



**COMMUNITY
CARE
COLLECTIVE**
BY FUTURE FOCUSED

Community Care Collective: 2026 Policy Recommendations

The Community Care Collective's Youth Behavioral Health Council and Advisory Group, representing youth leaders, educators, employers, clinicians, policymakers, and community organizers across New Mexico co-created 2026 policy recommendations. Together, we envision a youth-led, healing-focused behavioral health system grounded in equity and intergenerational leadership.



1. Invest in Youth Behavioral Health Career Pathways & Community Capacity

Advance SB3's mandate to grow New Mexico's behavioral health workforce by investing in youth behavioral health career pathways.

Key Priorities:

- Fund CTE programs, dual credit offerings, microcredentials, and paid pre-apprenticeships/internships/practicums in Behavioral Health.
- Support the development of apprenticeships and fellowships to expand learning, leadership, and workforce readiness.
- Fund or match community-based host site or employer funds used for sustainable stipends, training, and mentorship support.
- Fund and require youth voices in policymaking.
- Address barriers to credentialing, reimbursement, and compensation to ensure pathways lead to sustainable careers. (See Recommendation 2.)

2. Expand Equitable Access to Credentials & Competitive Wages

Eliminate financial and structural barriers preventing youth and early-career professionals from entering or advancing in the field.

Key Actions:

- Offer direct financial support for tuition, exams, supervision, CEUs, and paid practicum experiences, with clear funding sources and sustainability plans.
- Increase Medicaid reimbursement rates for Community Health Workers, Certified Peer Support Workers, Family Peer Support Specialists, and Youth Peer Support Specialists (YPSS) to ensure living wages and reduce turnover.
- Create state-recognized, stackable credential pathways for youth peer support roles that are portable across regions and institutions.
- Implement targeted outreach and incentives to attract and retain diverse youth, especially in rural and underserved areas.

3. Expand School-Based Mental Health Promotion & Community Capacity

Invest in school-based education, prevention, and mental health services that support youth wellbeing across the full continuum of care, from early intervention to direct clinical support.

Key Priorities:

- Funding to increase school-based behavioral health supports, including counselors, social workers, behavioral health professionals, and School-Based Health Centers.
- Fund youth-led mental health promotion and peer support programs to make students co-creators of their systems and environments of care.
- Fund certified peer support workers and trained school-based advocates who help youth navigate behavioral health and education systems while uplifting youth voice and diverse family structures.
- Support the community schools model, partnering with local organizations, elders, and cultural practitioners to integrate arts, movement, and healing practices.
- Ensure equitable access for Indigenous, multilingual, disabled, and low-income students through funding accessibility initiatives that close resource gaps.

4. Strengthen Regional Planning Through Youth-Centered System Alignment

Ensure SB3 Regional Behavioral Health planning structures are designed to engage schools, elevate youth voice, and include culturally responsive prevention.

Key Steps:

- Fulfill the \$1 billion Behavioral Health Trust Fund commitment through a clear, phased plan that sustains long-term investment in behavioral health and workforce development.
- Formally include youth and community representatives from diverse backgrounds, including those who are not in traditional school settings, in regional planning. Align agency investments (NMPED, HED, DOH, CYFD, DWS, HCA) to coordinate school and community based mental health efforts.
- Recognize schools as essential behavioral health infrastructure and ensure sustained funding for providers and community partners.
- Create a public accountability mechanism requiring agencies to report how youth and community input shapes policy and outcomes.

5. Center Youth and Family Leadership, Language Justice & Decolonial Approaches

Reimagine behavioral health systems through shared leadership, healing justice, and cultural resilience.

Key Recommendations:

- Engage youth and caregivers as co-creators in policy and program design—not just participants—with commitments to Indigenous partnership and language justice.
- Include youth-led initiatives within regional priorities and define transparent processes for youth and family partnership in the planning process.
- Replace punitive or carceral responses with healing-centered, community-based approaches rooted in dignity while repairing and healing harm.
- Fund paid leadership roles for young people with lived experience, including mentorship and advocacy training.
- Invest in intergenerational third spaces—community spaces for art, music, movement, and cultural healing outside school or home environments.



Together, these recommendations will build a more equitable, youth-led behavioral health system.

Scan the QR Code to get in touch with Community Care Collective.

Thank you to our Community Care Collective Advisory Group, Future Focused Education's Youth Behavioral Health Council, and community partners.