

From Systems to Sessions: Bridging Structural Equity and Culturally Responsive Therapy

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Who's in the room?

- *I want to know who's in the room where it happens!*
- *Say your name*
- *Your roots (where you're from or who shaped your lens)*
- *What grounds your soul?*



About me

- *Who Am I?*
- *My roots (where came from, what made me into who I am today).*
- *What grounds my soul?*



Session Goals

- How equity frameworks inform systems and therapy
- Identify barriers and facilitators to culturally responsive care
- Apply actionable strategies across roles



Political & Policy Landscape

Volatile U.S. policy
climate affects
behavioral health

Medicaid and funding
debates threaten
equity priorities

Systemically
Marginalized
communities bear
disproportionate
impacts

Washington State Behavioral Health Data

1 in 3 youth (0–25) with mental health needs receive no services

40% of youth had no follow-up within 7 days post-ED visit

27% had no follow-up even within 30 days

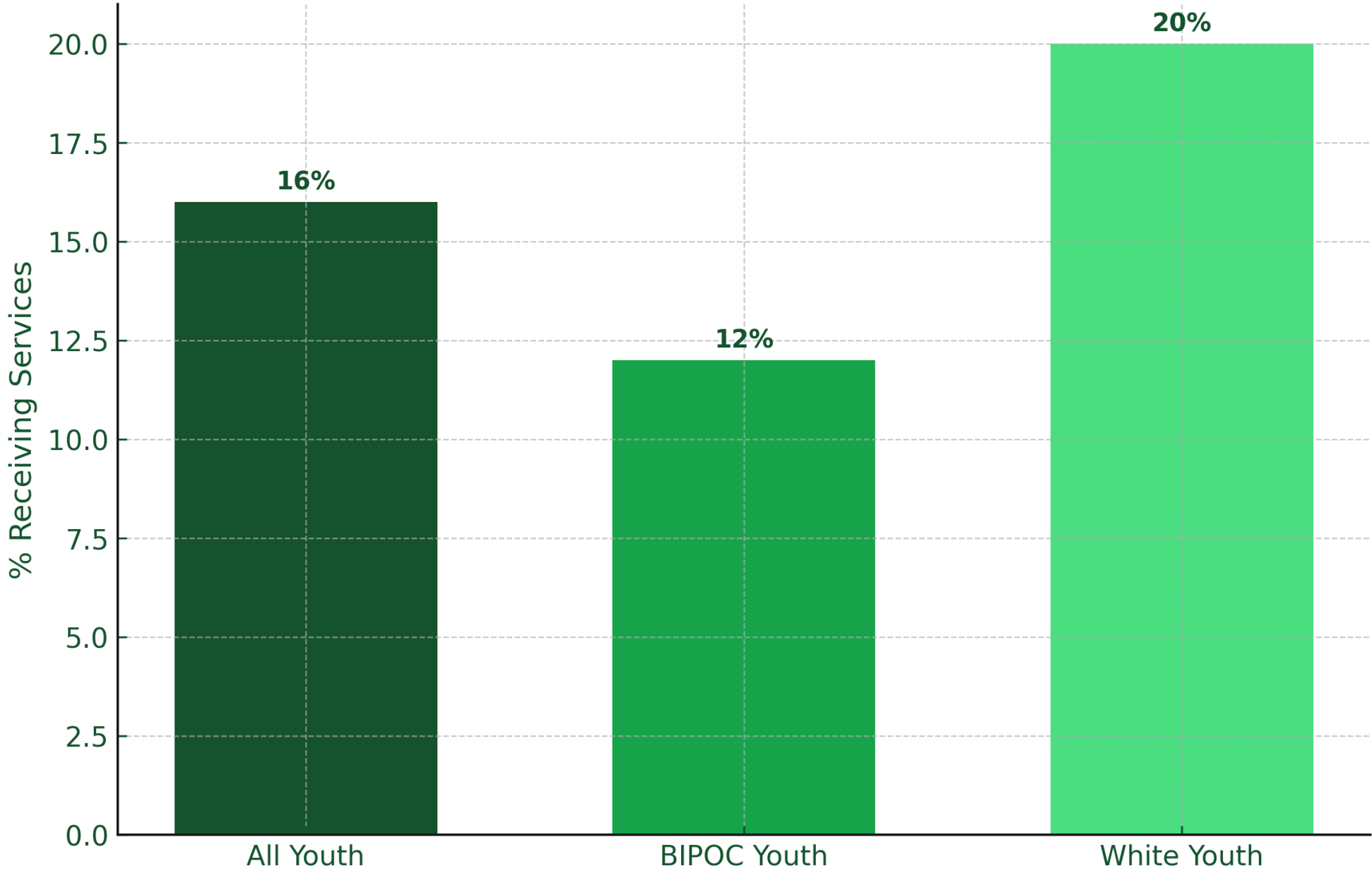
3 in 4 youth needing SUD treatment received none

Only 17% of child-serving BH providers speak another language

- Note: Youth of color in Washington experience disproportionately higher unmet behavioral health needs.



Youth Receiving Mental Health Services (WA, Apple Health)



Note: Youth of color in Washington experience disproportionately higher unmet behavioral health needs.



Federally Designated Health Professional Shortage Areas for Mental Health Care April 25, 2025



Workforce Shortages in WA

- Severe provider shortages in rural counties
- Geographic disparities: urban vs. rural access
- Shortages limit culturally and linguistically responsive care

System-Level Inequities



FUNDING AND WORKFORCE GAPS



SYSTEMIC RACISM AND
IMMIGRATION-RELATED BARRIERS



COMMUNITY DEMANDS FOR
REFORM



Case Vignette:

Ayan

- 28-year-old Somali refugee, trauma history
- **Barrier:** Difficulty finding a therapist who understood her faith and culture; early sessions felt unsafe. Interpreter gaps, childcare, and transport needs led to missed care.
- **Turning Point:** Connected with a therapist who practiced cultural humility and honored her background. With interpreter and telehealth support, she engaged more consistently.
- **Outcome:** Therapy became affirming and life-changing, easing depression and anxiety.

Case Vignette: Carlos

- 12-year-old Latinx youth, caregiver undocumented
- **Barrier:** Family fear, distrust of systems
- **Solutions:** Trust-building, school-based, culturally competent services
- **Outcome:** Reduced anxiety, better school performance



Therapy Room Practices



Cultural humility in intake



Trauma-informed care addressing
historical oppression



Adapting evidence-based
practices (EBPs) to cultural context

Bridging Macro ↔ Micro Framework



MCO Collaborative Workgroups

MCO Collaborative Workgroups

Follow-Up After
Hospitalization for Mental
Illness

PAST MEASURES

Health Equity: Children's Mental
Health Service Rate



All-MCO Health Equity project

Statewide Mental Health Penetration

- Partnered with WA MCOs on collaborative Health Equity PIP
- Tracking Mental Health Service Rate (MHSR) with race/ethnicity data
- Prioritized Asian & NHOPI disparities in youth (ages 6–17)

2024 Aim

- Close access gaps

How

- CBO grants
- Equity training for providers & staff
- Ongoing data tracking & comparison

The YMCA and Heritage University: A Collaborative Impact on Community Health Through Higher Education

- ✨ **Representation matters: Reform + inclusive practice require educators and providers who reflect the communities they serve.**

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How This Framework Fits: YMCA of Greater Seattle + Heritage University Master's in Mental Health Counseling



Equity in Action



Expands culturally responsive workforce



Professors & mentors who reflect students & communities served



Strengthens therapeutic trust, relevance, and connection



4-year retention commitment strengthens continuity of care

Interactive Exercise



Prompt: Where do you have influence, system, practice, or both?

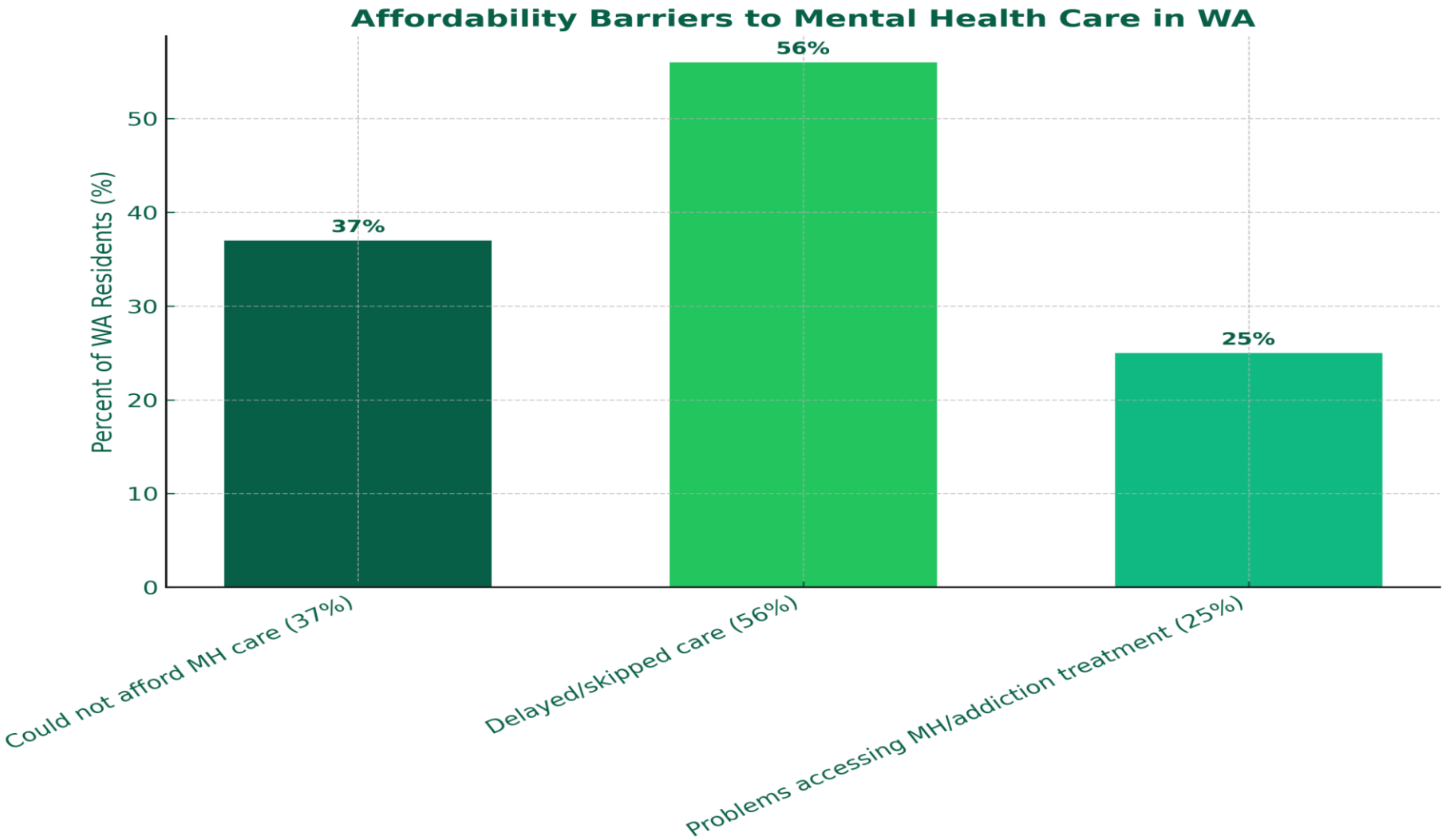


Identify one equity action you can take



Take a couple of seconds and please share it in the chat

Costs Preventing Access to Therapy in Washington



Why I Started Soulful Journey Therapy

- **Mission:** Make therapy more accessible and culturally inclusive for all groups
- Offer sliding scale options and Employee assistance programs (EAP) to reduce cost barriers



From Systems to Sessions – Bridging the Gap

Systems-Level Barriers

- Policy gaps and funding shortages
- Workforce shortages and language access gaps
- High costs and affordability barriers
- Structural racism and exclusion



Therapy-Level Solutions

- Affordable, accessible, sliding scale, and Employee assistance programs (EAP) options
- Culturally inclusive and responsive care
- Services in multiple languages
- Trauma-informed, equity-centered practice

Equity requires both: systemic reform + inclusive therapy practice.

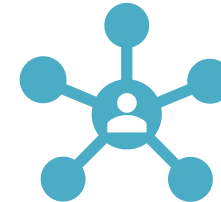
Key Takeaways



Equity must live at policy and practice levels



Cultural responsiveness = journey, not checkbox



Collaboration across systems, clinicians, and communities is essential

Call to Action + Closing

Choose one
action this
month



Find an
accountability
partner



Commit for 30
days

Questions



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