

Expanding Youth Access to Health Resources in Nevada County: A Pilot Program Proposal

Summary

This proposal recommends implementing Health Supply Boxes to improve youth access to essential health supplies throughout Nevada County. Many young people face barriers to obtaining basic health resources due to cost, transportation, or privacy concerns. By introducing a pilot program in community-based locations and a district-approved school site, the County can evaluate demand, reduce barriers to care, and promote preventative health practices among youth.

1. Introduction

Access to basic health resources is a critical component of youth well-being. However, many students in Nevada County are unable to consistently access items such as hygiene products, first aid kits, and other preventative health supplies. These gaps can lead to negative health outcomes and increase risk behaviors.

The Teen Health Subcommittee proposes creating Health Supply Boxes, modeled on existing public health vending machines in Nevada County, to provide free, discreet access to essential health supplies.

2. Background and Rationale

Youth in rural communities often face barriers to accessing healthcare and related resources, including:

- Limited transportation
- Financial constraints
- Lack of awareness
- Stigma around seeking help

These challenges prevent many students from accessing preventative care, even when resources exist elsewhere.

This proposal aligns with the Youth Commission's mission to identify, connect, and advocate for youth needs and builds on past recommendations that emphasize access, equity, and community partnerships.

3. Research

Research shows that making health resources easy to access helps more people actually use them, especially teens. A study from the National Institutes of Health found that public health vending machines are effective and widely accepted, especially when they are placed in locations that are easy to reach and offer privacy.

Local data from Nevada County Public Health supports this. In the past 12 months, public health vending machines distributed **7,348 free health supplies**, and usage continues to increase. The most popular items were toothbrush kits (913), grooming kits (881), and first aid kits (706). This shows a strong need for basic health and hygiene items, not just emergency supplies.

Data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention also show that improving access to health resources and education supports youth health and reduces risky behaviors. Many teens face barriers like stigma, transportation, and not knowing where to go, which makes it harder to get what they need.

Overall, both national research and local data show that providing free, easy-to-access supplies through Health Supply Boxes is a practical and needed solution.

4. Youth Survey Findings

To better understand the gap between teens and how they access health resources, the Teen Health Subcommittee has developed and distributed a youth survey.

Preliminary findings (88 responses as of May 14) indicate:

- Nearly 70% of teens could see themselves or one of their peers using Health Supply Boxes
- Time (54%), stigma (39%), confidentiality (21%) and transportation (16%) were the biggest barriers to health access
- 86% of teens said school would be their preferred location for Health Supply Boxes

Key takeaways:

- Most teens can see themselves or someone they know using a Health Supply Box
- Finding a location for Health Supply Boxes that is confidential and non-stigmatizing is important
- School are the preferred location for Health Supply Boxes

These results will directly inform the types of resources included in the boxes (all supplies will be pre-approved by sites), preferred locations, and ensure that youth know how and where to access these resource boxes.

5. Proposal

The Teen Health Subcommittee recommends the development of Health Supply Boxes that provide free access to essential items, which may include:

- Hygiene products (toothbrushes, deodorant, menstrual products)
- Grooming kits
- First aid kits
- Electrolyte packets for hydration
- Other health products, information, and resources

These boxes would function as a smaller-scale, community-based version of existing public health vending machines, increasing accessibility while maintaining confidentiality. All Health Supply Boxes would be approved in advance by the site (i.e., school district approval for school sites) and all health products would be approved by the site in advance.

6. Pilot Program and Implementation

To ensure effectiveness, we recommend launching a pilot program with the following components:

Pilot Locations

Based on survey feedback, the pilot should be placed in community-based, youth-accessible locations, such as:

- Youth-serving non-profit organizations

- Pilot school site (district-approved)

This approach addresses concerns about vandalism and ensures accessibility in safe, supportive environments.

Data Collection and Evaluation

The pilot will include:

- Tracking usage and restocking frequency
- Collecting anonymous student feedback
- Evaluating survey data alongside real-world usage

This data will determine whether expansion to additional locations, including other school campuses, is appropriate.

Partnerships and Operations

Successful implementation will rely on strong community partnerships, including:

- **Nevada County Public Health**
 - Providing or contributing supplies
 - Purchasing Health Supply Boxes
 - Coordinating restocking efforts
 - Offering guidance on products and health resources
- **Schools and Student Leadership Programs**
 - Student leadership groups (e.g., ASB or leadership classes) may assist with regular restocking and monitoring
 - Encourage youth involvement and ownership of the program
- **Local Nonprofits and Youth Organizations**
 - Supporting outreach and awareness efforts
 - Hosting Health Supply Boxes in their facilities

This collaborative model promotes sustainability while keeping costs and staffing needs manageable.

7. Funding Considerations

The implementation of Health Supply Boxes is expected to require minimal to moderate funding, primarily for purchasing the boxes, purchasing supplies, printing materials, maintenance, and restocking.

Potential support may include:

- Contributions or in-kind support from Nevada County Public Health, including supplies and restocking assistance. Public health has already set funds aside for this next year to support implementation.
- Partnerships with local organizations and non-profits
- Exploration of grants or public health funding opportunities

Further evaluation is needed to determine the most sustainable funding structure. The pilot program will help assess overall costs and long-term feasibility.

8. Conclusion

Expanding access to essential health resources is a critical step toward improving youth health, safety, and equity in Nevada County. By implementing a pilot program for Health Supply Boxes, the County can take a proactive, data-driven approach to addressing health access gaps.

With support from the Board of Supervisors, this initiative has the potential to:

- Reduce barriers to care
- Promote preventative health practices
- Support vulnerable youth populations
- Strengthen partnerships between youth, schools, and public health agencies

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