



Step 1: Assessment

An Introduction to SAMHSA's Strategic Prevention Framework

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 substances use problems and related behaviors occurring? Which are happening most frequently?
- **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 substances use problems and related behaviors (e.g., males, females, youth, adults, members of certain cultural groups)

Conducting an assessment helps identify, prioritize, and determine how to address the substance use problems most effectively in your community. To answer the 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 your assessment data, analyze it according to the following criteria to determine your community's priority substance use problem(s):

- **Magnitude:** The prevalence of specific substance use problems or behaviors (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 individual 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

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. (2019). [A Guide to SAMHSA's Strategic Prevention Framework](#).