

Introduction

In 2005, Vermont received a U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Strategic Prevention Framework Grant to strengthen the state's approach to substance abuse prevention. As part of that program, Vermont Department of Health (VDH), State Epidemiology Workgroup conducted a review of Vermont's alcohol and drug use rates and associated health consequences. Based on that review the following public health priorities were identified:

- Reduce underage drinking.
- Reduce high-risk alcohol consumption among persons under age 25.
- Reduce marijuana use among persons under 25

Facts

The 2009 Vermont Youth Risk Behavior Survey of students in grades 8-12 found that:

- 36 percent said they consumed alcohol and 20 percent said they binged on alcohol (5 or more drinks within a few hours) in the past 30 days.
- 67 percent of students perceive that alcohol is easy to obtain.
- 23 percent reported riding in a car with a driver who had been drinking.
- 19 percent of students start drinking before the age of 13.
- 61 percent have had a drink of alcohol.
- 76 percent obtain alcohol by someone giving it to them or by getting someone else to buy it for them.

Consequences of Early Alcohol Use

- Alcohol related problems are the third leading contributor to disease and death (after tobacco & obesity).
- Alcohol interferes with mental and social development and interrupts academic progress, and increases the likelihood of juvenile delinquency and crime.
- The earlier young people start drinking and the more they drink, the more likely they are to become alcohol dependent and move on to other drugs.

More information about the health affects of underage drinking can be found in the report, Reducing Underage Drinking, A Collective Responsibility from the National Academy of Sciences.

http://www.nap.edu/openbook.php?record_id=10729&page=R1

Research indicates the following are among the strongest factors contributing to community alcohol problems:

- Low perceived risk of alcohol use

- Social norms encouraging early use
- Low enforcement of laws and policies
- Easy social access
- Lack of parental monitoring
- Pricing and promotion of substances
- Limited availability of screening and early intervention services

According to the National Survey on Drug Use and Health, Vermont ranks in the worst fifth of U.S. states when it comes to youth and adult perceptions of health risks associated with binge drinking.

In 2003 the National Academy of Sciences conducted a review of research on the prevention of youth alcohol use and published a set of recommendations for states and communities entitled, *Reducing Underage Drinking: A Collective Responsibility*. The study concluded that:

...underage drinking cannot be successfully addressed by focusing on youth alone. Youth drink within the context of a society in which alcohol use is normative behavior and images about alcohol are pervasive. They usually obtain alcohol – either directly or indirectly from adults. Efforts to reduce underage drinking, therefore, need to focus on adults and must engage the society at large.

Community Solutions

Underage alcohol use, like other substance abuse issues, is a complex health concern. The research shows that prevention approaches are most likely to be effective when they use multiple strategies at more than one level of the community, are sustained over time and involve peers, families and organizations. The goals are to educate, engage and motivate action about alcohol and drug issues before substance abuse becomes a life-long problem.

Vermont Department Health's Strategic Prevention Framework includes:

- Community grants for increasing local capacity to assess, plan, implement and evaluate multiple prevention strategies
- Training and community resources for grantees
- Planning and evaluation tools
- Public information

A Campaign for Parents

As part of Vermont's 2007 needs assessment, a Vermont Task Force reviewed the National Research Council Institute of Medicine's recommendations for states and communities regarding the reduction of youth alcohol use. After reviewing Vermont's status on those recommendations, the Task Force's findings included a need to increase media outreach to parents and community members.

Focus groups with Vermont parents conducted in 2007-08 revealed:

- A lack of understanding of the health and social consequences of early alcohol use
- A desire to see their children succeed socially and a sense of powerlessness in addressing underage drinking as a normative behavior
- A lack of knowledge about existing community resources available to support youths and parents
- A lack of awareness about the legal penalties associated with possessing, consuming or supplying alcohol to minors

In many cases adults as well as youth may perceive early drinking and marijuana use as socially acceptable and perhaps the easiest means of building relationships, coping with stress and establishing an adult identity.

Parents recognize they have a powerful role in preventing underage alcohol use but don't know how they can help their children overcome pressures to drink. Many Vermont parents are unsure of where they can learn about prevention even though their children are at an age where tools and information can provide the best defense against early alcohol use.

Middle School Parents Campaign

This campaign is directed at parents of Vermont middle school students ages 11 to 13. The objectives of the middle school parent campaign are to:

- Motivate parents of middle school children to take simple, proven steps with their children to reduce underage drinking
- Increase the number of parents aware of community prevention and intervention resources available to help them prevent and reduce youth alcohol use

This project will be followed by a second campaign focused on parents of high school students. The Common Theme Campaign is one component of a larger strategy. Vermont is also participating in a Strategic Prevention Framework national evaluation with states across the U.S.

Funding

The Common Theme Campaigns are federally funded through two sources:

- The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration Strategic Prevention Framework State Incentive Grant (Department of Health and Human Services)
- The Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention's Enforcing Underage Drinking Laws Grant (Department of Justice).

Vermont Department of Health—ADAP

The Vermont Department of Health, Division of Alcohol and Drug Abuse Programs (ADAP) exists to help Vermonters prevent and eliminate the problems caused by alcohol and other drug use. Working in partnership with state and national public and private organizations, ADAP plans, supports and evaluates a comprehensive system of services. These include education, intervention, prevention, recovery, research and treatment.