SPTAC
STRATEGIC PREVENTION
TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE CENTER

TURNING INSIGHT INTO IMPACT: COMMUNICATING THE VALUE OF PREVENTION

Effective substance use and misuse prevention is a shared effort that depends on the support of a wide range of partners—each bringing their own values, priorities, and perspectives. To gain this support, prevention professionals can tailor their messaging so it resonates with the unique motivations of each partner.

This resource is designed to support preventionists in this work.

- It offers clear, compelling, and research-backed statements that preventionists can use to frame the value of prevention in ways that connect with policymakers, funders, community leaders, educators, healthcare providers, and others.
- Organized by theme and drawn from trusted sources in prevention science, federal agencies, and peer-reviewed research, these statements are intended to help professionals strengthen their outreach efforts.

HOW TO USE THIS BRIEF

Adapt the statements below to make the case for why prevention is important.*

- Include the statements in case statements, grant applications, educational materials, messaging, and discussions with potential partners.
- Tailor the statements to appeal to individual audience priorities.
    - For example, policymakers may respond to data-driven messages about cost savings and public health, healthcare professionals may focus on health benefits and reduced healthcare burden, and community leaders may resonate with community empowerment and safety.

* The statements included in this resource use a variety of terms to describe prevention programming, such as evidence-based prevention programs, evidence-based interventions, and youth primary prevention. Each of these terms refers to same type of prevention efforts.

PREVENTION WORKS!

"Evidence-based prevention programs can dramatically reduce rates of substance use and [substance use disorders]. Dozens of programs have been found to significantly reduce substance use, some by over 50 percent."[i]

> **Ideal Audience:** Individuals and groups focused on measurable results, such as funders, community leaders, and parents).

"Can research-based programs prevent drug addiction in youth? Yes. Studies have shown that research-based programs . . . can significantly reduce early use of tobacco, alcohol, and other drugs."[ii]

> **Ideal Audience:** Parents and organizations focused on youth development will find this encouraging, as it reassures them that substance misuse can be prevented at a young age through evidence-based programs.

PREVENTION SAVES LIVES AND MONEY

"Evidence-based interventions to prevent substance use can save society money in medical costs and help individuals remain productive members of society. Such programs can return [up to] $65 per every dollar invested in prevention."[iii]

> **Ideal Audience:** The cost-savings potential resonates with policymakers, funders, and community leaders focused on optimizing public spending and reducing financial burdens on public systems.

THE MANY BENEFITS OF PREVENTION

"Youth primary prevention also reduces the risk of substance use and lessens other negative outcomes, including low educational status, under- and unemployment, unintended parenthood, and an increased risk of death from a variety of causes."[iv]

> **Ideal Audience:** Education and employment outcomes resonate with educators and those concerned with building a strong future workforce, such as community leaders and business sectors. Unintended parenthood would likely interest those working in public health, educators, and parents.

"Importantly, prevention activities have a variety of benefits beyond reduced substance use, including lower long-term treatment costs, less premature mortality, and overall higher quality of life for young people, among many others."[v]

> **Ideal Audience:** Appeals to those in healthcare who are focused on reducing long-term costs and improving overall health and quality of life of young people.

IMPACT ACROSS THE CONTINUUM

"The U.S. currently has one of the highest rates of substance use and substance use disorder (SUD) in the world. Americans account for approximately four percent of the world's population—and 27 percent of the world's drug overdose deaths. Proven prevention programs should be implemented nationwide to reduce substance use, SUDs and overdose deaths."[vi]

> **Ideal Audience:** Provides a global comparison, making an impactful argument for policymakers who are tackling issues on a broader scale.

MINIMIZE PAIN AND SUFFERING

"Greater support for prevention could minimize the pain and suffering associated with mental, emotional, and behavioral disorders, and, critically, reduce the burden on overtaxed treatment and recovery systems."[vii]

> **Ideal Audience:** Makes a compelling argument to policymakers, funders, and others—that prevention is worth the investment.

PREVENTING SUBSTANCE MISUSE PREVENTS MENTAL ILLNESSES

"Substance use disorders frequently co-occur with other mental illnesses, such as depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress disorder. The benefits of prevention for substance use disorders, particularly in early childhood, can extend to preventing other mental illnesses later in life."[viii]

> **Ideal Audience:** Appeals to community leaders, funders, mental health and other health professionals, educators, and parents by addressing multiple health issues at the same time.

LONG-TERM BENEFITS FOR SOCIETY

"Evidence-based prevention interventions, especially those that focus on early childhood, do more than decrease drug use; they also reduce mental health problems and crime and promote academic motivation and achievement. Thus, these programs can have tremendous, long-term benefits for the children and families they serve, as well as for society as a whole."[ix]

> **Ideal Audience:** Appeals to those who work with young children, funders, and parents, as it underscores the broad positive impacts of early intervention on overall life outcomes.

RESOURCES

Looking for help putting these statements into action? Check out these resources!

- *Advocacy Toolkit*. 2020. Partnership to End Addiction. https://drugfree.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/advocacy_toolkit.pdf
- *Impactful Advocacy for Substance Misuse Prevention (webinar recording).* March 2025. Great Lakes Prevention Technology Transfer Center. https://pttcnetwork.org/products_and_resources/impactful-advocacy-for-substance-misuse-prevention/
- *Reframing Adolescent Substance Use and Its Prevention: A Communications Playbook.* 2018. Frameworks Institute. https://www.frameworksinstitute.org/resources/reframing-adolescent-substance-use-and-its-prevention-a-communications-playbook/
- *The NACCHO Advocacy Toolkit*. January 2020. National Association of County and City Health Officials. https://www.naccho.org/uploads/downloadable-resources/Advocacy-Toolkit-February-2020.pdf
- *The Power of Advocacy*. (n.d.). American Public Health Association. https://www.apha.org/-/media/files/pdf/advocacy/power_of_advocacy.pdf
- *You Gotta Hear This! Developing an Effective Elevator Pitch*. October 2024. Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. https://www.samhsa.gov/resource/sptac/you-gotta-hear-developing-effective-elevator-pitch

CITATIONS

[i] Addiction Policy Forum. (August 16, 2020). The Importance of Drug Prevention. https://www.addictionpolicy.org/post/the-importance-of-drug-prevention

[ii] NIDA. (July 2020). Preventing Drug Misuse and Addiction: The Best Strategy. https://nida.nih.gov/publications/drugs-brains-behavior-science-addiction/preventing-drug-misuse-addiction-best-strategy

[iii] NIDA. (July 2020). Preventing Drug Misuse and Addiction: The Best Strategy. https://nida.nih.gov/publications/drugs-brains-behavior-science-addiction/preventing-drug-misuse-addiction-best-strategy

[iv] Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health. (n.d.). Principles for the Use of Funds from the Opioid Litigation, https://opioidprinciples.jhsph.edu/invest-in-youth-prevention/

[v] National Academy for State Health Policy. (June 17, 2024). State Strategies for Preventing Substance Use and Overdose Among Youth and Adolescents. https://nashp.org/state-strategies-for-preventing-substance-use-and-overdose-among-youth-and-adolescents/

[vi] Addiction Policy Forum. (August 16, 2020). The Importance of Drug Prevention. https://www.addictionpolicy.org/post/the-importance-of-drug-prevention

[vii] National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine. 2025. *Blueprint for a National Prevention Infrastructure for Mental, Emotional, and Behavioral Disorders*. Washington, DC: The National Academies Press. https://doi.org/10.17226/28577.

[viii] National Institute on Drug Abuse. (September 2023). Prevention. https://nida.nih.gov/research-topics/prevention#are-prevention-programs-good-roi

[ix] Addiction Policy Forum. (August 16, 2020). The Importance of Drug Prevention. https://www.addictionpolicy.org/post/the-importance-of-drug-prevention