

Foundations in Behavioral Health Prevention Webinar Series

Webinar 1: Foundations of Prevention Science Resource Guide

Iowa's Center of Excellence for Behavioral Health

June 2025

Table of Contents

Summary	3
An Overview of the Prevention Practice	4
From State Goals to Local Action	4
CSAP Strategies	5
Risk and Protective Factors	6
Behavioral Health Priority Areas	7
Mental Health	7
Substance Use – Drugs	8
Substance Use – Alcohol	19
Suicide	10
Gambling	11
Tobacco	12

Summary

In this resource document, one will find materials on prevention which provide an overview of the field and practice, along with some identified priority areas relative to the current behavioral health targeted concerns here in the state of Iowa. This resource document also offers prevention specialists materials for strategies in adopting prevention methods in one's community, information on core competencies and accompanying knowledge, skills, and abilities while also offering valuable information on risk and protective factors.

An Overview of the Prevention Practice

SAMHSA Prevention Core Competencies

- Prevention core competencies and accompanying knowledge, skills, and abilities by SAMHSA offer professional direction to the prevention field, affecting staff development, career ladders and pipelines, and providing guidance for training programs and service delivery qualification.

Focus On Prevention

- This manual by SAMHSA helps communities plan and deliver substance use prevention strategies. It covers conducting needs assessments, identifying partners, and creating effective strategies for marketing and program evaluation.

From State Goals to Local Action

Data and Resources | County Health Rankings & Roadmaps

- The County Health Rankings & Roadmaps website's annual data release provides a revealing snapshot of how health is influenced by where we live, learn, work, and play. The snapshots provide communities a starting point to investigate where to make change.

Compare Counties | County Health Rankings & Roadmaps

- The County Health Rankings & Roadmaps website tool helps to compare data from counties within the state of Iowa.

Center for Substance Abuse Prevention (CSAP) Strategies

There are six strategies for the delivery of prevention services through a comprehensive approach developed by the Center for Substance Abuse Prevention (CSAP). The CSAP Strategies were developed and approved by SAMHSA. These six strategies include:

Information Dissemination	This strategy provides awareness and knowledge of a given topic whether it is alcohol, tobacco and drug use, abuse or addiction. It shares the nature and extent of its impact on individuals, families and communities (e.g., brochures, public service announcements (PSA's), speaking engagements, information resource centers, and media campaigns etc.).
Education	This strategy is a two-way strategy involving an educator/facilitator and the participants. It is distinguished from information dissemination in this way with activities instead aimed to affect the critical life and social skills of individuals (e.g., educational programs, classroom/small group sessions, parenting or family management classes and the delivery of evidence-based programs).
Alternatives	This strategy offers effective activities for target populations in efforts to discourage the use of alcohol and other drugs by the implementation of technical assistance or consultation and support methods. (e.g., alcohol, tobacco, other drug and problem gambling free events, community drop-in centers, and mentoring programs).
Environmental	This strategy influences the incidence and prevalence of the abuse of alcohol, tobacco, other drugs, and problem gambling used in the population by changing or establishing new community standards, codes, and attitudes (e.g., product pricing strategies, promoting policies in schools and modification of advertising practices).
Community-based Process	This strategy offers collaborative group opportunities to more effectively provide prevention services such as for substance misuse and or problem gambling (e.g., systematic planning, multi-agency coordination and collaboration, community team building, community and volunteer training as well as technical assistance to coalition members).
Problem Identification and Referral	This strategy does not determine an individual's need for treatment but instead aims to identify individuals who have either indulged in illegal or age- inappropriate use of tobacco or alcohol and those who have indulged in the first use of illicit drugs, other substances and problem gambling, in order to assess the reversal of their behavior through proper education (e.g., student/employee assistance programs, DUI education programs, risk reduction education, court-mandated alcohol or drug awareness education programs).

Sources: ¹[CSAP Strategies](#)

Risk and Protective Factors

Assessing the risk and protective factors that contribute to behavioral health conditions, substance misuse, and suicide helps practitioners select appropriate interventions.

Many factors influence a person's chance of developing a mental and/or substance use disorder. Effective prevention focuses on reducing those risk factors, and strengthening protective factors, that are most closely related to the problem being addressed. Applying the Strategic Prevention Framework (SPF) helps prevention professionals identify factors having the greatest impact on their target population.

Risk factors are characteristics at the biological, psychological, family, community, or cultural level that precede and are associated with a higher likelihood of negative outcomes.	Protective factors are characteristics associated with a lower likelihood of negative outcomes or that reduce a risk factor's impact. Protective factors may be seen as positive countering events.
Individual-level risk factors may include a person's genetic predisposition to addiction or exposure to alcohol prenatally.	Individual-level protective factors might include positive self-image, self-control, or social competence.

Some risk and protective factors are fixed: they don't change over time. Other risk and protective factors are considered variable and can change over time. Variable risk factors include income level, peer group, adverse childhood experiences (ACEs), and employment status.

All people have biological and psychological characteristics that make them vulnerable to, or resilient in the face of, potential behavioral health issues. Because people have relationships within their communities and larger society, each person's biological and psychological characteristics exist in multiple contexts. A variety of risk and protective factors operate within each of these contexts. These factors also influence one another.

Targeting only one context when addressing a person's risk or protective factors is unlikely to be successful, because people don't exist in isolation. For example:

In relationships, risk factors include parents who use drugs and alcohol or who suffer from mental illness, child abuse and maltreatment, and inadequate supervision. In this context, parental involvement is an example of a protective factor.

In communities, risk factors include neighborhood poverty and violence. Here, protective factors could include the availability of faith-based resources and after-school activities.

In society, risk factors can include norms and laws favorable to substance use, as well as racism and a lack of economic opportunity. Protective factors in this context would include hate crime laws or policies limiting the availability of alcohol.

Sources: ¹[Risk & Protective Factors | SAMHSA](#); ²[Risk & Protective Factors | SPRC](#)

Behavioral Health Priority Areas

Mental Health

What is it?

Mental health typically refers to one's, emotional, psychological, social well-being. It involves how one thinks, feels, acts, and makes choices. Nearly one-in five adults live with a mental illness.

What is its impact?

Mental health is an essential aspect of our lives and having good mental health enables us to confront life's challenges, accomplish our responsibilities and find purpose and meaning in our lives. On the other hand, poor mental health can limit us physically, weaken our self-perception and disrupt our relationship with those we interact with as well as with our environment.

Effects on the Brain

The effects on the brain can vary with mental illness as they are disorders ranging from mild to severe. They can impact a person's thinking, mood and/or behavior.

Resources to Learn More About Mental Health

- [Adult Mental Health | Your Life Iowa](#)
- [Health & Wellness - Adult Mental Health | Your Life Iowa](#)
- [What is Mental Health? Conditions, Warning Signs, Symptoms | SAMHSA](#)
- [Mental Health Conditions | SAMHSA](#)
- [Mental Health | Mental Health | CDC](#)
- [SAMHSA State TA: Finding and Treating Serious Mental Illness Promptly](#)
- [Center for Mental Health Implementation Support \(CMHIS\) | SAMHSA](#)

Behavioral Health Priority Areas

Substance Use – Drugs

What is it?

The use of drugs including marijuana, cocaine, methamphetamine, as well as prescription drug misuse and illicit opioids can affect the health and well-being of an individual.

What is its impact?

Drug impacts vary depending on various factors. The continued use of drugs not only impacts the individual using the substance but impacts those around them. It can lead to dependence and addiction, as well as injury, accidents, health problems and more.

Effects on the Brain

Drugs can alter areas of the brain that are necessary for life sustaining functions which can drive the compulsive drug use that causes addiction. When a drug exposure causes changes in the brain, it is said that an individual has developed a substance use disorder (SUD). Some drugs such as opioids can disrupt parts of the brain which includes the brainstem that controls one's heart rate, breathing and sleeping, all which are basic functions to critical life.

Resources to Learn More About Drugs

- [Drugs | Your Life Iowa](#)
- [Health and Wellness - Drugs | Your Life Iowa](#)
- [Substance Use Disorder - Causes, Symptoms, Treatment & Help | SAMHSA](#)
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- [Behavioral Health Barometer, Region 7, Volume 7: Indicators as Measured in the 2021-2022 National Surveys on Drug Use and Health](#)

Behavioral Health Priority Areas

Substance Use – Alcohol

What is it?

Alcohol is known to be a colorless, flammable liquid that is produced by the natural fermentation of sugars. It comes in various forms such as wine, beer, spirits and is considered the intoxicating part of these beverages. The misuse of alcohol includes binge drinking and heavy drinking. Binge drinking is a pattern of drinking alcohol that brings blood alcohol concentration (BAC) to 0.08%—or 0.08 grams of alcohol per deciliter—or more.

What is its impact?

An excessive use of alcohol impacts an individual by changing their mood and behavior while increases one's risk of harmful consequences such as developing an alcohol use disorder (AUD). Withdrawal symptoms of excessive alcohol use can include, trouble sleeping, shakiness, restlessness, nausea, sweating, racing heart and dysphoria.

Effects on the Brain

Alcohol effects the brain as a sedative, slowing down the body's system and impairing one's functioning such as causing loss the of coordination and disruption in thought processing when the amount of the substance increases.

Resources to Learn More About Alcohol

- [Alcohol | Your Life Iowa](#)
- [Health and Wellness - Alcohol | Your Life Iowa](#)
- [Alcohol Use Disorder - Causes, Symptoms, Treatment & Help | SAMHSA](#)
- [Data on Excessive Alcohol Use | Alcohol Use | CDC](#)
- [Check Your Drinking | Alcohol | CDC](#)
- [Rethinking Drinking | NIAAA](#)
- [About Underage Drinking | Alcohol Use | CDC](#)
- [Check Your Drinking | Alcohol | CDC](#)

Behavioral Health Priority Areas

Suicide

What is it?

Suicide is death caused by injury to oneself with the intention to die. A suicide attempt is an intentional harming of oneself without completing an end to one's life.

What is its impact?

Suicide can affect anyone. When a person dies by suicide, there are both family and community related impacts. Suicide thoughts, attempts and completion affect many Iowans. Suicide does not discriminate and can affect anyone. In 2015, suicide was the 10th leading cause of death for all Iowans.

Effects on the Brain

While the reasons a person may experience thoughts of suicide are complex and varied, suicidal thoughts indicate that a person is in need of support and resources for what they are experiencing. It could be related to depression, the loss of a friend, loss of a job, divorce/affair, or any number of events that may be disrupting their life. Many may or may not be receiving help for a mental or emotional disorder.

Resources to Learn More About Suicide

- [Iowa Plan for Suicide Prevention](#)
- [Suicide | Your Life Iowa](#)
- [Health & Wellness - Adult Mental Health | Your Life Iowa](#)
- [About Suicide – Suicide Prevention Resource Center](#)
- [About Suicide and Suicidal Behavior | SAMHSA](#)
- [Crisis Help: Suicide, Mental Health, Drug, and Alcohol Issues | SAMHSA](#)

Behavioral Health Priority Areas

Problem Gambling

What is it?

Problem gambling is sometimes referred to as, gambling “addiction” or “disorders”. Gambling disorders are known to be comorbid with mental health and substance use disorders and are often hidden addictions with low perceptions of harm.

What is its impact?

For starters, risk taking. The sense of anticipation creates a natural high, an adrenalin rush, a feeling that many individuals seek out in their fun and entertainment choices, even to the point that some will believe that they cannot live without it. Yet, there is the misperception of many that gambling is actually a low-risk, high reward entertainment choice. It’s actually a high-risk, low reward situation. The odds always favor the house. Despite this, individuals seek out the excitement of “hitting it big,” regardless of the probability.

Effects on the Brain

Research has found that gambling activates the brain's reward system in much the same way that alcohol or other drugs do. Just like alcohol and other drugs, some individuals may be more prone to developing problems. As an individual gambles more, it can overstimulate the brain’s reward system, causing a reaction in the brain that reduces the level of pleasure felt. This change in brain chemistry causes the individual to gamble more to feel the pleasure they seek.

Resources to Learn More About Gambling

- [Gambling | Your Life Iowa](#)
- [Health & Wellness - Adult Mental Health | Your Life Iowa](#)
- [FAQs: What is Problem Gambling? - National Council on Problem Gambling](#)
- [Stacked Deck](#)
- [Problem Gambling Self-Assessment - National Council on Problem Gambling](#)

Behavioral Health Priority Areas

Tobacco

What is it?

Tobacco use refers to the act of consuming products made from the tobacco plant, most commonly through smoking (e.g., cigarettes, cigars, pipes), but also through smokeless forms like chewing tobacco, snuff, and newer methods like vaping (e-cigarettes). The primary addictive substance in tobacco is nicotine, a powerful stimulant that affects the central nervous system.

What is its impact?

Tobacco use is a major public health concern due to its addictive nature and severe health consequences. It harms nearly every organ in the body, especially the brain, by altering its chemistry and reinforcing a cycle of dependence. Preventing initiation and supporting cessation are critical strategies for improving both individual and population health.

Effects on the Brain

Nicotine stimulates the release of dopamine, the brain's "feel-good" neurotransmitter, reinforcing the behavior and leading to dependence. Short-term use may improve focus or reduce anxiety, but long-term use is linked to depression, anxiety, and mood disorders. In adolescents, nicotine can interfere with brain development, especially in areas related to attention, learning, and impulse control. Regular nicotine use can alter brain circuits, making the brain more sensitive to stress and reducing its natural ability to regulate emotions.

Resources to Learn More About Tobacco

- [Smoking and Tobacco Use | CDC](#)
- [Youth and Tobacco Use | CDC](#)
- [Resources | Youth Engagement Alliance](#)
- [Tobacco Related Health Disparities Fact Sheet | Surgeon General](#)