



No Wrong Door: A Snapshot of Adolescent Substance Use Service Access Points Across New Orleans

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BACKGROUND

Substance use disorder (SUD) is defined by the American Psychiatric Association as being characterized by an uncontrolled use of psychoactive and intoxicating substances that interferes with daily functioning.¹ Those with SUD are at higher risk of comorbid mental health conditions, overdose, and worse physical health outcomes when compared to those who do not use substances.² Studies have shown that over 90% of people diagnosed with substance use disorder began using in adolescence, making it necessary to address prevention and usage among teens.³ In Louisiana specifically, the number of adolescents aged 12-17 that met the criteria for substance use disorder was 35,000, representing approximately 9.5% of the adolescent population in 2023.⁴ Approximately 47,000 adolescents in Louisiana were classified as needing substance use treatment in 2023, with about 22,000 actually receiving it.⁴

New Orleans currently has a patchwork of services addressing adolescent substance use including prevention, treatment, and crisis intervention programs. However, many families and even providers are unclear on how to access these services, who is eligible, and what the actual entry points are. Youth are often told “we don’t do that here” or are referred in circles. A system of care approach emphasizes a “no wrong door” approach where any youth presenting with need can be guided to the appropriate level of care; but this ideal is rarely achieved.

This project aims to:

- (1) Identify and map adolescent substance use services across Orleans, Jefferson, St. Bernard, and Plaquemines parishes.
- (2) Assess how youth and caregivers access these services across various entry points.
- (3) Identify gaps and opportunities to improve service navigation and coordination.
- (4) Create an accessible toolkit to aid providers and caregivers in navigating resources.

METHODS

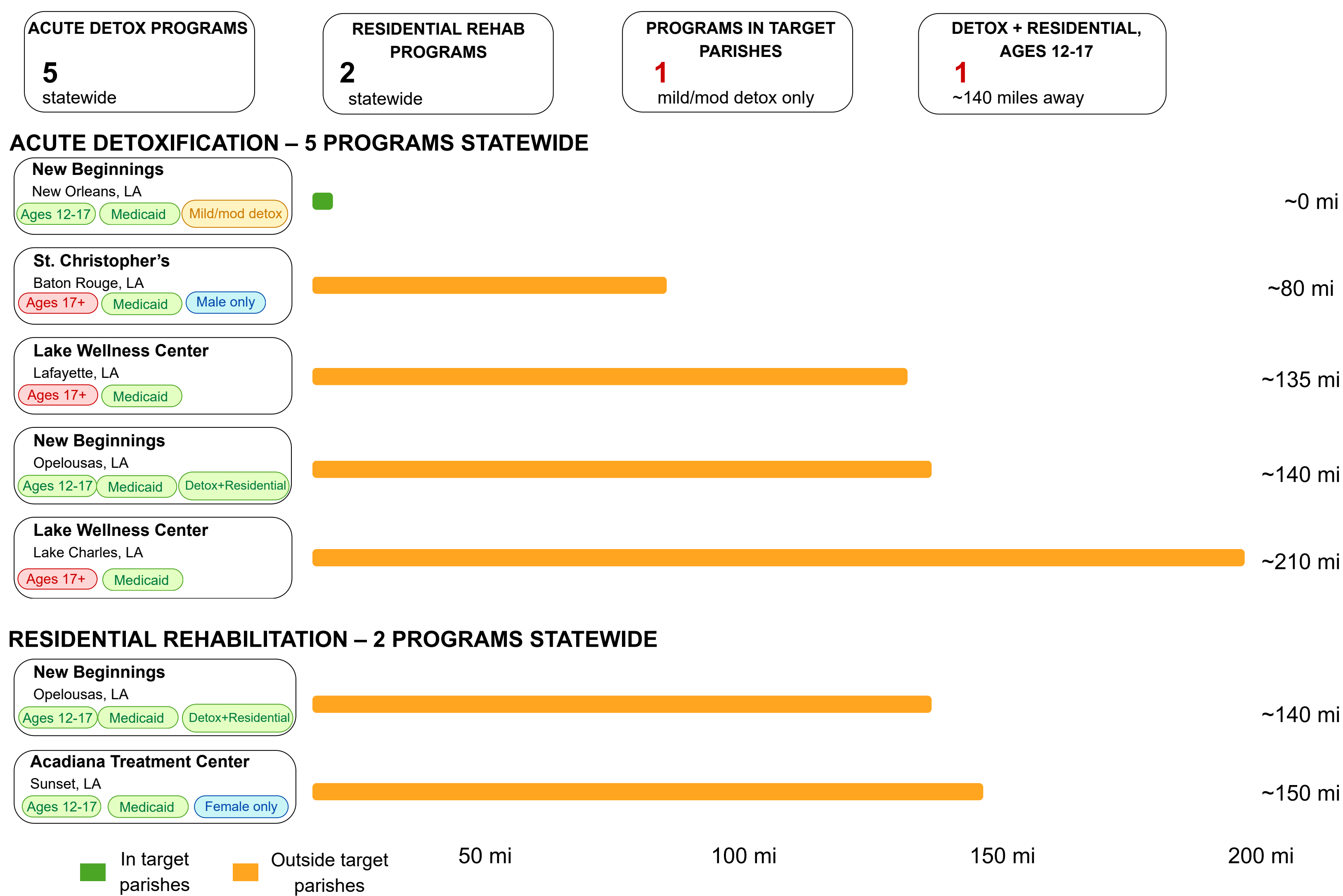
A service inventory was created to identify organizations offering substance use treatments and resources in Orleans, Jefferson, Plaquemines, and St. Bernard parishes for adolescents aged 12-17. Publicly available sources (organizational websites, service inventories, and community resource lists) were utilized to identify programs across 8 categories:

- (1) Outpatient
- (2) Prevention and Education
- (3) Support Groups
- (4) Intensive Outpatient
- (5) Acute Detoxification
- (6) General Psychiatric Inpatient
- (7) Residential Rehabilitation
- (8) Crisis and Family Services

Identified organizations were contacted to verify services offered and document program characteristics. After brief interviews with providers and program administrators, a service access map was created to visualize entry points, gaps, and resource availability. These interviews also provided qualitative insights on service navigation and typical referral pathways.

Due to the limited number of acute detoxification and residential rehabilitation resources in the aforementioned four parishes, alongside the importance of these services for substance use recovery, the search was expanded to encompass all of Louisiana strictly for programs focused on these two categories.

Critical Gaps: Access to Adolescent SUD Detoxification and Residential Rehabilitation Services in Louisiana



Distance from New Orleans to identified adolescent SUD acute detoxification and residential rehabilitation programs in Louisiana. Programs were identified through a service inventory of publicly available sources and verified through direct provider contact. Distances represent approximate driving miles from Orleans Parish. Age restrictions, gender restrictions, withdrawal severity limitations, and Medicaid acceptance status reflect information obtained during provider verification calls conducted by the research team, 2026.

CONCLUSION

Preliminary mapping identified critical gaps in three service categories: acute detoxification, residential rehabilitation, and peer support groups.

Regarding detoxification, five programs in Louisiana offer acute detoxification services for adolescents: Lake Wellness Center (Lake Charles), Lake Wellness Center (Lafayette), St. Christopher's Addiction Wellness Center (Baton Rouge), New Beginnings (target parishes), and New Beginnings Opelousas. The first three restrict admission to ages 17 and older. New Beginnings within the target parishes accepts ages 12–17 but is limited to mild and moderate withdrawal only. New Beginnings Opelousas is the only program in Louisiana that accepts adolescents ages 12–17 with no withdrawal severity restriction, making it the sole option for younger adolescents presenting with high-acuity withdrawal. However, it is located outside the four target parishes, creating geographic and financial barriers for families who cannot travel.

Regarding residential rehabilitation, two programs were identified in Louisiana serving adolescents: Acadiana and New Beginnings Opelousas. Both are located outside the four target parishes. For families without reliable transportation or adequate insurance coverage, distance alone is a prohibitive barrier — a service that exists but cannot be reached is, functionally, a service that does not exist.

To illustrate what this means in practice: when an adolescent presents with acute severe withdrawal in the target parishes, the most likely pathway is emergency department stabilization (costly, resource-intensive, and not designed for SUD care) followed by discharge home or transfer to an inpatient psychiatric facility. Without adequate SUD-specific treatment, relapse risk is significantly elevated. Youth should ideally step down to an intensive outpatient program (mild to moderate SUD) or residential rehabilitation (severe SUD), however residential rehabilitation is absent within the target parishes. Dedicated adolescent detoxification and residential rehabilitation programs within the target parishes would improve outcomes for families and reduce unnecessary emergency department burden.

Adolescent-specific peer support groups represent another significant gap. Positive peer relationships have been associated with reduced substance use, lower readmission rates, and greater aftercare engagement, yet SUD-focused groups tailored to teens are largely absent from the region.^{5,6} Adult meetings such as AA or NA are not appropriate substitutes.

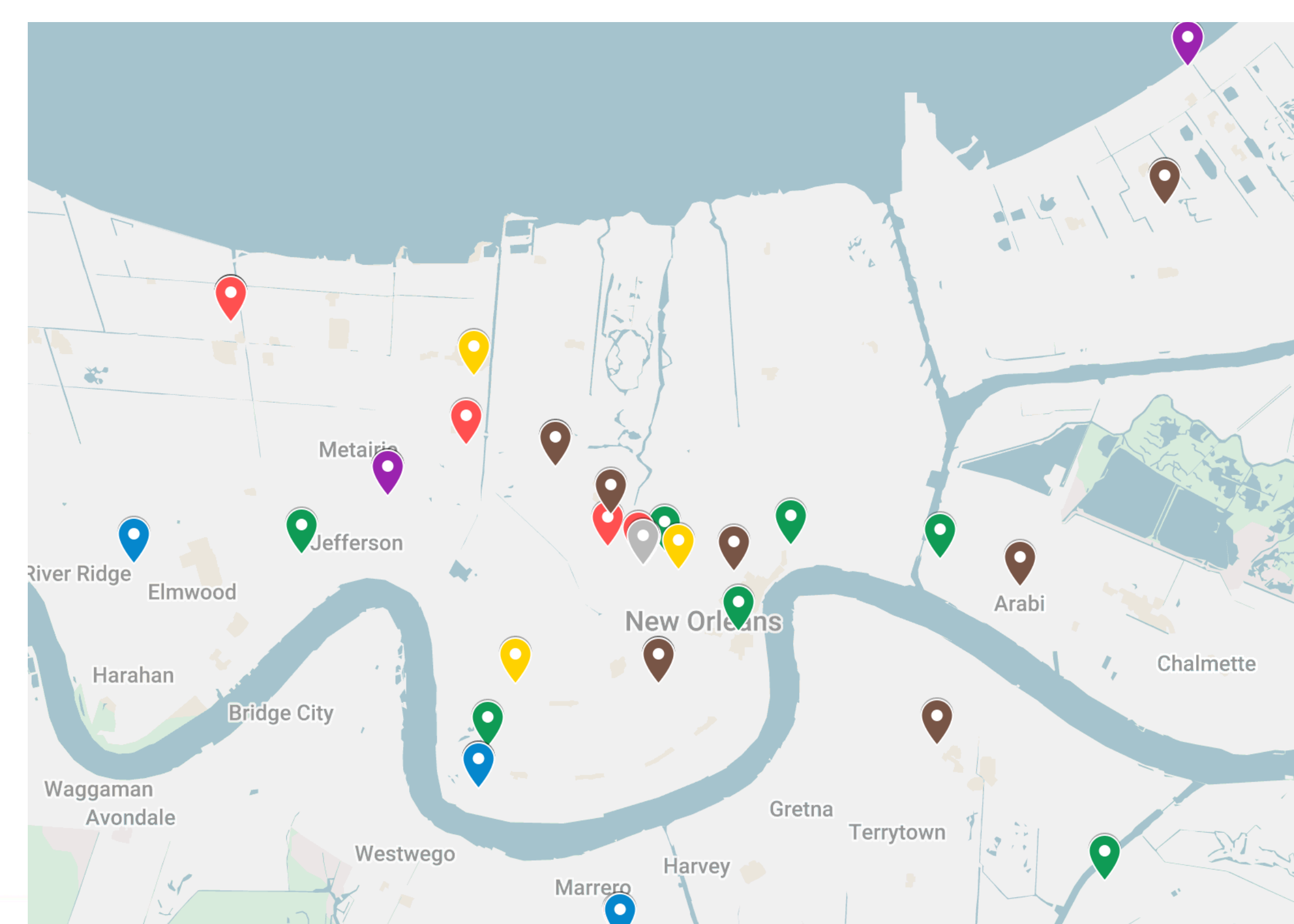
Service verification, via direct telephone contact with each program, revealed a fragmented and difficult-to-navigate system. When programs were ineligible for ages 12-17, staff were frequently unable to provide alternative referrals, leaving the research team stuck in the same dead ends families and healthcare providers routinely encounter. This system fragmentation leads to gaps in care and missed opportunities for intervention, resulting in many youth falling through the cracks.

Meaningful improvement requires strengthening referral pathways, embedding screening at every entry point, and expanding adolescent-appropriate services within existing organizations. Above all, the absence of dedicated adolescent detox and residential rehabilitation must be treated as a crisis. These are the building blocks of a true “no wrong door” model, one where any adolescent who reaches out is guided toward care, not turned away from it.

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RESOURCE MAP



- - Outpatient
- - Acute Detox
- - Prevention and Education
- - General Psychiatric Inpatient
- - Support Groups
- - Residential Rehabilitation
- - Intensive Outpatient
- - Crisis and Family Services

Link to Map:

