United Way Key Strategy: Reducing Substance Misuse

THE WHY

It’s no secret that substance use disorder has had deep and devastating effects on families, workplaces and our community, and it continues to affect people of all walks of life.

Substance misuse and mental health disorders are closely linked, and they also share one thing in common — stigma prevents people from getting help.

*“There comes a point where we need to stop pulling people out of the river. We need to go upstream and find out why they’re falling in.”* - Desmond Tutu

Reducing substance misuse requires a multi-pronged approach; not only do we need to treat the disease and support recovery, but we must also work to prevent the root causes of substance misuse. Early intervention has proven to be an important tool in supporting long-term resilience and increasing protective factors that prevent youth from substance misuse. BIPOC and LGBTQ+ youth are more likely to lack many of these protective factors, making them at higher risk of substance misuse and a priority population for addressing this issue.

THE DATA

* A record high [210 Vermonters died of an opioid overdose in 2021](https://vtdigger.org/2022/04/05/210-vermonters-died-of-an-opioid-overdose-last-year-first-time-death-toll-topped-200/), a 33% increase from the 158 fatal opioid overdoses Vermont saw in 2020.
* In Vermont, rates of people age 12+ using alcohol and marijuana is among the highest in the United States (National Survey on Drug Use and Health, 2018-19).

WHAT WE’RE DOING

**Community Funding**

United Way is investing in a range of programs and services to reduce the effects of substance misuse on our community. We fund programs that address mental health concerns and the prevention of substance misuse; treatment programs, like the residential program at Lund, that provides trauma-informed services to pregnant women and parents to build their health and resilience; and recovery programs at Turning Point Centers in Franklin, Grand Isle and Chittenden counties that provide coaching and recovery support by peers.

**2022 Funded Partners:**

* Boys & Girls Club of Burlington
* Greater Burlington YMCA
* Howard Center
* King Street Center
* Lund
* Northwestern Counseling & Support Services
* Sara Holbrook Community Center
* Turning Point Center of Chittenden County
* Turning Point of Franklin County (including their new satellite office in Alburgh)

**Northwest Vermont Regional Prevention Network (previously known as Prevention Center of Excellence)**

United Way is also working at a community level to design and implement a region-wide network to prevent substance misuse in youth and young adults. Utilizing a Prevention Center of Excellence (PCE) grant from the State of Vermont Division of Alcohol and Drug Abuse Programs (ADAP) and leveraging fundraising dollars to add staff capacity to this work, United Way spent the first part of 2021 hosting focus groups with policy makers, service providers, and youth. From those focus groups, a shared vision with a five-year strategic action plan was launched in 2022 bringing together action teams that will carry out the work. (*More information can be found in the Prevention Center of Excellence addendum document)*.

The grant also included funds to sub-grant to community programs working in substance misuse prevention in youth and young adults\*

**\*2022 PCE sub-grants:**

* Abenaki Circle of Courage
* Big Brother Big Sisters of Vermont
* Burlington Partnership for a Healthy Community
* Connecting Cultures at Vermont Psychological Services
* Franklin County Caring Communities
* LEAPS, Franklin Northeast Supervisory Union
* Lund
* Outright Vermont
* Richford Health Center NOTCH Summer Day Camps
* Trinity Educational Center
* Unleashing the Power of Partnership for Learning (UP for Learning)
* Turning Point Center of Chittenden County
* Turning Point of Franklin County
* Vermonters for Criminal Justice Reform