

Prevention^{IN}Action

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Town Government: An Integral Role in Prevention Efforts

The old adage – “It takes a village” – is certainly true for prevention of youth substance use. Community-based approaches provide proven strategies for reduction of risk factors and enhancement of preventative factors for youth use of alcohol, marijuana and non-medical use of prescription drugs.

Our local town departments and officials help to establish guidelines and cultivate acceptable norms. Let’s look at how to maximize town government’s impact so youth substance use is on every agenda for monitoring, safety and improvements.

Step 1: Leader Selection:

Listen and evaluate a town official’s commitment to reduction of youth substance use. Look beyond the speeches and dialogue to track records of action and direct support for programming for meaningful change.

Step 2: Structures in Place:

Ensure town governments establish substance use task forces or committees. Confirm commitment to the talent, resources and dedication needed to support ongoing change.

Step 3: We All Can Contribute:

Be a partner of town government. Reach out for comment, generate awareness, and offer time and talents to make a difference.

Step 4: Commitment to Education:

Encourage town resources for community



forums and expert speaker series. Keep elected officials accountable for dedicated resources to drive education.

Step 5: Localized Measurement:

Make sure programs are measurable and address specific town challenges. Be an advocate for progress as well as accountability so adjustments are made with new data.

Step 6: Establish Non-Use Norms:

Encourage town officials to support police and enforcement organizations with laws and consequences for youth substance use and directed at businesses that sell to the underage. Build a culture of non-tolerance. Elect leaders who model positive behaviors. Build an infrastructure that makes it difficult to engage in youth substance use. There is a direct reduction in substance use where towns have created strong punishments for the sale, use, possession, drinking/driving offenses, and other related infractions.

Step 6: Sharing Resources:

Link resources to maximize collaborations and impact. Encourage town partnerships with parents, schools, community organizations, law enforcement, faith organizations, businesses, health professionals, media and more. Work with the media to share real statistics and impacts.

Step 7: Power of Partnerships:

Leverage outside resources, proven programming and mirror progress of other towns. Build bridges between communities.

System-wide interventions and programming has the strongest likelihood of progress and success. A town’s infrastructure can help achieve the vision for a substance-free community. Let’s all commit to electing, holding accountable and partnering with our towns to create sustainable and lasting change.



Next Issue: Faith Communities and Civic Organizations

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