by lived experts. To prevent youth homelessness at different junctions of need, experience and system involvement, review the following reports.

Universal, primary and early secondary prevention: In these phases of prevention the work is focused to prevent crisis in the family unit, ensuring access to services and prevention of escalation and system involvement.

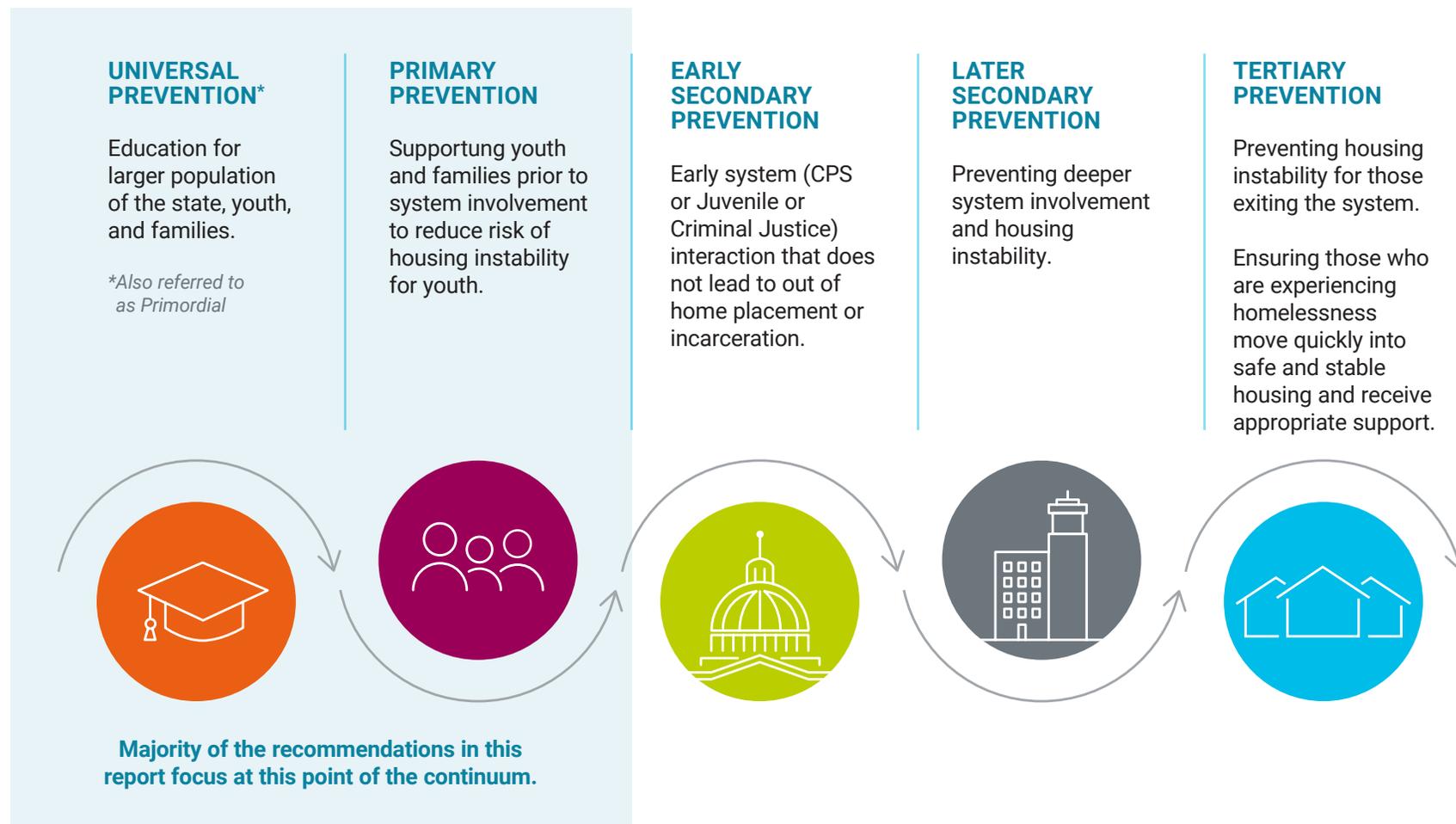
- a. [Preliminary Strategic Plan for the Prevention of Youth Homelessness](#).
- b. Shifting Services and Systems to Prevent Youth Housing Instability (current report).

Later secondary and tertiary prevention: In these phases, ensuring systems support young with access to housing, identification of housing instability and immediate access to housing are critical.

- a. Child welfare, juvenile legal systems (state and county), behavioral health: [Improving Stability for Youth Exiting Systems of Care](#).
- b. Behavioral health systems: [Safe and supportive transition to stable housing for youth ages 16–25 years](#).

This report predominantly focuses on recommendations universal and primary prevention space due the immense need identified by lived experts, caregivers and system side stakeholders.

Prevention continuum



Steering Committee on Prevention of Youth Homelessness

Since the publication of the initial report that focused on understanding root causes and system side levers for prevention of youth homelessness, the [Communities of Color Coalition](#), [Innovations Human Trafficking Collaborative](#), and the [Office of Homeless Youth](#) worked together to recruit, support and host lived experts to co-design the prevention of youth homelessness strategy for Washington in a Steering Committee of YYA lived experts and caregivers.

The Steering Committee on Prevention of Youth Homelessness is made up of youth lived experts between the ages of 15–30 who have experienced housing instability between ages 12–24, and caregivers (bio, kin, informal or foster) who have personal experience supporting Black, Indigenous and people of color (BIPOC), lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, queer, two-spirit (LGBTQ2+), or young people with intellectual or developmental disabilities (I/DD)). Steering committee members represent urban, rural and Tribal areas of the state. Ninety-five percent (95%) of the group identifies as BIPOC.

A small team supports the Steering Committee made up of [Communities of Color Coalition](#), [Innovations Human Trafficking Collaborative](#) and the [Office of Homeless Youth](#). The group was recruited from a larger pool of applicants who responded to a recruitment survey shared through “By and For” community organizations across the state, the Department of Children Youth and Families’ (DCYF) resource family mailing list, youth-serving organizations and individual referral. The initial group was limited to 22 participants, 10 caregivers and 12 youth to enable full participation in a digital format. Members were paid for their attendance and participation in 10 scheduled digital work sessions. The committee hopes to continue its work in moving the recommendations forward in collaboration with agency stakeholders and lawmakers.

The goal of the collective

The goal is to ensure safe and stable housing for all young people across the state of Washington so that they may thrive in the short and long term regardless of their location, age, race, ethnicity, neurodiversity, disability, gender identity or sexual orientation.

Address the root causes of housing instability

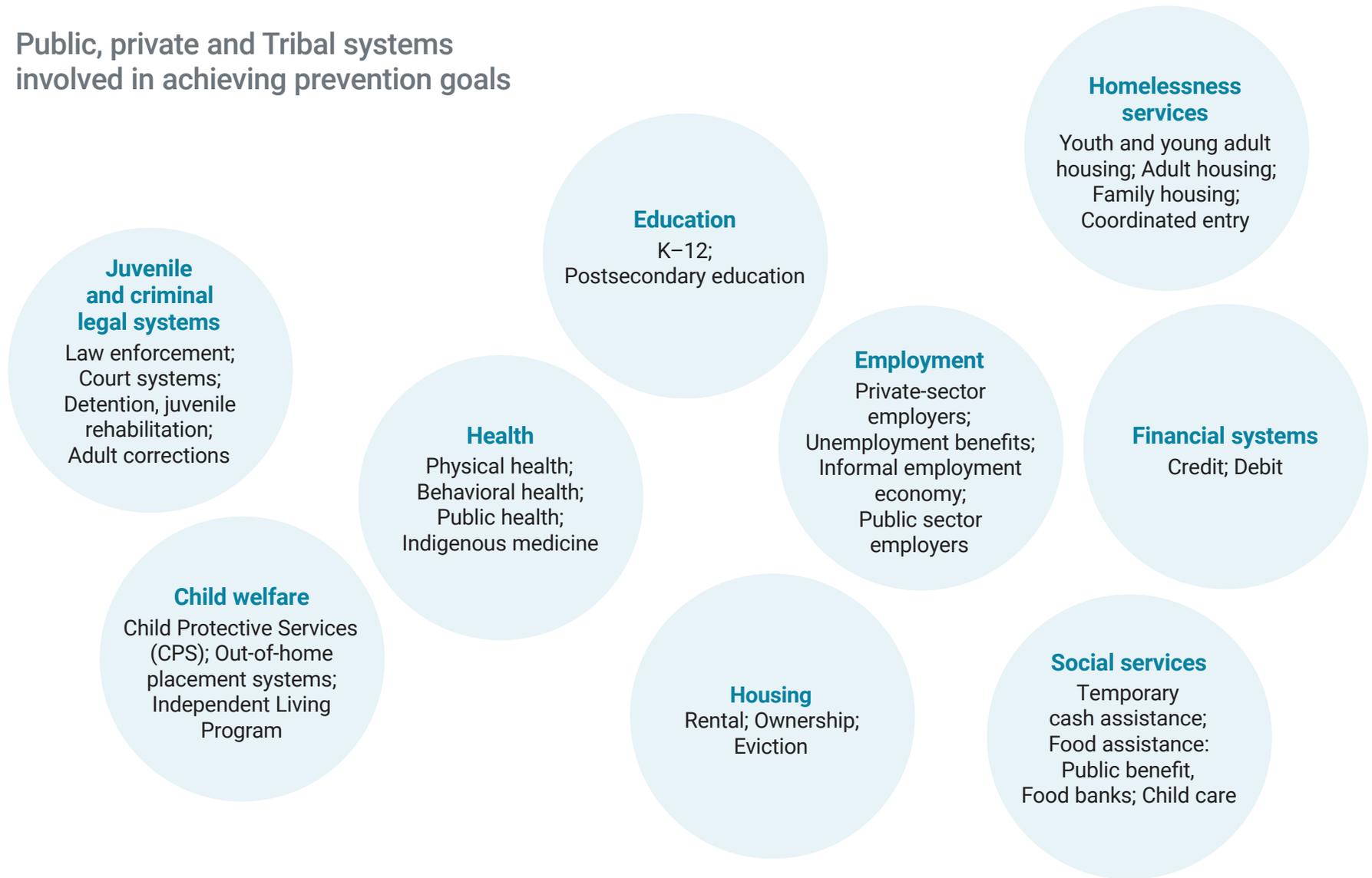
To learn more about the root causes of housing instability, refer to the [Preliminary Strategic Plan for the Prevention of Youth Homelessness](#). To prevent young people from experiencing housing instability and other resulting negative outcomes, we must move upstream to address the underlying conditions that cause housing instability. This requires a holistic approach that meets the needs of the whole family or care circle, which may include biological family, kin, chosen family, extended family, or any other natural supports in a young person's life.

Focus efforts on those most impacted

Not every young person experiences the same level of risk for housing instability. Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC), Lesbian, Gay Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Two-Spirit, (LGBTQ2+), youth with physical or intellectual/developmental disabilities (I/DD), and neurodivergent youth experience housing instability at higher rates than their white, heterosexual, cis-gendered, neurotypical, able-bodied peers.

Therefore, all strategies and recommendations described throughout this report are intended to center young people who are BIPOC, LGBTQ2+, neurodivergent and/or experience physical, intellectual or developmental disabilities.

Public, private and Tribal systems involved in achieving prevention goals



Outcomes

These outcomes are achieved through collective work. The cross-system coordinating body should be guided by these outcomes.

Decrease in housing instability among BIPOC, LGBTQ2+, neurodivergent, physical, intellectually or developmentally disabled (I/DD), youth and young adults.

Decrease in the family separation of BIPOC, LGBTQ2+, neurodivergent, disabled, I/DD youth and caregivers due to engagement with the child welfare or homelessness system.

Reduction in emotional, physical, sexual, and domestic violence against children, youth and young adults.

Increase in financial resources within BIPOC communities and at organizations that are “By and For” where leadership and staff belong to the same community they serve, promote, and work to preserve.

Recommendations

Recommendations from the Steering Committee on Prevention are thematically organized by four main pillars highlighted below. These pillars go across the prevention continuum and should be considered at every point in the prevention continuum. It is important to return to these main thematic pillars to ensure work is done towards preventing youth homelessness.

PILLARS	RECOMMENDATIONS
Supporting whole family well-being	<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Invest in youth and family well-being○ Prevent the separation of families and youth○ Meet the health and wellness needs of minors
Universal support for basic human rights	<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Support housing stability○ Support whole health and well-being of communities across the state○ Ensure youth people have access to information they need○ Create pathways for economic security
Eliminating racism in systems and supporting youth and families impacted by them	<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Require training in systems and support youth and families impacted○ Design services to meet the needs of marginalized communities○ Eliminate racial bias in systems
Shifting resources to BIPOC communities	<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Direct state funding to By and For organizations○ Ensure the workforce reflects the demographics of those served

Supporting whole family well-being

Many of the recommendations in this section are aligned with or complimentary to recommendations in the [Families and Youth In Crisis report](#) from 2019, [COVID-19 and Child Welfare: Using Data to Understand Trends in Maltreatment report](#) by Chapin Hall, and [A Way Home America's Child and Family Well-Being Justice pillar](#) of the [New Deal](#).

Invest in youth and family well-being

 **Primary prevention:** Co-design a single-entry point¹⁴ to comprehensive multigenerational, preventative well-being service system available to youth and families before, and during a crisis. Ensure that services are co-designed with lived experts and accessible through the call-in line or website. Ensure that services are funded and available in communities across the state. Do not require or court referral (juvenile, drug other) for access to the well-being service system.

- The well-being service system should include holistic, culturally informed prevention services, information and supports such as community-based family reconciliation, crisis resolution, mediation, LBGTQ2+, neurodivergent, intellectual and developmental disability (I/DD) and sex worker needs. Ensure supports meet basic needs of youth and families such employment, physical and behavioral health, education.
- Redirect DCYF's out of home placement funding to make flexible funding available for prevention services in the community including, but not limited to, time-limited cash assistance for biological parents and youth. Make same level of support available to kin and chosen family without having to go through CPS screening or DCYF licensing processes for caregivers (aunt, uncle, chosen family, grandparent) to support young people who might not be able to live with their biological parents.

Positive step forward: New York City's non-investigative [Collaborative Assessment, Response, Engagement and Support approach](#) supports families in developing their own solutions to care for their child in cases where there is no immediate or impending danger to children.

Positive step forward: Youth Engagement Team (YET) model in King County provides coordinated services between different services to support unaccompanied minors experiencing housing instability. YET can be expanded to schools, FRCs so that youth and families can access services prior to experiencing housing instability.

¹⁴ Instead of designing a whole new system, there is an opportunity to build on the [Crisis Connections](#) lines developed by Health Care Authority.

Supporting whole family well-being

- If a family is CPS-involved or court-involved through truancy, At-Risk Youth (ARY) or Child in Need of Services (CHINS) petitions, they should be referred to the community-led well-being services system instead of building a separate service pipeline for families who are system-involved.¹⁵
- Relocate family reconciliation services (FRS) into the well-being services system so that services are provided by community-based organizations and does not require a court order or referral through CPS to access.
- Ensure screening for services in the well-being service system (and across providers and agency services) are streamlined. Families and youth should not be required to do multiple screenings.¹⁶ Screenings questions and timing should be trauma and culturally informed. Ensure basic needs (rest, food, housing, culturally appropriate medicine, calming services) are met first. Screening should not be used to gate keep access to services.
- Services can be available or integrated into existing service centers and networks such as Family Resource Centers and the behavioral health crisis response system being developed per HB 1477 (2021) and work being done by BIPOC, LGBTQ2+ “By and For” organizations.
- Fund community-led support groups for parents of adolescents, with focused support on parenting LGBTQ2+, neurodivergent, I/DD youth and young people facing behavioral health challenges. Include appropriate counseling and bonding support for parents recovering from substance use disorder and whose children are reunified after out of home placement. Refer to evidence-based prevention practices highlighted by Washington State Institute for Public Policy (WSIPP)¹⁷ and promising practices highlighted by Department of Commerce’s January 2021 report.¹⁸
- Fund mentorship programs across the state to support young people led by “By and For” organizations and support programming similar to [Career Connected Learning \(CCL\)](#). Adapt CCL programming as needed for the youth who are served.

¹⁵ Recommendation is also reflected in the [Preliminary Strategic Plan: Prevention of Youth Homelessness](#)

¹⁶ This recommendation aligned with Strategy 6C in the [Dismantling Poverty in Washington](#) strategic plan.

¹⁷ WSIPP’s [2021 Updated inventory of Evidence-Based, Research-Based and Promising Practices](#)

¹⁸ [Preliminary Strategy to Prevent Youth Homelessness.](#)

Supporting whole family well-being

 **Early Secondary prevention:** Fund transition services for young people going into guardianship to support the guardian and young person.

 **Tertiary prevention:** Increase funding for behavioral health services integrated within housing and shelter programs for youth and parents, emphasizing individualized wrap-around supports for youth and families. Additionally, increase funding for mobile crisis units to provide immediate crisis response in emergency shelters and street response.

Prevent the separation of families and youth whenever possible

 **Primary prevention:** Invest in stigma-free respite for caregivers or youth with no strict length of stay to enable family members to access services needed to heal. This should be available to families who are not involved in the child welfare system, families at risk of entering child welfare, and biological families and kin. Include an array of respite services.

- Community members offering short-term support with housing and respite.
- Temporary elective housing for parents and youth.
- Expanding home visiting to include families with youth. Utilizing models such as informally trained community members to support parents and youth.

Positive example: [Safer Families Initiative](#)

Positive example: [The Mockingbird Society's "Mockingbird Family" care constellation model](#) creates an innovative model to support foster parents through an extended family network.

Opportunity: Create a similar model for biological families to be supported and access respite when needed.

Positive example: Vanessa Behan Crisis center in Spokane is available 24-hours and seven days a week for childcare birth to 6 years old to allow parents some respite. It includes supportive services and parenting classes.

Opportunity: Similar models open to older youth and their caregivers can serve as a respite model.

Positive example: CRC¹⁹ or HOPE²⁰ centers with supportive services.

Opportunity: Extend the limit of stay at CRC or HOPE centers to allow time for family reconciliation. Increase awareness, reduce barriers for entry to CRC and HOPE centers.

Positive example: "Granny army" of mobile elders²¹ or tribal elders or "House parent" who is a trained community member who helps to maintain household structure.

¹⁹ Crisis Residential Centers

²⁰ [Office Homeless Youth programs](#)

²¹ Soon to be implemented in Prowers County by the Cornerstone Resource Center with support from Tennyson Center for Children

Supporting whole family well-being

 **Early Secondary prevention:** Prevent unnecessary separation of BIPOC families as a result of child welfare engagement.

- Refine mandated reporting categories to differentiate poverty-related neglect from abuse and endangerment²² to ensure that families that fall into poverty-related neglect categories can be diverted away from child welfare²³ into community based supportive services in the well-being service system rather than go through CPS processes. Ensure that supports include economic supports to families.²⁴
- Co-create new training for all mandated reporters with families and youth, to re-orient their roles to be mandated supporters of family well-being rather than engage in family policing. CPS, educators, healthcare providers, law enforcement and caseworkers should understand the link between trauma, poverty and substance use to detect unmet needs such as housing, food, clothing for families and youth rather than further traumatize and separate them from their families through out of home placement of their children and youth.
- Require meaningful evidence before a child is removed from the home, HB 1227 (2021).²⁵
- Improve family finding process and prioritize kinship placement or guardianship when out of home placement is deemed necessary. (Chapter 211, Laws of 2021,).

 **Early Secondary prevention:** Make the same level of financial and in-kind resources available to biological parents to care for youth with physical, intellectual or developmental disabilities as placement in Behavioral Rehabilitation Service (BRS) facility. If staying at home is not an option, resources should be available to kin or foster homes to ensure the caregiver is supported.

²² Recommendation is aligned with recommendations in Chapin Hall's Issue Brief: [COVID-19 and Child Welfare: Using Data to Understand Trends in Maltreatment](#)

²³ [Keeping Families Together](#) Legislation 2021

²⁴ Recommendation is aligned with recommendations in Chapin Hall's [Family and Child Well-Being System: Economic and Concrete Supports as a Core Component](#)

²⁵ Working group such as the Families Together Workgroup are working to addressing issues related to keeping families together.

Supporting whole family well-being

 **Later Secondary prevention:** Reform the court process to help families in severe crisis resolve conflict and/or address treatment needs. Re-examine the Family In Need of Services (FINS) proposal (HB 2870/SB 6467, 2018) to create a family-focused process for accessing support and providing intervention when parents are not reachable, do not consent to out-of-home placement, or when families are unable to reconcile.

 **Tertiary prevention:** Prevent organizations from separating families in shelters, including but not limited to: children over the age of 2 years in pregnant and parenting shelters, children over the age of 13 years in domestic violence shelters, and fathers with children. In addition, ensure shelters and housing programs for minors can accommodate minors with children.

 **Tertiary prevention:** Fund and develop more culturally led treatment centers where families can heal together.

 **Tertiary prevention:** Expand the Child Welfare Housing Assistance Pilot program to support reunification among families where lack of housing is the primary barrier.

Supporting whole family well-being

Meet the health and wellness needs of youth under the age of 18

Recommendations in this section build on exiting work done to review state-level laws impacting unaccompanied minors, including [Alone without A Home](#) and [State Laws to Support Youth Experiencing Homelessness](#):

 **Tertiary prevention:** Provide options for parental consent required in emergency housing, residential programs, host homes and other placements for minor youth. Options include:

- Delaying the time required to obtain consent from 72 hours to 7 days to allow time for program staff to work with parents/guardians, or;
- Allowing consent from youth to be provided when a parent/guardian is unreachable or refuses to allow youth to return home, or;
- Requiring program staff to notify a parent of youth's housing rather than obtain consent to provide emergency, transitional or longer-term housing to youth.

 **Tertiary prevention:** Develop and expand interventions that support long-term stability for youth, such as:

- Increasing or removing the length of stay in HOPE Centers to allow more time for family reconciliation,
- Supporting the guardianship process for young people to live with kin or chosen family
- Expanding transitional living programs
- Allowing youth ages 16+ to legally sign a lease
- Making the emancipation process accessible and feasible for youth who don't have any parental supports.

Supporting whole family well-being

 **Tertiary prevention:** Reform the court process for minors to access support when their basic needs are not being met at home. Re-examine the Family In Need of Services (FINS) proposal (HB 2870/ SB 6467, 2018) to authorize longer-term out-of-home placement for youth who cannot safely return home. Expand access to civil legal aid for families.

 **Tertiary prevention:** Fund legal advocacy for minors. Ensure advocates, pro-bono or otherwise, are present and available in HOPE centers, CRC and other youth housing.

 **Tertiary prevention:** Reform licensing of residential programs that serve adolescents, such as HOPE and Crisis Residential Centers, to be developmentally appropriate and support increased independence.

 **Tertiary prevention:** Allow unaccompanied minors to consent to their own preventative health services.

Universal support for basic human rights

Support housing stability through innovative policy levers and funding specialized housing

Across the continuum: Establish new models of housing.

- Create community land trusts (CLT) in urban, suburban and rural areas to permanently maintain affordable housing.²⁶
- Design and fund multigenerational housing communities for young families, parents with adolescents, biological parents who need support to have access to elders and community members to prevent social isolation, with case managers and supportive services easily accessible. Example: Bridge Meadows, OR.
- Fund transitional housing for black trans people in western and eastern parts of the state designed, developed and maintained by organizations with lived expertise of Queer, Trans, People of Color (QTPOC) experience and history of supporting Black trans people.²⁷
- Create state-funded housing programs for pregnant and parenting teens and young adults and their partners that are a combination of low-barrier, youth-centered transitional living programs, housing vouchers for market value rentals or motels, support to non-parental caregiver or host home as applicable. Programs should include supportive services to help care for child and supports to finish high school, access employment or trainings.
- Develop and fund supported transitional and supported permanent housing for young people with severe mental health conditions across the state where they do not need to compete with chronically homeless adults to stay stably housed with services.

²⁶ This recommendation aligned with Strategy 3G in the [Dismantling Poverty in Washington](#) strategic plan.

²⁷ Recommendation is aligned with or complementary to the demands of the WA Black Trans Task Force [WA-BTTF demands](#)

Universal support for basic human rights

Across the continuum: Make housing inclusive and low-barrier.²⁸ Ensure all housing programs for young people are informed by YYA with lived expertise and include employment support and connection to resources in the community. Ensure housing and shelter programs for young people are low-barrier and can accommodate pets, partners, and personal belongings such as cell phones.

- Require modification to local zoning laws across the state in urban, rural and suburban areas to increase different high-density housing options to counter the lack of affordable housing in the state.
 - Ensure new developments, whether they are for- or nonprofit, have 15–20% reserved for low-income people under 24 years or families. Low income can be defined as annual income levels under 80% of Area Median Income (AMI). Ensure of 5–10% of the set aside prioritizes those with annual income less than 30% of AMI.²⁹
 - Credit history or co-signers should not be a requirement to access housing for YYA.
 - Pathways to ownership should be made available to maintain affordability of housing and to build wealth for historically marginalized and discriminated communities.
- Direct 50% or more of capital funding projects to BIPOC led organizations, Tribal nations and rural areas to help increase housing stock.
- Invest in culturally sensitive sober living environments that can refer to low-barrier housing if an individual relapses.

²⁸ Also refer to the Affordable Housing Brief—[Dismantling Poverty in Washington](#)

²⁹ This recommendation reflect HB 1220 (laws of 2021)

Universal support for basic human rights

 **Universal and Primary prevention:** Protect housing stability for renters.

- Create a tax credit for low-income renters similar to homeowner's mortgage tax credit.
- Institute rent control in all areas of the state,
- Regulate evictions and create a policy to ensure eviction does not cause long-term housing instability by limiting access to eviction records, especially for low-income community members.

 **Tertiary prevention:** Create state government funds to buy back native lands currently not under state oversight to give back to tribes and generate a process to return native land under state jurisdiction to native communities and tribes.

Support whole health and well-being of communities across the state

 **Universal prevention:** Provide access to universal healthcare for everyone in WA state, especially low-income community members and preventative care access for undocumented young people.

- Train clinicians and doctors on supporting youth with Autism Spectrum Conditions (ASC), trans, queer, and two-spirit³⁰ youth as there is overlap and cross-over between these communities. Ensure existing training for support of ASC youth includes access to mental health supports and speech and occupational therapy for youth. Ideally, both trainers and health care providers are neurodiverse, trans and/or BIPOC.
- Provide health care support for transgender young people, including transitioning support, hormones and peer mentors.³¹
- Improve and fund access to therapy for everyone in WA state. Support culturally relevant therapy practices for BIPOC, neurodivergent and LGBTQ2+ communities.

³⁰ Due to the differential experiences of non-cisgender people with the medical system, here we want to highlight supports specifically designed with them.

³¹ This recommendation aligned with Strategy 4E in the [Dismantling Poverty in Washington](#) strategic plan

Universal support for basic human rights

 **Universal prevention:** Ensure accessibility and affordability of an array of services, including intensive case and care management for young people and parents with severe mental health considerations (schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, others). Provide services for those in mental health crisis to prevent interaction with law enforcement or deeper system involvement in the criminal legal system.

 **Universal prevention:** Stigma-free universal screen of neurodivergence to ensure that youth of color are not misdiagnosed when they are neurodivergent.

- Support and invest in research on diagnosis and treatment at the intersection of mental health and ASC for youth of color.
- Ensure all research on ASC, neurodivergence and behavioral health includes BIPOC youth and their needs.

 **Universal prevention:** Increase awareness of needs of youth with autism and other intellectual or developmental disabilities through mass education.

 **Universal prevention:** Reduce bias and stigma around gender identity and sexual orientation through campaigns and mass education approaches with access to information for youth and parents to learn more.

 **Tertiary prevention:** Increase the age limit of youth BH treatment centers to 21 years.

 **Tertiary prevention:** Create a screening for intimate partner violence and commercial and sexual exploitation of children, youth and young adults to connect them to the appropriate resource and supportive services. Screening should be conducted in emergency rooms, during medical checkups, in schools and in housing services.

 **Tertiary prevention:** Tribal nations should establish partnerships with local law enforcement systems to identify, support and bring back youth missing from Tribal and DCYF care.

Universal support for basic human rights

Ensure young people have access to information they need to make life decisions and are supported through high school and beyond

 **Universal prevention:** Improve comprehensive relationship education that is cross-lifespan and includes information on adolescent body changes, desires, consent, sex, pregnancy, inappropriate behaviors, relationship boundaries, trafficking, contraception, internet safety, building protective factors, pregnancy and child caring for youth of all genders. This should be available in community centers, Family Resource Centers, and after-school programs. Make relationship education accessible to parents, grandparents, chosen family and other adults.

- Prioritize sessions for young people with intellectual and developmental disabilities and their caregivers.
- Support youth and young adult advocacy in school assemblies to inform one another about understanding abuse, gender identity, sexual orientation, bodies, relationship boundaries, toxic relationships and resources for those who are experiencing abuse or trafficking.
- Create access to resources for adults to heal from previous sexual assault, toxic relationships, physical and emotional trauma.
- Empower women and LGBTQ2+ young people through mentors and supporting self-esteem to prevent involvement in toxic relationships. ——— **Positive example:** [Our Whole Lives](#)

 **Primary prevention:** Increase funding for school-based social workers who have mental health clinical training to support youth. Ensure all school districts have appropriate resources to ensure social workers are available, known about and accessible. Prioritize BIPOC, LGBTQ2+, foster care and homelessness lived experts and neurodiverse candidates.

Universal support for basic human rights

 **Primary prevention:** Increase special education (SE) funding for school districts by increasing the multiplier used in calculating SE allocation to school districts to ensure the needs of neurodivergent students and those with disabilities are met.

- Ensure funding and maintenance of alternative schools in all communities.
- Create safe spaces in schools for youth of all genders and BIPOC youth to support life skills learning, curriculum or activities focused on empowering minoritized genders and LGBTQ2+ understanding.

— **Positive example:** [Pizza Klatch](#) in Thurston County

 **Universal prevention:** Develop a comprehensive universal screening tool for schools to detect student substance use, behavioral health needs and potential for housing instability to connect youth and families to resources. Build on existing tools such as [Screening Brief Intervention and Referral to Treatment screening](#). Increase awareness of school based supports available to unaccompanied youth with students, teachers, afterschool programs so that students are aware of services available and can self-refer to access resources such as transportation, Wi-Fi access, basic needs through existing programs such as the [Homeless Student Stability Project \(HSSP\)](#) and [McKinney Vento Homeless Assistance Act](#).

— **Positive example:** [Geelong Project](#) in Australia included a universal screening tool used in school to identify housing instability potential early and connect youth to supports to stay stably housed.

 **Tertiary prevention:** Higher education.

- Create and fund financial aid navigation support for all students in high school and college to ensure that students are aware of and apply for federal and Washington State financial aid programs. Financial aid navigation support should specifically be available to support low-income, unaccompanied homeless, foster and undocumented students through the financial aid application.

Universal support for basic human rights

- Housing, food and basic needs for post-secondary³² students:
 - All low-income and homeless youth should have guaranteed housing while in post-secondary education, including between-terms and summer. Partnerships with higher education, agencies and community-based organizations should provide emergency, short-term support to ensure affordable off-campus housing³³ to ensure that housing is not a barrier to post-secondary completion. Case management should include wrap-around services with connection to public benefits, campus or community resources and counseling.
 - Remove restrictions on post-secondary students to receive SNAP benefits. Reduce work requirements for students enrolled in full-time post-secondary or higher education institutions. Create and expand equitable food systems for college and university students, including but not limited to food cards for low-income and homeless students not eligible for SNAP to access food on and off-campus.³⁴
 - Expand Washington Connections Child Care subsidies (WCCC) to include students working towards their bachelor's degree.
 - Allow unaccompanied and low-income students to take a break from college without it impacting their financial aid eligibility.
- Allow low-income, undocumented and refugee students who need to take credit-bearing courses while taking English as a Second Language (ESL) courses in all colleges and universities to maintain financial aid and make progress towards their degree.

³² Postsecondary includes all programs after high school such as apprenticeships, training, certifications, associate degrees, and beyond.

³³ Recommendation is reflective of content in soon to be published document by the Post-Secondary Basic Needs Taskforce. Content will be available here: [Student Supports | WSAC](#)

³⁴ Recommendation is similar to recommendations from the Post-Secondary Basic Needs Taskforce.

Universal support for basic human rights

Create pathways for economic security for YYA and families who have been historically (and continue to be) marginalized from participating in Washington's thriving economy

 **Universal prevention:** Build strong partnerships with private sector industries to create and increase entry-level positions in high growth industries across the state. Focus on opportunities for low income and housing unstable YYA, with a specific focus on trans women of color, pregnant and parenting YYA engaged in sex work or experiencing trafficking, and neurodivergent YYA as they are more severely impacted by stigma and lack of opportunities. Provide support to translate current experiences to workforce, resume building and finding opportunities that match interest and expertise. — **Positive examples:** [Career Connected Learning](#)

- Co-design training and increase awareness in the private sector on adverse childhood experiences (ACEs), impact of stress on the brain, trauma and needs of neurodivergent and trans, queer, and two-spirit³⁵ YYA, and mental health conditions to ensure that young people with different needs can access jobs and be supported in their roles without encountering stigma and bias.
- Increase the timeline of support to neurodivergent young people connected to jobs through the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation to 12 months of mentorship to navigate issues that might come up past the current limit of support.
- Create a support network for neurodivergent and young people previously engaged in sex work who are in the workforce to gather feedback from mentors and get input on navigating workplace dynamics.

³⁵ Due to the differential experiences of non-cisgender people with employers and the high unemployment rate of trans people, we want to highlight the need for supports specifically designed with them.

Universal support for basic human rights

 **Primary prevention:** Provide broadly available cash assistance for young people or their caregivers to meet their basic needs.³⁶

 **Universal prevention:** Annually evaluate and update income limits for access to public benefits to reflect the difference in cost of living across the state. In the analysis, ensure that caregivers do not lose all benefits if their income varies.³⁷

 **Universal prevention:** Provide cash incentive payments or higher education scholarship assistance to minor parents on TANF who have completed education and training requirements.³⁸

 **Primary prevention:** Lower the barriers to entry for apprenticeship and certification programs by not requiring completion of a GED or high school diploma to qualify for vocational programs and allowing YYA to work on the vocational program and high school completion simultaneously.

 **Primary prevention:** Provide comprehensive financial education and support for foster youth, low-income youth and young adults, and unaccompanied minors. Create concrete pathways for YYA to build credit and participate in the economy, housing and other interconnected systems that support their well-being.³⁹

³⁶ This recommendation is aligned with Strategy 6D in the [Dismantling Poverty in Washington](#) strategic plan

³⁷ This recommendation is aligned with Strategy 6B in the [Dismantling Poverty in Washington](#) strategic plan

³⁸ Recommendation is aligned with recommendations in the [Alone Without A Home report](#)

³⁹ Youth advocates at [The Mockingbird Society](#) have consistently called for financial literacy education geared towards young people in foster care and/or experiencing homelessness.

Eliminate racism in systems and supporting youth and families impacted by them

Require training in systems and support youth and families impacted

 **Tertiary prevention:** Create a funding stream for multimodal therapy, supportive services and flexible funding to support BIPOC youth and families impacted by government systems including but not limited to juvenile and criminal legal, and child welfare. Additionally invest in recommendations co-created with young people in the report [Improving Stability of Youth Exiting Care](#) to prevent homelessness from child welfare, behavioral health and juvenile legal systems.

 **Early and Later Secondary prevention:** Require history, diversity, equity and anti-racism training across all state agency workers with an emphasis on judges, law enforcement and front-line staff. Identify and acknowledge harm that government systems, from local to state level, have caused to communities of color. Require acknowledgment of previous and current harms caused. Prioritize individual and organizational learning so that state workers can work to dismantle racism within their agencies, policies and programs.

 **Early and Later Secondary prevention:** Train judges and prosecutors in understanding the impact of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) on brain development and adolescent brain development.

 **Primary prevention:** Require a minimum standard of training for law enforcement across the state that includes an understanding of trauma and its impact on brain development. Invest in supportive services for police to understand and deal with their individual and personal trauma and understand the impact of stress on their behavior to reduce police violence.

Eliminate racism in systems and supporting youth and families impacted by them

Design services to meet the needs of marginalized communities

Across the continuum: Employ peer specialists in the delivery of services and system navigation across behavioral health, health and human services, schools, housing systems, and legal system. Specifically, employ, train and support those who identify as BIPOC, LGBTQ2+, neurodivergent, and/or experience physical, intellectual or developmental disabilities.

Across the continuum: Partner with and pay young people and caregivers with lived expertise to design programs, services, and policies at the state, county, city government and in community-based organizations; specifically, those who identify as BIPOC, LGBTQ2+, neurodivergent, and/or experience physical, intellectual or developmental disabilities.⁴⁰ Include lived experts on state, county and local level advisory and steering committees. Provide compensation for participation on committees.⁴¹

 **Universal prevention:** Ensure language accessibility of state, local and regional level programs.

 **Early Secondary prevention:** Create a process in the juvenile legal system that allows a young person to talk directly to the judge and court staff in a trauma-informed, safe space so that they can advocate for themselves before any decision is made on their case.

⁴⁰ Recommendation reflect and overlap with research insights and recommendations from the [Black Brilliance Research Report](#)

⁴¹ Recommendation is also reflected in [Preliminary Strategic Plan: Prevention of Youth Homelessness](#)

Eliminate racism in systems and supporting youth and families impacted by them

 **Primary or Tertiary prevention:** Fund centralized diversion through BIPOC organizations to ensure that young people have access to basic needs, access to a diversity of housing and opportunities to move out of state to live with a caregiver if there is an opportunity.

Eliminate racial bias in systems

 **Universal prevention:** Ensure all new policies in the state go through anti-racism screening to not perpetuate existing inequalities. Review previous policies to decolonize them. Increase capacity of the Office of Equity to support this effort.

 **Early and Later Secondary prevention:** Support the court system in updating their practices, processes and approaches, so they are trauma-informed and anti-racist, especially in the juvenile context

 **Tertiary prevention:** Create equitable access to housing by updating Coordinated Entry guidelines.

- Prioritize young people under 25 in the screening tool and utilize a youth specific CE assessment tool.
- Make exits from jail or prison qualify as “homeless” on CE prioritization assessment.
- Include each police or system involvement as a vulnerability factor.
- Prioritize parents involved in the child welfare system.

Shifting resources to Black, Indigenous and people of color (BIPOC) communities

Direct state funding to support organizations run by and working directly with predominantly BIPOC communities

Across the continuum: Reduce siloed requirements around funding from the state to ensure people's whole health and well-being is supported and is not based on outcomes siloed by department needs.

 **Universal prevention:** Provide more state funding to BIPOC and "By and For" organizations at the community level. Ensure funding is flexible and includes technical assistance to support the application process. Utilize innovative approaches such as participatory budgeting to shift decision making power to "By and For" organizations. BIPOC By and For organizations that support basic needs, education access, after-school programming, employment and economic services, sex-worker support, cultural engagement etc should be prioritized. Include wellness centers or youth services run by Tribal nations.

Ensure the workforce reflects the demographics of those served

Recommendations are aligned with or complementary to findings and recommendations from the [SPARC Phase One Study Findings](#) by the [Center of Social Innovation](#).

Across the continuum: Ensure each organization working in human services is representative of the community served (BIPOC, LGBTQ2+, neurodiverse, survivors of trafficking, sex-workers) from case managers to leadership to board; make funding contingent on the organization representing the community being served.

  **Universal and Primary prevention:** Fund mentoring programs for youth of color and neurodivergent as free after school programs across the state where youth learn life skills, are exposed to different careers and build a strong network of caring adults.

Next steps

Next steps required to actualize the recommendations from this report include:

1. Set up and program manage a cross-system coordinating body that includes agency stakeholders, legislators, community-based organizations working in prevention and a steering committee of lived experts to analyze fiscal needs for the implementation of the recommendations.⁴² Ensure lived experts are paid for their time.
 - a. Identify agency leads for each of the recommendations including stakeholders within the agencies to lead the work. Prioritize incorporation of high priority recommendations into agency asks to legislature.
 - b. Develop a plan of action for implementation. Coordinate across systems at the state and local level to implement recommendations. Conduct ongoing accountability meetings with agency leadership, lived experts and the cross-system coordinating body to ensure that the recommendations are co-designed and implemented according to the vision of the Steering Committee.
 - c. Develop required legislative workgroups that include steering committee members and incorporate recommendations into existing workgroups to champion the transformative changes required to support whole family well-being.
2. Fund community-based preventative services across the state and fund the development of a call-in line and website to access the services.
3. Set up the data infrastructure with Research, Data and Analytics team at Department of Social and Health Services to measure identified outcomes highlighted in this report. Incorporate outcome measure into Results WA dashboards.

⁴² The cross-system coordinating body was identified as a recommendation in the [Preliminary Strategic Plan for the Prevention of Youth Homelessness](#).

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