

# PREVENTION WORKS! VT

Substance abuse clearly is among the most costly health problems in the United States. Among national estimates of the costs of illness for 33 diseases and conditions, alcohol ranked second, tobacco ranked sixth, and drug disorders ranked seventh (National Institutes of Health [NIH], 2000). Programs designed to prevent substance abuse can reduce these costs.

## Can we Prevent Substance Abuse in Vermont?

- Science-validated substance abuse prevention programs, if properly implemented by schools and communities, can reduce substance abuse.

- These (science-validated) programs work to boost protective factors and eliminate or reduce risk factors for drug use.

- Also demonstrating success are environmental strategies - those prevention efforts aimed at changing or influencing community conditions, standards, systems and policies. For example, research shows that sales to underage youth are higher in communities where a responsible beverage service training program is not in place.

## Substance Abuse Prevention: Benefits Outweigh Costs

The positive outcomes from successful substance abuse prevention efforts are many.

- Prevent expenditure on drug abuse-related emergency room visits,
- Increased productivity,
- Improved job stability,
- Fewer unemployment episodes,
- Lower rates of violent crime,
- Prevention of DUI injuries to others,
- Better family interaction,
- Reduced juvenile delinquency,
- Fewer incidents of family violence,
- Improved school attendance and academic achievement, and
- Better health outcomes.

Cost Benefit studies indicate that \$1 spent on substance abuse prevention can result in \$10 of long-term savings.

## Examples of Practices to Prevent and Reduce Substance Abuse and Addiction

### Prevention and Early Intervention

- Targeted media campaigns
- Comprehensive family, school and community-based prevention
- Screenings, brief interventions and treatment referrals

### Treatment and Disease Management

- Behavioral and pharmacological treatments For chronic illness
- Intensive case management
- Drug treatment alternatives to prison
  - Prison based treatment/aftercare
  - Recovery coaching
  - Supportive housing
- Employee Assistance Programs

### Taxation and Regulation

- Alcohol and tobacco tax increases
- Health insurance coverage for prevention & addiction
  - Indoor smoking bans
  - Keg registration laws
- Maintaining Minimum Legal Drinking Age of 21
- Lowered blood alcohol levels for intoxicated driving offenses

### Research

- Factors influencing risk
  - Best practices
  - Costs and benefits of interventions

## Early Use and an Increased Potential for Future Dependence

Early alcohol and drug usage among youth is strongly related to future abuse.

- Over half of the individuals in alcohol and drug treatment services initiated substance use before the age of 18.
- Less than 30 percent of individuals in treatment for alcohol or drug dependence initiated use after they turned 20 years old.
- Adolescents who begin drinking before the age of 15 are four times more likely to develop alcohol dependence.
- Each additional year of delayed onset of drinking reduces the probability of alcohol dependence by 14 percent.
- Research from SAMHSA (2002) indicates that children who first smoke marijuana younger than 14 years old are more than five times as likely to abuse drugs when becoming adults, compared to those who first use marijuana at 18 years of age.

## What Works in Substance Abuse Prevention

Research has shown that a broad array of evidence-based programs can effectively prevent substance abuse, promote mental health, and prevent related health and social problems by reducing risk factors and increasing protective factors.

For every dollar federal and state governments spent on substance abuse and addiction in 2005, only 1.9 cents was spent on prevention and treatment. For every dollar federal and state governments spent to prevent and treat substance abuse and addiction, another \$59.83 in public programs was spent addressing consequences, including health costs, justice related costs, child and family assistance, costs to the education system, costs for mental health and disabilities, and public safety costs.

## Community Coalitions

It is neither realistic nor fair to expect schools to prevent drug use all by themselves, and experts in prevention agree that prevention strategies should be comprehensive. Ideally, prevention strategies should affect all of the settings in which young people spend their time – including family, community and media interventions.

More than 20 Vermont communities have a prevention coalition that works to build relationships, increase opportunities for community involvement, increase understanding of alcohol, tobacco and other drug issues and coordinate comprehensive community-wide solutions to substance use issues.

Please contact Prevention Works! VT with your comments or questions.

## Prevention Works! VT

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**Prevention Works! VT** is a statewide coalition of  
community prevention coalitions.

*Our mission is to create and lead advocates to work collaboratively on policy, practice and attitudes that promote prevention, health and wellness with one voice.*