

Young adults often neglected in policies and programs that could help them

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According to a report co-authored by Prof. Mark Courtney, young adults between the ages 18 to 26 are in need of better support programs due to poorer health, higher stress and more economic challenges than other generations.

Credit: Getty Images

Young adults between the ages 18 to 26 are in need of better support and programs to help them be fully productive members of society, according to a report from the Institute of Medicine. The report says individuals in this age group have poorer health, higher stress and more economic challenges than other generations.

The consensus report, "Investing in the Health and Well-Being of Young Adults," states that the time between 18 to 26 years in a person's life is particularly critical for the development of the individual and has long-

lasting implications. Mark Courtney, professor at the School of Social Service Administration, is one of the authors on the committee of experts that wrote the recent report.

"We need to shift from the Hollywood version of 'Failure to Launch' stereotype of the immature young adult who is still living at home because they're not able to make a plan towards their independence," said Courtney. "We should be looking at these young people and realizing that there are many obstacles in their way. They are a missed opportunity to be fully engaged in our society."

The report states that [young adults](#) are "too rarely treated as a distinct population in policy, programs and research. Instead they are often grouped with adolescents, or more often, with all adults."

Courtney says this group of young adults is often marginalized because there are not sufficient supports in place to help them. Marginalized young adults include those aging out of [foster care](#), those in the criminal justice system, those with disabilities and those responsible for young children. These young adults are much less likely to make a successful transition to adulthood.

Most adolescents "age out" of foster care at 18, but Courtney recommends that services be extended to the person's 21st birthday. California has studied the cost-benefit analysis and found that it is worth the investment to extend foster care to support the individual as they transition to adulthood. Another example Courtney provides is the earned income tax program, which provides a subsidy for low-income working families, but is not available to anyone under 25 years of age—a cohort with many low-income workers who are supporting families. Also, the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families provides financial assistance to help pay for food, clothing and housing, but Courtney says it provides no parenting skills support, even though many of the

recipients are young parents.

Previous generations usually followed the predictable path of graduating from high school, attending college or getting a job, moving out of their parents' or guardians' home, finding a spouse and starting a family. Courtney notes that only about half of this age group will have a two- or four-year college degree by the time they're 26. There is very little vocational training available and many [young people](#) incur debt trying to obtain a [college degree](#). The cost of independent living is high and many young adults have children outside of marriage before gaining the professional skills and income to support their children. The unemployment rate for 18- to 26-year-olds remains high while the overall unemployment rate has been declining.

Young adults are surprisingly less healthy than either adolescents or adults. The Institute of Medicine report suggests that technological changes, [economic challenges](#) and the prolonged transition to adulthood contribute to the health problems of this age group. They are more likely to be obese, sedentary, have high stress levels and engage in high-risk behaviors. A recent study showed almost one-fifth of this age group had a mental illness in the past year, but the majority did not receive treatment.

"The government, non-profits and community organizations have been somewhat tone-deaf to the needs of this distinct population," Courtney said. "We need to make the same investments in this age group as we do in early childhood to make sure they thrive. We need young adults to be healthy, productive and skilled to ensure a strong national workforce, a global competitiveness, public safety, and to help them successfully parent the next generation."

Provided by University of Chicago

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