

## Improved Service Quality – Shared Quality Standards

### Background

Shared quality standards represent a coordinated effort to establish clear, cross-agency expectations for prevention service delivery while keeping the flexibility needed for providers to adapt to their unique community contexts. These standards are designed to strengthen consistency, access, and effectiveness across the prevention ecosystem by identifying core practices that support high-quality implementation in schools and community settings. Developed through collaborative input from Chicago-based providers, these standards address key domains such as transportation and accessibility, school engagement, relationship building, community expansion, and youth and family involvement. Together, they serve as a practical framework to improve coordination, reduce barriers to participation, and ensure that prevention services are responsive, equitable, and aligned with the needs of the communities they serve.

### Transportation & Site Access/Safety

Prevention services can only be effective if participants can reliably access them. These standards ensure that prevention organizations address the physical and logistical barriers to services, including transportation, facility inclusivity, and site safety, so that all participants may be equitably included.

- Provider organizations ensure participants have access to the transportation needed to attend services, including transit vouchers as a budgeted line item.
- Provider organizations maintain a clear, documented system for distributing and tracking transit vouchers, ensuring these resources are used appropriately and reach the participants who need them most.
- Provider organizations offer virtual service delivery options as an accessible alternative to in-person programming, applying best practices from telehealth to ensure quality.

- Provider organizations ensure service delivery sites meet the full accessibility needs of participants, going beyond baseline ADA requirements and leveraging partnerships or facility adaptations to remove barriers.
- Provider organizations maintain a current, written safety plan for each service delivery site, addressing essential components including emergency protocols and site-specific risk factors.

## School Relationships

High-quality prevention work is built on strong relationships, and building those relationships is an ongoing skill that requires practice, support, and continuity. These standards reflect the expectation that providers are equipped with the tools needed to have intentional, sustainable relationships with school partners.

- Re-engagement protocol and strategies exist for schools where access lapsed due to COVID-19 or other disruptions.
- Prevention specialists use consistent, relationship-centered approaches to engaging school administrators and staff, supported by shared tools and ongoing training and technical assistance available across agencies.
- Prevention specialists entering a new school setting have access to structured peer support, including shadowing and mentoring, in order to build competency in school engagement.
- Provider organizations engage school partners as co-designers of prevention programming, collecting input from administrators and teachers, aligning services with existing school priorities, and fostering a sense of shared ownership over the work being done at their school.
- Provider organizations have a defined approach to maintaining school relationships over time, including follow-up touchpoints after initial engagement.

## School Logistics

Chicago Public Schools are the primary setting for prevention work, and continued access relies upon strong relationships with school administration and staff. These standards establish expectations for how provider organizations enter, navigate, and maintain their presence within school systems in a consistent and effective manner. Providers are also encouraged to advocate for policy change at the district level to reduce the barriers to school entry.

- Provider organizations use a standardized introductory packet that enables school administrators to quickly understand and opt in to prevention programming. Packets may include a brief overview of services, curriculum summary, and Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) template.
- Prevention specialists complete a structured handoff to school administrators at the start of a new engagement, using the standardized introductory packet to enable staff to understand the program, their role, and expectations before services begin.
- Provider organizations advocate for and, whenever possible, secure a consistent, dedicated space within school buildings to store materials and take breaks, therefore supporting continuity of services and a stable provider presence within the school community.
- Provider organizations advocate for a centralized, streamlined process for provider background checks and volunteer clearances so that approvals are completed within a two-week window and do not require school-by-school replication.

## Expanding Beyond Schools

Reaching youth and families across a variety of settings is a hallmark of high-quality, community-centered prevention work. These standards reflect the expectation that provider organizations cultivate partnerships with community-based sites as a strategic extension of their services, thereby meeting participants where they are and deepening their presence within the communities they serve.

- Provider organizations identify and build relationships with community-based sites, including youth centers, faith-based organizations, park districts, and after-school programs, as alternative or complementary locations for service delivery.
- Provider organizations engage in strategies to reach families and caregivers, leveraging settings with lower barriers to entry like town halls and community events as entry points.

## Youth and Community Engagement

Prevention programming is most effective when it is shaped by the people it is designed to serve. These standards reflect a commitment to centering youth as co-creators, engaging families and caregivers on an ongoing basis, and ensuring that services are responsive to the needs of the communities providers work within.

- Provider organizations actively engage youth voices through advisory committees (or similar efforts) to inform and improve awareness, relevance, and uptake of prevention services.

- Provider organizations offer ongoing, meaningful opportunities for families and caregivers to engage with prevention programming, including educational opportunities, structured feedback mechanisms, and direct involvement in program activities.
- Provider organizations ensure that prevention programming is culturally responsive and accessible to the communities they serve, engaging community partners and service delivery sites in ongoing assessment of programming fit and effectiveness.
- Provider organizations advocate for and, whenever possible, secure dedicated resources for participant incentives (e.g., gift cards, celebratory events, or other meaningful rewards) to promote consistent participation in programming and support stronger outcomes through sustained engagement.