

Monica Hutt, Chief Prevention Officer Testimony
HHS and HEd Joint Hearing- Afterschool/Summer Funding
2/7/24

Testimony Outline

Introduction – creation and role of the Chief Prevention Officer per enabling legislation

- 1) Role created by the Legislature through Act 82-----
 - identify and coordinate initiatives across State government and among community stakeholder groups that improve well-being;
 - examine promising prevention practices in other jurisdictions that may be replicated in Vermont; and
 - improve the well-being of all Vermonters by considering population prevention measures in relation to all policy determinations
- 2) MCH began in February of 2021

Although intended to broadly focus on the social determinants of health and upstream prevention efforts across the board, the CPO does have a unique and targeted focus on substance use and prevention of substance misuse/SUD

It is with that particular lens-- and in my role as a member of the Substance Misuse Prevention Oversight Advisory Council-- as a well as a member of multiple Task Forces on Afterschool and Summer Programming that I am testifying today.

Membership on SMPC; role of the SMPC

- 1- Increase protective factors, resilience, feelings of connectedness
- 2- Decrease risk factors for SU
- 3- Increase efficiency and collaboration on prevention efforts across all state, public and private entities

Multiple iterations of the After School task forces and committees

- a. **2021 Summer Matters grants (Interagency working group)**
- b. EO creating **VT Interagency Afterschool Youth Task Force** (Oct 2021)
2022-2023 new round of summer and afterschool grants
(Expanding Access grants)
- c. **2023 Afterschool Advisory Council**

From the Universal Afterschool Task Force Report issued to the Legislature in May of 2021, the goal was to create the opportunity for universal after school/third space opportunities for all of Vermont’s youth- from kindergarten through high school

The vision for universal afterschool was to build on the Finnish and Icelandic models; the Icelandic model in particular is designed to address a reduction in substance use among youth.

- BMC public Health:
 - *The Icelandic Prevention Model (IPM) is a collaborative upstream model that was designed to influence risk and protective factors related to substance use within the community, school, peer and family contexts. **By engaging whole communities, the IPM has been found to be effective in reducing youth substance use behaviours across Iceland.***
 - *From an article published by Yesarts- a recovery program in Kentucky*
 - *Our interest in Youth in Iceland stems not only from its dramatic success in reducing Iceland’s teen substance abuse problem, but also from the central role that investment in high-quality after-school programming – with sports and arts as the focus – played in the country’s success.*
 - *In substance abuse prevention terms, after-school sports and arts programs favorably shift the balance of risk and protective factors; in physiological terms, they can induce brain activities that mimic the neurological “high” that can come from drug use; in common sense terms, they provide fun, healthy activities for kids to do instead of engaging in drug/alcohol use and associated risky behaviors. The success of such programs as implemented in Iceland is based on a very simple yet powerful premise: rather than telling young people to “just say no” to drugs, we must give them things to say “yes” to.*

Data on current youth substance use in Vermont:

- Looking at data from the YRBS and the VT Young Adult Surveys conducted by VDH; the results across substances are varied. You can see decreases in alcohol use but increases in tobacco use and vaping. With increases in cannabis use among young adults and increases in use of heroin and cocaine with a persistent lack of awareness of the dangers of some drugs and a lack of awareness of the dangers of mixed substances like fentanyl.

- The majority of adolescents initiate engagement in substance use between the age of 12-21
- 74% of individuals aged 18-30 admitted to treatment initiate youth at age 17 or younger
- And we know that Vermont's death by overdose rate has continued to climb
- **It is critical that we leverage our prevention efforts, meet kids and families where they are, wherever that may be, and leave no child behind in our efforts.**

Afterschool and Summer Programming IS prevention

Primary Tenet of Successful Prevention Strategies for Youth (and Adults) includes the engagement of organizations and a community in which individuals feel at home and connected.

- Youth substance use prevention takes community involvement and strong partnerships
- A primary tenant of asset building is the idea of multiple trusted adults in the life of a youth – across settings to generalize positive, proactive messaging
- We cannot limit those opportunities as we work to find the right places for each child.
- Our local community coalitions, one of our primary prevention strategies, are small entities embedded in communities, that work to create programming across the lifespan and are primary examples of community-based organizations working with youth
- **If we eliminate options, we limit impact**

Equity and Access

- We need to **build systems across the state and eliminate barriers to participation** in afterschool and summer programming to leverage the positive impacts of prevention strategies.

- We need a **community-based approach, messages must be available and consistent across entities** – reminiscent of both MTSS and, before that, PBSS (positive behavioral supports and strategies) that built on community culture and messages that were generalized to every setting to surround kids with positive, consistent context and community supports
- We need to **ensure access, in a rural state with geographic isolation**, we need to nurture small, community based programs which are often more available and accessible to kids and families
- We need to **be very cautious about creating geographic inequity or creating environments** in which a program must be housed in a specific setting- we need to be flexible and build on strengths and where youth and families feel connection
- **Schools cannot be expected to be all things to all people- the demands for education, mental health, social supports is already intensive and difficult to achieve.** We cannot ignore the opportunities for community partners and must seize the opportunity to meet very real needs by building an inclusive system.

Position of the SMPC in support of a mixed delivery system (see submission for testimony)

- Initial letter in 2021
- Afterschool and summer programming is a key prevention strategy
- Current position continues to support a mixed delivery system, intentionally broad, to maximize access and impact

Position of the Current Afterschool Advisory Council

- From the **Update from the Field of Afterschool, Summer and Third Space Programs from 2024** that was submitted to the Committees, you can see a few key metrics that highlight the success of the grant programs we've been administering since 2019- the **Executive Summary**

addresses some of those metrics but I encourage you to review the whole document, it's long but an easy and really informative read.

- Through **7 rounds of grants**- community partners have **increased slots for kids and youth by over 13,000** and **increased days of programming by 2, 651**- slots and days that would not have existed without the grants **and were in addition to** whatever already existed – through schools and traditional afterschool/summer programs. That's how you leverage prevention efforts- by offering more slots, more days, more access.
- And **that happened in all 14 counties of the state which**, I can assure you was not true at the start of the Summer Matters program in 2021- that was our goal, to eliminate programming deserts so that all kids and families could get to programs.....we have a long way to go but **the best way to get there is additive, not by reducing opportunities and potential partners.**