

INITIATIVE #3 - INVEST IN EVIDENCE INFORMED PREVENTION PROGRAMS

- ✓ Recognize that investments in early childhood wellbeing (access to healthcare, early intervention services and quality childcare, for example) result in delayed initiation and decreased use of drugs by adolescents.
- ✓ Strengthen New Hampshire's capacity to promote healthy social, emotional and physical development of infants, toddlers, other young children and their families and to provide mental health services and supports.
- ✓ Support evidenced informed prevention strategies such as student assistance programs in schools and fully funded juvenile diversion programs.
- ✓ Support evidence informed drug and alcohol screening of New Hampshire youth.
- ✓ Offer age appropriate, evidenced informed substance misuse prevention curriculum in all schools.
- ✓ Support ongoing collection of youth data through the Youth Risk Behavior Survey.

Overview

Substance abuse and addiction are preventable disorders. While substance use generally begins during the adolescent years, there are known biological, psychological, social, and environmental factors that contribute to the risk that begin accumulating as early as the prenatal period. This creates opportunities to intervene very early in an individual's life and thereby prevent substance use disorders—and, along with them, a range of other related behavioral problems—long before they would normally manifest themselves. According to the National Institute on Drug Abuse, various factors can contribute to risk starting as early as the prenatal period.¹ A growing body of research shows that providing a stable home environment, adequate nutrition, physical and cognitive stimulation, warm supportive parenting, and good classroom management in the early years of a child's life (prenatal through age 8) protects against a multitude of risks and increase the likelihood of positive developmental outcomes. Positive effects of these interventions include delayed initiation and decreased use of drugs when the child reaches adolescence.² New Hampshire must adopt and build on existing evidence informed prevention practices, programs and policies that cover the lifespan of a child's development.

Background

Evidence informed prevention efforts across the lifespan are critical and the most cost effective way to prevent a new generation of individuals from misusing substances. In recent years, the New Hampshire Legislature slashed state funding for community based, direct prevention services. However, thanks to a commitment from private funders, and renewed federal and state investments in prevention, New Hampshire's 13 Regional Public Health Networks are actively working with multiple stakeholders within their communities to employ evidence-informed prevention practices, programs and policies proven to curb youth substance misuse. In addition to New Hampshire's public health infrastructure, there are strong community-based coalitions across

¹ Principles of Substance Abuse Prevention for Early Childhood, NIDA, March 2016.

² *Id.*

the state working to provide education and support services for youth and families to minimize risk and intervene early to prevent problems associated with substance misuse. These Regional Public Health Networks and local community-based coalitions represent New Hampshire's army of prevention professionals that need continued and expanded support and resources to continue the crucial and multi-faceted work of prevention.

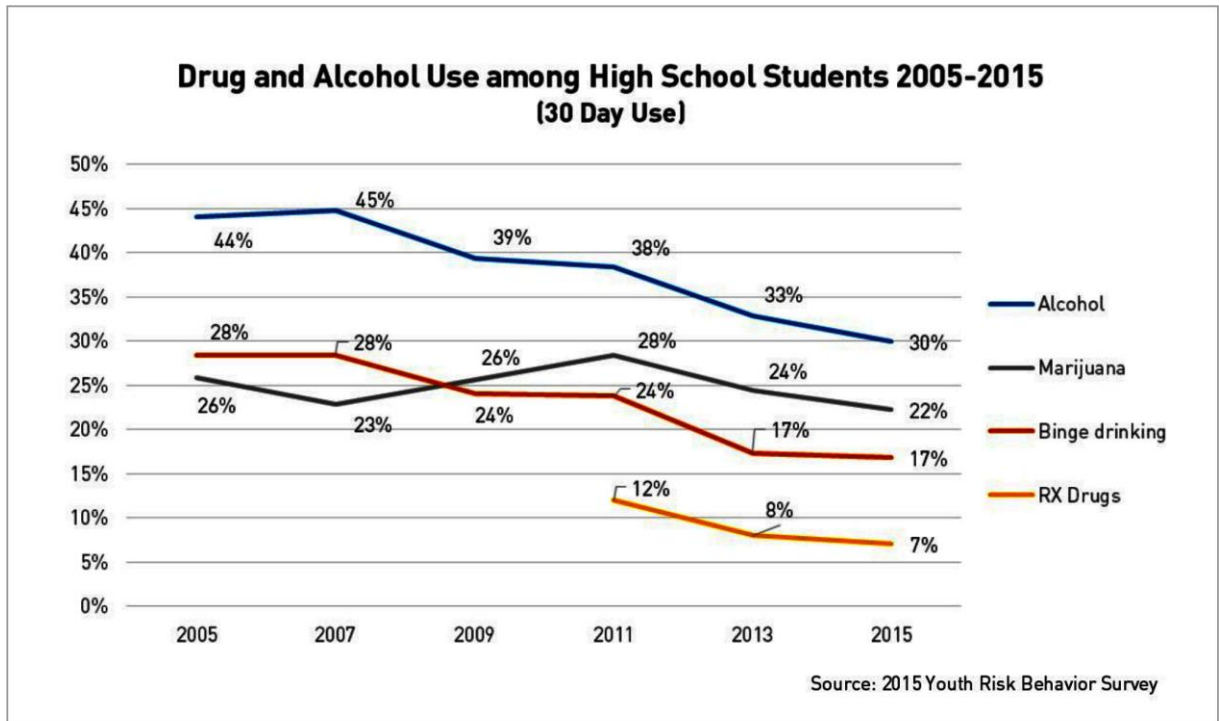
Facts and Figures

Results of the latest Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS), administered in 2015, indicate that substance misuse among youth is on the decline in New Hampshire.³ The results reinforce the fact that substance misuse is preventable and that the community based prevention efforts that have been in place throughout New Hampshire are making a positive impact among Granite State youth. The survey, administered by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, measures attitudes and behaviors associated with substance misuse, mental health and other risk behaviors. High schools across New Hampshire participate in the YRBS survey every two years with the support of the New Hampshire Departments of Education and Health and Human Services.

As the chart below indicates, regular (past 30-day) use of alcohol and rates of binge drinking have dropped since 2005. Marijuana use is also down as is the misuse of prescription drugs since 2011. These results are promising, but more needs to be done to prevent substance misuse by New Hampshire youth and young adults. For example, while youth binge drinking has dropped since 2005, it remained level from 2013 to 2015. Additionally, while overall rates of substance misuse are down, the rates of substance misuse by youth and young adults in New Hampshire remain some of the highest in the country.⁴

³ Youth Risk Behavior Survey, NH Department of Education, 2015

⁴ SAMHSA, National Survey on Drug Use and Health (2014).



Type of Policy Change

- Budget policy - Support funding for evidence informed substance misuse prevention strategies and programs, and early childhood supports and services.
- Administrative policy
 - Support Bureau of Drug and Alcohol Services' Screening Brief Intervention, Referral and Training (SBIRT) initiatives.
 - Monitor implementation of rules changes for the prescribing of opioids to prevent new cases of prescription drug misuse, especially among youth.
- Local policy – Offer age appropriate, evidenced informed substance misuse prevention curriculum in all schools. Support the participation and administration of the Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) in school districts.

Conclusion

In order to support a new generation of healthy Granite Staters, policymakers must expand substance misuse prevention efforts by embracing policies that support data collection, evidence informed programs and practices for youth and young adults, evidence informed early childhood supports and services, and affordable health care.