

What is Substance Use Prevention?

Substance Use Prevention aims to prevent and/or delay alcohol and other drug use, misuse, and substance use disorders. Prevention activities identify and address issues early with youth and continue to assist people of all ages throughout their lives, promoting healthy individuals, families, and communities.

Prevention Works by:



Strengthening individual and community knowledge of the harms associated with substance use and misuse



Changing internal practices of agencies and institutions to promote substance use prevention, wellness, and foster healthy choices



Fostering collaboration between coalitions, neighborhoods, and other partners to prevent substance use and promote safe and healthy communities



Influencing policy and legislation that reduces the availability of alcohol and other drugs



Educating healthcare, educational, and social services providers to recognize and intervene with individuals who show risky substance use behaviors



Primary Prevention Strategies

The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) Center for Substance Abuse Prevention (CSAP) identified six prevention strategies to deliver effective and comprehensive substance use prevention services. Strategies are selected based on community need to have the greatest impact.



Information Dissemination: Shares information from one source to several recipients about drug use, misuse and addiction and the effects on individuals, families, and communities, e.g., media campaigns, brochures, health fairs



Prevention Education: Engages in communications between an educator and participants to improve critical life and social skills, including decision-making, refusal skills, and critical analysis, e.g., classroom sessions, parenting classes



Alternative Activities: Organizes constructive and healthy activities that do not involve alcohol and drug use, e.g., community drop-in centers, mentoring programs



Problem Identification & Referral: Identifies those who have used and misused substances to assess if their behavior can be reversed through education, e.g., DUI programs, student assistance programs



Community-Based Processes: Enhances the ability and capacity of the community to more effectively provide substance use prevention services, e.g., neighborhood action training, multi-agency coordination



Environmental: Establishes or changes community standards, codes, and attitudes, with the goal of reducing drug use in the general population, e.g., advertisement restrictions, product pricing strategies, enforcement, policy changes



State Prevention Strategy Examples

The **North Dakota Department of Health and Human Services**, Behavioral Health Division (BDH) used a community-based process to increase the knowledge and skills of substance use prevention providers to implement evidence-based prevention strategies. Some of the strategies used to build their capacity include statewide media campaigns; substance use prevention trainings; and a statewide conference.

These actions increased skills and knowledge in the prevention workforce that led to increased effectiveness and positive trends in many communities. For example, underage drinking in North Dakota has substantially decreased over time. The state is also seeing some downwards trends in adult binge drinking and a reduction in alcohol-related fatal vehicle crashes.

The **West Virginia Department of Human Services' (DoHS)** data identified that the state's youth were using nicotine and tobacco at a high rate and the sale of nicotine products to underage individuals was increasing. They implemented an environmental strategy to educate state legislators and communities on the importance of having a state Tobacco 21 law to increase the legal age to purchase tobacco products from 18 to 21 years old.

DoHS worked with several partners to educate legislators and community members; developed media messages; compile statistics; and organized a Prevention Day where middle and high school students shared information on Tobacco 21 and data on youth vaping. Ultimately, the Tobacco 21 law was passed in 2024.



Additional Resources

SAMHSA Substance Use Prevention

<https://www.samhsa.gov/substance-use/prevention>

Substance Use Prevention Campaigns, Events, and Observances

<https://www.samhsa.gov/substance-use/prevention/campaigns-events>

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