

Strategic Prevention Framework Step 1: Assessment

Assessment, the first step of the Strategic Prevention Framework (SPF), involves identifying local prevention needs based on data. To conduct a comprehensive assessment of prevention needs, you need to gather data about each of the following:

- Substance use and misuse problems and related behaviors
- Risk and protective factors for priority problems
- Capacity, including resources and readiness, for prevention

It is important to assess the nature and extent of both substance use and misuse problems and related behaviors in the community.

WHAT ARE PROBLEMS AND BEHAVIORS?

- **Problems** refer to the negative effects, or consequences, of substance use. Some problems are direct consequences of substance use (e.g., overdose), while others are indirect consequences (e.g., motor vehicle crashes).
- **Behaviors** refer to how people use or misuse substances and are sometimes referred to as consumption (e.g., binge drinking). Consumption patterns describe substance use or misuse behaviors within specific groups (e.g., binge drinking among 12- to 17-year-olds).

ASSESSING PROBLEMS AND RELATED BEHAVIORS

Use the following questions to guide your community assessment of substance use problems and related behaviors:

- **What** substance use problems (e.g., overdoses, alcohol poisoning) and related behaviors (e.g., prescription drug misuse, underage drinking) are occurring in your community?
- **How often** are these substance use problems and related behaviors occurring? Which ones are happening the most?
- **Where** are these substance use problems and related behaviors occurring (e.g., at home or in vacant lots, in small groups or during big parties)?
- **Who** is experiencing more of these substance use problems and related behaviors (e.g., males, females, youth, adults, members of certain cultural groups)?

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This information can help you identify—and determine how to most effectively address—your community's priority substance use problem(s). To answer these four assessment questions, you will need to do the following:

- **Take stock of existing data:** Start by looking for state and local data already collected by others (e.g., hospitals, law enforcement agencies, community organizations, state agencies, epidemiological workgroups).
- **Look closely at the existing data:** Examine the quality of the data that you've found, discard the data that are not useful, and create an inventory of the data you feel confident about including in your assessment.
- **Identify any data gaps:** Examine your inventory of existing data and determine whether you are missing any information (e.g., about a particular problem, behavior, or population group).
- **Collect new data to fill those gaps:** If you are missing information, determine which data collection method (e.g., surveys, focus groups, key informant interviews)—or combination of methods—is the best way to obtain that information.

ANALYZING ASSESSMENT DATA

Once you have all of your assessment data, analyze it according to the following criteria to determine your community's priority substance use problem(s):

- **Magnitude:** The prevalence of a specific substance use problem or behavior (e.g., Which problem/behavior is most widespread in your community?)
- **Severity:** How large an impact a specific substance use problem or behavior has on the people or the community (e.g., Which problem/behavior is most serious?)
- **Trend:** How substance use patterns are changing over time within a community (e.g., Which problem/behavior is getting worse/better?)
- **Changeability:** How likely it is that a community will be able to modify the problem or behavior (e.g., Which problem/behavior are you most likely to influence with your prevention efforts?)

REFERENCES

SAMHSA's Centers for the Application of Prevention Technologies (2015). *Criteria for analyzing assessment data*. Retrieved from <https://www.samhsa.gov/capt/tools-learning-resources/criteria-analyzing-assessment-data> on February 21, 2017.

SAMHSA's Centers for the Application of Prevention Technologies (n.d.). *What is the SPF? An Introduction to SAMHSA's Strategic Prevention Framework*. Retrieved from <https://captionline.edc.org/> on February 21, 2017.