

# The Power of Primary Prevention

#PreventionWorks!



## What is Primary Prevention and Why is it Important?

Decades of research show addiction is both preventable and treatable. Primary prevention in substance abuse refers to strategies aimed at preventing the onset of substance use or abuse before it occurs.

Ninety percent of all individuals with substance use dependence started using before the age of 18, and half started before the age of 15.<sup>1</sup> **For this reason prevention MUST be a critical component of national, state, and local drug demand reduction strategies.**

## Education and Early Intervention

Early education programs in schools and communities play a crucial role in providing information about the risks associated with substance abuse. Such interventions help shape healthy behaviors and attitudes toward substance use, potentially deterring experimentation and abuse later in life.<sup>2</sup>

## Reducing Risks Factors

Primary prevention efforts target risk factors such as family history, peer pressure, lack of parental supervision, and community influences that contribute to substance abuse. By addressing these factors through awareness campaigns and community programs, prevention initiatives can effectively reduce the likelihood of individuals engaging in substance abuse.<sup>3</sup>

## Environmental Strategies

Policies and environmental strategies such as limiting access to alcohol and tobacco, implementing regulations on advertising, and creating supportive communities can significantly impact substance abuse rates. These efforts influence the availability and social norms related to substance use, thereby deterring initiation and reducing overall consumption.<sup>4</sup>



## Economic Benefits

Substance abuse is a preventable and treatable condition that imposes tremendous financial and social costs. Societal costs of drug abuse and addiction equate to over \$532 billion a year, nearly 6 percent of the nation's income.<sup>5</sup>

Investing in primary prevention initiatives can result in significant cost savings by reducing the burden on healthcare, criminal justice systems, and lost productivity associated with substance abuse. Preventing substance abuse before it starts is more cost-effective than treating addiction and its consequences. **Every \$1 invested in effective substance use prevention programs will result in savings of between \$2 and \$18.<sup>6</sup>**

**Investing in prevention means investing in positive youth outcomes. Your support is needed to ensure research-based prevention programs are funded at the highest possible levels.**



## Policy Recommendations/Consideration

- Dedicate, at minimum, 25% of drug demand reduction efforts and policy budget (including opioid abatement funds) to primary prevention strategies.
- Collaborate with prevention professionals across the continuum of care when developing strategies to address drug demand reduction and supply efforts.
- Support community-based coalitions.



### Sources:

<sup>1</sup>Dennis ML, et al. Changing the focus: The case for recognizing and treating cannabis use disorders. *Addiction*. 2002;97(Suppl 1):4-15.

<sup>2</sup>National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA)

<sup>3</sup>Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA)

<sup>4</sup>Center for Disease Control (CDC)

<sup>5</sup>Estimates of the economic costs of alcohol abuse, smoking, and drug abuse were \$166.5 billion, 138.0 billion, and 109.9 billion, respectively, in 1995. Schneider Institute for Health Policy, Substance Abuse: The Nation's Number One Health Problem, Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, Princeton, NJ, February 2001 Update. The total, or 414.4 billion was over 6 percent of GDP in 1995. The estimate reported here is based on | applying the 6 percent of GDP to the GDP of 2001.

<sup>6</sup>Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration Center for Substance Abuse Prevention Substance Abuse Prevention Dollars and Cents:

A Cost-Benefit Analysis <https://www.samhsa.gov/sites/default/files/cost-benefits-prevention.pdf>

