

The power of prevention across domains

Youth substance misuse & mental health matter



Substance use

Impacts of effective prevention efforts have lowered overall youth substance use rates since 1975.^{1,2,3} However, there are concerns regarding 30-day use rates among Washington State 10th graders. Specifically, youth rates of using e-cigarettes, nationally and globally, have increased since 2017.^{4,5} Vaping negatively impacts youth mental and physical health and increases youths' risk of using other substances later.^{4,5,6}

Furthermore, since 2021, there has been an increase in youth use of fentanyl and other opioids, nationally and in Washington State.⁷

A recent systematic review of research literature indicates substance use is associated with increased suicidal thoughts and behaviors.⁸ These trends in youth substance use and mental health point to the ongoing need for prevention.



Mental health

Youth mental health is a key part of overall well-being and it requires attention now. Nationally, high school students' rates of depression have been increasing since 2011, about 10% of students reported suicidal thoughts or behaviors in 2021, and LGBTQ+ youth experience disproportionately higher rates of depression and suicidality.⁹ While Washington youths' mental health has been improving, there continue to be a concerning high percentage of youth experiencing mental health challenges. In 2023, 30% of tenth grade students reported depressive feelings, 15% reported thinking about suicide, and these percentages are much higher for LGBTQIA+ youth in particular.⁹

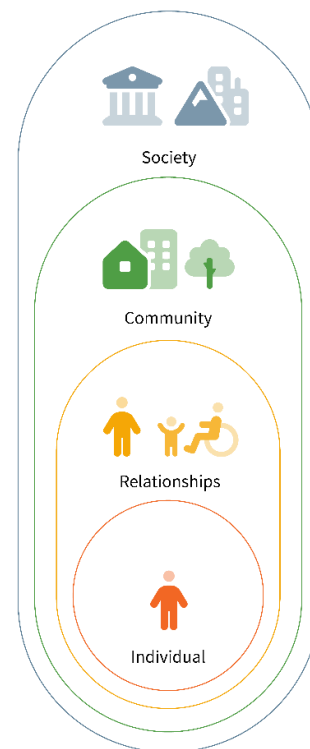
Where does prevention make a difference?

Youth mental health promotion and substance misuse prevention can happen anywhere! Prevention work is rooted in research science and often organized by the **social ecological model**;¹⁰ a

model to display how an individual is influenced by several layers of context.

Multiple factors, multiple levels

Risk factors are associated with an increased likelihood that a person will experience a problem. **Protective factors** are associated with a decreased likelihood. Both types of factors operate at different levels of a person's experience.



To effectively promote youth mental health and prevent substance misuse, we must understand and address the risk and protective factors within each of these contexts.

Additionally, the impacts of these risks can have a cumulative effect. For example, consider Mia. If she experiences some risks in her home environment, it can impact her ability to engage in school and make her more likely to be swayed by peer and neighborhood influences. If she lives in a society that does not provide adequate supports for her neighborhood, school, and family, her risks of poor outcomes are greater. And if, collectively, we are

able to reduce any of these risks, Mia will have a better chance at leading a healthy life.



Youth surrounded by positive and negative influences across the domains.

Prevention impacts across domains of influence



Family-based prevention

There is substantial research indicating youth with stronger relationships with parents/caregivers who provide clear standards for behavior are less likely to engage in risky health behaviors.¹¹ Family-based prevention involves both children and parents, as well as parent training, reduces youth substance use and can buffer against the effects of potential childhood traumatic events.



School-based prevention

School-based programs have broad reach for youth and their family within the school's service area to provide wellness and minimize barriers that lead to poor health outcomes. Thus, schools are another important domain for prevention work. School-based prevention generally builds on students' existing social, emotional, and cognitive skills, can be incorporated with family-based prevention, and reduces emotional and behavioral problems and delays initial substance use.¹²



Community-based prevention

Community-based prevention reaches a group of people who share a geographic space, interests, goals, history or culture. Community-based prevention

empowers local communities, address risk and protective factors in higher or broader levels of context than in other domains. These strategies often rely on the power of social influences in a community, for example implementing social marketing and public education campaigns and organizing community bonding activities. This type of prevention focus often works in tandem with other prevention efforts to address substance use and problem behaviors as well as to promote general health and well-being.¹³



Society-based prevention

Societal factors are “big-picture” factors like national laws, cultural norms, and time.¹⁴ One example of prevention science and practice considering societal factors is an examination of how COVID-19, physical locations, and institutional policies influenced families and youths' substance use.¹⁵ One finding reported flexible work environments in response to COVID-10 may have increased families' time together and enhanced the protection of parent-child bonds. On the other hand, the physical location of families' homes and their distance from acceptable or healthy forms of recreation and social activities might have increased youths' unstructured and unsupervised time.¹⁵ Prevention must consider these contexts when developing interventions and prevention research can, in turn, inform large-scale policies and efforts.

What can be done?

There are several important pathways to prevent youth substance use and behavioral and mental health problems. **Prevention work is essential to maintain focus on decreasing youth alcohol and cannabis use and to address the increasing trends in vape use, opioid use and specific youth mental health challenges.** Dedicated funding and evaluation mechanisms are one way to continue existing prevention efforts.

Additional research is required to better understand how to maximize the effects of prevention at all contextual levels and youth as well as adaptations to strategies for an equitable cause. This is especially true regarding program adaptations that increase participation and local and cultural acceptability and relevance.

The power of prevention across domains
08/2024

Prevention science strategies are demonstrated by research to enhance youth well-being, decrease behavioral health problems, and more.¹⁶ We must continue to align prevention services to impact risks in multiple domains in order to promote resilience in all our young people.

Characteristics of prevention efforts across domains

	Family-Based Prevention	School-Based Prevention	Community Based Prevention
Intervention Types	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Home visiting strategies Parent/family education, support, and coaching In-home or outpatient interventions <small>11</small>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Social and emotional learning programs School-wide strategies (ex., improve school environment or culture) Integrated programs extending beyond the school (ex., involves family) <small>12</small>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Coalition-led prevention planning and implementation Media campaigns Creating and enforcing policies Creating opportunities for community members to have positive interactions Enabling participation in recreational activities Increasing actual and perceived safety <small>13</small>
Effective Intervention Components	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Theoretical basis Involve children AND parents Enhance social and emotional skills Include interactive practice Improve parent-child bonds <small>11</small>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Focuses on known risk and protective factors Uses cognitive and/or behavioral strategies Interactive, comprehensive, and uses multiple activities Builds on student skills in a structured manner Uses social influence strategies and reduce peer pressure <small>12</small>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Focuses on known risk and protective factors Implements strategies in response to community priority risk and protective factors and behavioral outcomes Leverages community connections <small>17 – 20</small>
Prevention Impacts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Delays onset and reduces substance use (cannabis, alcohol, tobacco) Reduces depression and anxiety Reduces externalizing problems Reduces the effects of childhood trauma <small>8, 11, 21-23</small>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reduces problem behaviors (e.g., violence, delinquency) Delays substance use onset Reduces internalizing problems (e.g., depression) & externalizing problems (e.g., conduct problems) Improves social and emotional health Improves academic achievement. <small>13, 24-26</small>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Builds community collaboration Builds community cohesion Can transform the community’s prevention system Delays and reduces substance use Reduces anxiety and depression Reduces delinquency, violence and handgun carrying Enhances educational attainment Promotes healthy behaviors <small>20, 27-34</small>

The power of prevention across domains
08/2024

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The power of prevention across domains
08/2024

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