

Community Prevention: New Opportunities to Create Impact through Collaboration

By Esther Lucas

COM-MU-NI-TY¹

- A group of people living in the same place or having a particular characteristic in common.
- A particular area or place considered together with its inhabitants.
- A body of nations or states unified by common interests.
- The people of a district or country considered collectively, especially in the context of social values and responsibilities; society.

SUBSTANCE ABUSE PREVENTION IN A COMMUNITY SETTING

Substance abuse issues lie at the heart of many complex social problems, from poverty to unemployment to poor graduation rates. No community is immune, as substance abuse cuts across racial, socio-economic, geographic and generational lines.¹

Those working to reduce substance abuse know their work is closely aligned with other prevention efforts, such as those that address violence and crime. When this work is done collectively, by a community, it is called *Community Prevention*. One of the hallmarks of community prevention is a focus on improving public health outcomes. Community Prevention includes a broad spectrum of approaches, ranging from programs and services that directly involve individuals, to the adoption of laws and policies aimed at deterrence, mitigation, or penalty, often referred

to as environmental prevention.² With new federal directives and laws, including health care reform, the substance abuse prevention field has more opportunities than ever to work together within their communities to advance common prevention interests. Community clinics, health care providers, and county health departments all play a role in implementing health care reform, and communities have a stake in how policies and programs are implemented locally.

While there are now a broad range of evidence-based strategies addressing prevention, it is not always apparent what the best approach is for a given community and how those strategies fit with existing prevention efforts. Many county departments, cities and communities engage in planning processes that address areas of common concern: crime reduction, improving child health, and access to recreation, to name a few. When these efforts are coordinated and comprehensive, the impact can be great. Moreover, efforts that involve and empower communities to assess, prioritize and engage in the work themselves are more likely to endure.

This publication in the *Power of Prevention Series* takes a closer look at Community Prevention and how substance abuse prevention, which has a long history of working closely with the community, can use these relationships and experiences to further their goals, especially with more broadly focused community prevention efforts.

¹ SAMHSA, Office of Applied Studies, 2008, Results for the National Study on Drug Use and Health: National Findings.

² Environmental prevention looks at how community standards, social norms and attitudes are shaped by our surroundings. Environmental strategies consist of public laws, codes, and organizational practices, which impact social norms and behaviors to, in the long run, improve public health outcomes.

WHY IS COMMUNITY PREVENTION IMPORTANT?

Research on the social determinants of health reveal that where we live has a profound influence on the quality of our lives and how long we will live. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), “The social determinants of health are the conditions in which people are born, grow, live, work, and age, including the health system. These circumstances are shaped by the distribution of money, power, and resources at global, national, and local levels. The social determinants of health are mostly responsible for health inequities—the unfair and avoidable differences in health status seen within and between countries.”ⁱⁱⁱ

The impacts of health inequities play out locally, in the context of communities, shaping our life experience. Community prevention identifies and works to change those community level conditions, including social norms, policies, and practices that negatively impact health and wellness.

Community Prevention has the potential to make positive, long-term, and comprehensive prevention and health promotion efforts succeed. Those in public health stand by the motto: “let’s make the healthy choice the easiest choice.” Community Prevention is a comprehensive approach that supports healthier choices for all residents by adapting to the unique culture and complexities of each community. There is a growing body of knowledge, resources and experience for communities to draw from as they develop their own community prevention efforts.

³ Unnatural Causes: Is Inequality Making Us Sick? First aired on PBS television in spring, 2008, Unnatural Causes is a powerful set of video documentaries featuring compelling stories from actual communities. The videos show how health inequities impact community and individual health and give examples of upstream, community and policy change solutions. A discussion guide is available for use with the videos.



COMMUNITY PREVENTION IS HEALTH PROMOTION

“Health promotion is the process of enabling people to increase control over, and to improve, their health. It moves beyond a focus on individual behavior towards a wide range of social and environmental interventions.”ⁱⁱⁱ **The ultimate goal of community prevention** is to develop, support, and sustain healthy communities, while implementing strategies designed to prevent problems from occurring in the first place. **The power of community prevention** lies in its ability to do much more than address current problems; it builds a foundation through engaging people, developing skills, fostering relationships, and building and sustaining capacity within the community. Successful community change comes about when community members are invested in making changes, and when they can access the resources and support needed to make them.

NATIONAL STANDARDS AND PRECEDENTS IN COMMUNITY PREVENTION

Efforts Align Toward a Common Vision

There is a wealth of prevention work that is directed and funded by institutions and governments. As a result, there is a bureaucratic need to breakdown related issues into categories in order to have efficiency and organization. However, this can result in the creation of

artificial boundaries as problems are identified and segregated by discipline and funding source (public health, mental health, substance abuse). Community prevention efforts have the potential to bring together prevention and health promotion efforts from different disciplines by defining problems within the broader context of community wellness.

The Affordable Care Act's National Prevention and Health Promotion Strategy is a "comprehensive plan that is designed to help increase the number of Americans who are healthy at every stage of life." The Strategy is a product of a 17 agency collaborative with input from numerous experts and stakeholders. It demonstrates leadership by providing federal policy direction for cross prevention efforts. It outlines four strategic directions considered fundamental to improving the nation's health:

1. *Building Healthy and Safe Community Environments*
2. *Expanding Quality Preventive Services in Both Clinical and Community Settings*
3. *Empowering People to Make Healthy Choices*
4. *Eliminating Health Disparities*

These four strategic directions represent a holistic and inclusive approach to community wellness. Substance abuse prevention is one element of this comprehensive national strategy. **As a field, substance abuse prevention's collaborative participation with other disciplines in efforts that support these strategic directions at the local level is essential.**

Federally Supported Planning Processes that Support Community Prevention

Increasingly, the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Agency (SAMHSA) has emphasized the importance of effectiveness and the use of evidence-based approaches in prevention work. This requirement has led to

more research on the efficacy of prevention strategies and the development of a process that communities can use to determine which programs, policies, or practices to support.⁴ The **Strategic Prevention Framework (SPF)**^{iv} was developed by SAMHSA to help states, jurisdictions, tribes, and communities build the infrastructure necessary for effective and sustainable prevention. The SPF is a logical, step-by-step process which guides substance abuse prevention efforts and is particularly suited for use with community prevention, wellness promotion and problem-solving efforts.

The SPF is grounded in data-driven, outcome-based planning principles that can be generalized beyond the substance abuse prevention field for use by and with other prevention efforts such as mental health, early childhood development, public health, and violence prevention. Very often these related disciplines undergo a similar process, bringing the same partners to the table as they develop needs assessments, engage in planning, and implement strategies to address their particular issue. **By using the SPF with a broader community perspective, community prevention efforts can work toward a new level of coordination and collaboration that will benefit everyone involved.**

This dynamic five step process guides communities as they **assess** the nature and scope of the problem, **build the capacity** of the community residents, institutions, and service providers, and together develop a detailed **plan** when doing community prevention. Using their assessment data, a community partnership or coalition can prioritize the problems, develop goals and objectives, and identify which strategies and approaches are most appropriate to **implement**. **Evaluation** of the process and progress toward achieving stated outcomes is

⁴ Resources such as SAMHSA's National Registry of Evidence Based Programs and Practices (NREPP) and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's Prevention Research Centers can help communities to identify strategies that will help get to the desired goals and objectives.

designed to identify additional assessment, capacity building and planning needs. The steps are iterative and overlapping. **Cultural competence** and **sustainability** are central guiding principles of the framework.

COMMUNITY PREVENTION, FROM SEED TO FLOWER

While there is not an agreed upon definition of Community Prevention, it can be better understood by knowing who is involved. In many instances, the work is guided by a coalition or partnership of key stakeholders. These are people, organizations, and institutions that have an interest in improving the health and well-being of their community. Participants not only benefit from successful community prevention efforts, they can contribute important perspective and resources to these efforts.

Some coalitions grow from the “grassroots” when community members, such as a group of neighbors or parents, face a problem and decide to organize an effort to solve the problem. Typically, their effort expands as they recognize the need to invite others to join them, including individuals and organizations with an interest in their issue. Sometimes coalitions are convened by professionals from the public or non-profit sector who can contribute their expertise, knowledge, and resources to a community prevention effort.

To keep community prevention efforts authentic, it’s important to engage the people who are impacted most by engaging youth and adults who live in the community. This includes those who have traditionally been marginalized, or absent from decision-making processes, and who can bring legitimacy to an effort by being given opportunities to provide input, develop their skills, and take leadership roles in community prevention work. **A vibrant coalition will continuously develop capacity, building on the existing strengths and skills within the community.**



Youth Involvement Bolsters Community Prevention Efforts

Youth are a natural focus of many substance abuse prevention efforts. A great deal of work focuses on preventing youth from early involvement with alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs. Community prevention emphasizes strategies that reduce youth access to alcohol and other drugs by focusing on community norms, policies, and practices specific to youth. The benefits of involving youth are two-fold; engaging youth in community prevention is a productive, empowering and enriching endeavor for youth, and it contributes to the success of the effort. Youth coalitions, and youth who participate in community coalitions, are playing a major role in policy change efforts both locally and at the state level in California. Many Friday Night Live chapters across the state engage in meaningful work of this nature (www.fridaynightlive.org).

COMMUNITY PREVENTION, FINDING BALANCE IN A COMPREHENSIVE APPROACH

The national organization that supports community prevention work, the Community Anti Drug Coalitions of America, or CADCA, encourages coalitions to “engage in multi-strategy, comprehensive action to work at all

levels of the ecological model and to facilitate linkages between levels.”⁵ CADCA supports the use of a wide array of approaches: from those that are individually focused (Indicated), to those that address a group determined to be at risk (Selective), to those that are applied at a population level (Universal).⁶ Population level approaches usually involve environmental or place-based strategies; however, they may also include outreach and education efforts that are applied to the whole population.

As researchers apply the social-ecological model to coalition work, new ways to organize and further explain interventions and how they complement one another have developed. These categorizations may include scale, impact and level, and serve to assist coalitions to

5 “Research Support for Comprehensive Community Interventions to Reduce Youth Alcohol, Tobacco and Drug Use and Abuse”, CADCA, 2010. This quote references the ecological levels of analysis, Bronfenbrenner in 1979.

6 The Institute of Medicine Model prevention intervention model shows prevention consisting of Selective, Indicated and Universally applied approaches, and is used by the Substance Abuse Mental Health Services Association (SAMHSA)

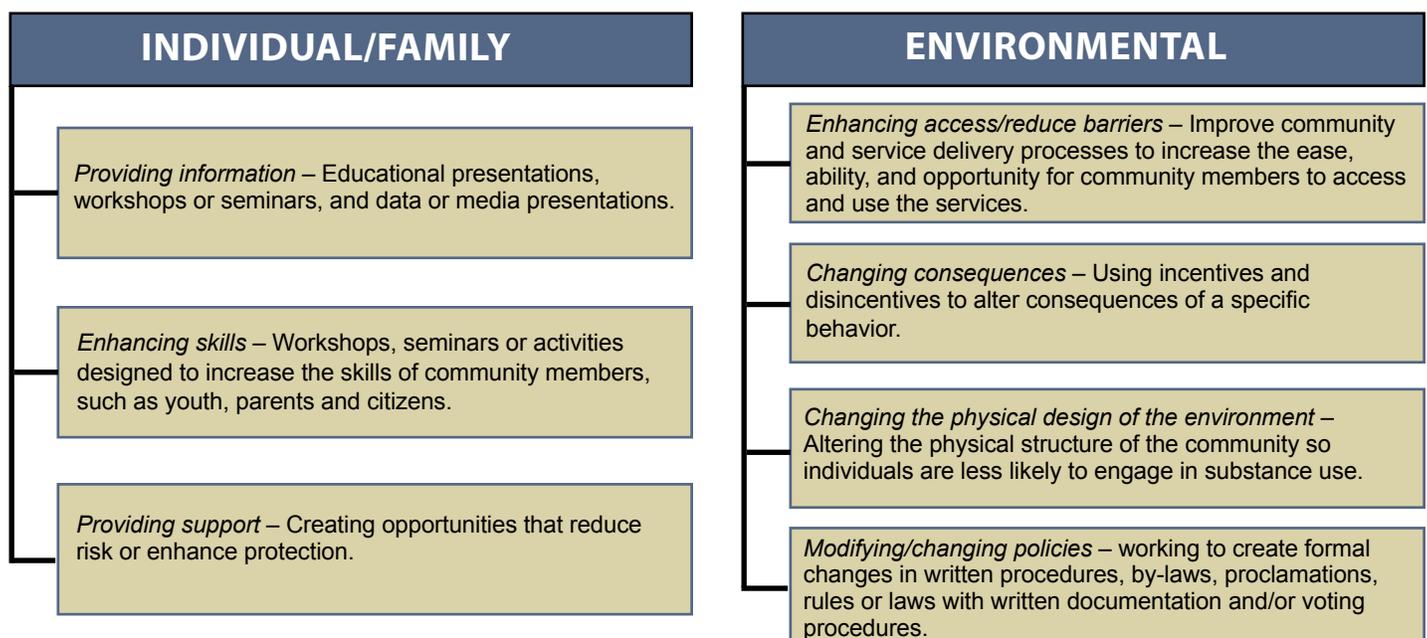
strike a balance and better match interventions to outcomes. Coalitions can assess their needs for breadth vs. depth, considering that individually focused strategies have a more concentrated impact on a smaller group of participants, while universal approaches have a broader reach and are necessarily diffuse.

As noted previously, community prevention comes in many forms, and researchers have used categories to help manage prevention efforts by function (see diagram #1 below).⁷

In addition, The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention publishes Community Guides, which document and describe a variety of environmental/policy interventions. The Community Guides are available at www.thecommunityguide.org.

7 “Analyzing the Contribution of Community Change to Population Health Outcomes in an Adolescent Pregnancy Prevention Initiative. Paine-Andrews, A., Fisher, J., Berkeley-Patton, J., Fawcett S.B., Williams, E., Lewis, R., Harris, K. (2002). Health Education & Behavior, 29(2). 183-193.

CATEGORIES OF COMMUNITY PREVENTION BY LEVEL OF INTERVENTION (DIAGRAM #1)



The Prevention Institute presents another useful way of applying community prevention. Using the *Spectrum of Prevention*⁸ is one way of expanding the potential of community prevention so that it becomes more inclusive and comprehensive.

- Influencing Policy and Legislation
- Changing Organizational Practices
- Fostering Coalitions and Networks
- Educating Providers
- Promoting Community Education
- Strengthening Individual Knowledge and Skills

The Spectrum of Prevention helps expand prevention efforts beyond education models by promoting a multifaceted range of activities for effective prevention. It has been used nationally in prevention initiatives targeting traffic safety, violence prevention, injury prevention, nutrition, and fitness.

The Spectrum identifies multiple levels of intervention and encourages people to move beyond the perception that prevention is only about teaching healthy behaviors to individuals. The Spectrum's six levels for strategy development (listed above) is a framework for a more comprehensive understanding of prevention. These levels are complementary and when used together produce a synergy that results in greater effectiveness than would be possible by implementing any single activity. At each level, the most important activities related to prevention objectives should be identified. As these activities are identified, they will lead to interrelated actions at other levels of the Spectrum."^v

⁸ Originally developed by Larry Cohen while he was director of the Contra Costa Health Services Prevention Program, the Spectrum is based on the work of Dr. Marshall Swift in treating developmental disabilities.

The Prevention Institute has developed useful tools, guides, and frameworks related to community prevention that can be accessed through their website.^{vi}

RESOURCES FOR BUILDING AND SUSTAINING COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS AND COALITIONS

COALITION MODELS

Communities That Care

Communities That Care (CTC) is a SAMHSA supported community prevention model that uses public health approaches to target youth problem behaviors. The same group whose research identified the important role of risk and protective factors developed this evidence-based model.⁹ Communities That Care takes a systematic approach to community building and seeks to address risk factors using the Social Development Strategy, which focuses both on promoting positive youth development and on preventing problem behaviors. Community resources, as well as gaps and needs, are identified. Communities create a profile of risk and protective factors and then use the data to set priorities, develop a community action plan, select and implement appropriate strategies, and evaluate progress. Information on Communities That Care is available through a link on the SAMHSA website at www.samhsa.gov.^{vii}

Drug Free Community Coalitions and the Community Anti-Drug Coalitions of America (CADCA)

There are now over 5,000 anti-drug coalitions across the nation working collectively in their communities to address substance abuse prevention with youth. These coalitions have

⁹ Developed by Drs. J. David Hawkins and Richard Catalano at the University of Washington's *Social Development Research Group (SDRG)*, CTC's principal strategy, the **Social Development Strategy**, focuses on strengthening protective factors that can buffer young people from problem behaviors and promote positive youth development.

received funding by the Drug-Free Communities (DFC) Support Program. DFC grantees address drug use and underage drinking problems in their neighborhoods, cities, counties and states. The associated coalitions develop strategies for addressing substance abuse including prevention, intervention, treatment, aftercare and law enforcement, but with a particular focus on prevention.

The CADCA organization exists to provide training and technical assistance to these community anti-drug coalitions. Its website and publications can be accessed by any coalition, and provide helpful guidance when it comes to coalition building. In fact, having an existing coalition is a prerequisite for applying for DFC grant funding. Resources are available at www.cadca.org.^{viii}



FUNDING RESOURCES

Drug Free Communities Support Program

The DFC program falls under the Office of National Drug Control Policy and has been part of their demand reduction strategy since its passage in 1998. Through an annual competitive application process, it funds communities around the country to strengthen collaboration among community entities and reduce substance use among youth. DFC

funds are not intended for programs or services. Coalitions are expected to identify and address local youth substance use problems and create sustainable community-level change through environmental strategies. Coalitions who apply must demonstrate that they have been an active coalition for at least six months, and must include twelve community sectors: youth, parents, business community, media, schools, youth-serving organizations, law enforcement agencies, religious or fraternal organizations, civic and volunteer groups, healthcare professionals, state and local and/or tribal government agencies with expertise in the field of substance abuse, and other organizations involved in reducing substance abuse. The value of the DFC program can go far beyond its stated purpose. Working as a coalition can lead to invaluable relationships and learning opportunities for all involved. Experience and expertise gained through this effort can be shared with other prevention and wellness promotion efforts and applied to a broad range of community issues, spreading the impact well beyond the parameters of the particular grant.

Although the funding can be as much as \$125,000 annually for a five year period, the eventual goal is for coalitions to support their activities locally. This goal is encouraged by requiring grant recipients to provide a local match of funding or in-kind services, which increases each year. More information about the Drug Free Communities Support Program can be found at <http://www.whitehouse.gov/ondcp/drug-free-communities-support-program>.

Community Transformation Grants

The Community Transformation Grant Program (CTG) was created with the passage of the Affordable Care Act (ACA). The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) administers the program. CDC supports and enables grantees to design and implement

community-level programs that prevent chronic diseases such as cancer, diabetes, and heart disease. Initiated in 2011, the program is expected to improve the health of more than 4 out of 10 U.S. citizens—about 130 million Americans.

Although not specific to substance abuse prevention work, the CTG supports coalitions in capacity building and planning, and funds implementation of plans developed by community coalitions that have “specific measures to achieve health equity, eliminate health disparities, and improve the health of the overall population and population groups.”^x

The CTG encompasses five strategic directions. There is a requirement that all grantees work on the first three directions:

1. **Tobacco-free living**
2. **Active living and healthy eating**
3. **Clinical and community preventive services**
4. *Healthy and Safe Physical Environment*
5. *Social and Emotional Wellness*^{xi}

Guided by these strategic directions, the CTG takes on health outcomes that heavily impact individuals and communities. The substance abuse prevention field can play an important role in changing these outcomes and are encouraged to participate early in the planning process. The substance abuse prevention field can align with these strategic directions in many ways. For example, of the communities addressing healthy eating and active living, many are working to ensure there are safe routes to schools, shopping and recreation, and having safe neighborhoods is also a concern of substance abuse prevention.

The real and perceived safety of neighborhood streets and parks is a determining factor in the ability of residents to spend quality time outdoors and engaged in healthy physical activity. Community substance abuse

prevention efforts are also concerned with these factors because having safe recreational alternatives and strong anti-drug community norms serve as a buffer against drug use. More information on CTG can be found at <http://www.cdc.gov/communitytransformation/small-communities/faq/index2.htm> or by calling the CDC at 800-CDC-INFO (800-232-4636).

The California Endowment

In addition to the prevention efforts noted thus far, which are more directly tied to federal policy, *foundations* make funding available to support community health and wellness. A prominent example in California is the California Endowment, whose mission is “to build a stronger state by expanding access to affordable, quality health care to underserved communities and improving the overall health of all Californians.”

The California Endowment identifies five core strategic areas for grant-making with the goal of building healthier communities.

1. **Building resident power:** community engagement through organizing and training.
2. **Enhancing the efficacy of community collaborations:** promoting shared data and analysis by forming and enhancing collaboratives of key community groups, social service agencies, and policymakers.



3. **Fostering youth leadership opportunities:** that, among other things, purposefully link youth to community college programs.
4. **Changing the narrative among those who shape local opinion:** the chambers of commerce, local trade guilds, political organizations and benevolent associations.
5. **Leveraging strategic partnerships:** with the intention of dovetailing TCE plans with ongoing efforts and to bring further funding to the table.^{xii}

More information about the California Endowment including its Building Healthy Communities initiative can be found at their website: <http://calendow.org/>.

COMMUNITY-FOCUSED PREVENTION APPROACHES, COUNTY EXAMPLES

Stanislaus County Behavioral Health and Recovery Services (BHRS) department has developed a strength-based approach to working with communities that aligns with their mission statement:



“In partnership with our community, our mission is to provide and manage effective prevention and behavioral health services that promote the community’s capacity to achieve wellness, resilience, and recovery outcomes.”

The BHRS staff is empowered to partner with the community, shifting from a traditional approach of identifying problems and risk factors and then trying to address them, to focusing on the factors that community residents identify in order to build and support mental health and wellness in their particular communities. Genuine partnership and accomplishment is achieved through these efforts.^{xiii}

Sonoma County’s Upstream Initiative is sponsored by the County Board of Supervisors and led by a policy committee.

The mission of the Sonoma County initiative is: “All residents of Sonoma County will benefit from prevention-focused policies and interventions that increase equality and reduce monetary and societal costs.”

The initiative’s vision is: “In Sonoma County, poverty is eliminated and all people have an equal opportunity for quality education and good health in nurturing home and community environments.”^{xiv}





- Find out about your county's general plan, and raise the importance of including a health element during the planning process.
- Find out when needs assessments are planned; work to ensure that they routinely include substance abuse prevention questions.
- Strengthen connections to substance abuse outcomes in other wellness and prevention programs and services such as after school and tutoring programs, early childhood education centers, creative and expressive arts programs, neighborhood watch groups, and senior services.

Work together across disciplines:

- Build relationships across disciplines: Join networks, partnerships, and coalitions that are focused on community health and wellness, even if the focus is not specifically substance abuse prevention.
- Ask questions, share ideas, collaborate on projects and grant applications.
- Think about community prevention and health promotion in an integrated way.
- Leverage and share resources broadly; blend or braid funding where possible.

- Plan and design needs assessments and other data collection efforts collaboratively.
- Encourage colleagues and coalition partners to think broadly about prevention and understand the underlying conditions that, when addressed, can lead to broad-based solutions.
- Consider engaging with partners who have not traditionally been invited to the health-promotion table: builders, planners, auto insurance agents, small business owners, and others who have an interest in, or an influence on, the health of the community.

Take advantage of resources available to the field and across disciplines:

- Use the Strategic Prevention Framework as a guide.
- Take advantage of local expertise as well as websites, webinars, publications, workshops, and technical assistance.
- Consult with existing community prevention coalitions, multi-disciplinary and cross-disciplinary health promotion efforts to learn from their experience.

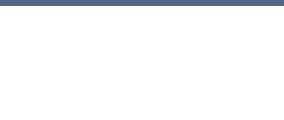
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- ^{xiii} Stanislaus: <http://www.stanislausmhsa.com/PEI.shtm>
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