



The Critical Role of Substance Misuse Prevention During and After COVID-19

As sheltering in place becomes the new normal in many areas of the US, millions are experiencing isolation, financial insecurity, and unprecedented levels of stress—at a time when physical distancing separates people from the support systems they need most.

And as we move into the planning for our response, let's remember that prevention practitioners have a proven track record of success in coordinating local public health responses to health emergencies. National emergency epidemiologic data demonstrate that state and local prevention efforts work: the overall prevalence of drinking among 12- to 20-year olds has declined by 32.9 percent since 2004, due in part to effective prevention initiatives.

Substance misuse prevention practitioners are uniquely positioned to contribute to an effective response to the short- and long-term impacts of COVID-19.

- **The threat is real.** Individuals who experience trauma face greater risk of developing substance misuse problems. Substance misuse also increases the risk of suicide, domestic violence, and chronic health conditions such as cardiovascular disease. For those living with a substance use disorder, the COVID-19 crisis increases the risk of relapse. Prevention practitioners can help us recognize and address the factors that contribute to or protect against behavioral health problems.
- **Staying safe depends on behavior change.** Prevention practitioners understand how difficult it is for people to change behaviors. They are experts in implementing well-planned, well-executed behavior change strategies that produce the greatest benefit.
- **Alcohol sales are up.** Alcoholic beverage sales rose by 55% in late March, when many states and public health officials urged residents to stay at home, compared to sales in 2019. Prevention practitioners experience in developing and implementing evidence-based policies to foster healthier community conditions.
- **Alcohol use poses risk.** Alcohol use is not an effective coping mechanism for stress. Drinking at home during the pandemic can increase other problems, including family or domestic violence. Prevention practitioners understand the need to create environments that support healthy behaviors.
- **Evidence is critical.** In this era of “fake news,” relying on hard evidence is more important than ever. Prevention practitioners provide the data needed to develop appropriate evidence-based responses to behavioral health problems facing different communities.

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- **Health disparities exist.** COVID-19 is affecting people of color disproportionately. An extensive amount of data shows disparities in health by race, ethnicity, and social class, across the lifespan. Communities of color have less access to testing and higher rates of infection and death from the virus. Prevention practitioners understand the importance of health equity and have experience applying the National Standards for Culturally and Linguistically Appropriate Services (CLAS) in Health and Health Care to community work. Prevention professionals help to prioritize our most vulnerable populations and create seamless systems of care to make sure that no one falls through the cracks.
- **Stigma hurts everyone.** Stigma and discrimination can occur when people associate a disease, such as COVID-19, with a population or nationality. Prevention practitioners understand that words matter and are experts in creating positive, productive, and inclusive materials and messaging.
- **Trauma-informed care must be the norm.** Youth who have experienced trauma are more likely to experience mental health conditions, demonstrate difficult behaviors, and struggle to form healthy relationships. Prevention practitioners understand trauma's link to mental health and can help professionals respond in trauma-informed ways to youth whose lives have been disrupted by this pandemic.
- **Collaboration and coordination are more important than ever.** COVID-19 requires a coordinated response. Prevention practitioners have experience convening community partners, facilitating group planning, and generate decisions that are practical and well-supported.
- **Prevention is cost-effective.** Effective prevention policies and programs can offset the cost of substance misuse. Prevention-experienced practitioners are skilled in identifying and utilizing evidence-based approaches with limited resources.
- **States project budget shortfalls.** As states grapple with the budgetary and economic consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic, state leaders and local officials will all have to make difficult decisions on how to allocate resources during the recovery. The National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL) is tracking projected revenue shortfalls and revised estimates for fiscal year 2020 (FY 2020) and fiscal year 2021. Read the full report: [Corona Virus \(COVID-19\) Revised State Revenue Projections](#)

State and community leaders need to understand the crucial roles for prevention during and post-pandemic. Make the voice of prevention heard where you live and work!

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