



UPSTREAM PREVENTION targets the root causes of substance issues early, preventing problems before they occur.

Upstream Prevention Is Critical

- **Early Intervention:** Upstream prevention efforts target the root causes and early indicators of substance misuse. By intervening early, these efforts can prevent the development of substance use disorders. The transition to high school is a peak period for the initiation of substance use, making adolescence a critical time for prevention.
- **Cost-Effectiveness:** Investing in prevention is more cost-effective than addressing the consequences of substance misuse. For example, after-school programs like those funded by PhillyBOOST have shown that for every \$1 spent on prevention, approximately \$4 is saved in future costs related to criminal justice.
- **Public Health Approach:** A public health prevention framework—like harm reduction—acknowledges that substance use serves a purpose for youth, often related to social connections or coping with emotional problems. Effective prevention efforts offer healthy alternatives for achieving these goals, which can reduce the likelihood of substance misuse.
- **Reduction in Health and Social Costs:** Upstream prevention efforts reduce the long-term health and social costs associated with substance misuse. These include costs related to healthcare, lost productivity, and the criminal justice system.
- **Holistic Development:** Prevention programs that focus on the holistic development of youth delay the onset of substance use and reduce the likelihood of experimenting with illicit substances.
- **Community and Family Engagement:** Upstream prevention efforts engage families and communities, which can strengthen protective factors and reduce risk factors associated with substance misuse.
- **Reduction in Prevalence Rates:** Evidence-based interventions for preventing substance use disorders in adolescents are effective in reducing prevalence rates of substance use, particularly for widely used substances like alcohol, tobacco, and marijuana.

Cost-Effectiveness

Upstream Prevention focuses on preventing substance misuse before it starts, which is more cost-effective than treating substance use disorders after they have developed. A recent SAMHSA report says providing effective school-based prevention interventions to all U.S. youth could result in significant social cost savings and a positive social return on investment.

Downstream Interventions, such as treatment and law enforcement, are expensive. These interventions occur after substance misuse has already occurred and can involve more complex and resource-intensive measures, such as rehabilitation programs, legal proceedings, and healthcare services.

Efficacy

Upstream Prevention efforts delay or prevent the initiation of substance use. They target risk factors and enhance protective factors through education, community programs, and policy changes. These efforts can reduce the prevalence rates of substance use among adolescents as they address an issue before it escalates.

Downstream Interventions can be effective in treating substance use disorders, but they may not address the broader societal factors that contribute to substance misuse. The effectiveness of treatment can also vary, and there is a risk of relapse, which can lead to repeated cycles of treatment and associated costs.

Coordinated by the Commonwealth Prevention Alliance (CPA)

What Works!

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

Effective prevention should follow these guiding principles :

1

Use evidence-based programs, practices or policies whenever possible.

When no evidence-based programs, practices or policies are available or appropriate, use strategies that align with best practice and the best available evidence.

2

Invest in long-term prevention strategies and avoid quick fixes.

The reasons and conditions that lead to substance use are varied and complex. There are no “quick fixes” for preventing substance use.

3

Implement comprehensive prevention strategies.

One activity on its own, regardless of what it is, is unlikely to produce change. Prevention strategies are needed to address multiple risk/protective factors across the lifespan and in multiple different domains (e.g. family, school, community). For example, we can't only provide one educational program for youth in schools. We also need programs for families, strategies to change policies or community and environmental conditions, etc. It is the carefully coordinated implementation of multiple prevention strategies within communities that's needed for population level change in substance use.

4

Involve individuals and communities you serve in the selection, planning, and implementation of programs and services

“Nothing about us without us” communicates the importance of collaborating with the communities we serve. It underscores the necessity for active involvement, input, and investment from community members and representatives across diverse sectors. This involvement ensures that decisions regarding programs, services, resource allocation, and evaluation are made in close partnership with those directly impacted, resulting in more relevant and effective initiatives.

Early Prevention of Substance Misuse in Pennsylvania

Advocacy for Investing in Early Prevention

Imagine a community where every child, regardless of background, grows up in a supportive environment that promotes healthy choice and well-being. Investing in early prevention of substance use is crucial for safeguarding the health and future of Pennsylvania's diverse youth population. This fact sheet aims to inspire and mobilize community members, policymakers, and organizations to advocate for increased investment in prevention programs.

Key Statistics:

- **Substance Use Awareness:** According to the 2023 Pennsylvania Youth Survey (PAYS), 21.5% of 8th graders and 32.5% of 10th graders in Pennsylvania have tried alcohol. Additionally, 30.4% of 12th graders reported lifetime marijuana use, with 14.6% using it in the past 30 days. ([PAYS, 2023](#)).
- **Promoting Health:** Supporting adolescents to stay substance-free can contribute to their overall well-being and reduce the risk of future health challenges ([Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#)).

The Power of Protective Factors

Protective factors are essential in preventing substance misuse among youth. These elements provide the support and resilience needed to encourage healthy decisions and avoid risky behaviors.

Key Protective Factors:

- **Family Support:** Positive family relationships are foundational, offering guidance and stability.
- **Healthy Peer Influence:** Friends who promote healthy choices play a crucial role in shaping positive behaviors.
- **School Engagement:** Active participation in school fosters confidence and resilience.
- **Community Connection:** Involvement in community activities provides a sense of belonging and purpose.

Data from the Pennsylvania Youth Survey (PAYS) shows that youth with stronger protective factors, like family and community support, are less likely to engage in substance use. Investing in programs that enhance these factors can lead to safer, healthier communities and better outcomes for our youth.

Why Early Prevention? Consider Alex, a 12-year-old from a small town, and Taylor, a 13-year-old from an urban neighborhood. Both Alex and Taylor, supported by their families and community programs, thrive in school and make healthy choices. Early prevention programs are designed to foster positive environments and equip young people with the tools they need to make healthy choices, offering numerous benefits:

- **Cost Savings:** Every dollar spent on prevention can save up to \$18 in healthcare, criminal justice, and social services costs ([Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration](#)).
- **Improved Outcomes:** Prevention programs lead to better school performance, improved mental health, and enhanced future job prospects ([National Institute on Drug Abuse](#)).
- **Community Benefits:** Strong prevention programs contribute to safer, healthier communities with lower crime rates and stronger social bonds ([National Institutes of Health](#)).

Advocacy Strategies:

- **Educate:** Share diverse stories and information about the benefits of prevention through community workshops, school programs, and social media campaigns. Include testimonials from individuals of various backgrounds to highlight the universal importance of prevention.
- **Engage:** Mobilize community leaders, schools, and caregivers from all demographic groups to support prevention programs. Host town hall meetings and create advocacy groups that reflect the community's diversity.
- **Empower:** Encourage youth like Alex and Taylor to lead peer-led prevention programs, participate in advocacy efforts, and share their stories to inspire others.

Call to Action:

- **Get Involved:** Join local advocacy groups, attend community meetings, and support prevention programs in your area. Ensure these efforts include voices from all parts of the community.
- **Contact Your Representatives:** Advocate for policies that increase funding for prevention programs and support evidence-based interventions that consider cultural and socioeconomic factors.
- **Share Your Story:** Use social media and community events to share personal stories about the positive impact of prevention. Highlight diverse experiences to foster inclusive advocacy.