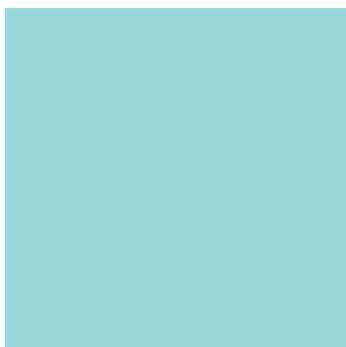


# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: TEENS TAKE ON HEALTH REPORT

APRIL 2014



**LISTENING TO TEENS:** How We Can Help Youth Shape A Healthier Future



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Ultimately, the future of our country's health belongs to our teens. To ensure the brightest possible outlook, two years ago Molina Healthcare and 4-H embarked on a joint initiative, *Teens Take On Health: Solutions for a Healthy America*.

The goal of this initiative was to prepare teens to take ownership of their health, promote healthy living in their families and communities, and become health leaders as they grow into adulthood. Molina and 4-H worked together to encourage teens to think critically about health issues and create viable solutions to help them live balanced, healthy lives.

Using its experience providing government-sponsored programs for over 30 years, Molina brought a wealth of information about working with low-income and minority populations to this initiative. There are 2.1 million Americans across 11 states that are currently enrolled in Molina Medicaid plans – over 25% of them Hispanic, and many adolescents.

4-H's Healthy Living programs educate youth and inspire them to lead healthy lives that balance physical, emotional and social health. Through these programs, 4-H youth are learning not only how to make smart and healthy decisions for themselves, but also giving back to their communities so their friends and families can do the same.

4-H directed the *Teens Take on Health* initiative while Molina's engagement staff teamed with neighborhood schools and teen centers to ensure the participation of low-income youth in each phase of the campaign.

**The *Teens Take On Health* initiative was implemented in three phases. Teens were asked to:**

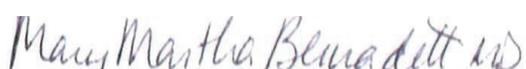
1. Describe their health concerns through a social media survey campaign
2. Compete to make the best original video demonstrating solutions to health issues
3. Team up in Town Hall Meetings to define the nation's most significant health issues and design bold new solutions to address their top health concerns

We used a powerful facilitation method called Liberating Structures to keep all participants successfully engaged in the Town Hall Meetings that took place in five states (California, Florida, Maryland, Michigan and Utah). Not only did teens get involved, they learned how to plan and run the meetings themselves.

It was a rewarding process, showing us that the health of America is in good hands with our teens. In fact, through this initiative, we learned that the ingredient needed more than any other in order for our teens to move forward successfully is better support from us through healthy living programs that offer solutions to the key health issues faced by youth today.

Molina and 4-H are committed to providing teens with the assistance and encouragement they need for all of us to enjoy a new generation of health in America.

Sincerely,



Martha Molina Bernadett, MD, MBA  
Executive Vice President of Molina Healthcare



Jennifer Sirangelo  
President and CEO, National 4-H Council

Joe\* wishes his parents would stop smoking and be more active in their children's lives. *"Throughout my life it has been more about buying cigarettes than spending time with my sister and me. I have also seen my dad's health deteriorate because of his habitual smoking."*

Erika\* is worried that many people can't find healthy foods where they live. *"Not a lot of people know what a food desert is," she said. "After learning about the problem, I am suggesting community gardens as part of the solution. I know they are not the only answer, but they can definitely help."*

And Jose\* is tired all the time. He wishes his family would eat dinner earlier so he could get to bed. *"I don't even get close to eight hours of sleep,"* he said. Lack of sleep together with the pressures of school and family leave Jose and his peers feeling anxious and depressed.

Everyone is paying attention to the Affordable Care Act and its impact on healthcare today. But who is paying attention to the future of healthcare? Our teens. And what they think and do now may have more of an impact on future costs than anything else. It's time we listened and inspired them to be part of the solution for a healthier America, not part of the problem.

Who knew that our teens craved home-cooked meals and wanted to go to bed earlier? Who knew teens were willing to limit video games or set family exercise schedules? Who knew they wanted more personal time and stress relief? Now we know. And now it's time to do something meaningful to help teens make the changes they yearn for.

Stress, healthcare, lack of sleep, obesity and chronic illness—teens today are worried about their health. They are worried, but they also have ideas and solutions. This is the exciting and inspiring conclusion of the newly released *Teens Take On Health* report. Launched in 2012 by National 4-H Council and Molina Healthcare, *Teens Take On Health* is a youth-led initiative to engage young people across the country in an interactive dialogue about health.

The goal: to hear directly from teens about the health issues that matter to them—and then use that information to create meaningful changes teens can act on. What emerged was a picture of teens ready to make real lifestyle changes to address their own health—as well as their families' and communities'.

You may be surprised by what teens are saying, and you'll definitely be inspired:

*"Being a part of a large family (four children and two working parents), sometimes there is medicine and procedures that are still not affordable—even though my parents both have health insurance—because there are so many kids in my family."*

*"Fast lives, [we are] too rushed, forced to eat fast food because of a busy schedule."*

*"We need to promote stress relief and personal time."*

*"We worry about my parents' and grandparents' diabetes and the potential of my younger family members getting it. A solution could be diabetes awareness classes and classes on how to cook for your diabetes."*

\* Not their real names.



## Teens Speak Out: Videos, Social Media, Town Halls

Teens had the chance to voice their concerns via the tools and technology they know best: through videos and social media as well as face-to-face town hall conversations with peers. Nearly 1,000 teens from diverse backgrounds participated in one or more of these research activities. The research was conducted in three phases from late 2012 through early 2014. (See page 8 for specifics on each phase.)

### WHAT TEENS SAID

**Obesity Is a Top Concern:** Obesity is a critical issue facing society, and a top concern with teens as well. Teens clearly saw obesity as an urgent personal health concern as well as a public health issue. They knew that they and their families were eating less healthy food, not drinking enough water and were not active enough to maintain a healthy weight. And they understood the connection between improved food/nutrition and increased physical activity in preventing or eliminating obesity.

**Sleep, Stress and Mental Health Are Real Issues:** Teens reported they weren't getting enough sleep, needed help managing and reducing stress, and were concerned about mental health needs in their communities. Teens across all economic and demographic levels saw sleep, stress and mental health as vital components of "health"—highlighting the growing urgency of these issues.

**Healthcare Access and Cost Matters:** Adults aren't the only ones thinking about healthcare access and cost. Teens were sophisticated enough to recognize that they and their families needed better access to healthcare, that healthcare costs are too high and that health insurance is important. Critically, teens also recognized that they needed family, community and public policy support to live a healthy lifestyle.

**Health Problems Are Perpetuated at Every Level:** The high cost of healthy food, and the abundance of preservatives, chemicals and other additives in processed food—teens saw these bigger issues as clear pieces of the health puzzle and barriers to healthy living. They understood that health problems and solutions exist at multiple levels: personal, family, organizational, community and policy. Their suggestions for solutions ranged from changes in their personal behavior to changes in public policy.



## Teen Solutions

Teens did more than just identify their top concerns. They had concrete and thoughtful suggestions based on their own experiences. And the majority clearly saw that they themselves had a role to play in leading change—whether that meant changing a personal behavior such as drinking less soda, or encouraging their community to open a free fitness facility.

**Personal and Family Action:** *“I would like my family to be more active every day. I have learned in school for years how important it is to exercise every day but it’s hard when the people you spend the most time with do not make it an important activity.”*

Teens knew they had to take personal responsibility for their health by eating better and being active, but they also wanted their families to be involved. They suggested ways to involve family by grocery shopping together and doing physical activities as a group through family fitness nights or “play days.”

**Community and School Action:** *“Have workout stations placed throughout the community, in parks, on trails, by stores, etc... They are free of charge and anyone can use them. These are provided by the government.”*

Teens wanted schools and communities to take real steps to help their families live healthy lives. They suggested creating community/school gardens, expanding farmers markets and offering healthy living classes. And they had ideas about ways to engage entire communities through activities such as local food drives, designing a fair to raise awareness about community health and opening facilities offering healthy living programs for all ages. For schools, they suggested replacing typical junk food vending machines with ones that offer healthy options.

**Public Policy Action:** *“Don’t tax whole foods and fresh produce. This will lower the cost and encourage people to eat healthier.”*

Teens had clear concerns about the lack of availability and the cost of healthy food. They were worried that families that **do** want to eat well or be active are limited by things beyond their personal choices. Many suggested removing or reducing taxes and subsidizing healthy food. They also proposed limiting the sale of processed and fast foods near schools; changing state and federal laws regarding food coloring, chemicals, fats, additives and growth hormones; increasing the legal age limit for purchasing energy drinks; requiring large businesses to provide monetary incentives for good health practices; and

## Key Findings

Teens spoke clearly and identified their top concerns:

- **Obesity** is an urgent personal and family concern—the number one issue for teens.
- Teens are worried about **stress, lack of sleep and mental health.**
- Teens are anxious that their families **don't have the healthcare they need** to stay healthy.
- **Improving health** will take more than personal lifestyle changes—it will require changes at the family, community and policy levels.

permitting Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) cards to be used to purchase prepared salads.

True to their generation, teens also saw the value of using technology as a tool to improve health. Ideas included creating programs or apps to encourage and/or track physical activity, making exercise more fun through gaming and monitoring food intake.

### Teens Are Ready to Take on Health!

The results from this research tell us one thing: we have a chance today to harness the ideas, energy and enthusiasm of this generation. We can work with teens to create truly effective and successful healthy living programs that are engaging, fun and relevant—for all youth. Teens are eager to take steps toward healthy living, they are ready to engage their families and their community, and they are willing to advocate for public policy changes.

Even more compelling and exciting is that teens understand that there won't be quick fixes in the journey toward better health. They see the complexity of health issues *and* they realize that solutions must come from all sectors. They are ready to do their part to actively create a dynamic culture of health that involves families, communities, and even government.

### Next Steps: Turning Research Into Action

How can National 4-H Council and Molina Healthcare act on the issues and solutions offered by these teens? It's clear that the teens' responses and concerns echo a conversation that is happening across the country—in living rooms, schoolrooms and the hallways of government. The time is right to expand public outreach and education initiatives that emphasize healthy living in general, and youth health in particular.

What's more, it's evident that youth see themselves as part of the solution. **Teens have spoken clearly and the door is open:** They are looking for opportunities to improve their health and well-being.

What happens next will depend on the broad participation and support of many different partners to help create the healthy living programs that teens are demanding. In fact, to be successful, it is clear that multiple partners **must** be involved in healthy living programs for youth, including state and local 4-H staff, youth and volunteers.



National 4-H Council and Molina Healthcare have pledged to continue to apply and expand the following principles to their existing healthy living programs. Together, we call on youth development organizations and all organizations that are in a position to engage and influence youth—such as schools and community programs—to do so as well.

National 4-H Council's objectives are to:

- Develop and enhance programs around mental and emotional health, including anti-bullying and stress management programs
- Provide leadership opportunities to help teens use the power of the youth voice
- Model and reinforce healthy behaviors at youth events, making sure they include nutritious food, physical activity and early bedtimes during weekday programming

Molina Healthcare will focus on three specific areas as a result of these findings that will contribute to its mission of improving the health of traditionally underserved communities:

- Engage teens to develop health education and social media materials that inspire their peers toward healthier behaviors
- Give greater emphasis to socio-emotional issues in work with adolescents, especially sleep and stress
- Develop train-the-trainer materials on positive youth development to incorporate in Molina's existing community engagement work

The *Teens Take On Health* initiative has given National 4-H Council and Molina Healthcare new resolve to deepen efforts to improve the health of today's youth. We'll turn teen ideas into actions by giving them a forum to lead the way. And we will collaborate and share our expertise with each other in order to create a robust *Teens Take On Health* initiative that will shape a brighter and healthier future for all youth.

## Study Details

Teen responses were gathered from the following activities conducted from late 2012 through early 2014:

### **Phase One: Social Media Survey:** *183 youths*

Teens answered a series of three survey questions that were posted on Facebook. They were asked what they would change about their parents' health, how social media and technology affect health, and what could be done to improve health in their local communities. Teens who did not have access to Facebook were given the option to complete an online survey.

### **Phase Two: National Video Contest:** *82 youths*

Teens were invited to submit a 90-second video describing a health challenge and a proposed solution. Eighty-two videos were submitted through an online portal. Five finalists received \$500 each, and the grand prizewinner received an all-expense paid trip to New York City with their family.

### **Phase Three: Town Hall Conversations:** *539 youths in five states; 81 youths at National 4-H Youth Summit on Healthy Living*

State 4-H programs in California, Florida, Maryland, Michigan and Utah took the lead in planning town hall meetings. The states were strategically selected in locations where Molina Healthcare serves low-income families. Additional youth were engaged at the National 4-H Youth Health Summit. The town hall events successfully reached both minority youth and teens from low-income households. Over half of the attendees were identified as racial minorities and more than half were from low-income homes.

National 4-H Council and Molina Healthcare also conducted a scholarly review of health research, policies and programs that complemented the teen views expressed in the project's research. This literature review provided a context for interpreting the *Teens Take On Health* report. Link to full report: [www.4-H.org/teenstakeonhealth](http://www.4-H.org/teenstakeonhealth).

### **About National 4-H Council:**

National 4-H Council is the private sector, non-profit partner of the Cooperative Extension System and 4-H National Headquarters at the U.S. Department of Agriculture. 4-H programs are implemented by the nation's land-grant universities, and annually reach more than 6,000,000 youth between the ages of 5 and 18. Learn more about 4-H at [www.4-H.org](http://www.4-H.org).

### **About Molina Healthcare:**

Molina Healthcare is focused on providing solutions for government-funded health programs. The company began in 1980, when Dr. C. David Molina cut the cost and raised the quality of health care for patients who'd been going to the ER for primary treatment, by opening a community clinic. Today, Molina Healthcare serves approximately 2.1 million members across 11 states through its health plans. The combined effort of Molina's health plans, clinics and information systems simplifies access to health care, empowering 5.3 million lives around the country. For more information, visit [www.MolinaHealthcare.com](http://www.MolinaHealthcare.com).

