

What to look for when INVESTING IN SUBSTANCE USE PREVENTION

Effective prevention strategies are critical to addressing the addiction crisis and are often underutilized. Research supports a primary prevention framework that both reduces risk factors that contribute to youth substance use and strengthens protective factors that help young people live healthy lives.

Looking to invest opioid settlement funds (or other funding) in substance use prevention? Here's what to look out for to ensure you are making a worthwhile investment...

GREEN FLAGS

Programs/initiatives that:

- **Are evidence-based or evidence-informed.** There are many prevention programs that are backed by rigorous research demonstrating effectiveness. Check out registries like [Blueprints for Healthy Youth Development](#), [SAMHSA's Evidence-Based Practices Resource Center](#), and [Youth.gov's Program Directory](#).
- **Address underlying risk and protective factors** and use strategies such as building resilience and coping skills, promoting mental wellbeing, and strengthening youth's relationships with their families, schools, and communities.
- **Include and engage parents and families**, in addition to youth. Parents and families play a key role in prevention but are often underutilized partners.
- **Address the community's most pressing needs.** Conduct a needs assessment to determine what the biggest prevention gaps are in your community.

RED FLAGS

- **One-time events.** Prevention is not a one-time event. Once-a-year assemblies or presentations that are not part of a broader, sustained effort are not likely to result in long-lasting attitude or behavior changes.
- **Guest speakers.** Especially if used as a one-time event, celebrity stories can have the unintended consequence of making risk behavior seem thrilling and survivable. Law enforcement professionals can be intimidating and emphasize the criminal/legal aspects of substance use, which often do not resonate with young people and add to stigma.
- **Standalone media/awareness campaigns.** Like one-time events, standalone PSAs are unlikely to result in lasting change that prevents substance use. They often ignore the underlying reasons people use substances and instead often employ scare tactics.
- **Scare tactics.** Research shows scare tactics do not work and in some cases can be harmful. Messages on the dangers of substance use are often easy for young people to disregard and do not lead to lasting attitude or behavior change. Even common programs like DARE have shown not to be effective for this reason.
- **Punitive practices.** Punishing people for substance use can often lead to worse outcomes. Such practices fail to address the underlying reasons for substance use, perpetuate stigma, and can prevent people from seeking help.
- **Reliance on one product** or exclusive focus on reducing prescription medications (e.g., drug disposal pouches). This will not address underlying factors leading to substance use, and no one product is going to solve this crisis. Be wary of marketing selling quick fixes.

For more on how to invest in effective prevention see:

[Guidance for Investing the Opioid Settlement Funds in Primary Prevention](#)