



ADVOCATES FOR YOUTH

2017 Youth Policy Agenda

Rights. Respect. Responsibility.

 **Advocates
for Youth**
Rights. Respect. Responsibility.

YOUTH POLICY AGENDA

YOUNG PEOPLE ARE FIGHTING HARD EVERY DAY TO MAKE OUR WORLD A BETTER PLACE. FROM IMMIGRATION REFORM AND CLIMATE CHANGE TO THE BLACK LIVES

Matter movement, young people are front and center, pushing for change on issues that impact their daily lives in the face of enormous political obstacles - and the reproductive and sexual health, rights and justice movement is no different. Our society owes it to young people to recognize their rights to honest sexual health information; to accessible, confidential, and affordable sexual health services; and to the resources and opportunities necessary to create sexual health equity for all youth. In service of this goal, Advocates for Youth surveyed over 125 of our core youth activists who are active participants in Advocates' youth programs around the United States and the global south, to identify their priorities and needs. We conducted in-depth follow-up conversations with over 20 of them.

The result is our **2017 Youth Policy Agenda**, which lays out young people's vision for a society that they deserve. As the United States transitions into a new Presidential Administration, Congress, and state legislative sessions, Advocates for Youth and our youth activists are more committed than ever to making this vision a reality.

A FRAMEWORK GROUNDED IN CENTERING YOUNG PEOPLE

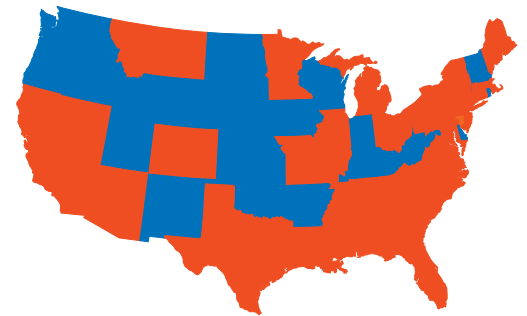
ADVOCATES' YOUTH POLICY AGENDA IS A BLUEPRINT, DRIVEN BY THE UNIQUE PERSPECTIVES OF OUR YOUTH

activists and centered in the belief that young people's sexuality is not only a natural and healthy part of human development, but a part of their identity that should be celebrated and embraced. To address our nation's gaps in sexual health, such as unintended teen pregnancy rates or access to medically accurate and confidential information and services, including those most impacted by the issue is critical. Doing so creates more inclusive and effective decision-making processes while achieving better health outcomes through more relevant intervention policies and programs. When it comes to bold and innovative ideas to addressing sexual health barriers, young people are part of the solution, not the problem. If we want better health outcomes for our communities then we must center young people.

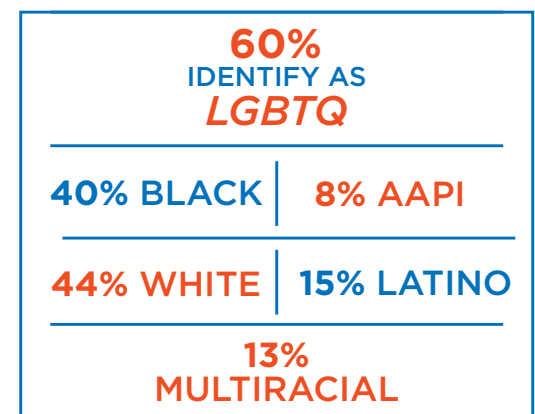
This **Youth Policy Agenda** recognizes that one's race and ethnicity, nationality, immigration status, gender identity or expression, sexuality, location, and many other factors impact one's ability to access medically accurate, confidential, and culturally responsive sexual health resources and services. It is crucial to take an intersectional approach to policy advocacy - i.e. an approach that acknowledges that many different and related system of oppression, domination, and discrimination overlap or intersect - because our country's history with race, gender and class is a long and complicated one, where the bodies of young people, LGBTQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer/questioning) individuals and communities of color are often controlled by others and members of these communities are criminalized simply for existing.

Coercion tactics and forced sterilization practices during the 1970s by the federal government targeting young women and communities of color led to 100,000 to 150,000 young women being sterilized each year. As an immediate response to Roe v. Wade, the Hyde Amendment

OUR YOUTH ACTIVISTS ARE:



FROM 27 STATES + D.C.



made it illegal to use federal funding to fund abortion care targeting low-income communities and women of color, ultimately making abortion inaccessible to many in 1976. In 1996, Welfare reform spurred funding for abstinence-only-until-marriage programs, which deny young people life-saving information about contraception options, encourage harmful gender stereotypes, and stigmatize LGBTQ young people. Today, 43 states have some form of Parental Notification and Involvement (PNI) laws, which require parents to be notified and/or provide consent for minors to receive reproductive and sexual health services, threatening the safety of young people by forcing them to disclose health decisions, regardless of the threat of violence or abuse in their homes. These examples are part of a laundry list of policies and programs that have detrimental effects on young people in communities across the country and around the world. Policymakers must use an intersectional lens to recognize the diversity of lived experiences of young people, ensure that the policies that impact young people's daily lives reflect that diversity, and achieve real change in youth reproductive and sexual health

The **Youth Policy Agenda** is the culmination of Advocates for Youth and youth activists from across the country and the global south working in partnership to outline the policy priorities and recommendations for the policymakers that make decisions on our lives every day. We are committed to working with policymakers, at all levels of government, to implement an agenda that makes progress in five priority areas. These critical categories are based on what young people need in order to have the opportunity to lead sexually healthy lives and to become



**“We exist!
Queer people
exist. There’s
no point in
acting like it is
a dangerous
lifestyle.”**

-Tori, CAMI Alabama

YOUNG PEOPLE NEED:

- **INCLUSIVE, SHAME-FREE CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE AND LGBT-INCLUSIVE COMPREHENSIVE SEXUALITY EDUCATION AND INFORMATION;**
- **INDEPENDENT AND CONFIDENTIAL ACCESS TO THE FULL RANGE OF SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH SERVICES;**
- **INSTITUTIONS AND COMMUNITIES THAT PROVIDE SAFE AND SUPPORTIVE ENVIRONMENTS AND EQUITABLE DISTRIBUTION OF OPPORTUNITIES AND RESOURCES;**
- **INTERSECTIONAL POLICIES THAT FULLY ADDRESS THE DIVERSITY OF THEIR BACKGROUNDS, IDENTITIES AND EXPERIENCES AND CENTERS THE MOST MARGINALIZED;**
- **A SOCIETY THAT VIEWS SEXUALITY AS NORMAL AND HEALTHY AND TREATS YOUNG PEOPLE AS A VALUABLE RESOURCE.**



“From the first day of sex education, boys and girls were separated and we were told that we would get in trouble if we said anything to the boys. The first thing I did when a boy asked what we learned was to tell him, and I got in trouble. From then on I knew that it was going to be a big deal that the guys and girls had to keep secrets about their bodies.”

-Mariah, Campus Organizer

YOUNG PEOPLE NEED INCLUSIVE, SHAME-FREE COMPREHENSIVE SEXUAL HEALTH EDUCATION AND INFORMATION

sexually healthy adults.

TO BUILD EMPOWERED, HEALTHY LIVES, YOUNG PEOPLE NEED ACCURATE AND COMPLETE INFORMATION ABOUT THEIR HEALTH AND RIGHTS, AS WELL AS CONFIDENCE in their own safety and the support of the communities around them as they develop and express their identities, desires, and needs. They need a society that is not afraid to recognize youth sexuality as a normal and natural part of becoming adults.

When sexuality is approached with silence and shame, young people face violence, increased risk of negative health outcomes, unhealthy relationships, and bullying and discrimination. Yet, much of our federal, state, and local funding for sex education programs is designated for abstinence-only-until-marriage programs that reinforce shaming messages. Even when school districts do invest in more comprehensive approaches to sex education, teacher training is often lacking or nonexistent.

Instead, we must provide young people with honest, age appropriate, comprehensive sexual health education, in school as well as in our families and communities. This means that we equip young people with an understanding of their own and other's bodies, gender identities and expressions, and sexual orientations, of how to build healthy relationships and practice consent. It means teaching about safer sex options such as condoms and

contraception methods, HIV and STI testing and treatment, and PEP and PrEP. And it means teaching about the full range of pregnancy options, including parenthood, adoption and abortion care

THUS, ADVOCATES FOR YOUTH AND OUR ACTIVISTS CALL ON POLICY MAKERS TO:

- Pass laws such as **The Real Education for Healthy Youth Act** to provide federal funding for sex education programs that are comprehensive, culturally responsive, and inclusive. This funding must include teacher training, and incentivize programs designed within communities and with youth input.
- Protect and expand federal funding for evidence-informed programs that currently exist, such as the **Teen Pregnancy Prevention Program**, and the **Personal Responsibility Education Program**, as well as CDC's **Division of Adolescent and School Health**. Stop providing funding, such as that provided through the federal Title V State Abstinence Education Grant Program, for programs that focus exclusively on promoting abstinence-only "sexual risk avoidance", and that fail to educate students about contraception and safer sex methods, and reinforce harmful gender stereotypes.
- Pass state laws requiring that school districts teach sex education that is comprehensive, culturally responsive, and LGBT-inclusive, and provide sufficient training for teachers. State policymakers should look to **The Comprehensive Model Sex Education Legislation**, updated in fall 2016 by Advocates for Youth, Planned Parenthood Federation of America, The Sexuality Information and Education Council of the U.S., and the American Civil Liberties Union for guidance.
- Pass school district policies to provide age appropriate sex education from Kindergarten through 12th grade, that is comprehensive, culturally responsive, and LGBT-inclusive. School districts should commit to

ALMOST **80%** OF
YOUNG PEOPLE
SURVEYED RECEIVED
SEX EDUCATION
IN SCHOOL THAT
DIDN'T INCLUDE
ALL THE
INFORMATION



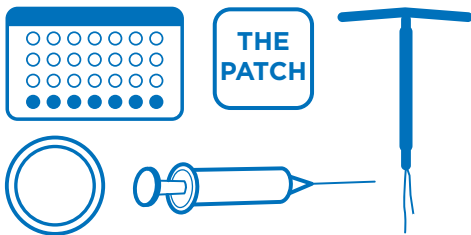
THEY
WANTED OR
NEEDED TO KNOW
OR
DIDN'T INCLUDE
OR REFLECT THEIR
EXPERIENCES



BY AGE
20
75%
OF
YOUNG
PEOPLE
HAVE HAD
SEX

implementing these policies by developing or adapting curricula with input from the local community and young people themselves. For more information on what model policies and curricula should look like, please contact Advocates for Youth.

ALMOST $\frac{1}{3}$ OF
YOUNG PEOPLE
TRIED TO GET
THEMSELVES OR
SOMEONE
THEY KNOW
CONTRACEPTION
AND WERE
UNABLE
TO GET IT
CONFIDENTIALLY



UNDER OBAMACARE
THE NUMBER OF
**UNINSURED
MILLENNIALS**
FELL BY
HALF
FROM **23%** IN 2013
TO **11%** IN 2016

YOUNG PEOPLE NEED INDEPENDENT AND CONFIDENTIAL ACCESS TO THE FULL RANGE OF SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH SERVICES

YOUNG PEOPLE DESERVE TO BE ABLE TO ACCESS THE FULL RANGE OF HEALTH CARE SERVICES

they need, independently and without worrying about affordability or that their privacy will be violated. They should be able to trust those that provide services, as well as the accuracy and quality of the services they are receiving. And they should be able to rely on the guidance of trusted adults and other credible resources so that they do not have to face health care decisions alone.

When we do not empower young people as decisionmakers for their own health, when they view health care services with suspicion and fear, they may delay or forgo care, leading to higher rates of unprotected sex, unintended pregnancy, untreated STIs, and other negative health outcomes. Yet, our health care system leaves many young people without health insurance coverage or an easily accessible place to find services. For services that young people are able to access, state and federal law often fails to protect their privacy or respect their right to make their own choices. And many health care providers do not provide services in ways that make all of their young patients feel safe and supported.

Instead, we must build a health care system that is affordable and easily accessible for young people. We must ensure young people both over and under the age of majority are able to access quality HIV and STI testing and treatment and PrEP; the full spectrum of reproductive healthcare services including all contraception options, prenatal care, maternity care, and abortion; mental health services; services for sexual assault survivors; and trans-related healthcare services for trans and gender nonconforming young people.

In accessing the services they need, young people should be supported in involving their parents and loved ones. They should also be able to trust that their privacy will be respected, and be



“I come from a poor family that hasn’t had health insurance. I don’t always prioritize my reproductive health because it’s expensive and it’s burdensome financially. I care about my body, but then I see the price tag for service and I feel I have to put it off...Transportation and income and access to health insurance will really change how you interact or choose not to interact with a reproductive health care provider.”

-Richelle, 1 in 3 organizer

assured that including parents or other loved ones in their health care choices is not a requirement for receiving care. At the same time, we must ensure that medical professionals are equipped to provide the advice and support young people need: that they are ready to serve LGBTQ young people without judgment, ready to counsel youth on contraceptive and pregnancy options without coercion. We must provide the resources to support medical professionals from a range of communities, and who can serve different communities in the way that works best for the patients they serve.

THUS, ADVOCATES FOR YOUTH AND OUR ACTIVISTS CALL ON POLICY MAKERS TO:

- Protect the gains made by the **Affordable Care Act (Obamacare)** in ensuring health care coverage for all, as well as extend affordable and quality health insurance coverage to all young people, no matter their income or immigration status. Require that all health insurance - regardless of the employer, school, or other entity providing that insurance cover all necessary health services including contraception and abortion care, including by passing the **Equal Access to Abortion Coverage in Healthcare Act**.
- Protect and increase federal funding for vital health services programs, particularly the **Title X Family Planning Services Program** and the **Ryan White HIV/AIDS Program**, to increase the population these vital programs are able to serve.
- Pass federal and state protections, such as Advocates for Youth’s **MY Access Act**, to end federal and state requirements of parental notification and consent for young people under 18 seeking health care and guarantee the confidentiality of young people seeking health care regardless of age or reliance on parents for health insurance coverage.
- Provide federal and state funding to expand the training that health care providers receive both before and while they practice medicine to include all relevant reproductive health services, cultural competency, and specific training on serving adolescent and young adult patients.
- Pass federal and state protections to ensure that pharmacies, medical providers, and hospitals cannot claim religious beliefs as a reason to deny people reproductive or other

health services.

- Maintain and expand U.S. funding for vital health services around the world, including funding for the **United Nations Populations Fund** and other family planning programs, and funding for the **President's**

**OVER
75%
OF
YOUNG PEOPLE
SURVEYED
REPORTED BEING
DISCRIMINATED
AGAINST
AT SCHOOL
BECAUSE
OF THEIR
SEXUAL ORIENTATION,
GENDER ORIENTATION,
OR GENDER IDENTITY**

Emergency

Plan for AIDS Relief. Truly fulfill the promise of U.S. global health funding by lifting harmful restrictions, including the Global Gag Rule and the Helms Amendment, which ban funding to international nongovernmental organizations who provide or even discuss abortion care.

**YOUNG PEOPLE NEED
INSTITUTIONS AND
COMMUNITIES THAT PROVIDE
SAFE AND SUPPORTIVE
ENVIRONMENTS AND
RESOURCES**

**OUR HOMES, SCHOOLS, AND COMMUNITIES
SHOULD BE SPACES WHERE YOUNG PEOPLE CAN**

thrive free from fear that they will experience harassment, violence, or sexual assault at the hands of their peers or of adults, including police. If they have faced violence, harassment, or assault, youth need to know where they can turn for trusted help or guidance, and they deserve institutions and communities that will embrace and include them rather than treat them with stigma or shame.

When young people fear bullying and harassment in their communities; when schools, law enforcement and the judicial system don't invest in young people but instead treat them as targets; when young people are isolated from any trusted resources or community, we are denying them the resources



“The role of parents and community is to make a person comfortable with however they identify themselves. We should have their support and know that they are still there for us. Supporting any decision we make in our lives.”

-Alysa, 1 in 3 organizer



and support to build healthy lives. Yet, our high schools and colleges fail to adequately support survivors of sexual assault. LGBTQ young people report staggeringly high rates of bullying, harassment, depression, and homelessness. And schools systems continue to rely on institutional structures for discipline, such as Zero-tolerance policies, that turn classrooms into pipelines to prison, especially for Black youth and other youth of color.

Instead, our society has a responsibility to create accepting spaces and institutions that treat young people with understanding, dignity and respect. This means building inclusive and culturally appropriate resources for young people, including for young parents and survivors of sexual assault. It means giving teachers, health care providers, and other adults who work with young people the tools and training to be trusted allies for those they work with and for. And it means supporting young people in organizing their own spaces and advocating for themselves.

THUS, ADVOCATES FOR YOUTH AND OUR ACTIVISTS CALL ON POLICY MAKERS TO:

- Support young parents through federal, state, and school policies that provide for flexible attendance, child care, transportation, lactation accommodations, and continued opportunities to participate in regular academic and extracurricular programs.
- Ensure that schools implement federal **Title IX** protections against sexual assault and for sexual assault survivors to the fullest extent of the law, including by adopting affirmative consent policies, and undergoing training to provide culturally responsive services to survivors. Pass policies on the federal, state, and local levels that empower youth to speak up and combat rape culture, not that further criminalize responses to sexual assault.
- End the School to Prison Pipeline and the criminalization of youth of color by reforming zero-tolerance policies

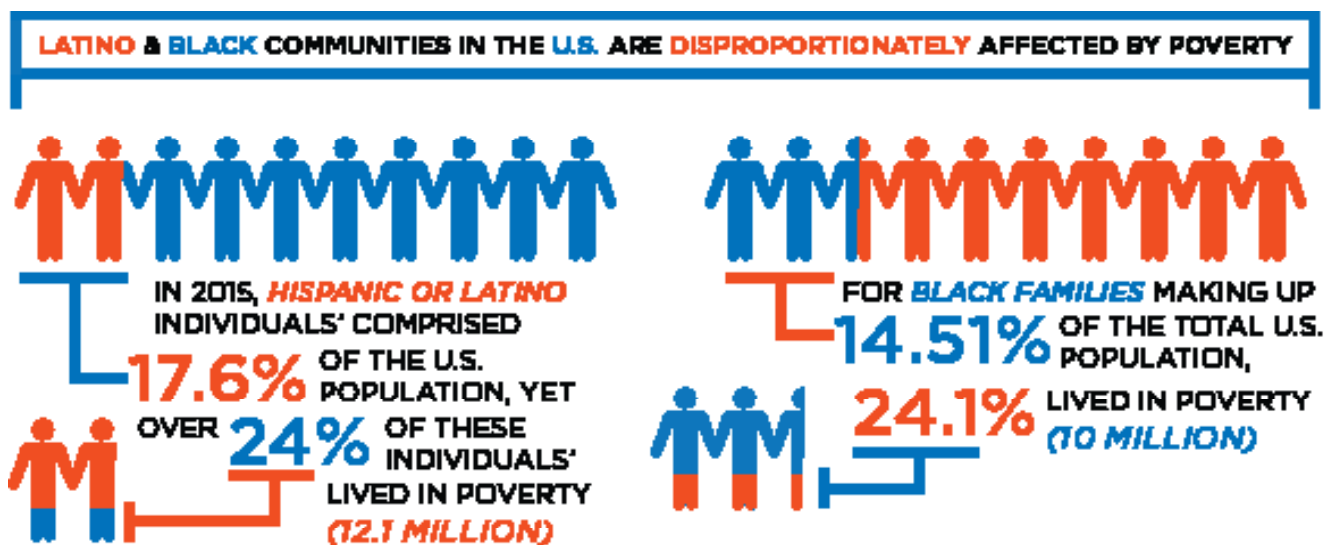
YOUNG PEOPLE NEED INTERSECTIONAL POLICIES THAT FULLY ADDRESS THEIR DIVERSITY OF BACKGROUNDS, IDENTITIES AND EXPERIENCES

YOUNG PEOPLE COME FROM ALL DIFFERENT BACKGROUNDS, IDENTITIES, AND EXPERIENCES. AN AGENDA THAT FULLY MEETS THE NEEDS OF THE DIVERSITY OF young people should respect and value the differences experienced by these young people in their community, their state and their country. Specifically, we must recognize the vast obstacles many young people face in order to access health care as young immigrants and youth of color. Social, economic, and cultural barriers limit the ability of young people from many backgrounds to receive accurate, adequate information on sexual health, and culturally and linguistically competent education and services.

Rates of HIV and other sexually transmitted infections (STIs) as well as rates of unintended pregnancy are disproportionately high among youth of color. Adequate studies that document the reproductive health care experiences and needs of this diverse group of young people are few, and there are even fewer studies disaggregating data by ethnicity within broader communities. Lack of research prevents health care providers from adequately treating youth of color - particularly LGBTQ youth of color - and prevents public health advocates from developing sufficient educational materials and programs focused on the needs of this diverse and growing population.

Immigrant youth face numerous barriers due to either their immigration status, or the status of their families, a general lack of culturally and linguistically appropriate services, and state and federal laws that prevent them from accessing safety net services in their communities. When local, state, and federal policies continue to exclude immigrant youth from accessing necessary resources in their communities, and programs like Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) leave young people uncertain of their future in the country, it is difficult for young people to think about their health care needs, or those of their families. In addition to the exclusion of DACA recipients from the ACA, young new permanent residents face legal barriers to health coverage eligibility during their first five-year of their permanent resident status.

Instead, we must invest in young people and provide them with health care services that are not only easy to get to, but are also culturally, linguistically, and economically accessible. All young people in the United State deserve legal immigration status and access to equitable health care. Young people in the United States are a diverse group, and depending on their identity, many are disproportionately at risk of negative health outcomes, confronting many different forms of health inequity. In order to serve this growing and important part of the United States population, we must listen to and address their needs.



THUS, ADVOCATES FOR YOUTH AND OUR ACTIVISTS CALL ON POLICY MAKERS TO:

- Pass the **LGBT Data Inclusion Act** and expand the scope of the **Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System (YRBSS)** to gather specific data with strong confidentiality protections in place for individuals providing their personal information - on the state of immigrant youth and youth of color, their health care needs, barriers to preventive care, and immigration status, to help address health inequity among those who are disproportionately at greater risk of negative health outcomes.
- Pass the **Youth Access to Sexual Health Services Act** to provide communities with federal funding to support partnerships and programs that give young people of color, immigrant youth, LGBTQ youth and otherwise marginalized or vulnerable young people medically-accurate and age-appropriate information and skills on how to access and obtain sexual health care and related services.
- Pass federal policies such as the **Health Equity & Access Under the Law (HEAL)** for Immigrant Women & Families Act, to ensure all lawfully present immigrants can access affordable coverage for which they are otherwise eligible, and allow immigrant women and their families to receive the health care they need, creating healthier communities and a stronger economy.
- Promote Reproductive Justice - which is, in the words of our partners, Forward Together, “the economic, social and political power and resources to make healthy decisions about our bodies, sexuality and reproduction for ourselves, our families and our communities in all areas of our lives” - as part of federal, state, and local policies



“I really need research to be focused on communities of color, and trans communities of color, because we need to work from the margins up.”

-Kiersten, Young Women of Color Leadership Council



“It’s unfair to let adults’ fears around sex hurt young people. You do so much more harm not informing a young person about sex and their sexual responsibility than you do having the conversation. Because in those silences, they ask the wrong people and get misinformation. Silence makes people feel uninformed and make uninformed decisions.”

-Lexus, Youth Resource

YOUNG PEOPLE NEED A SOCIETY THAT VIEWS SEXUALITY AS NORMAL AND HEALTHY AND TREATS YOUNG PEOPLE AS A VALUABLE RESOURCE

CULTURAL BELIEFS AND ATTITUDES PLAY A SIGNIFICANT ROLE IN THE PROMOTION OF YOUNG PEOPLE’S SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH. STEREOTYPES AND misperceptions around young people can affect the development, implementation and evaluation of sexual health programs and policies, which is why a shift in our society’s dysfunctional approach to youth sexual health is crucial. To most effectively improve youth sexual health we need our society to shift its culture away from one that stigmatizes young people and their sexual development, towards a culture that celebrates and embraces youth sexual development as a normal and healthy part of life.

Policies and programs that use stigmatizing language not only prevent young people from getting the life-saving information they need but also impact their ability to access resources. Legislation such as “no promo homo” laws, that ban teachers from discussing LGBTQ communities and relationships in any positive way - or at all - shame LGBTQ youth and further stigmatize their families. When legislators use language that stigmatizes young people and reinforces harmful gender roles and stereotypes, it creates additional barriers for young people to access information for their reproductive care that go beyond health care systems and into the classroom. When young people hear stigmatizing language in school about their sexual orientation, gender identity and other identities it creates a hostile school environment that impacts their academic performance.

Policymakers must work in partnership with young people and welcome them to the table, not only to include their unique perspective as a community that is directly impacted by sexual health policy but also because it leads to more inclusive and more effective health outcomes.

THUS, ADVOCATES FOR YOUTH AND OUR ACTIVISTS CALL ON POLICY MAKERS TO:

- Pass legislation that uplifts young people's lived experiences by using inclusive, shame-free and affirming language in legislation when speaking to reproductive and sexual health information.
- Repeal state and local education laws, such as "no promo homo" laws, that foster unsafe and hostile school environments, leaving LGBTQ students more vulnerable to bullying and harassment.
- Intentionally integrate young people in the policy and program development processes around efforts intended to reach and serve young people by developing guidance and requirements for federal, state and local agencies to ensure the participation of young people in grant review processes, advisory councils, task forces, etc.
- Invest in building a pipeline of leadership for young people so that they can play an integral role in informing policy and educating the public about issues directly impacting their communities. Organizations such as the Congressional Black Caucus Foundation and the Congressional Hispanic Caucus Institute deeply invest in young people of color by providing leadership development for our country's next generation of leaders. At a time when policymakers are often more divided than collaborative, continuing to create a pipeline of leadership for young people is critical. Policymakers must continue to fund these programs and ensure that young people are at the table.



1
3

OF

YOUNG PEOPLE
THINK THE
MOST IMPORTANT
ISSUE

IS

CREATING
ENVIRONMENTS

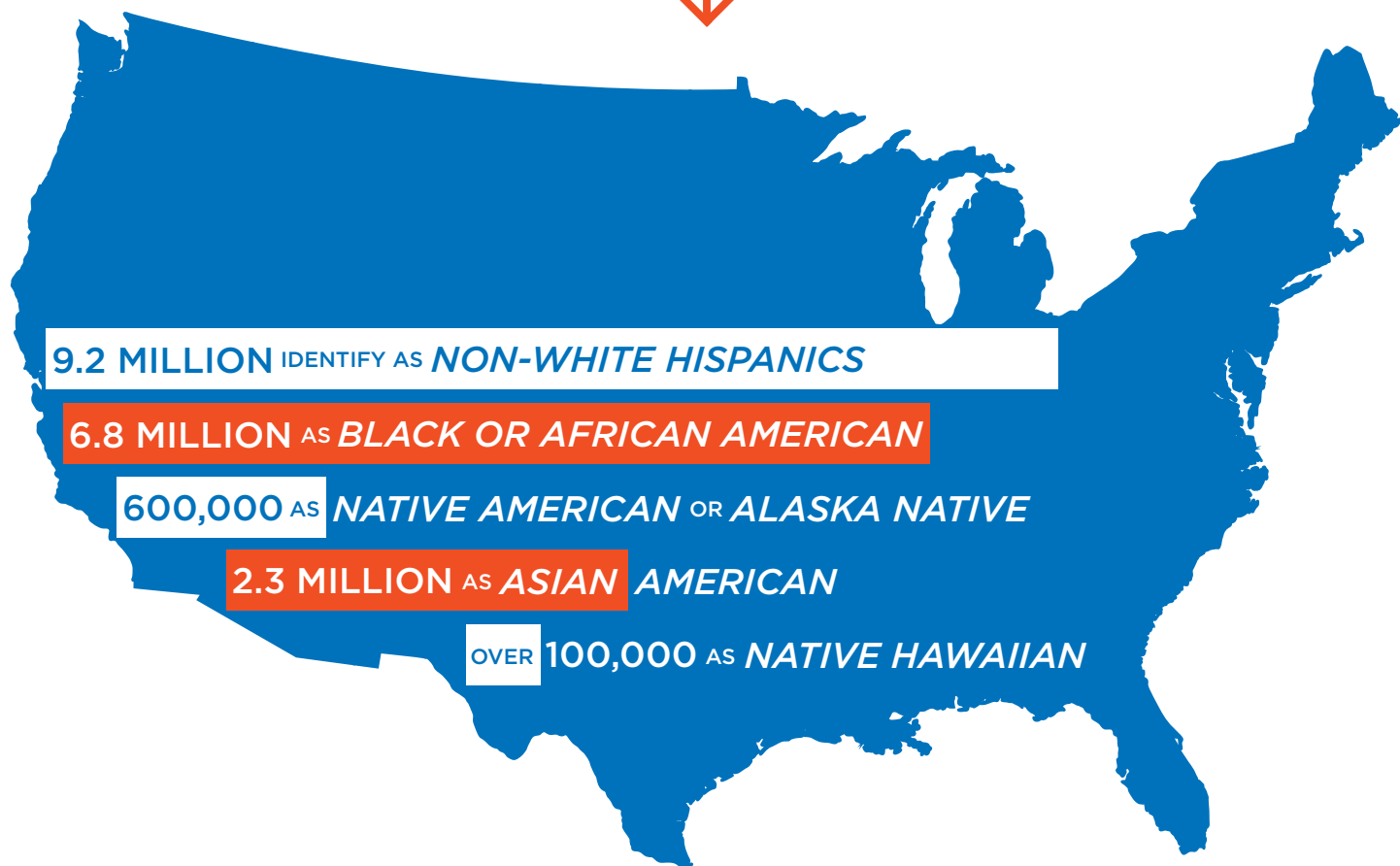
THAT ARE

FREE FROM STIGMA

MILLENNIALS ARE THE LARGEST AND MOST DIVERSE POPULATION IN THE U.S.



OF THE 43.8 MILLION YOUNG PEOPLE AGES 15-24 IN THE U.S.



A PATH FORWARD

Young people have been leading the movement for sexual and reproductive health, rights and justice for years, fighting everyday to make our world a better place. No election cycle can take that away. They are resilient, they are visionary, and they deserve policymakers who will work with them to build a society in which all young people are valued, respected, and treated with dignity; sexuality is accepted as a healthy part of being human; and youth sexual development is recognized as normal. This Youth Policy Agenda lays a path for how policymakers can begin this work, and Advocates for Youth and our youth activists will fight tirelessly to ensure that you do.

For more information, please contact Advocates for Youth's Public Policy department:

Diana Thu-Thao Rhodes, Director of Public Policy, diana@advocatesforyouth.org

Abbey Marr, State Policy Analyst, abbey@advocatesforyouth.org

Ariel Cerrud, Senior International Policy Manager, ariel@advocatesforyouth.org

Nimra Chowdhry, Policy and Law Fellow/Analyst, nimra@advocatesforyouth.org

Sophia Kerby, State Policy & Partnerships Manager, sophia@advocatesforyouth.org

OUR MISSION AND VISION

Advocates' vision is informed by its core values of *Rights.Respect.Responsibility*. (the 3Rs). Advocates believes that:

- Youth have the inalienable *right* to honest sexual health information; confidential, consensual sexual health services; and equitable opportunities to reach their full potential.
- Youth deserve *respect*. Valuing young people means authentically involving them in the design, implementation, and evaluation of programs and policies that affect their health and well-being.
- Society has the *responsibility* to provide young people with all of the tools they need to safeguard their sexual health, and young people have the responsibility to protect themselves.