

The Science & Art of Primary Prevention: Staying Ahead of Emerging Problems

Prevention Coalition Advisory Council of PA (PCAC)

PCAC is an advisory council, consisting of key coalition leaders from around the state, which focuses on the advancement, growth, and sustainability of prevention-focused coalitions. These coalitions are grounded-in and promote the use of evidence-based/informed practices through education, advocacy, and collaboration in order to prevent the likelihood of onset problem behaviors.

Why is this paper important?

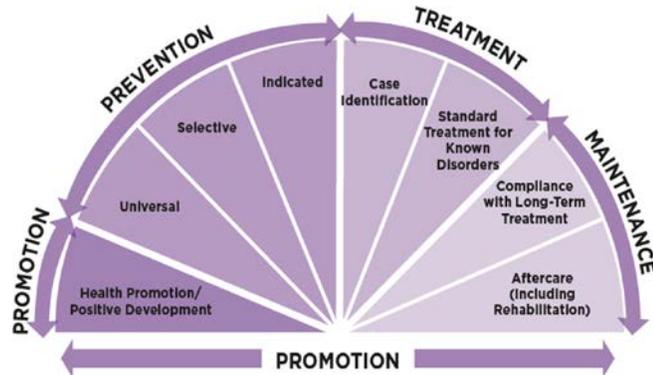
To educate decision-makers on the value of primary prevention and to increase their understanding of prevention as a science. In addition, the aim is to optimize health promotion and to provide guidance on the best evidence-based programs, policies, and practices to support the field of prevention.

“The most effective primary-prevention approach to reducing youth problem behavior begins with understanding the causes of the issues and then implementing evidence-based programs and strategies that have been proven effective at reducing the causal factors.

Targeting the causes of issues is a pro-active prevention approach that can lead to the reduction of various societal problems which results in long-term cost-savings to the general public.”

**-- Mike Pennington,
Director, OJJDP & OCJSI
PCCD**

Institute of Medicine Mental Health Intervention Spectrum



**Health Promotion/
Positive
Development**
Approaches designed to benefit health & quality of life

Universal
Approaches designed for an entire population

Selective
Interventions targeted to higher risk subgroups

Indicated
Interventions aimed at individuals showing signs of problem behaviors

[Click Here to Learn More About the IOM MH Intervention Spectrum](#)

What is primary prevention?

Primary prevention is focused on PREVENTING the onset of problem behaviors including:

- Substance Use
- Depression & Anxiety
- Violence
- Delinquency
- School Drop-Out
- Teen Pregnancy

It involves interventions that are applied before there is any evidence of the problem.

Research has proven these problems can be prevented by identifying and addressing the underlying causes (risk factors) that lead to negative outcomes.

The graphic above outlines the IOM's Mental Health Continuum of Intervention which depicts the need for intervention across the spectrum to achieve positive results for the community.

Call to Action

Be an **Advocate** for effective primary prevention that includes:

- Funding for local coalitions that utilize risk-focused, data-driven strategic planning processes
- Supporting programs and activities that build positive bonding experiences as defined by the Social Development Strategy
- Supporting public policy development that utilizes practices which have been proven effective
- Implementing evidence-based programs, policies, and practices
- Utilizing proven-effective public awareness materials

Effective Primary Prevention

Effective primary prevention takes many forms. Just as the IOM's Intervention Spectrum show us, primary prevention requires a multi-faceted approach for maximum impact. This page focuses on community-based actions that are grounded in prevention science.

Health promotion and positive youth development are two of the cornerstones to primary prevention.

The four fundamental aspects of these prevention principles include:

1. **Strengthening** community action
2. **Creating** safe and supportive environments
3. **Developing** personal skills
4. **Building** public policy

1. Strengthening Community Action

Development of coalitions and collaborative boards that adopt the public health approach to upstream prevention is paramount in achieving positive, long-term outcomes for youth and families. These coalitions address the risk factors for problem behavior rather than the problems themselves.

The coalition models that most effectively utilize prevention science as the basis of their work are:

- Communities That Care
- PROSPER
- Drug-Free Communities
- Community Schools
- Collective Impact

These primary prevention coalitions follow a strategic planning structure that utilizes science as the basis of all their prevention strategies through activities such as:

- Coordinated data analysis to determine targeted behaviors and risk and protective factor priorities
- Implementation of proven-effective programs, policies, and practices
- Setting goals and tracking impact

2. Creating Safe and Supportive Environments

Safe and supportive environments help to build trust, self-confidence, and self-esteem which are core factors in the development of healthy youth behaviors. When youth feel connected to their families, schools, communities and peers, they are much more likely to engage in positive behaviors.



The Social Development Strategy (SDS) identifies multiple protective factors that increase the likelihood of healthy youth outcomes.

The strategy outlines approaches that lead to one of the most vital components in safeguarding a child from the presence of risk factors: Bonding. These approaches include providing meaningful:

- Opportunities
- Skills
- Recognition

Acknowledgement of a young person's effort and achievement promotes positive bonding: a sense of attachment, emotional connection, and commitment.

Once bonding has occurred, youth are more motivated to follow clear and healthy standards of the person or group to whom they have bonded.

For more information about SDS,
please visit:

www.communitiesthatcare.net

3. Developing Personal Skills

Personal skill development is an important part of effective primary prevention. Prevention coalitions sponsor and promote evidence-based programs in our communities which have been proved effective in reducing youth problem behaviors through skill building and increasing knowledge for both youth and adults.

For more information about Evidence-Based Programs,
please visit:

www.episcenter.psu.edu/ebp

4. Building Public Policy

Primary Prevention Coalitions are proactive in responding to legislation and policy that will potentially result in negative outcomes for Pennsylvania youth. Coalitions are an excellent resource for legislators and other key stakeholders for education regarding risk factors that are present for youth in our communities and how policies can ensure that risks are reduced in order to prevent problem behaviors.

Building and implementing local policies that address such issues as funding gaps and enforcement of local laws are vitally important to the impact healthy youth outcomes. Local leaders should understand the needs of their community in order to develop prevention-focused policies to reduce problems in the future.

The 1% Solution is a policy, which has been introduced by the PA Commission on Crime and Delinquency, that would have tremendous positive impact for youth and their communities. This policy would increase PCCD's appropriation by the equivalent of 1% of the Department of Corrections (DOC) general-fund budget to allow for the expansion of evidence-based delinquency and violence prevention programming and community-development efforts throughout PA.



To download this whitepaper,
please visit:

www.commonwealthpreventionalliance.org