



# TEEN HEALTH MISSISSIPPI

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PRESS TOOLKIT

## HEADQUARTERS

125 S. Congress St., Suite 1330  
Jackson, MS 39201  
601-487-1228

124 East Second St.  
Clarksdale, MS 38614











# TEEN HEALTH MISSISSIPPI

WE BELIEVE ALL YOUNG PEOPLE DESERVE ACCESS TO  
INFORMATION AND RESOURCES THEY NEED FOR THEIR HEALTH  
AND WELL-BEING.

## OUR MISSION

To build capacity within youth and communities to attain equitable health outcomes.

## OUR VISION

Healthy Youth. Whole Communities.

## KEY TOPICS OF INTEREST

- Inclusive, Equitable and Youth-Friendly Healthcare
- School- and Community-Based Sex Education
- Mental Health Supports
- Innovation in Youth-Led Programming
- Youth Advocacy
- Leadership Skills and life skills for all youth

# TEEN HEALTH MISSISSIPPI



## OUR TEAM

### **Hope Crenshaw, PhD**

Executive Director

[hope@teenhealthms.org](mailto:hope@teenhealthms.org)

### **Josh McCawley**

Deputy Director

[josh@teenhealthms.org](mailto:josh@teenhealthms.org)

### **Kimberly Massey**

Director of Operations

[kimberly@teenhealthms.org](mailto:kimberly@teenhealthms.org)

### **Amber Helsel**

Director of Communications

[amber@teenhealthms.org](mailto:amber@teenhealthms.org)

### **Patrina Williams**

Director of Education & Training

[patrina@teenhealthms.org](mailto:patrina@teenhealthms.org)

### **Mariaha Amos**

Project ME. Coordinator

[mariaha2@teenhealthms.org](mailto:mariaha2@teenhealthms.org)

### **Whitney French**

Director of Healthcare & Community Engagement

[whitney@teenhealthms.org](mailto:whitney@teenhealthms.org)

### **Triuna Taylor**

Director of Community-Based Education, Gulf Coast

[triuna2@teenhealthms.org](mailto:triuna2@teenhealthms.org)





# PRESS RELEASE

## TEEN HEALTH MISSISSIPPI, A YOUTH-FOCUSED ORGANIZATION

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

### **Teen Health Mississippi Unveils New Vision for Holistic Youth Well-being**

Jackson, MS—Teen Health Mississippi (THMS) proudly announces the launch of its transformative mission and vision, signaling a significant shift towards equitable health outcomes for youth and communities through a comprehensive and holistic approach to youth well-being.

#### **The Journey Towards Holistic Well-being**

Founded with a focus on sex education and youth-friendly health care, THMS recognizes the necessity to embrace holistic approaches to address the myriad challenges faced by young people. The organization will now actively pursue equitable and supportive healthcare, community and school-based sex education, mental health supports, innovation in youth-led programming, youth advocacy, workforce development, and leadership/life skills for all youth, including justice-involved and expectant/parenting youth.

Dr. Hope Crenshaw, Executive Director of Teen Health Mississippi, emphasizes the importance of providing resources and information to support youth on their journey to adulthood. "We plan to build those resources for and with youth," she states.

#### **Healthy Youth, Whole Communities**

THMS prioritizes youth voices for equitable health outcomes, empowering advocates to shape programs and initiatives. Their impact extends from legislation advocacy to inclusive education. Collaborating with adults, THMS provides training, building the capacity of trusted adults and youth-serving organizations. They believe enhancing youth lives contributes to building healthier, happier, and whole communities.

#### **Expanding Impact Across Regions**

While the primary focus remains on Mississippi, THMS has witnessed an increasing number of young people from the Southeast and other parts of the U.S. joining the movement to uplift youth leaders' voices. Poised to impact beyond state borders, THMS eagerly seeks collaborations to advocate for youth, regardless of geographical location.

#### **A Call to Action**

As THMS unveils this transformative vision, it extends an invitation to others committed to youth well-being. The organization is ready to collaborate and advocate for youth wherever there is an opportunity to make a positive impact.

For media inquiries, please contact: [contact@teenhealthms.org](mailto:contact@teenhealthms.org).

# LEADING OUT LOUD



*"I really enjoy researching new things for content. Not only does it help spread factual knowledge to teens who don't know anything about the issue; it also teaches me things about that issue too." —Mind Elevation. Influencer*

*"I have learned how to advocate for myself and others. Teen Health has given me so many resources to use in every day challenges like talks with peers, mental health issues and even talking with adults."  
—MYCouncil youth partner*





# THMS HISTORY

## The Beginning

Mississippi First (MSF), THMS' parent organization, launched Creating Healthy and Responsible Teens (CHART) in partnership with Mississippi State Department of Health. This was the beginning of our work in teen health.

**YEAR  
2010**



## Expanding the Team

Mississippi Youth Council (MYCouncil) was founded, and our first full-time employee, under MSF, was hired to focus on teen health.

**YEAR  
2013**

## Joining WISE

In 2013, Mississippi was named a WISE (Working to Institutionalize Sex Education) state.

**YEAR  
2014**



## New Funding

Our teen health work continued to expand, and we hired another full-time staff member. We received a CDC grant and launched Focused Pregnancy Prevention for Mississippi Teens (Focus4Teens).

**YEAR  
2015**



## Five Strong

Mississippi First officially formed Teen Health Mississippi (THMS) and expanded the team to five full-time staff members.

**YEAR  
2016**



# THMS HISTORY, CONTINUED

## Spinning Off

THMS began to the spin-off process from Mississippi First in order to become a standalone nonprofit. THMS also launched the Sex Education Training Cadre (now the Teen Health Mississippi Training Cadre).

**YEAR  
2017**



## Partnering With Youth

We received new funding to expand youth engagement work. These projects included LinkedUp, Mississippi Youth Voice (MYVoice), Project ME., and the Mobilizing Youth Summit (MYSummit).



## Independence

As of January 1, 2019, THMS is a standalone 501c3. We now have a total of nine staff members and 50 contractors across Mississippi.

**YEAR  
2019**



**YEAR  
2022**

## Five Years

Teen Health Mississippi celebrated five years as a 501c3 charity.



**YEAR  
2024**

## Working With Youth And Communities

We are an organization dedicated to ensuring young people's access to info and resources for their health and well-being and uplifting them as leaders.



# Youth-led advocacy is not just a moment; it's a **movement.**



*"MYSummit taught me that youth advocacy is really important, and Teen Health (Mississippi) has also taught me that it's important to engage with the youth and help out in communities."*

*—Danija Rucker, 2023 Mobilizing Youth Summit Attendee*

*"Teen Health Mississippi has given me hope that youth can empower our generation. We can empower our peers. We can empower our families, communities. It's something that I didn't know was possible, and I am really proud to be a part of that."*

*—Shelbie Spain, MYCouncil Alumnus*

*"Being a part of (Project ME.) and THMS has impacted my life greatly. It has taught me the importance of raising awareness in my communities, schools, and to my peers about sexual health and mental health and much more of that nature beyond just health."*

*—A'Davion Bush, Project ME./MYCouncil Youth Partner*

# FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

## EVERYTHING YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT THMS

### **Does Teen Health Mississippi only work in Clarksdale and Jackson?**

Teen Health Mississippi has two offices, one in Clarksdale and one in Jackson. However, these are not the only communities that Teen Health Mississippi works in. These offices are just considered home-base for Teen Health Mississippi team members. Our programs serve youth all across the state and worked with young people and communities throughout the South.

### **Why did you change your mission and vision?**

Our new mission and vision allow us to be responsive to the challenges more youth face on their journey to adulthood. Sex education is still paramount to our work, but our new mission and vision gives us the ability to meet more youth where they are and address a variety of topics, including advocacy, workforce development, and leadership/life skills for young people.

### **Why has THMS expanded work beyond high-quality sex education and youth-friendly healthcare?**

Sex education and youth-friendly healthcare will always be part of the foundation of Teen Health Mississippi. However, ensuring the overall wellness of all young people requires us to look beyond just SRH and youth-friendly healthcare. We must look at the overall picture—their physical, emotional, mental, reproductive, and relational health—if we want healthy youth and whole communities.

### **Why is one of your focuses on sexual and reproductive health in Mississippi?**

We believe all young people in Mississippi deserve access to high-quality sex education and youth-friendly healthcare to attain their highest level of health and well-being. Our state ranks 1st in teen birth rates, 3rd in gonorrhea infections, and our state capitol, Jackson, has the 4th highest HIV infection rate among metropolitan areas in the nation. The truth of the matter is good sex education and access to youth-friendly healthcare in the state of Mississippi is truly a matter of “life and health.” We are dedicated to improving outcomes for youth in our state.

### **How is Teen Health Mississippi funded?**

Teen Health Mississippi is a 501c3 nonprofit organization registered with the Mississippi Secretary of State. We receive funding from grants, foundations, earned revenue through our trainings and contract work, and individual donations. We complete an annual financial audit at the end of our fiscal year. Our fiscal year runs from July 1-June 30. If you are interested in funding our work, email [contact@teenhealthms.org](mailto:contact@teenhealthms.org). See our financial reports [here](#).



# FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

## EVERYTHING YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT THMS

### **How do I partner with Teen Health Mississippi?**

THMS is always looking for opportunities to partner with youth and communities. Learn about our trainings at [this link](#). If you are a young person interested in joining one of our youth movements, go to [this link](#). Other ways of supporting and partnering with us include following us on social media (@teenhealthms on Facebook and Instagram) and subscribing to our YouTube channel, signing up for our newsletter at [teenhealthms.org](#), and giving a gift to support our work at [this link](#).

### **What do you offer parents who want to learn more?**

We want to ensure parents are prepared to have conversations with their young people about topics like their sexual and mental health. Our Trusted Adults trainings, which include ones on cyberbullying, talking to young people about their sexual health, intimate partner violence, and what a healthy relationship looks like. We also host public Youth Mental Health First Aid trainings, where trusted adults learn how to recognize the signs and symptoms of a young person experiencing a mental health challenge or crisis. To see our training schedule, go [this link](#). For more resources for parents, go to [this link](#). Keep up with our work by signing up for our newsletter.

### **What is abstinence-plus v. abstinence-only sex education?**

Abstinence-plus sex education emphasizes abstinence, but also teaches youth about options to prevent unintended pregnancies and STI transmission. Teen Health Mississippi works with Mississippi school districts to implement high-quality sex education policy and curricula. Abstinence-only sex ed stresses abstinence until marriage as a method of preventing unintended pregnancies and STI transmission.

### **What does it mean to be youth-friendly?**

Youth-friendly healthcare is accessible to all young people, and the services meet youth expectations and needs and improve their health.

# FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

## EVERYTHING YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT THMS

### YOUTH FAQs

#### **Do you partner with youth directly?**

We work with teens in a variety of capacities. Youth serve on our board of directors, drive our programming, and act as advisers when developing new training and resources. Specifically, our Mississippi Youth Council (MYCouncil) provides trainings and house meetings to youth around the state. We also host an annual Mobilizing Youth Summit (MYSummit) that is open to young people across the state to learn more about advocacy in their community. Participants of Mississippi Youth Innovation (MYInnovation) develop interventions and increase access to treatment and preventative healthcare for young people living with or at risk of HIV. Project ME. leverages social media as a tool for youth to connect with their peers over resources and information for their health and well-being. We are an organization dedicated to partnering with youth. We employ a 360-degree model, part of which is a youth-adult partnership. We believe that when youth and adults work together, whole communities benefit.

#### **I am a young person, and I am interested in Teen Health Mississippi. How can I get involved?**

Youth engagement is a number one priority for Teen Health Mississippi. There are many different ways that youth can be involved in our work. If you are interested in getting involved, contact Josh McCawley, our Deputy Director, at [josh@teenhealthms.org](mailto:josh@teenhealthms.org).

### TRAINING

#### **How much do trainings cost? Are trainings free?**

Teen Health Mississippi offers a variety of trainings that are geared toward youth-serving adults. This includes parents, clergy, teachers, healthcare providers, and community organizers. Many times we offer trainings in partnership with other organizations, and the trainings can be free of charge. We are also available for hire if you are looking for a specific training you want to provide. Our trainings open to the public generally cost around \$20-\$40, and scholarships are available. Trainings are free for those who work in some Mississippi counties. Contact Deputy Director Josh McCawley at [josh@teenhealthms.org](mailto:josh@teenhealthms.org) for more information. If you are interested in hosting a training or attending a training, contact Patrina Williams, our Director of Education & Training, at [patrina@teenhealthms.org](mailto:patrina@teenhealthms.org).



# BUILDING POWER WITH YOUTH AND COMMUNITIES

## PROGRAMS & INITIATIVES



MYCouncil teaches youth advocacy and policy-making skills, culminating in attendance at Capitol Day, a youth advocacy event.

MYSummit introduces young people to community-led change and teaches how to create ideas, organize, and implement programs.



Project ME. connects youth to information related to their sexual and mental health through the use of on-the-ground, community-based and social media campaigns. MYVoice is our peer-to-peer sex education youth program.

More2Me is a 4-week computer-based training for juvenile justice-involved youth that emphasizes goal setting, social network improvement, and knowledge and resources for sexual/reproductive health.



MYInnovation combines design strategies and prototyping to develop public health promotional tools. It connects youth affected by or at risk of HIV with essential health resources.

The THMS Training Cadre provides trainings and support to trusted adults, educators, healthcare providers, and faith-based and community-based organizations on topics like sex education, LGBTQ+ inclusivity, and mental health.



Creating Healthy and Responsible Teens (CHART) is a partnership between THMS and Mississippi State Department of Health that provides abstinence-plus training and education to educators in 19 school districts across the state.

Youth Friendly Health Care Trainings and LinkedUp enhance the quality of healthcare for young adults through connecting schools and healthcare providers with information about health resources.



# THMS IN ACTION

## MISSISSIPPI YOUTH INNOVATION

In November 2023, youth from THMS's MYInnovators embarked on a journey to Atlanta, Georgia, to revolutionize HIV prevention and awareness in colleges. After first piloting their program at HBCUs in Mississippi, MYInnovators were invited to Morehouse and Spelman Colleges to replicate their programming. MYInnovator Nankecia Bell's participated in a captivating discussion at the Viv Healthcare Community Summit regarding the power of HBCUs in the fight against HIV epidemic. In 2024, we look forward to establishing MYInnovator partnerships at HBCUs across the Southeast.

## 2023 MOBILIZING YOUTH SUMMIT

During a 3-day summit in June 2023, 83 youth partners from across the South gathered at Hinds Community College in Raymond to talk and learn about advocacy and making change within their communities. This year marked the fourth Mobilizing Youth Summit. Youth partners spent time creating, participating in discussion circles, and participating in breakout sessions on topics like identity, mental health, advocacy, and being an agent of change. This year's event also included a Sneaker Ball, where staff members, camp counselors, and participants mingled and danced the night away.

## CAPITOL DAY 2023

Capitol Day 2023 triumphed! MYCouncil and 50 youth from Mississippi united at the state capitol, engaging legislators to champion comprehensive sex education and vital sexual health and mental health resources. Through this empowering experience, they honed advocacy, leadership, networking, and communication skills, all the while addressing issues that matter most to them. Youth left feeling empowered by the ways they can affect change.

## THE MIND ELEVATION. PROJECT

Project ME., THMS's youth-led community-based and social media awareness initiative, reached 160,000+ youth and adults through popular social media platforms and in-person events at colleges, health fairs, churches, youth justice programs, and conferences. In partnership with the MSDH STI/HIV Program, many also received condoms and safer sex kits.







## **PARENT AND TRUSTED ADULT TRAINING**

Youth Mental Health First Aid and sex education training were the most popular workshops attended by youth-serving adults. Training hours increased by 42 percent- to over 1,000 hours of education received. THMS also piloted an intensive training that guides trusted adults through developing rapport, motivational interviewing, and discussing sensitive topics like peer groups, reproductive health, or legal challenges.

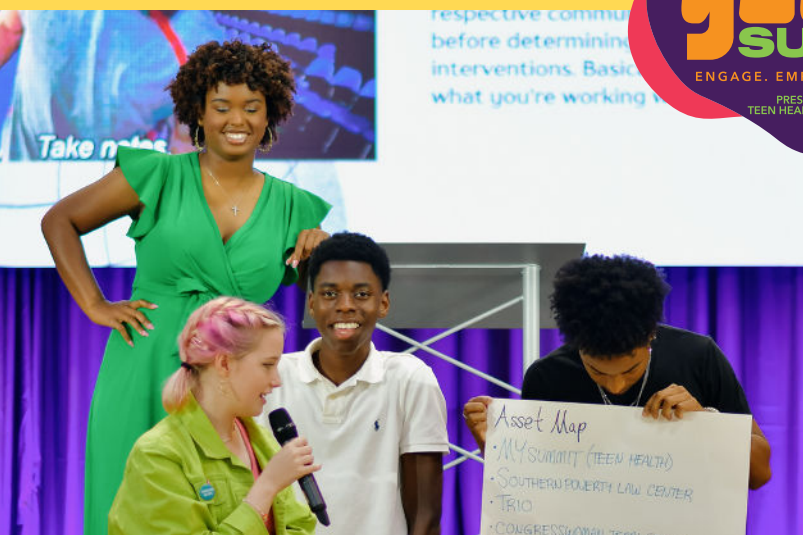
## **YOUTH-FRIENDLY HEALTHCARE**

LinkedUp partners helped reach 1,126 young adults with vital health information and referral resources. Providers at nine healthcare organizations as well as around 500 student nurses in the MS Nursing Association learned how to foster youth-friendly practices, including respect for confidentiality, remaining judgment-free, and providing medically accurate information.

## **YOUTH LEADERSHIP PIPELINE**

146 youth are part of the THMS Leadership Pipeline. They passionately contribute to MYSummit and Capitol Day, lead advocacy projects, design interventions for peers living with HIV, and create health-related social media content. Several THMS Leadership alumni now have successful careers in sexual health education, teaching, public service, and journalism. Others have joined us at THMS as either board or staff members! We're Empowering Youth to Empower Communities!









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