



State of Prevention Report

Why should prevention be prioritized in Boulder County?

The earlier a young person starts using substances, the more likely they are to become addicted, highlighting the importance of access to community supports for youth.¹

There are many risk and protective factors that influence our likelihood of abusing substances. These encompass the social, economic, community, family, and individual spheres, and include factors such as participating in prosocial activities, or having a trusted adult - both strong protective factors. Studies estimate that every \$1 spent on substance abuse prevention results in an average of \$10 in long-term savings.²

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Common Protective Factors

PROSOCIAL ACTIVITIES

Adolescents who participate in prosocial activities (clubs, sports, arts, volunteer groups, etc.) are more likely to have positive psychosocial adjustment and are subsequently less likely to report current marijuana use and cigarette smoking.^{3,4}

TRUSTED ADULTS

Students who can talk to a parent or other trusted adult if they have a problem are less likely to try substances and experience suicidality.⁴

Community Readiness Assessment

To assess Boulder County's readiness to address youth substance use, we utilized a structured, comprehensive information gathering approach known as the Tri-Ethnic Center Community Readiness Assessment which measures five dimensions of readiness: Community Knowledge of Efforts, Community Climate, Leadership, Resources, and Community Knowledge of the Issue. The process included interviews with partners that represented youth, schools, after school programs, health care, community coalitions, law enforcement, parent education, the cannabis industry, and elected officials.

The data revealed that Boulder community members are excited about prevention, and want to be involved, but may not know how or what they can do to help. The next section will tell you a bit specific findings.



Resources

Limitations

- Information about substance use resources and prevention is difficult to find.
- There are barriers to available programs like cost, location, scheduling, and language access which disproportionately impacts low-income, rural, and families where English is not the primary language spoken at home.

Knowledge

Issues and Efforts

- There is a low level of awareness among community members about the resources and programs that are available.
- Interviewees reported that there is denial in the community about youth substance use occurring within Boulder County.

Climate

Leadership and Community

Interviewees reported evidence based prevention strategies are not top-of-mind in decision-making. Community members do not have an evidence-based understanding of substance use including the following key issues:

- The cause of substance misuse is complex with many possibilities for support and intervention.
- Marijuana use poses legal, physical, and mental health risks to youth.
- Adult attitudes towards youth substance use matter and youth are less likely to binge drink if they feel that their parents don't approve.⁴

You Can Support Youth Substance Abuse Prevention

We can create a culture within our city that prioritizes prevention, because we know it works!

GET INFORMED AND SPREAD THE WORD

Address misconceptions related to youth substance use by sharing accurate information from the Healthy Kids Colorado Survey or Responsibility Grows Here campaign when communicating with others about youth substance use.

ASK QUESTIONS AND TAKE ACTION

Does your organization make decisions that address barriers to program accessibility and increase awareness about inequities and disparities in our community?

¹Chloe J. & Susan L. A. (2017). Sensitive periods of substance abuse: Early risk for the transition to dependence, *Developmental Cognitive Neuroscience*, 25: 29-44,

² Aos, S., P. Phipps, R. Barnoski, and A. Lieb. (2001). The comparative costs and benefits of programs to reduce crime. Olympia: Washington State Institute for Public Policy.

³ Lam, Ching Man. (2012). Prosocial Involvement as a Positive Youth Development Construct: A Conceptual Review. *TheScientificWorldJournal*. 2012. 769158. 10.1100/2012/769158.

⁴ Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment, Healthy Kids Colorado Survey (2017 & 2019). <https://www.bouldercounty.org/families/youth/results/>