

**GENERIC CHARACTERISTICS OF ADOLESCENT-FRIENDLY HEALTH SERVICES
WITHIN WHO-DEFINED DIMENSIONS OF QUALITY**

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Dimensions of quality.

Equitable: Services are provided to all people who require them.

Accessible: Ready access to services is provided.

Acceptable: Care meets the expectations of the people who use the services.

Appropriate: Required care is provided, and unnecessary and harmful care is avoided.

Comprehensive: Care provision covers all aspects of disease management from prevention to rehabilitation; psycho-social aspects of care are considered.

Effective: Care produces positive change in health status or quality of life of the patient.

Efficient: High quality care is provided at the lowest possible cost.

Source: WHO. Issues in health service delivery. Discussion paper 1 - Improving provider skills: Strategies for health workers to modify and improve skills. WHO. Geneva. 2000.

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To improve the **equity** of services at the point of service delivery level:

1. **Policies and procedures** are in place

- that do not restrict the provision of health services on any terms

What does this mean?

There are no laws and policies that restrict the provision of health services by age, sex or other areas of difference.

Why is this important?

In many countries, as result of laws and policies, the provision of some health services to all or some groups of adolescents is unauthorized or even illegal. These restrictive laws and policies are a serious obstacle to public health. They are also contrary to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) which says that young people have a right to life, development, and "the highest attainable standard of health and to facilities for the treatment of illness and rehabilitation of health." (Article 24)".

- that address issues that might hinder the equitable provision and experience of care

What does this mean?

Procedures are in place to ensure that no factor whether it be based on age, sex, social status, cultural background, ethnic origin, disability or any other reason:

- hinders the **provision** of health services to all or some groups of adolescents;
- hinders the **ability** of all or some adolescents from obtaining health services.

Why is this important?

Adolescents will not attend a point of service delivery if they feel excluded or discriminated against in any way.

2. **Health-care providers**

- treat *all* their patients with equal care and respect, regardless of status

What does this mean?

Health-care providers administer the same level of care and consideration to all adolescents regardless of age, sex, social status, cultural background, ethnic origin, disability or any other reason.

Why is this necessary?

Being treated disrespectfully is a strong disincentive for adolescents to seek help. Being treated equally will have a positive effect on adolescents, encouraging them to attend further appointments and recommend the service to their peers.

Support staff

- treat *all* their patients with equal care and respect, regardless of status

What does this mean?

Support staff administer the same level of care and consideration to all adolescents regardless of age, sex, social status, cultural background, ethnic origin, disability or any other reason.

Why is this important?

Being treated disrespectfully is a strong disincentive for adolescents to seek help. Being treated equally will have a positive effect on adolescents, encouraging them to attend further appointments and recommend the service to their peers.

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To improve the **accessibility** of services at point of delivery level

1. **Policies and procedures** are in place

- that ensure health services are either free or affordable to all adolescents

What does this mean?

All adolescents are able to receive health services free of charge or are able to afford any charges that might be in place.

Why is this important?

This is particularly relevant in adolescents who are likely to have limited financial means of their own. Adolescents who are dependent on their families may not want to 'add to the burden' by asking for money to pay for services. They may also be reluctant to disclose why they need to obtain health services.

2. **Point of delivery** has

- convenient working hours

What does this mean?

Health services are available to all adolescents during times of the day that are convenient to them.

Why is this important?

Adolescents may find it difficult to obtain health services if the working hours coincide with times when they are busy with study, work or other activities.

- convenient location

What does this mean?

Health services are physically easy to reach for all adolescents either on foot, on public transport or with their own transport.

Why is this important?

Adolescents are more likely to obtain health services if they can get to them easily, quickly and with little or no transport costs involved.

3. **Adolescents**

- are well informed about the range of health services available and how to obtain them

What does this mean?

Adolescents are aware of what health services are being provided, where they are provided, and how to obtain them.

Why is this important?

Informing adolescents about the range of health services available to them can help to encourage usage of services.

4. Community members

- Understand the benefits that adolescents will gain by obtaining health services, and support their provision

What does this mean?

Community members (including parents) are well-informed about how the provision of health services could help their adolescents. They support the provision of these services as well as their utilization by adolescents.

Why is this important?

Communities are likely to oppose the provision of health services to adolescents if they do not understand - or trust - their value. Engaging community members in a respectful discussion and working to create a shared understanding on this issue will help to ensure that the required health services can be provided, and obtained, without opposition.

5. Outreach workers, selected community members and adolescents themselves are involved in reaching out with health services to adolescents in the community

What does this mean?

Efforts are under way to provide health services close to where adolescents are. Depending on the situation, outreach workers, selected community members (e.g. sports coaches) and adolescents themselves may be involved in this.

Why is this important?

Adolescents may be reluctant to visit health facilities and other points of delivery. Some of them may be unable to do so. Outreach workers, selected community members and adolescents themselves can extend the reach of health services into the community. The provision of health information and services by people they can easily relate to and in places they frequent may be welcomed by adolescents.

To improve the **acceptability** of services at point of delivery level

1. **Policies and procedures** are in place

- that guarantee client confidentiality

What does this mean?

Policies and procedures are in place that maintain adolescent confidentiality at all times (except where staff are obliged by legal requirements to report incidents such as sexual assaults, road traffic accidents or gunshot wounds, to the relevant authorities).

Policies and procedures address:

- registration - information on the identify of the adolescent and the presenting issue are gathered in confidence,
- consultation - confidentiality is maintained throughout the visit of the adolescent of the point of delivery (i.e. before, during and after a consultation),
- record-keeping - case records are kept in a secure place, accessible only to authorized personnel,
- disclosure of information - staff do not disclose any information given to or received from an adolescent, to a third party (for example, family members, school teachers or employers) without their consent.

Why is this important?

Adolescents are very sensitive to privacy and confidentiality. Adolescents from around the world say that concerns about lack of privacy and confidentiality discourages their use of health services.

2. **Health-care providers**

- give adequate information and support to enable each adolescent to make free and informed choices relevant to his or her individual needs

What does this mean?

Health-care providers present sufficient information about possible treatment options. They check understanding, encourage questions and respond to them fully. They support their adolescent patients in selecting the most appropriate option for their individual needs.

Why is this important?

As adolescents mature, they need to take more responsibility for their own health. Offering good information and support on health-related matters will empower them to make their own decisions.

- are motivated to work with adolescents

What does this mean?

Health-care providers who are enthusiastic to work with adolescents.

Why is this important?

Adolescents will pick up the positive atmosphere created by health-care providers who are motivated in their work. Such an atmosphere will help reduce anxiety and facilitate communication.

are non-judgemental, considerate and easy to relate to

What does this mean?

Health-care providers do not criticize their adolescent patients even if they do not approve of their words and actions. They are considerate to their patients and reach out to them in a friendly manner.

Why is this important?

Health care providers do not need to abandon their own beliefs and values, but they must ensure that these beliefs and values do not negatively influence the way in which they deal with their adolescent patients. In addition, the ability to respond to adolescents with empathy and sensitivity will contribute to the development of good communication and mutual respect.

Judgemental, inconsiderate and unfriendly behaviour will hinder communication. It is also likely to turn adolescents away.

- are able to devote adequate time to their patients

What does this mean?

Health-care providers are able to dedicate sufficient time to deal effectively with their adolescent patients.

Why is this important?

Adolescents may find it difficult to communicate, be shy or frightened and may need extra time and encouragement to talk about their real concerns.

- act in the best interests of their patients

What does this mean?

The decisions and actions of health-care providers have only one criterion - the best interests of their adolescent patients. Every decision and every action is based on a thorough assessment of the patient's condition and social context, as well as a careful consideration of the views of the patient.

Why is this important?

This may be difficult if there is a tension between the interests of the adolescent and his/her family or community, or between the wishes of the adolescent and the potential impact on his/her well-being. It may be made more difficult if the health-care provider identifies with the views of the patient's family or community, or is insensitive to the views of the patient.

3. Support staff

- are motivated to work with adolescents

What does this mean?

Support staff who are enthusiastic to work with adolescents.

Why is this important?

Adolescents will pick up the positive atmosphere created by support staff who are motivated in their work. Having a positive experience of health services will encourage adolescents to attend appointments, return for services when they need them, and recommend the service to their peers.

- are non-judgemental, considerate and easy to relate to

What does this mean?

Support staff do not criticize their adolescent patients even if they do not approve of their words and actions. They are considerate to adolescents and reach out to them in a friendly manner.

Why is this important?

The attitudes and behaviour of security guards, receptionists, cleaners and other types of workers who have contact with adolescent patients can make a big impact on them.

Support staff do not need to abandon their own beliefs and values, but they must ensure that these beliefs and values do not negatively influence the way in which they deal with their adolescent patients. In addition, the ability to respond to adolescents with empathy and sensitivity will contribute to the development of good communication and mutual respect.

Judgemental, inconsiderate and unfriendly behaviour is likely to turn adolescents away.

4. Point of delivery

- ensures privacy

What does this mean?

The point of service delivery is located in a place that ensures the privacy of adolescent users. It has a layout which is designed to ensure privacy throughout an adolescent's visit. This includes the point of entry, the reception area, the waiting area, the examination area and the patient-record storage area.

Why is this important?

Adolescents give high priority to privacy. They are more likely to obtain the health services they need if they are confident that they will not be seen by anyone else, and that the privacy of their records will be maintained.

- ensures consultations occur in a short waiting time, with or without an appointment and (where necessary) swift referral

What does this mean?

Adolescents are able to consult with health-care providers at short notice, whether they have a formal appointment or not. If their medical condition is such that they need to be referred elsewhere, the referral appointment should also take place within a short timeframe.

Why is this important?

Adolescents are more likely than adults to be deterred by long waiting times or by rigid appointment-making policies. Having to wait for an appointment in advance could lead to a missed appointment or seeking help from other possibly less effective or even harmful service providers offering shorter waiting times.

- lacks stigma

What does this mean?

A point of service delivery which is discrete in its activities and can be visited by an adolescent with no risk to his or her reputation should they be seen by other members of the community (e.g. family members, friends or acquaintances).

Why is this important?

Adolescents may not want to be seen in or be associated with health facilities that are well-known in the community for providing a particular type of health service, (i.e. a clinic with a notice board announcing that it is an STI clinic).

- has an appealing and clean environment

What does this mean?

A point of service delivery which is welcoming, attractive and clean.

Why is this important?

Adolescents - like adults - may not want to go to a poorly maintained and dirty place.

- has an environment that ensures physical safety

What does this mean?

A point of delivery service for adolescents which guarantees their safety and security at all times.

Why is this important?

Adolescents will stay away from a point of service delivery if they feel it exposes them to the risk of physical harm.

- provides information using a variety of methods

What does this mean?

Informational materials that are relevant to the health of adolescents served by the point of delivery are available in different formats (e.g. posters, booklets and leaflets). They are presented in a familiar language, are easy to understand and are eye-catching.

Why is this important?

The adolescents who visit the place may not know what they need to, about the health problems that could affect them. They may have received incorrect information from their peers or other sources. They may have questions but may be embarrassed to ask their parents, teachers or others.

5. Adolescents

- are actively involved in the assessment and provision of health services

What does this mean?

Adolescents are given the opportunity to share their experiences in obtaining health services, and to express their needs and preferences. They are involved in certain appropriate aspects of health service provision.

Why is this important?

Involving adolescents in assessing service provision, and in actually participating in service provision can help make health services more sensitive and responsive to their needs.

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The **appropriateness** of health services for adolescents is best achieved if

1. The health services required to fulfil the needs of all adolescents are provided either at the point of delivery or through referral linkages

What does this mean?

The health needs and problems of all adolescents are addressed by the health services provided at the point of delivery, or through referral linkages. The services provided meet the special needs of marginalized groups of adolescents, as well as those of the majority.

Why is this important?

All adolescents should be able to obtain the health services that meet their needs either from one point of delivery, or from a set of points of delivery that are linked together in a helpful manner.

2. Health-care providers deal adequately with the 'presenting issue' yet strive to go beyond it, to address other issues that affect the health and development of their adolescent patients

What does this mean?

Health-care providers deal adequately with the issue for which the adolescent patient has sought help. They also make use of the contact to tackle other health issues affecting their patient.

Why is this important?

This practice will ensure that issues that the adolescent was not aware of, or concerned about, will be revealed and tackled.

The **comprehensiveness** of health services for adolescents is best achieved if

1. The health services provided cover promotive, preventive, curative and rehabilitative responses to a condition

What does this mean?

In addition to responding to the presenting issue appropriately (e.g. properly diagnosing and treating an STI), the health service provided, covers other relevant aspects of good case management (i.e. education on preventing future infections).

Why is this important?

A holistic approach which addresses all the relevant aspects of good case management will contribute best to adolescent health and development.

2. Adolescents are addressed as individuals, taking into account their physical, psychological and social needs

What does this mean?

Health-care providers treat their adolescent patients as individuals with their own unique needs. In other words, they carry out an assessment which covers the physical, psychological and social aspects of a condition, and then respond to this in a comprehensive manner.

Why is this important?

Adolescents are a varied group and their health and development needs vary according to age, sex, stage of development, life circumstances and so on. A 'one size fits all' approach to diagnosis and treatment will not tackle the complete range of their issues.

The **effectiveness** of health services for adolescents is best achieved if

1. Health-care providers have the required competencies

What does this mean?

Health-care providers have the required knowledge and skills to work with adolescents, and to provide them with the required health services.

Why is this important?

Health-care providers need to be competent in working with adolescents in general, in the 'adolescent-specific' aspects of providing promotive, preventive, curative and rehabilitative services, as well as in interpersonal relations and communication.

2. Health service provision is guided by technically sound protocols and guidelines

What does this mean?

Health service provision is based on protocols and guidelines that are technically sound and of proven usefulness. Ideally they should be adapted to the requirements of the local situation and approved by the relevant authorities.

Why is this important?

In using such tools, health-care providers are assured of the best course of action in responding to their adolescent patients.

3. Points of service delivery have the necessary equipment, supplies and basic services to deliver health services

What does this mean?

Each point of service has the necessary equipment, supplies (including medicines) and basic services (e.g. water and sanitation) needed to deliver the health services that is required to.

Why is this important?

Without the basic materials health services cannot be provided effectively. The provision of health services in such a context may endanger the health of adolescents.

4. Services are delivered as specified in protocols and guidelines

What does this mean?

Health-care providers delivery health services in line with the protocols and guidelines that they have been directed - and trained - to use.

Why is this important?

Following established protocols and guidelines helps ensure that best practices are employed. Health-care providers may not follow the required protocols and guidelines either because they are unable or unwilling to (e.g. because they are time-consuming or difficult to do).

A **quality improvement** process is in place, whereby

1. Points of delivery have a system to collect, analyze and make use of data

What does this mean?

A practical and effective system is in place for data on different aspects of a point of service delivery's operations to be collected, analyzed and fed back to staff members and other stakeholders for appropriate action.

Why is this important?

A system (as described above) is indispensable for identifying and solving problems that arise, and for improving - and/or sustaining improvements in - the quality of health service provision.

2. Points of delivery have a system to provide staff members with the support that they need to perform to the best of their abilities

What does this mean?

A practical and effective system is in place for health-care providers and support staff to draw attention to problems that they encounter and to work with their peers and supervisors to solve them. Staff members feel supported by their colleagues. They also feel motivated to do their best, as part of a team.

Why is this important?

A supportive working environment will contribute to improving the performance of all staff members, and thereby the quality of health service provision.

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