



PREVENTION WITH PURPOSE:

A Guide for New Campus-Based Prevention Professionals

What is Campus-Based Prevention?

Stepping into a new role as a prevention professional on a college or university campus can be overwhelming. There is so much to learn, both about substance misuse prevention and about the campus community that you will be supporting.

As a campus-based prevention professional, you will focus on promoting student well-being, minimizing substance use, misuse, and related harms, and strengthening campus environments through systematic planning, implementation, and evaluation. You will also work with partners both on and off campus to address alcohol and drug use and misuse issues with the goal of building a healthy, safe environment for all students.

This guide will walk you through some of the basics of being a campus-based prevention professional. It is meant to be general and is considered a starting point. This guide draws heavily upon material presented in the Drug Enforcement Administration's [Prevention with Purpose: A Strategic Planning Guide for Preventing Drug Misuse Among College Students](#), as well as [related topic-specific resources](#). Links to relevant Prevention with Purpose supplemental publications can be found throughout this document.

As you read through this document, think about how the information relates to your own campus context, and what you will need to focus on to grow your own learning. Each section provides information and initial action steps that new professionals can take to learn more.

What Do New Campus-Based Prevention Professionals Need to Know?

Some of the first things you will need to learn are the fundamentals of prevention and its implementation. You will then need to learn more about how prevention works on your campus and within the greater community.

Prevention is a Science

Prevention science draws on multiple disciplines and frameworks that will be essential for you to understand. Effective substance misuse prevention uses a public health model to change a community's norms and behaviors around alcohol and drug use. To do this, prevention professionals rely on a strategic approach to apply evidence-based strategies, data-driven decision-making, and collaborative partnerships to reduce risk factors and enhance protective factors within a defined population.

“

Prevention science begins with promoting mental, emotional, and behavioral health development in a way that engages the entire community to prevent or decrease the impact of high-risk behaviors.

The Public Health Approach

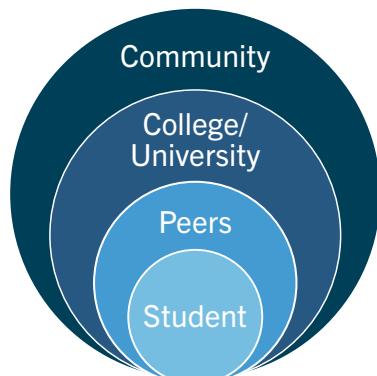
Prevention requires a comprehensive approach to addressing substance misuse on campus. The public health model is a simple approach to identifying and addressing a specific health issue from problem to response. It requires that you ask and answer these four key questions:

1. **What is the problem?**
2. **What causes the problem?**
3. **What works to address the problem and from whom?**
4. **How do you address the problem?**

Public health also draws on the use and consideration of the Socio-Ecological Model as the basis of effective, comprehensive prevention. The SEM explains how individual behavior is shaped by expanding rings of influence, from personal relationships all the way up to societal laws and norms.

Effective campus-based prevention should incorporate interventions at these multiple levels, such as:

The Socio-Ecological Model



Individual: Strengthen individual skills, brief interventions

Peer: Social norms clarification, bystander intervention

University: Adopting regulations, shaping community/social norms, policy review and enforcement

Community: Policy review and enforcement, convening groups and individuals for broader impact



ACTION: Identify resources to learn more about the public health approach and the SEM. There may be academic resources or contacts on your campus that can provide support and guidance in your learning. Learn how decisions regarding prevention strategies have been made in the past. If you cannot find information directly, keep asking — there may be institutional knowledge that can be found with other departments or partners. In some cases, you may not be able to identify how past decisions were made. Take your new knowledge of public health and the SEM and use it to move forward in your own work.

Data Drives Prevention

Use a data-driven approach to understanding substance misuse patterns on campus. Assessing substance misuse on your campus is essential in the selection and implementation of effective prevention strategies. Conducting an assessment can be a long, difficult process that involves collecting and analyzing data regarding substance misuse among students. The good news is there are many places to find existing data to help inform your work. Data sources that can be found outside of your school include:



- [Monitoring the Future](#), University of Michigan, National Institute on Drug Abuse
- [National Survey on Drug Use and Health](#), Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration
- [National College Health Assessment](#), American College Health Association
- [Healthy Minds Study](#), Healthy Minds Network

Existing data can also be found on campus in unexpected places including public safety, athletics, student organizations, and more.



ACTION: Develop an understanding of the type of data needed and connect with colleagues, offices, and departments across campus to ask about their data collection efforts and where they might overlap with your data needs. Search existing data sets to learn more about alcohol and drug use at the state and national levels.

Assessing substance use and misuse and related behaviors takes us back to the public health approach and involves asking four main questions:

- 1. WHAT** substance misuse problems and related behaviors are occurring on your campus?
- 2. HOW** often are these substance misuse problems and related behaviors occurring?
- 3. WHERE** are these substance misuse problems and related behaviors occurring?
- 4. WHO** is experiencing these substance misuse problems and related behaviors?



Campus-Based Prevention is Different

Campus- and community-based prevention are different but they should work together. While community-based prevention often spans multiple sectors and populations, prevention on campus operates within a unique, self-contained ecosystem. Colleges and universities have distinct cultures, governance structures, student development patterns, and environmental influences. In your role as a campus-based prevention professional, you must navigate academic calendars, student transitions, residence life dynamics, campus policies, and the university's brand and mission. You must also consider how communication channels, accountability structures, and stakeholder engagement look different in a campus setting.

Additionally, campuses exist within broader municipal, county, and state environments. Prevention professionals need to be aware of local ordinances, alcohol outlet and cannabis dispensary density, law enforcement partnerships, community coalitions, and campus and community dynamics. Identifying and connecting to prevention work happening in the community can strengthen campus-based prevention efforts, too.



ACTION: Reach out to community health and prevention agencies to learn about any coalitions working on prevention and related issues in the community. Research local ordinances and policies related to alcohol and other drug use, such as retail beverage server training requirements, alcohol outlet and cannabis dispensary density, and alcohol sales restrictions.

Every Campus is Unique

A campus is its own community with a unique organizational design. Prevention professionals should understand where prevention fits into the general hierarchy of their institution and the existing culture surrounding substance misuse.

Substance misuse prevention can be housed in a variety of areas of the university. Prevention offices can be found in Student Affairs, the Student Health Center, Counseling Services, the Dean of Students Office, Public Safety, or another division. Where prevention is located affects decision-making authority, access to data, funding streams, and collaborative opportunities. Substance misuse is directly related to violence, sexual assault, and injury prevention as well as mental health promotion and may or may not be housed within the same offices or divisions.



ACTION: Consider taking a listening tour to meet with colleagues, leaders, students, and others across the university. This can help you learn the structure and hierarchy of the campus and about campus culture, including major events, traditions, or patterns that shape student behavior and substance misuse.



Prevention Requires Partners

Prevention science and the public health model require us to think about our work in a comprehensive way. Prevention professionals alone could never address the issues of how and why students are using substances or reach all the levels of the socio-ecological model. For this reason, it is essential to have partners. Because substance misuse prevention is related to many other areas of behavioral and emotional well-being, you can find partners throughout student support services that address issues such as mental health, suicide prevention, sexual violence prevention, and injury prevention.

Often, many others who share your prevention goals have the potential to become strong partners. They may include [senior administration](#), [public safety](#), [faculty](#), [athletics](#), [student organizations](#), parent groups, and community health and prevention providers. Building relationships with others who want to address substance misuse on campus will help you avoid duplication of efforts and ultimately [achieve greater impact](#). Prevention can and should be the responsibility of everyone on campus.



ACTION: Identify individuals, offices, or departments that have been partners in the past. Set up meetings to introduce yourself and get to know them and their work. As part of your listening tour consider potential for new partnerships. Set follow-up meetings with those who may share your goals.

Practices to Help You Succeed

Remember: we already know what makes for good prevention. As a new campus-based prevention professional, you should rely on existing prevention tools and knowledge to help you succeed. You do not have to reinvent the wheel! Here are three practices to get you started:

1. Follow the Strategic Prevention Framework.

The SPF should be the north star for your campus prevention efforts. Developed in 2004, the SPF is a widely used planning model for building sustainable prevention systems, including on college campuses. The SPF guides practitioners through multiple steps needed to create successful prevention initiatives. It also provides information on how to gather and use data, bolster community partnerships, and leverage research and evaluation to create programs that work and that last.

[Prevention with Purpose: A Strategic Planning Guide for Preventing Drug Misuse Among College Students](#) covers the use of the SPF on campus in detail. The guide walks through each of the SPF steps in detail and provides tools for planning and implementing this strategic framework.



2. Build a trusted network.

As noted throughout, effective prevention requires partnerships. Identify prevention practitioners, both on and off your campus, who share your goal of creating a safe community. This may include people from the athletics department and student health services, as well as community health providers and the local police department. This network can do more than just offer guidance and feedback on new initiatives—they can be key allies in implementing new programs, too.

3. Keep learning.

Prevention is a rapidly-evolving field influenced by new research, shifting student behaviors, and changing legal and policy landscapes. Prevention professionals must commit to continuous learning, skill development, and adaptation throughout their careers. Thankfully, there are many ways to learn about emerging issues in the field. These include:

- Seeking out a mentor who can support your professional growth.
- Taking online or self-paced courses about prevention.
- Attending local and national conferences and trainings on preventing drug use and misuse among college students.

Key Resources

Finally, new professionals can deepen their knowledge about campus-based prevention by taking advantage of reputable sources such as:

- [DEA's Campus Drug Prevention website](#)
- [The Prevention Technology Transfer Center \(PTTC\) Network](#)
- [The Higher Education Center for Alcohol and Drug Misuse Prevention and Recovery](#)
- Professional associations within higher education (e.g., [NASPA-Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education](#), [American College Health Association](#), Alcohol and Other Drug Coalitions)
- [The Guide to the Eight Professional Competencies for Higher Education Substance Misuse Prevention](#), David S. Anderson, Ph.D., Professor Emeritus of Education and Human Development, George Mason University, 2022
- [Prevention Core Competencies](#), Center for Substance Abuse Prevention, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, 2021
- [The Guide to the Strategic Prevention Framework](#), CSAP, SAMHSA, 2019
- [Advice for Established and Emerging College AOD Misuse Prevention Professionals: A Conversation with Dolores Cimini](#), Drug Enforcement Administration, Office of Congressional and Public Affairs, Community Outreach and Prevention Support Section, 2020



Acknowledgements

David Anderson, Ph.D.

Professor Emeritus
George Mason University

Dave Closson

CEO, Founder
DJC Solutions, LLC

Joan Masters

Senior Project Director
Missouri Partners in Prevention

Kelly Truesdell

University of Virginia
Associate Director of Substance Use and Recovery Services

PROJECT TEAM

Sean Fearns

Chief, Community Outreach and Prevention Support Section
Drug Enforcement Administration

Erin Ficker

Lead Consultant
Compass Prevention Consulting

Richard Lucey, Jr.

Senior Prevention Program Manager
Drug Enforcement Administration

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

#deacampus
#preventionwithpurpose



JANUARY 2026