

PREVENTING ADDICTION



The undeniably best way to avoid the costly consequences of substance misuse and addiction is to invest in effective prevention and early intervention. Effective prevention involves a comprehensive approach to change cultural norms around youth substance use; empower the public to take action; delay the onset of substance use for as long as possible; reduce the risk of addictive substance misuse; reduce the prevalence of misuse and addiction; and reduce the consequences of addiction. Current approaches to prevention are limited to only one component (e.g., interdiction) or rely on interventions that are not evidence-based (e.g., scare tactics).

94% of people with drug addiction used an addictive substance before the age of 18¹

Spending \$1 on effective, school-based prevention programs yields \$18 in savings²

Key recommendations for adopting a comprehensive prevention strategy:

- Educate/inform adults and youth about addictive substances, the nature of substance use and addiction, and that addiction is a preventable and treatable disease (e.g., public education campaign)
- Reduce exposure to addictive substances by reducing unintentional exposure in young children, banning use in public places, and restricting youth-oriented advertising and marketing of addictive substances
- Reduce access to addictive substances through age restrictions; zoning retail outlets; limiting availability and accessibility of prescription medications (PDMPs, prescribing guidelines, take-back programs); and interdiction to reduce supply of illegal drugs
- Reduce appeal of addictive substances by banning youth-oriented packing and marketing, including tobacco/nicotine and marijuana products that are appealing to youth
- Increase appeal of alternative activities by offering after-school and weekend activities that provide a “natural high;” enhance youth civic engagement/volunteering; and increase family time
- Address risk factors and vulnerabilities that lead to substance use and addiction (e.g., family history, adverse childhood events, mental health/behavioral problems, poor parent-child relationship, bullying)
- Foster protective factors to build resilience (positive adult role models; effective parenting skills; impulse control; skill building; strong attachments to family, school, community)
- Screen for and identify signs of risk, including routine, health-promoting universal screening of all substance use in health care, school, social welfare, and justice settings
- Intervene early for those at risk with evidence-based interventions and refer those in need of treatment to effective care (ideally within the health care system)

A variety of stakeholders are needed to engage in a comprehensive approach: youth, parents, health care providers, educators/communities, policymakers, entertainment media, and the industries that make addictive substances (pharmaceutical, alcohol, nicotine/tobacco, marijuana). Messaging and interventions must be tailored to be age-appropriate and implemented in homes, schools, health care facilities, communities, and the media.

Additional Resources:

- **Center on Addiction**, [Ending the Opioid Crisis: A Practical Guide for State Policymakers](#) (ch. 2)
- **Center on Addiction**, [Adolescent Substance Use: America's #1 Public Health Problem](#)
- **U.S. Surgeon General**, [Facing Addiction in America](#) (ch. 3)
- **Project Here** (www.here.world)

Sources:

1. Center on Addiction. (2018). *Center on Addiction Analysis of the National Survey on Drug Use and Health (NSDUH), 2016*. Rockville, MD: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration.
2. Miller, T., & Hendrie, D. (2008). *Substance Abuse Prevention Dollars and Cents: A Cost-Benefit Analysis*, DHHS Pub. No. (SMA) 07-4298. Rockville, MD: Center for Substance Abuse Prevention, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration.

