

EVIDENCE-BASED PROGRAMS, CURRICULA, & APPROACHES

With the current opioid addiction and overdose crisis, many states are ramping up treatment and harm-reduction services to mitigate the negative consequences associated with drug use. What is also needed, however, is prevention!

Over the past 30 years, prevention research has shown that systematically addressing the root causes of behavioral problems among vulnerable populations and promoting protective and supportive environments will steadily divert trajectories away from substance use disorders, which could include opioid use disorders, later in life. The same risk and protective factors in child and adolescent families, schools, peer groups, and neighborhoods that affect smoking, alcohol use, and cannabis use are also predictive of advancing opioid use.¹⁵ Therefore, the use of evidence-based programs to address those factors known to affect the determinants of alcohol, tobacco, and other drug use is likely to reduce the likelihood that school-age youth will initiate or continue to use opioids or fentanyl. However, the evidence base regarding the effectiveness of such approaches, specifically on adolescent fentanyl use, is lacking and deserves further attention.

Research on periods of vulnerability during youth development and the kinds of social and environmental factors that increase risks associated with substance use have led to the design and testing of numerous evidence-based prevention programs that have been shown to reduce risk factors as well as increase protective factors that affect drug use. These evidence-based programs have multiple benefits – with some showing decreased or delayed drug experimentation in adolescence and young adulthood. Policymakers and school administrators should advocate for the implementation of those curricula and programs known to be effective in reducing substance use among school-age youth. These prevention programs also could abate lifelong harms from substance use disorders – including opioids.

For this reason, states and schools should implement programs demonstrated by research to work. [Blueprints for Healthy Youth Development](#) is a free online registry designed to help decision-makers find evidence-based programs.¹⁶ Prevention programs listed on the Blueprints registry have been shown through rigorous research to improve child development, support families, and enhance school experiences.¹⁷ These programs are developmentally appropriate, and many have been shown to either prevent the initiation of substance use or escalation of use.

Blueprints-certified programs can be effectively scaled when integrated into a comprehensive service delivery system based on an assessment of need, delivered at the community level, and supported by a monitoring and evaluation data infrastructure. Scaling of evidence-based programs is also part of a comprehensive [national strategy to prevent opioid use disorder](#) launched by the National Prevention Science Coalition to Improve Lives.¹⁵

The Appendix of this document contains a matrix listing 15 programs designed for children and youth backed by solid evidence of effectiveness in preventing the onset of problem behaviors associated with substance use and two frameworks that can be used to scale these programs. Most programs are school-based, meaning they can be implemented during the regular school day. Each program name within the matrix is hyperlinked to a Fact Sheet listed on the Blueprints website, where you can find more program information, such as costs and materials to assist with dissemination.