

ABCD: Continuing the Arc of Development

July 21-22, 2025

9:00 AM ET

Virtual: <https://videocast.nih.gov>



Social Health & Environment Pre-Meeting June 26, 2025

Participants

External Experts

Chia-Chen Yang – Oklahoma State University
Genevieve Dunton – University of Southern California
Julianne Holt-Lunstad – Brigham Young University
Leah Somerville – Harvard University

ABCD Experts

Carlos Cardenas-Iniguez – University of Southern California
Raul Gonzalez – Florida International University

Planning Team

Dana Schloesser – National Institutes of Health Office of Behavioral and Social Science
Diana Alkire – National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA)
Gaya Dowling – NIDA
Kim LeBlanc – NIDA
Laura Thomas – National Institute of Mental Health
Lindsey Pool – National Heart Lung and Blood Institute
Michael Charness – US Department of Veterans Affairs
Traci Murray – NIDA

Summary

Social health and wellbeing in young adulthood are multidimensional and dynamic concepts, requiring subjective and objective measures including social connection and developmental transitions. Capturing changes over time will support continuity of adolescent assessments of social health and the environment.

Defining Social Health and Wellbeing

Social health and wellbeing are subjective, depending on whether an individual's social experiences and connections meet their personal needs and expectations. Social connection was described as an umbrella term that includes the structure (e.g., size and diversity of social networks), the function (e.g., availability and perception of social support, sense of belonging), and the quality (both negative and positive) of relationships and social

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networks. This multidimensional definition aligns with frameworks from the [U.S. Surgeon General](#), [World Health Organization](#), and [Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development](#). The group also noted that social health constructs like loneliness can fluctuate significantly over short periods, highlighting the importance of capturing temporal dynamics.

Key Social Health and Environmental Constructs in Young Adulthood

The group identified several constructs, including loneliness, social support, social media use, digital navigation skills, sense of purpose, independence, optimism for the future, and quality of relationships. Participants emphasized the importance of subjective self-report measures for socio-emotional outcomes, while also advocating for quantitative approaches to capture social network size and diversity. Digital measures, such as app-based tracking or social media activity logs, are increasingly relevant. However, there was caution against collecting data without a clear research purpose or interpretation, such as number of social media followers. Ecological Momentary Assessment (EMA) was highlighted as a method for capturing day-to-day variability, and the group agreed that annual surveys could be supplemented by burst sampling. Multimodal methods and measurements will assist in identifying translatable solutions. Emerging issues such as the impact of AI companions and remote work on social wellbeing were also raised.

Non-Social Environmental Factors

Beyond social factors, the group discussed the importance of capturing experiential diversity (novelty and variability of daily activities); exposure to danger (natural disaster or otherwise), toxins (e.g., environmental), or violence; both subjective and objective safety; and perceptions of time availability. Methods for measuring constructs include self-report surveys on routine and safety perceptions, passive sensing technologies like GPS tracking, and linking objective data from external datasets based on residential history. The group suggested that regular intervals of passive, continuous data collection could be valuable for non-social environmental factors.

Linking Young Adult and Adolescent Measures

Continuity between measures collected in adolescence and those in young adulthood allows for the prediction and understanding of outcomes. Recommended measures include established scales for loneliness (such as the UCLA Loneliness Scale, included in the current ABCD protocol for 7- and 9-year follow-up visits), social isolation, or support, ideally using tools that are validated across age groups. The group noted the need to capture developmental transitions, such as independence, hobbies, and changes in living arrangements to reflect the evolving context of young adulthood.

PANEL MEETING

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Balancing Longitudinal Consistency and Developmental Change

While maintaining continuity with early measures is valuable for longitudinal analysis, it is equally important that measures remain developmentally appropriate and meaningful as participants age. Some constructs may need to be adapted or replaced over time. The group noted that young adults may be more tolerant of more extensive or frequent protocols than adolescents.