



## Listening Sessions Summary: COVID-19's Impact on Prevention Practitioners

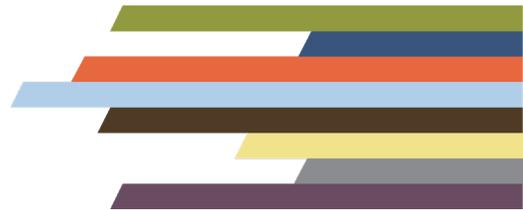
In response to new challenges experienced by the prevention workforce resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic, the Pacific Southwest Prevention Technology Transfer Center (PTTC) facilitated four listening sessions over video conference with 111 prevention practitioners joining. Listening sessions were conducted at various times throughout the day on April 15, 16, 21, and 22. Participants represented Arizona, California, Guam, Hawaii, Nevada, and the Republic of the Marshall Islands, as well as a few participants from outside of the Pacific Southwest region.

The listening sessions opened up a conversation about the specific challenges practitioners are facing with doing their work in prevention; what training and resources the PTTC could provide to address these challenges; and where are they finding new opportunities for their work. During the listening sessions, spontaneous peer-sharing and crowdsourcing of resources naturally occurred. This document briefly summarizes the conversations held across these four sessions and includes various links to resources as they relate to various topics that emerged during these conversations.

### New Challenges

While many challenges were identified, most related to several specific themes:

- **Accessing and engaging youth and parents.** In-person events have been cancelled, including school assemblies, parent education nights, youth summits, during- and after-school programming, coalition meetings, and other community meetings. This is made more difficult due to an inability to plan for future in-person events or activities or know when they might be possible and safe again. Some participants mentioned that they were not able to even access youth to invite them to online activities, meetings, and other events.
- **Transitioning meetings, activities, and events online.** Coalitions, task forces, and other prevention groups are quickly shifting to online meetings. Many expressed a lack of experience with various online meeting platforms, concerns with security, and lack of experience and skill with facilitating different types of events over video conference.
- **Engaging coalition members and other key stakeholders.** As various types of stakeholder meetings move online, outreach and engagement has proven to be challenging. Some participants said they were not sure if their meeting notices and other information were reaching their partners, while others shared that they were concerned with how to build relationships with new partners without in-person contact.



- **Accessing online or distance learning events.** Some service recipients and key stakeholders lack internet connection and/or access to devices (computers, tablets, or smart phones) that allow for distance learning, virtual events, or online meetings. Concerns for specific population groups lacking access were frequently mentioned, including rural/frontier populations, jurisdictions/islands, senior populations, and families who are low socioeconomic status.
- **Using social media effectively.** Listening session participants frequently mentioned lack of experience with social media. Some noted that they were unfamiliar with most (or any) platforms, were uncertain as to which ones reached their specific population, or needed guidance on how to maximize its benefits through quality messaging and interaction without overusing it.
- **Advocating for prevention.** Participants noted that prevention funding has continued to decrease over the past 10-15 years despite evidence that prevention is highly effective when done well. Concerns are greater in this context with how to get better prevention messaging out to the public, especially given that shelter-in-place orders, while deemed beneficial to fighting COVID-19 by the CDC and other experts, might have unintended potential consequences of increased substance misuse, mental health problems, domestic violence, and suicide. Participants were concerned that the value and importance of substance misuse prevention is being overlooked, both in general and with the current context of people rarely leaving the home and experiencing increased stress.
- **The actual work of prevention.** Participants noted repeatedly how much of prevention work is in-person, from building relationships with stakeholders to delivering services and educating the public. Many expressed concern with how to translate in-person activities and evidence-based curricula while maintaining fidelity. Others noted that it was difficult to maintain momentum and keep staff motivated when working from home alone.

## Training and Resource Needs

Participants are interested in skill-based trainings, peer-sharing conversations, and a variety of resources such as pre-recorded videos, resource documents, and fact sheets. Topic areas were quite varied:

- **Using virtual meeting platforms.** Participants frequently noted that using virtual meeting platforms was very new to them. Some requested a resource document outlining different online meeting platform options, including comparisons of various platform features. They noted that many resources are available for learning to use each platform, but they would prefer skill-based training where an experienced user walks them through step-by-step and provides support as they practice the various features (e.g., white boards, polling, and break-out rooms) with them. The vast majority of people were specifically interested in Zoom, although a few are using other platforms due to security concerns. More participants requested resources to ensure their meetings are secure and free from uninvited people and external disruptions.
- **Accessing stakeholders and service recipients.** This theme included several categories: 1) how to check in on coalition members to make sure they stay involved and are able to join online

meetings; 2) new, creative ideas for accessing those without internet access or devices (e.g., computers); and 3) accessing youth when you either don't have contact information or they are inaccessible for other reasons.

- **Facilitation skills for virtual meetings and events.** Participants acknowledged that facilitation skills differ when people are in a video conference as opposed to in person and that it is more difficult to engage everyone in the same way. They requested training and tips for facilitating coalition meetings, parent education events, and youth activities. Online facilitation skills to create and use age-appropriate activities that engage youth and keep them involved in prevention work long-term was the most frequently mentioned need.
- **Engaging stakeholders and service recipients.** Participants noted concerns with engaging and keeping youth engaged over time via online means, and the appropriate type and frequency of engagement. Participants also mentioned the need for resources on engaging parents and senior citizens, as well as other stakeholders who might have more direct access to engage these groups (e.g., teachers, school administrators, and health care providers). One participant was looking for a means of giving youth and community members a voice to process their experiences, through something like Photovoice or virtual community “talk-story” or storytelling time.
- **Education and evidence-based intervention delivery.** Questions were raised about how to adapt evidence-based curricula intended for in-person delivery. Participants were also looking for no cost alcohol, other drug, and violence prevention education materials that can be delivered online; ideas for online activities for national Prevention Week; and information on bringing selective or indicated strategies into homes in a safe manner.
- **Social media.** Participants requested a resource that details the various social media platforms, including audiences reached; different uses and options for each platform; how to create appealing and engaging social media content; and how to effectively engage youth through social media. One participant also indicated that a central place for prevention messaging, memes, gifs, etc. could be shared.
- **Self-care, coping skills, and returning to work or school.** Like many other health-care professionals, prevention practitioners' focus tends to be on their service recipients and stakeholders. Participants frequently mentioned a need for resources on self-care and coping techniques for themselves and their staff. Related to this, participants are considering how they will *safely* transition back into more frequent in-person events in a graduated fashion to protect themselves and others if COVID-19 is still being transmitted. Finally, participants are concerned about how to prepare youth to transition back into physical school buildings once that is allowed.
- **Parenting resources.** Participants indicated a need for resources on how to support parents, including general parenting skills during stressful times and more specifically on how to take advantage of this opportunity to talk to their children about the dangers of substance misuse.
- **Professional development.** Participants noted that they still need their usual, on-going professional development opportunities to stay up-to-date with science-based prevention and certification requirements. Others noted more specific topic areas for professional development during this time:

- **Science-based messaging and evidence-based message delivery** that helps people understand the connections between COVID-19 and various substance misuse issues (e.g., vaping might make COVID-19 symptoms worse; youth might have greater access to alcohol and are exposed to more pro-alcohol and pro-marijuana messaging; and people turning to substances as a coping mechanism). Also, participants are very interested in improving positive social norms messaging, media campaigns, and social marketing campaigns with strong evidence-bases of effectiveness.
- **Advocacy skills** to ensure the successes of substance misuse prevention are well-understood by funders, as more funding continues to be cut. In addition, due to alcohol and marijuana regulations to be loosened to allow for take-out and curbside pick-up of these substances, participants are looking for training on how to ensure that these regulations are tightened back up after businesses fully re-open and that they cannot be loosened again should another similar crisis occur. One request was for a model ordinance that could be adapted locally.
- **Shared risk and protective factors** to help educate the general public, key stakeholders, and funders that substance misuse prevention also effectively prevents or mitigates other behavioral and physical health problems, especially through the development of protective factors and resilience.
- **Trauma** resulting from the pandemic and changes to everyday life was noted by participants as something they expect to have a lasting impact on their prevention work. Participants would like training on how to incorporate trauma into primary prevention work.

## Opportunities

Participants identified a number of opportunities and reasons to stay hopeful during this time.

Opportunities identified include:

- More flexibility from funders to meet goals and objectives in different ways or using different strategies.
- A chance to focus on developing and disseminating quality, well-tested messaging rather than something “fluffy” or that tries to “scare them back to health”.
- New partnerships with new stakeholders, agencies, and organizations. Some coalitions have been partnering with other coalitions to offer more webinars on important topics, like marijuana trends, LGBTQ+ issues, etc.
- Learning to work smarter, not harder, with less face-to-face meetings and less travel
- Empowering our youth and young adults by letting them lead us through this transition to online work and communication. Teens can teach us how to use Zoom and engage with them via technology and we can formally recognize their knowledge and skills in this way.
- Strengthening family bonding for some families, which we know is a strong protective factor.
- A chance to just listen carefully to our key groups (i.e., youth and senior citizens) to find out what they need now and in general.