

State-Level Strategies to Promote Prevention Practice, Policy, and Science

The Issue

Behavioral health problems in childhood and adolescence take a heavy toll over a lifetime, with significant impacts on rates of economic independence, morbidity, and mortality. A large body of scientific evidence over 30 years shows that behavioral health problems can be prevented. Evidence supporting the effectiveness of prevention programs and policies is bolstered by findings from benefit-cost analyses indicating that preventive interventions offer significant financial savings over treatment and incarceration alternatives.

The Coalition for the Promotion of Behavioral Health

The Coalition for the Promotion of Behavioral Health (CPBH) is an interdisciplinary group of researchers, practitioners, and policymakers committed to promoting positive youth development and reducing behavioral health problems including substance use, delinquency, school dropout, risky sexual behavior, violence and anxiety and depression in young people. In the next decade, the goals of the CPBH are to: 1) reduce the incidence and prevalence of behavioral health problems in the population of young people from birth to age 24 by 20%; and 2) reduce racial and socioeconomic disparities in behavioral health problems by 20% through the widespread implementation of tested and effective preventive interventions.

This Program Brief describes CPBH strategies aimed at helping states achieve widespread implementation of effective prevention programs and policies.

Action Steps and Goals

The CPBH uses 7 action steps to promote the selection and implementation of tested and effective preventive interventions for behavioral health problems. These steps, described in CPBH's guiding framework, [*Unleashing the Power of Prevention*](#), include:

1. *Develop and increase public awareness of the advances and cost savings of effective preventive interventions that promote healthy behaviors for all.*
2. *Ensure that 10 percent of all public funds spent on young people support effective prevention programs.*
3. *Implement community-assessment and capacity-building tools that guide communities to systematically assess and prioritize risk and protective factors and select and implement evidence-based prevention programs that target prioritized factors.*
4. *Establish and implement criteria for preventive interventions that are effective, sustainable, equity-enhancing, and cost-beneficial.*
5. *Increase infrastructure to support the high-quality implementation of preventive interventions.*
6. *Monitor and increase access of children, youth, and young adults to effective preventive interventions.*
7. *Create workforce development strategies to prepare practitioners in health and human service professions for new roles in promotion and preventive interventions.*

Action Step 5: Increase State Infrastructure to Support Preventive Interventions

One focal point of the work of the CPBH has been Action Step 5: *Increase infrastructure to support the high-quality implementation of preventive interventions*. To that end, CPBH members are working with states to improve infrastructure necessary to select and implement tested and effective preventive interventions for behavioral health problems.

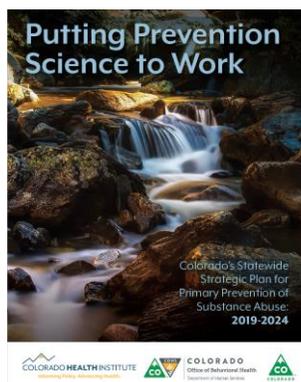
CPBH members use several strategies to engage elected officials, state administrators, policy makers, and practitioners in efforts to increase prevention infrastructure and choose and implement tested and effective interventions. States vary significantly in their readiness and experience in understanding, selecting, and using tested and effective preventive interventions for behavioral health problems. Consequently, CPBH members initiate collaborative efforts in states by examining current initiatives, goals, and progress. Information gleaned from this initial process guides our strategies and activities that include: 1) identifying administrators, practitioners, and elected officials who hold leadership positions in state-level prevention policy and practice; 2) convening prevention summits or holding small group meetings to inform leaders of the current state of prevention science, practice, and policy; 3) informing state leaders of infrastructure support models that may best meet the needs and goals of their states; 4) collaborating with state leaders to develop, implement, or disseminate prevention-related goals, objectives, and strategies; and 5) participating in existing state task forces and providing testimony to legislative bodies.

Examples from Selected States

The CPBH has implemented the strategies identified above to promote the use of tested and effective preventive interventions in several states. These efforts have included: 1) presenting at statewide convenings and conferences attended by practitioners, policymakers, and researchers; 2) participating in state prevention task forces, planning groups, and administrative boards; 3) providing testimony to legislative bodies to advocate for prevention funding; and 4) writing briefs, op-eds, and reports. Three state examples are described below.

Colorado

CPBH members actively participated in a strategic planning group and in several smaller workgroups to help create Colorado's first statewide plan for preventing substance abuse. The final report, [Putting Prevention Science to Work: Colorado's Statewide Strategic Plan for Primary Prevention of Substance Abuse, 2019-2024](#), was sponsored and funded by the Colorado Department of Human Services, Office of Behavioral Health with funding by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Administration's Center for Substance Abuse Prevention.



The plan takes a risk and protective approach to preventing substance abuse and aims to promote programs, policies, and strategies addressing risk and protective factors that predict — or protect against — substance abuse and other behavioral health problems in youth and their families. Using strategies identified in the report, Colorado will increase its focus on upstream factors — building youth resilience; strengthening families, communities, and schools; and changing environments, policies, and social norms. The plan aims to strengthen the prevention system in Colorado by coordinating funders and the efforts they support. It also identifies distinct, coordinated roles for prevention funders to best support and strengthen the system.

Utah

Members of the CPBH have been actively participating in state-level prevention efforts in Utah for nearly 3 decades. These efforts date to the early 1990s and the initial implementation and evaluation of the [Communities that Care](#) prevention system. Since 2015, CPBH members have delivered keynote presentations at a statewide prevention summit attended by administrators and elected officials, presented at the annual conference of the [Utah State Division of Substance Abuse and Mental Health](#), helped create and organize a statewide group of prevention researchers, and assisted in the implementation of the statewide implementation of the Botvin [LifeSkills Training](#) program. These and other ongoing activities in Utah are conducted in collaboration with the state's Division of Substance Abuse and Mental Health.

Massachusetts

CPBH activities in Massachusetts began in 2017 with public presentations by members of the CPBH Steering Committee to the state's [Special Legislative Commission on Behavioral Health Promotion and Upstream Prevention](#). Information presented by CPBH members was used in the Commission's final report, [Promote Prevent: A Plan to Promote Mental, Emotional, and Behavioral Health and to Prevention Behavioral Health Issues](#), published in 2018.



[Read the Promote Prevent Commission Report](#)



*“Over the last thirteen months a dedicated group of twenty-four Promote Prevent Commissioners—leaders from across the fields of government, public health, behavioral health, education, criminal justice, and insurance—have...coalesced around the belief that if we act early, we can save individuals and families from tragedy and create a happier, healthier, and more prosperous CommonwealthTogether we heed the call to action to **unleash the power of prevention.**”*

James M. Cantwell, Chair and State Representative

PROMOTION: “strategies designed to create environments and conditions that support behavioral health and the ability of individuals to withstand challenges.”

PREVENTION: “interventions intended to prevent or reduce the risk of developing a behavioral health problem, such as underage alcohol use, prescription drug misuse and abuse, and illicit drug use.”

Summary

This brief illustrates ways in which members of the CPBH are working with states to advance Action Step 5 - increasing infrastructure necessary to implement tested and effective preventive interventions - of the guiding framework of *Unleashing the Power of Prevention*. Please see the [CPBH website](#) for additional information about ways to unleash the power of prevention!