



PREVENTION WITH PURPOSE:

Campus Health/Counseling Center Administrators

Preventing drug misuse is essential to creating a campus environment where students can thrive. To be effective, prevention efforts must include partners from across the campus community. As an administrator at a campus health or counseling center, you can be the bridge between center-specific and campuswide prevention efforts.

Understanding the Connections

Campus health and counseling professionals work to promote the health and well-being of students. To do this effectively, it is important to understand the relationships between drug use and misuse, mental health, and physical health.

- » Most adults with a substance use disorder began using substances during their teen or young adult years.¹
- » Youth with an SUD experience higher rates of physical and mental illnesses, diminished overall health and well-being, and potential progression to addiction.²
- » People with a mental health disorder such as anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder may use alcohol or other drugs as a form of self-medication.
- » Many individuals diagnosed with mental disorders are also diagnosed with an SUD—and vice versa. About half of the people who experience a mental illness will also experience an SUD.³



Drug misuse can also affect students' academic success and retention as well as have legal implications with far-reaching consequences, including employment options after college.⁴ Such consequences can further affect students' long-term mental health.

Aligning Strategies to Achieve Common Goals



Most health and counseling center services focus on the individual. Students seeking help for physical or emotional problems work together with their health provider or counselor to identify solutions tailored to their unique circumstances and needs. In relation to alcohol and other drug use, these solutions may come in the form of education, counseling, individual behavior change strategies, and/or referral to substance use treatment. These strategies are directed toward changing a student's relationship to their drug use.

By comparison, campuswide health promotion and drug use prevention efforts tend to focus on the student body as a whole. These efforts go beyond the individual to address the broad range of social and environmental factors that influence student drug use, such as the availability of drugs or campus norms related to use. They seek to create an environment that makes it easier for students to make healthy choices.

The most effective prevention approaches combine individual-focused strategies, such as those promoted by health and counseling centers, with proactive, environmental strategies.

To ensure these strategies align, campus prevention, health, and counseling professionals must understand the full spectrum of wellness and prevention efforts happening on campus.

➔ What Does Prevention in a Health or Counseling Center Look Like?

Health and counseling centers routinely include drug use prevention and mental health promotion strategies in their clinical practice. Individual strategies that can be embedded into health and counseling center practices strengthen the collective impact that other prevention and health promotion services have on the entire campus population. These services include health education, counseling, motivational interviewing, skills training around drugs and life skills,⁵ and the use of Ask, Advise, Refer, which includes referring to health promotion, prevention, treatment, and recovery support services when indicated. These strategies are directed toward changing a student's relationship to alcohol and other drug use.



Environmental strategies are universal approaches that focus on the broader conditions that can either increase a student's risk of drug use or protect against it. They are often designed to address the risk and protective factors that influence drug use, such as campus and community conditions, standards, institutions, structures, systems, and policies.

The goal is to connect these two approaches (the focus on individual behavior and the environmental focus) in a way that complements and reinforces each other. What does this look like in practice? Consider the following example:

A student athlete presents with an injury that requires pain medication. The health care provider uses this opportunity to provide health education about the dangers of opioid misuse, including the risks associated with taking any pills that are not prescribed by a doctor and dispensed through a trusted pharmacy. The provider also shares materials created as part of a campuswide prevention campaign that promotes the message that sharing pills purchased outside of a licensed pharmacy is illegal, dangerous, and potentially lethal.

Take Action! Getting Involved in Campus Prevention Efforts

Here are some ways that campus health and counseling professionals can begin to engage in the crucial work of preventing drug misuse among college students:

- » **Seek out prevention staff.** If prevention staff are not part of your center's staff, introduce yourself and let them know what you do. Invite them to your staff meetings and clinical team meetings. Don't wait for them to come to you.
- » **Formalize your partnerships with campus prevention staff** by creating a process for two-way communication, education, and referrals.
- » **Streamline your referral system** so that students have access to follow-up services when they need it. This includes determining what releases are needed for providers to refer to and communicate with each other and creating processes for warm handoffs between students and referring providers when possible.
- » **Work with health and counseling center staff** to identify ways to integrate prevention strategies into clinical practice.
- » **Identify potential ways health and counseling professionals can support and enhance drug use and misuse prevention efforts on campus**, for example:
 - Share aggregate data
 - Promote campuswide education campaigns
 - Offer services that promote health-based protective factors
 - Advocate for policies that seek to reduce risk factors at the individual level



Acknowledgements

Katrin Wesner-Harts, Ed.D., FACHA

Director, Student Health Center
University of North Carolina Wilmington
Wilmington, North Carolina

Marcus Hotaling, Ph.D.

Director, Counseling Center
Union College
Schenectady, New York

Endnotes

- 1 Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Division of Adolescent and School Health, National Center for HIV/AIDS, Viral Hepatitis, STD, and TB Prevention. (2022, September, 29). *High-risk substance use among youth*. <https://www.cdc.gov/healthyouth/substance-use/index.htm>
- 2 Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Division of Adolescent and School Health, National Center for HIV/AIDS, Viral Hepatitis, STD, and TB Prevention. (2022, September, 29). *High-risk substance use among youth*. <https://www.cdc.gov/healthyouth/substance-use/index.htm>
- 3 National Institute on Drug Abuse. (2022, September 27). Part 1: The connection between substance use disorders and mental illness. <https://nida.nih.gov/publications/research-reports/common-comorbidities-substance-use-disorders/part-1-connection-between-substance-use-disorders-mental-illness>
- 4 Richmond, K. (n.d.). The importance of preventing drug abuse among college students. *Campus Drug Prevention*. <https://www.campusdrugprevention.gov/views-from-the-field/importance-preventing-drug-abuse-among-college-students>
- 5 Community Anti-Drug Coalitions of America, and National Community Anti-Drug Coalition Institute. (2010). *The coalition impact: environmental prevention strategies*. Community Anti-Drug Coalitions of America. <https://www.cadca.org/sites/default/files/resource/files/environmentalstrategies.pdf>

Copies of this Publication Are Available Online

Copies of this publication are available online at www.campusdrugprevention.gov, DEA's website for professionals working to prevent drug misuse among college students.

**Drug Enforcement Administration
Office of Public Affairs
Community Outreach and Prevention Support Section**

#deacampus

#preventionwithpurpose



January 2023