Session Overview

It Doesn’t Stop at 18: Primary Prevention for Young Adults

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Presenter Bio

Amelia Arria, PhD



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Dr. Amelia Arria's research focuses on substance use and untreated mental health problems among adolescents and young adults, with a special focus on the connection between behavioral health and human capital. She values translating scientific findings for parents, policymakers and community stakeholders. As a first-generation college student, she is dedicated to making sure that higher education fulfills its promise as a place and a pathway to personal and professional success. She is Director of the Center on Young Adult Health and Development and the Associate Dean for Research and Strategic Initiatives.

It Doesn't Stop at 18: Primary Prevention for Young Adults

2026 National HIDTA Prevention Summit

The Architecture of Primary Prevention from Childhood through Young Adulthood
October 27, 2026
Virtual Event

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OVERVIEW



01 Background
Past and Current Projects
General Approach to Prevention
Progress

02 Why Focus on Young Adulthood?
Characteristics of this Developmental Period
Significant Milestones
Opportunities to Change Lives

03 Getting down to "Brass Tacks": Specific Strategies
Parent-focused Communication
Reducing Availability and Access
Reinforcing Non-use as Normative and Healthy
Promoting Academic and Occupational Engagement: Connecting Choices to Future Success

04 Settings and Audiences
Academic Institutions
Primary Care
Workplace
Activating your Partners in Prevention

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OVERVIEW



01 **Background**
Past and Current Projects
General Approach to Prevention
Progress

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College Life Study

An NIH-funded prospective study of the nature and consequences of college student health-risk behaviors

PRE-COLLEGE
2004
Summer Orientation
(n = 3401)

sampling

COLLEGE
2004-2010
Ages 18-23
(n = 1253)

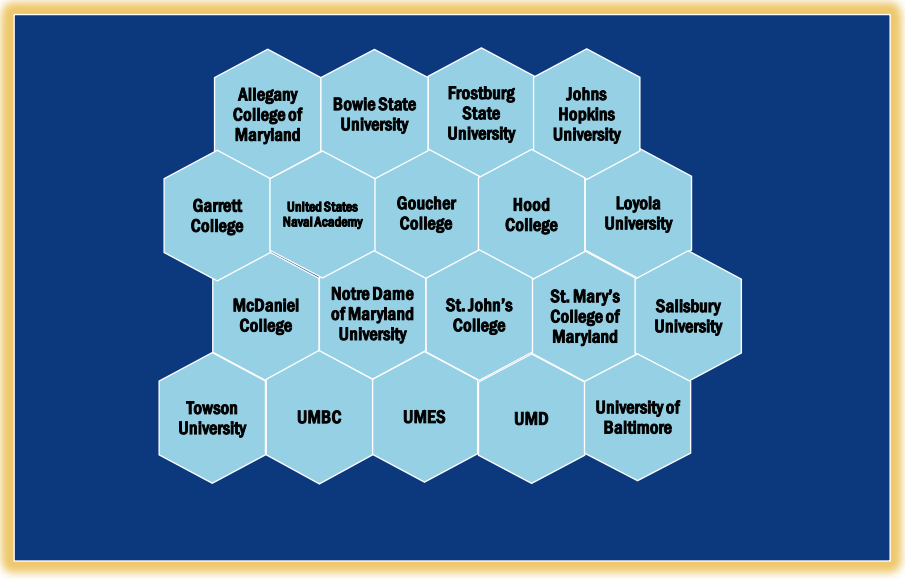
POST-COLLEGE
Ages 22-33

Annual follow-up rates of 90% +

Personal Interviews | Biannual Assessments

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Maryland Collaborative 2025



Structure

Governance Council
(College Presidents)

Community and Campus Key Players

Public Health Faculty

Amelia M. Arria, PhD
Malinda Kennedy, ScD
Kelsey O'Hara, MPH
Sara Benjamin-Neelon, PhD

Funding Acknowledgment: *Maryland Department of Health*

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We use a multi-level, multi-component approach
to influence student decisions and change behavior

Environmental Strategies

Changing what is perceived and seen

- Policies and their enforcement
- Advertising & Promotion

Changing what is available and accessible

- Campus social environments
- Community social environments
- Community retail environments



Individual-level approaches



Information and skill building



Identification, assessment, and referral

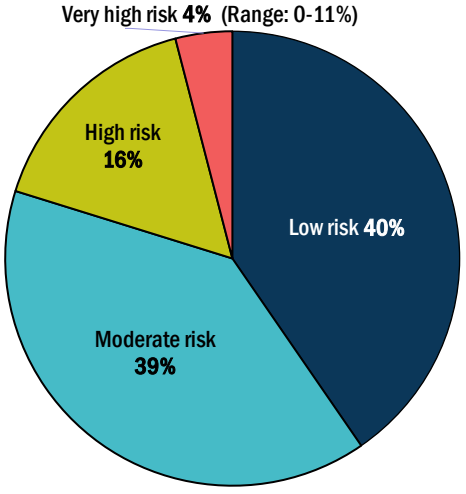


Meaningful conversations

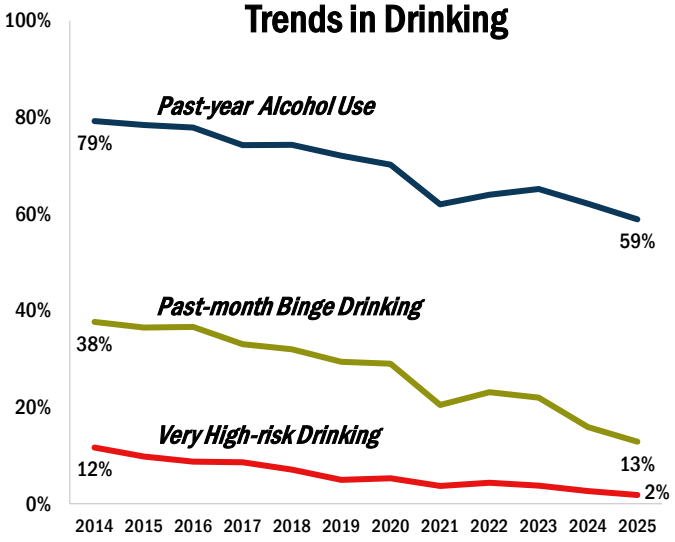
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Trends in Alcohol Consumption 2014-2025

Alcohol Risk Groups



Trends in Drinking



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OVERVIEW



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Why Focus on Young Adulthood?

Characteristics of this Developmental Period
Significant Milestones
Opportunities to Change Lives

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EMERGING ADULTHOOD is defined loosely by age—and more so by **instability**.

There are steps being taken **toward independence**.

There is a high degree of **exploration** of one's identity and role in relationships and larger society.

It is **highly variable** depending on individual circumstances, culture and historical period.

It is a time to **build resilience skills** to adversity and unexpected challenges.

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What are the major traditional milestones associated with young adulthood?

- Living independently
- Finishing school
- Getting a job
- Forming significant relationships
- Having children



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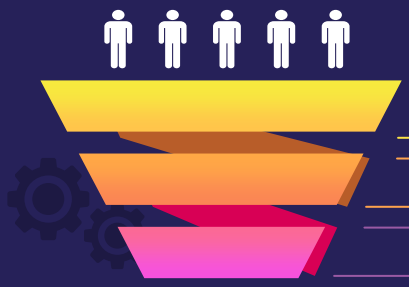
Q. Why prevent drug use before it starts?

A. There's a lot at stake.



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3.5 MILLION PEOPLE STARTED USING CANNABIS IN THE U.S. IN 2023



1.2 MILLION Young Adults (18 to 25)

1.2 MILLION Adolescents (12 to 17)

1.1 MILLION Adults 26+

52% of new initiates were younger than 21 years old

Graphic created by the Center on Young Adult Health and Development, University of Maryland School of Public Health. Reference: Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. (2024). Source: SAMHSA, Center for Behavioral Health Statistics and Quality, National Survey on Drug Use and Health, 2022 and 2023. (Detailed Tables; Table 4.1B).

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In 2020, more than 4000 college students were asked what they thought about cannabis...

48% didn't know cannabis can be physically addictive

67% didn't realize cannabis use is related to an increased risk for mental health problems

59% didn't know that cannabis is more potent today than it used to be

50% believed that cannabis is an effective way to reduce stress



Students who had more accurate perceptions about cannabis were less likely to use it

Source: Maryland Collaborative (aggregate data), 2020

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There is widespread availability of new products and misinformation is proliferating

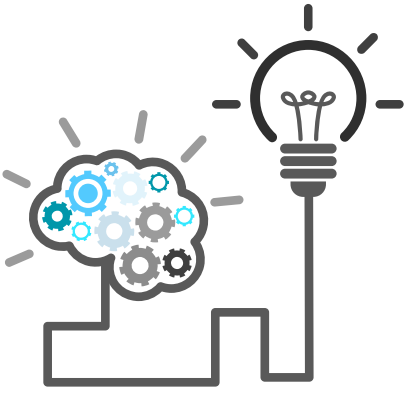


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WHAT'S AT STAKE?



ACADEMIC POTENTIAL

- Creativity
- Skill Acquisition
- Communication Skills
- Knowledge

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Essential for Maximizing Academic Potential:
Cognitive Function



- Perception and Focus
- Selective Attention
- Learning & Information Processing
- Memory

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Neurocognitive deficits associated with substance use

Attention:
Less efficient in differentiating or allocating attentional resources between relevant and irrelevant information

Executive Function:
Impaired planning, judgment and decision-making

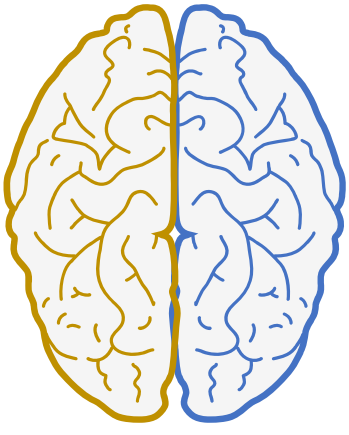


Learning:
Impaired learning of new tasks

Memory:
Decreased verbal, episodic and verbal working memory

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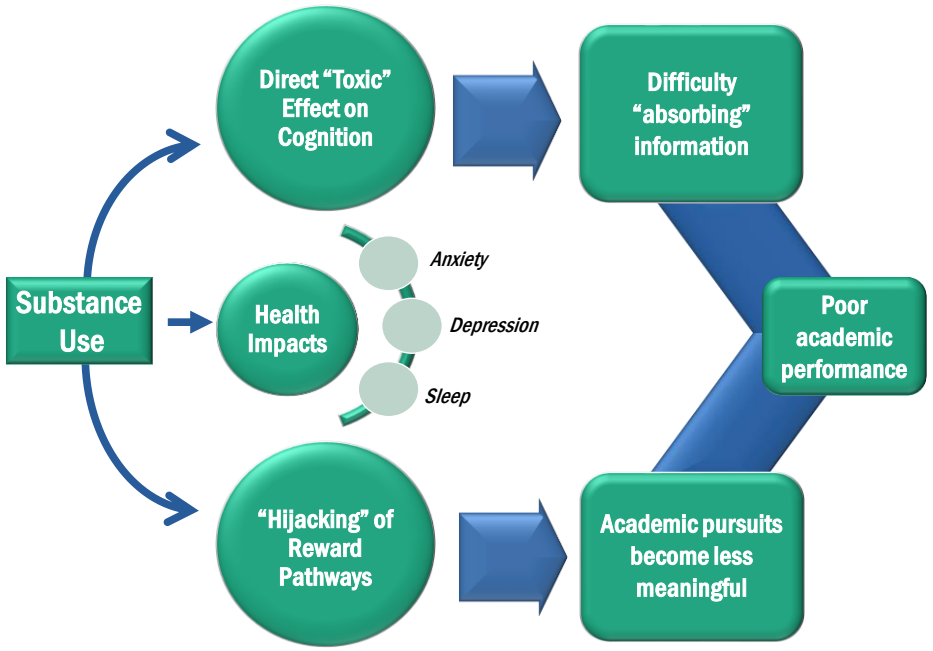
Substance use can "hijack" reward pathways in the brain



The immediate gratification associated with drug use can detract from other priorities, like family, meaningful friendships, and fulfilling responsibilities.

A student's focus on academic pursuits becomes blurred as drugs become more valued.

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Arria AM, Barrall AL, Allen HK, et al., The academic opportunity costs of substance use and untreated mental health concerns among college students. In: Cimini DM & Rivero EM: Promoting Behavioral Health and Reducing Risk among College Students: A Comprehensive Approach, Routledge, 2018.

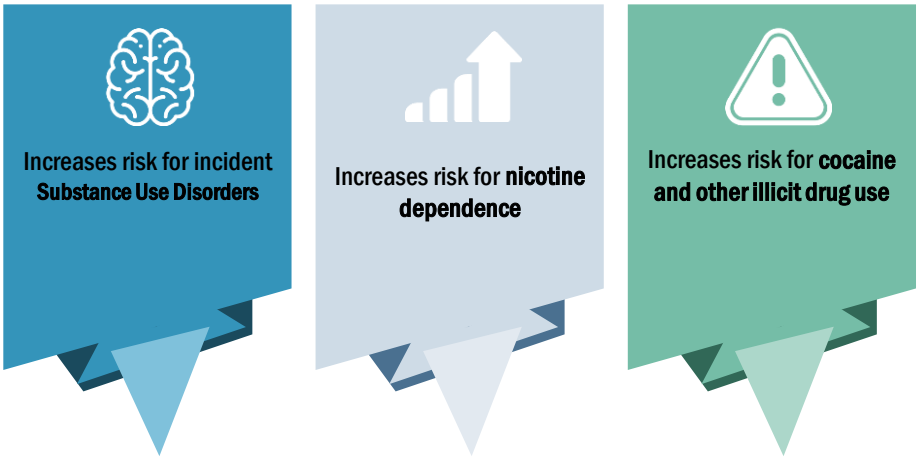
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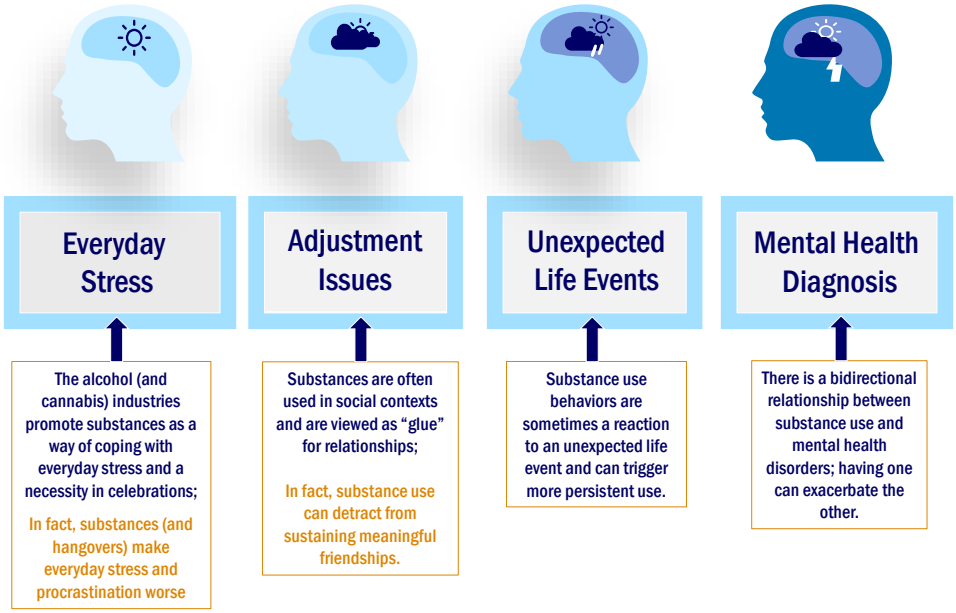
44.7% of individuals who used cannabis at some point in their life progress to other drug use

(Secades-Villa, 2015)

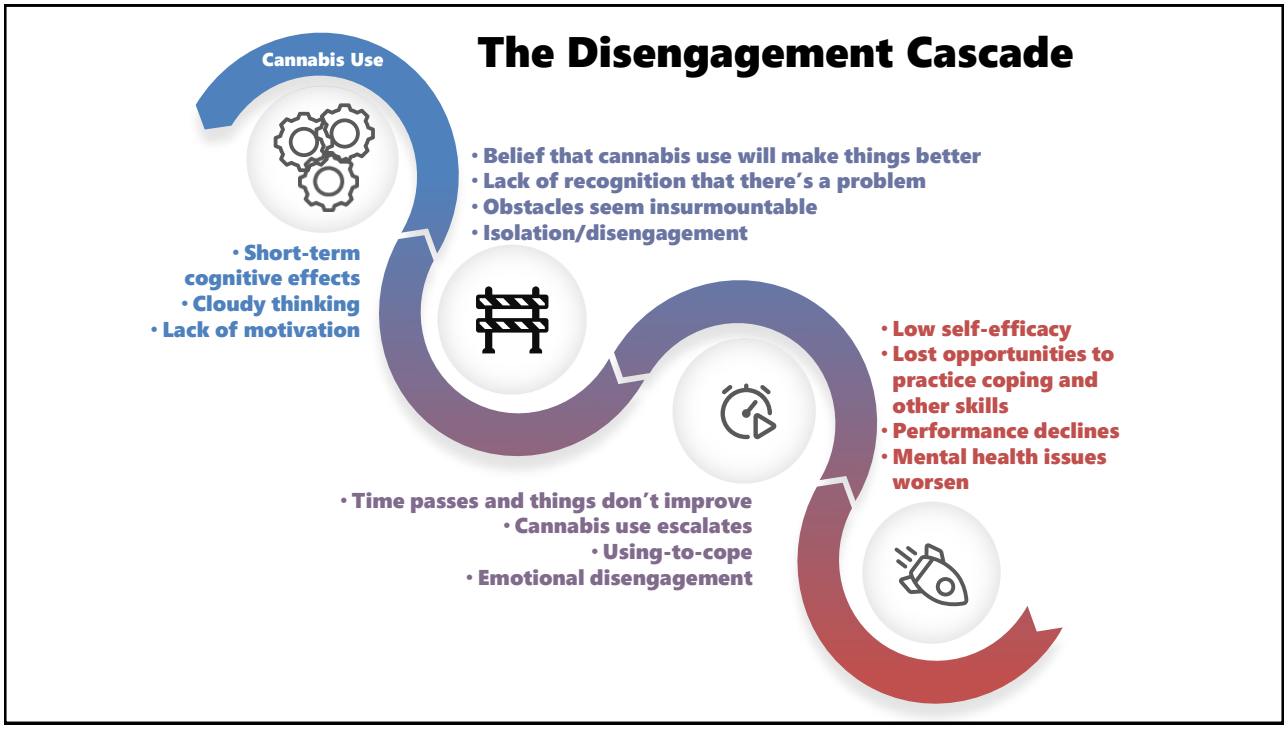


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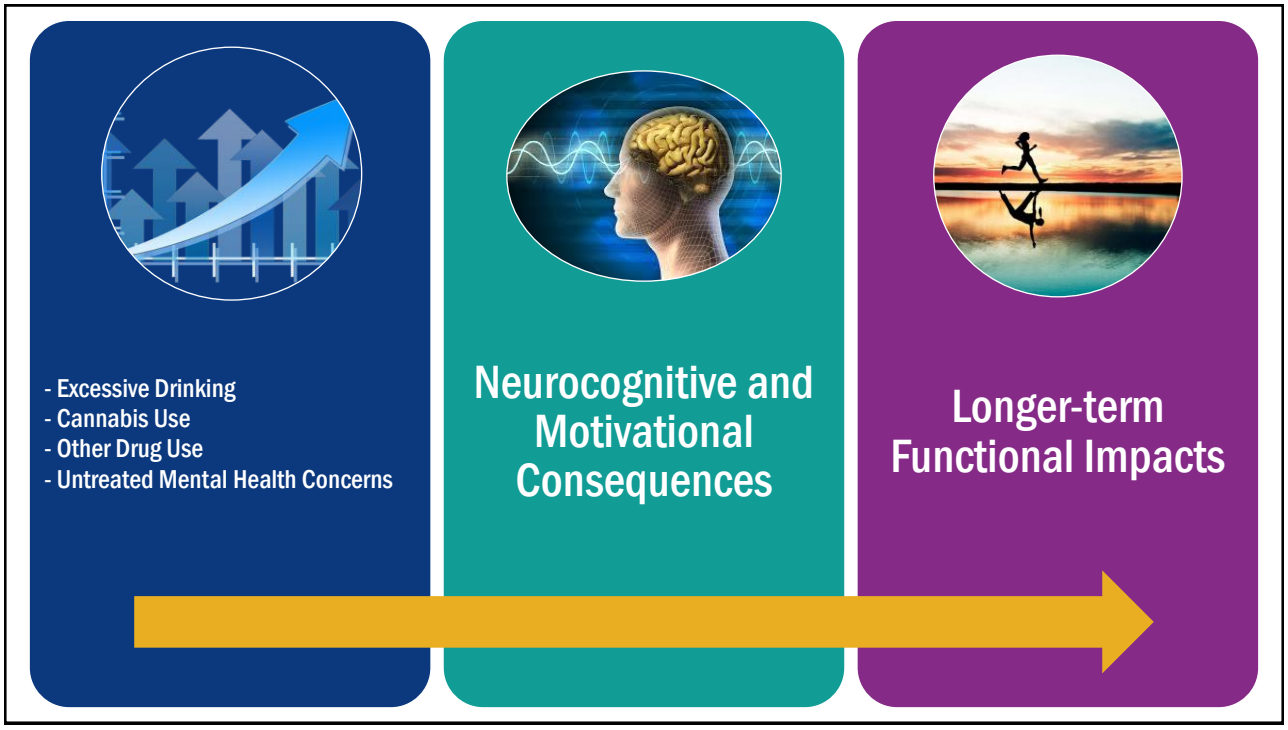
How are Substance Use and Mental Health related?



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The Disengagement Cascade
Cannabis Use
• Short-term cognitive effects
• Cloudy thinking
• Lack of motivation
• Belief that cannabis use will make things better
• Lack of recognition that there's a problem
• Obstacles seem insurmountable
• Isolation/disengagement
• Time passes and things don't improve
• Cannabis use escalates
• Using-to-cope
• Emotional disengagement
• Low self-efficacy
• Lost opportunities to practice coping and other skills
• Performance declines
• Mental health issues worsen

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- Excessive Drinking
- Cannabis Use
- Other Drug Use
- Untreated Mental Health Concerns
Neurocognitive and Motivational Consequences
Longer-term Functional Impacts

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OVERVIEW

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Getting down to "Brass Tacks": Specific Strategies

Parent-focused Communication
Reducing Availability and Access
Reinforcing Non-use as Normative and Healthy
Promoting Academic and Occupational Engagement: Connecting Choices to Future Success

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www.collegeparentsmatter.org

Engaging Parents

- Evidence-based information
- Conversation tips
- Direct examples
- Answers to FAQs
- Conversation checklist
- Quarterly newsletter





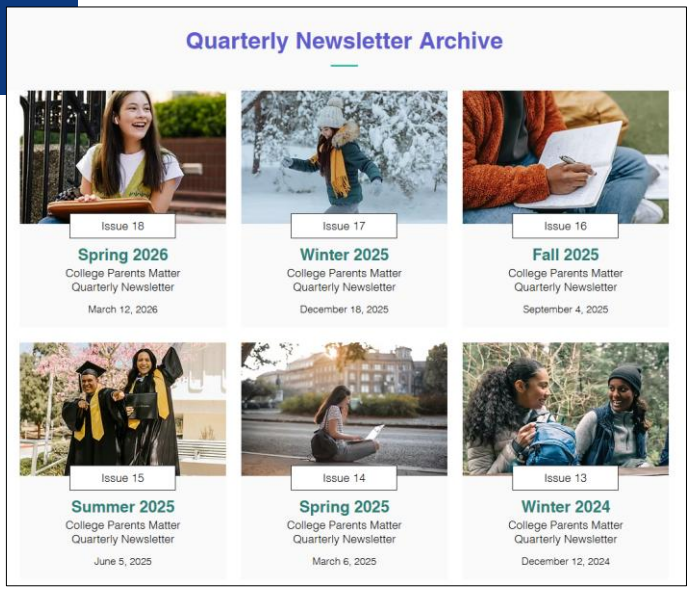




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Parent and Family Newsletter

- Sent via email
- Seasonal topics
- Links to resources



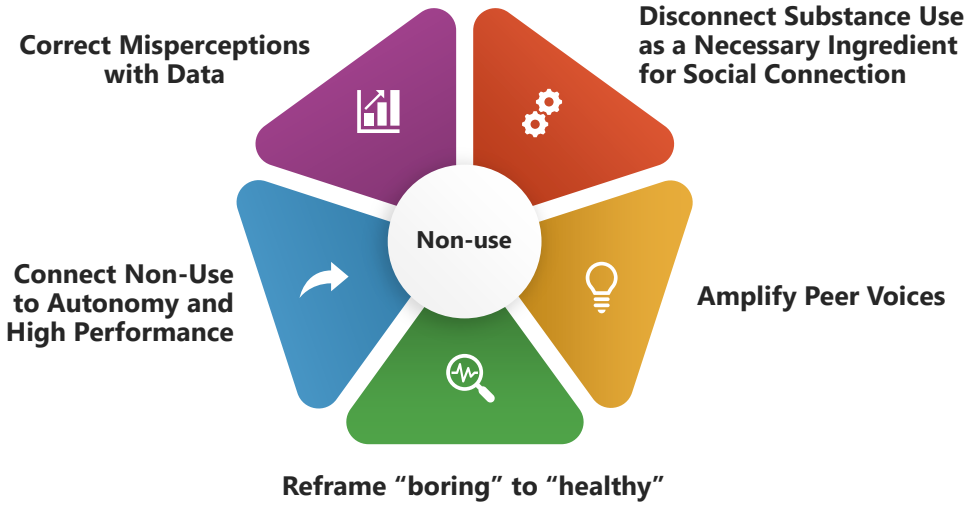
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Reduce Availability and Access

Environmental Strategy Type	Action Item	Target Mechanism
01 Commercial	Compliance checks and False ID training	Stops retailers from selling to minors (18-20)
02 Zoning	Density caps and Buffer Zones	Reduces physical exposure and proximity
03 Social	Social host laws and Shoulder Tap Stings	Stops older peers from supplying younger peers
04 Economic	Minimum pricing and banning drink promotions	Makes substances financially out of reach

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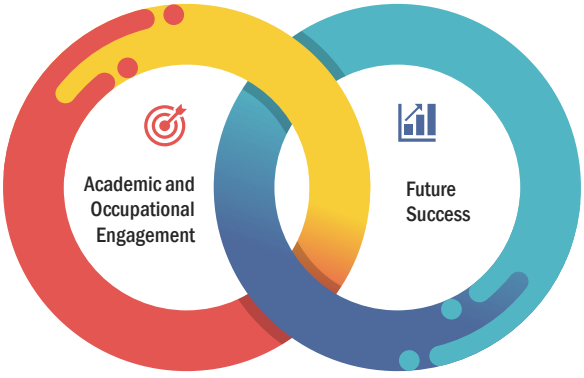
Reinforce Non-use as Healthy and Normative



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Promote Academic and Occupational Engagement: Connecting Choices to Future Success

- Efficiency
- Pursuing personal Interests
- Establishing good working relationships
- Cultivating healthy peer relationships



- Employment, career and personal success
- Fulfilling requirements for safety-sensitive professions
- Opportunity costs
- Financing the future

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OVERVIEW



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04 **Settings and Audiences**

Academic Institutions
Primary Care
Workplace
Activating your Partners in Prevention

Target Audiences in the Educational Space

On Campus

Residence Life
Student Affairs
Athletic Coaches
Academic Advising
Faculty/Staff
Campus Security
Health Centers

College Students

Off Campus

Parents/Families
Law Enforcement
Landlords

Parallel Audiences in the Community

In Schools

Teachers
Administrators
Athletic Coaches
Academic Advising
School Nurses

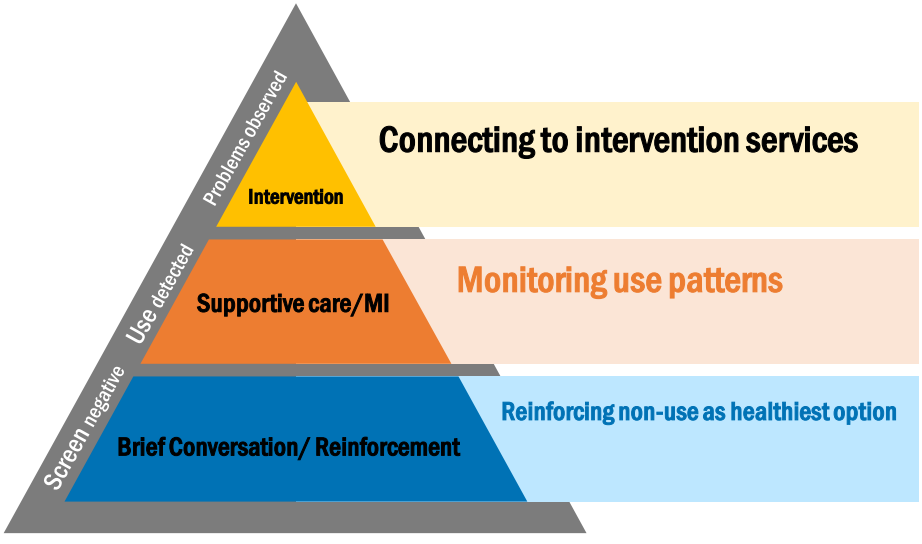
Youth

Community

Mentor Organizations
Employers
Primary Care/Peds
Religious leaders

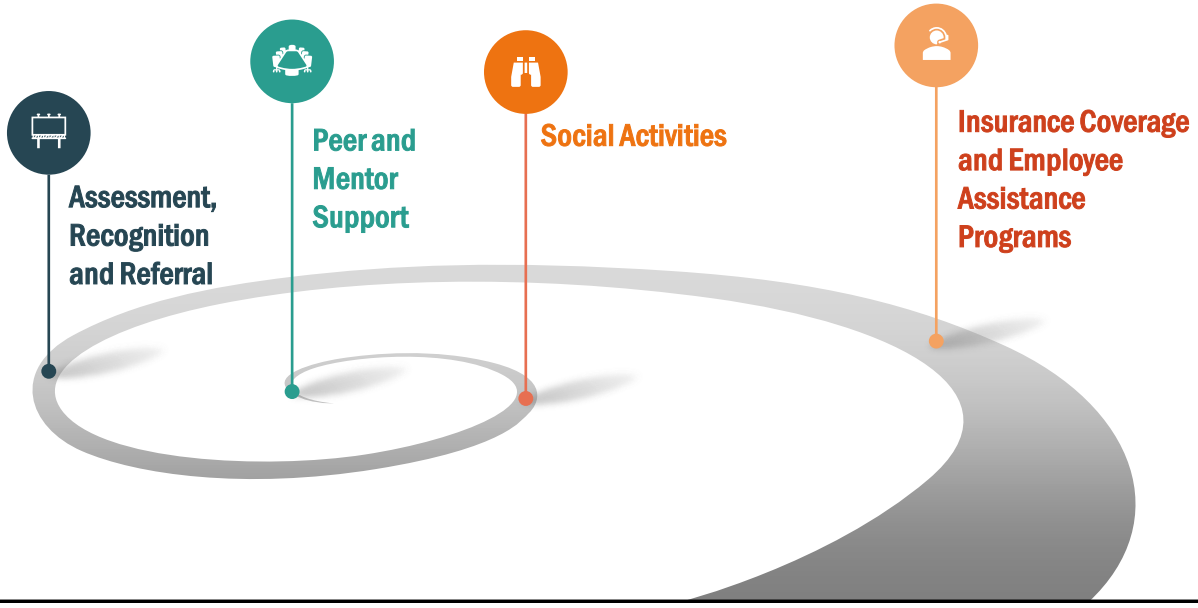
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Potential Roles for Primary Care Physicians



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Involving Employers in Substance Use Prevention



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Collaborations:

Understanding their Beliefs and Goals to Activate Your Partners in Prevention

- WHAT DO THEY HOPE TO ACHIEVE?
- WHAT DO THEY CONSIDER SUCCESSES?
- WHAT HAVE BEEN THEIR CONSTRAINTS?
- WHAT ARE THEIR CHALLENGES?

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Understanding their Beliefs



What are their beliefs?



What shapes their beliefs?



What information sources do they use?



Do they consider science-based information useful?

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Understanding their Goals

Does the selected audience want to…



Impact the trajectories of young people?



Detect a problem early?



Save money?



Make the most of limited resources?



Make environments safer?

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Example Audience: Athletic Coaches

Your goal: *Encourage them to care about providing evidence-based prevention strategies for their teams*



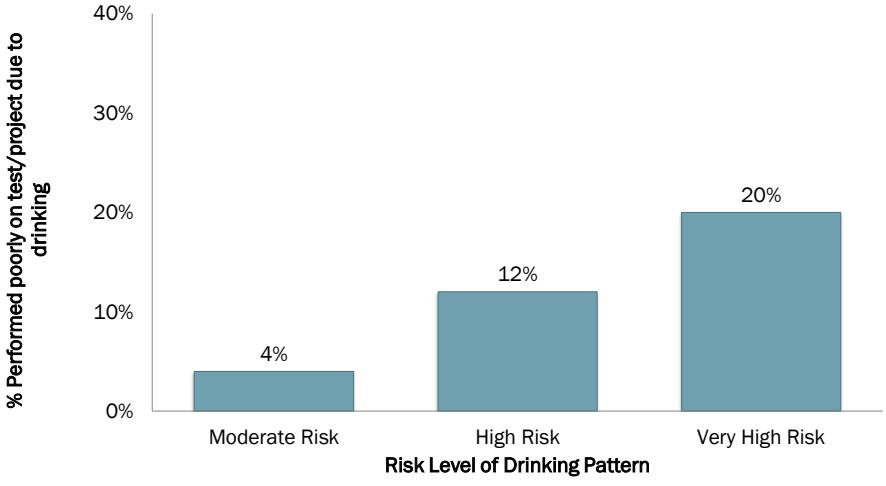
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Prime concerns:

- ❑ Injury risk
- ❑ Losing athletic scholarships, poor grades
- ❑ Winning games

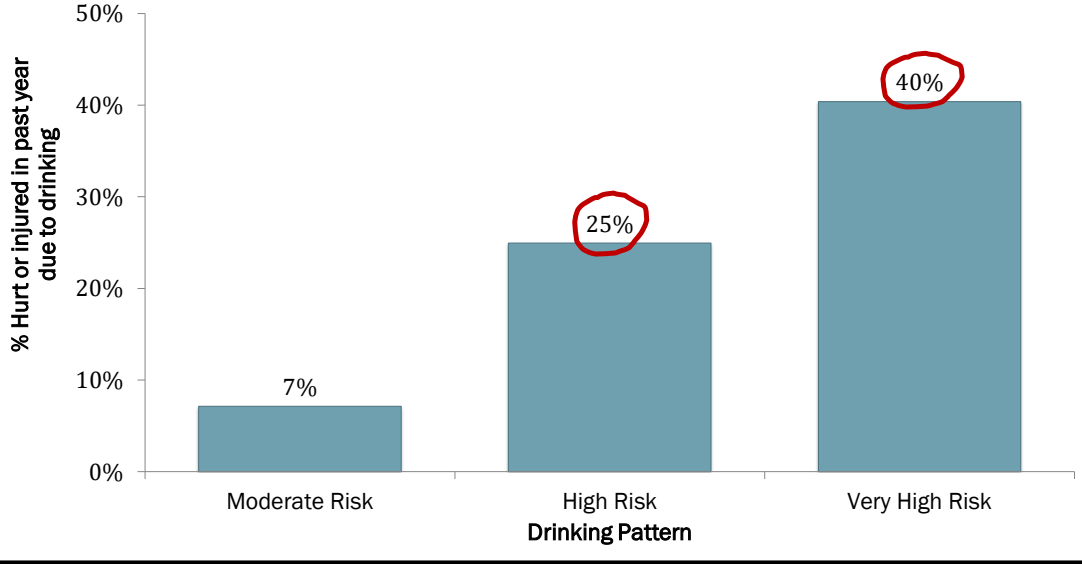
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Athletes with higher-risk drinking patterns were more likely to perform poorly on a test or project



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Athletes with higher-risk drinking patterns were more likely to get injured



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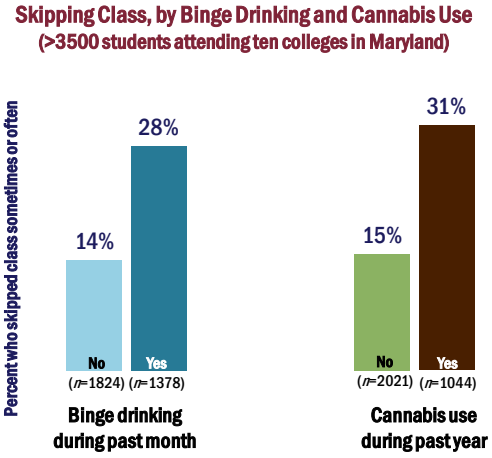
Example Audience: School Board/College President

Your goal: *Encourage them to care about providing evidence-based prevention strategies on their campus*

What do they care about?

What do they know?

What are their expectations?



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SUMMARY & KEY MESSAGES

- Young adulthood is an inherently interesting and impactful period of one's lifespan.
- Substance use during young adulthood can potentially compromise one's future.
- The changing landscape of available products keeps us on our toes.
- Substance use can precipitate the onset or worsen a mental health problem.
- Specific strategies to consider include stricter accessibility standards, parental engagement and reinforcing a positive view of non-use.
- Target audiences to consider include college campus professionals, primary care physicians, employers, and coaches.
- Use motivational ways to engage a wider net of partners in your daily activities and prevention strategy planning.

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Additional Resources

College Parents Matter: Have the Conversation

Visit https://www.collegeparentsmatter.org/ for resources to support parents and guardians of college-aged youth in having developmentally-appropriate communication about a variety of topics, including high-risk behaviors.

On the next page you will find a sample resource that provides guidance on health-oriented conversations and reminders to talk about with students throughout the year.

COLLEGE PARENTS MATTER: MOMENTS TO CHECK IN WITH YOUR STUDENT

The college years can be hard sometimes. With your help, your student will feel supported in making healthy decisions for themselves and have a happier and more successful experience! Here are some behavioral health conversation prompts and reminders to talk about with your student throughout the year.

Fall

- **Move-in time!** Regularly ask about their roommates and how their relationship with them is going.
- **Make sure your student knows campus resources** that can help. Do they know which services are offered at the health and counseling centers?
- **Use fall family weekend or another visit to check in** with your student about their well-being (sleep, mental health, nutrition, etc.).
- **Fall means football (or other sports)!** Give them some ideas for tailgating that don't include alcohol.
- **Halloween in college** can be really fun, but sometimes students feel pressure to drink alcohol to celebrate. Encourage them to start new traditions!

Winter

- **It's finals season!** Have a conversation over Thanksgiving break about how they can manage stress during their upcoming exams.
- "How are you, really?" **Set aside some time during winter break** to talk about how their fall semester went. Include topics like grades, relationships, social life, etc.
- **Ask if they've felt any need for support services** and if they've taken advantage of campus resources. Discuss any barriers they feel to getting help.
- **Discuss "break boundaries".** Even if your student drank while away, it's still appropriate to communicate your expectations at home. High-risk events can include the Wednesday night before Thanksgiving and New Year's Eve.

Spring

- **Spring Break is here!** What are their plans? Cruises, trips to the beach, etc. can involve high-risk drinking and funding them for your student might mean inadvertently paying for alcohol. Help them explore alternatives such as a "staycation" or a service trip.
- **The cold, early spring months can exacerbate mental health concerns.** Check in regularly and encourage your student to use campus resources. Offer to help them navigate the system.
- **High-risk drinking "holidays"** include St. Patrick's Day, Cinco de Mayo, and graduation, but they don't have to be high risk! Help them explore safer options.
- **Encourage self-care habits** like good sleep, nutritious snacks, and relaxation strategies during finals. Many schools have "de-stress" events available.

Summer

- **If your student will be new to college in the fall, <u>now</u> is the best time to talk with them about alcohol.** College Parents Matter has lots of resources available to help make these conversations effective.
- **If your student will be moving off campus,** this is a great time to talk with them about alcohol, and how they can make their home away from home a place where they can succeed as a student. College Parents Matter has specific guides for talking about off-campus housing.
- **If your student has any ongoing mental health care needs** (counseling and/or medications), talk with their school to understand how your student can continue to access that care while away from home.

Find out more about these topics, including conversation tips and guides!
Visit us at collegeparentsmatter.org

Contact Amelia Arria at aarria@umd.edu for more information.

COLLEGE PARENTS MATTER
have the conversation