

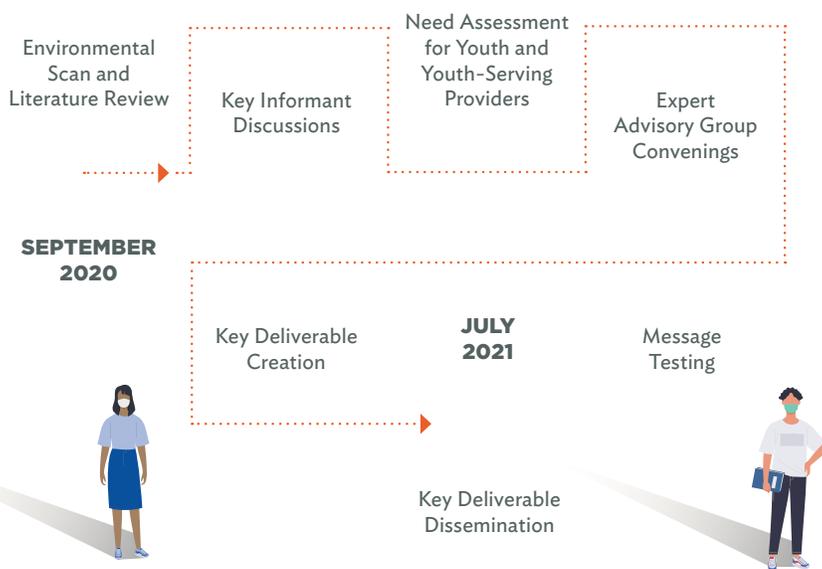
YOUTH SUBSTANCE USE AND MESSAGE DEVELOPMENT DURING COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic has caused an unprecedented disruption to the routines of youth across the United States. With funding from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the National Council is currently leading an initiative to assess the effects of the pandemic on substance use risks and drivers among youth ages 12-18 to equip youth-serving providers and organizations with the tools and resources necessary to support effective prevention messaging.

Effective early identification and intervention on youth substance use decreases the likelihood of future development of substance use disorders, and consequences related to the use of alcohol and other drugs. This initiative aims to equip providers with the necessary tools to engage youth in conversations to identify problems, intervene early and provide youth-centered resources for support.



PROJECT TIMELINE: SEPT. 1, 2020 TO JUL. 31, 2021



TARGET SUBSTANCES

Alcohol, Marijuana, Tobacco/
Nicotine, and Prescription
Drugs

TARGET AUDIENCE

Youth-serving providers and
organizations who work with
youth ages 12-18

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KEY DELIVERABLES

Evidence-based messaging on youth substance use prevention during COVID-19 and educational materials to support providers and other youth-serving organizations in message delivery, such as a messaging guide, webpage, social media graphics and shareables, videos, webinars, interactive worksheets, and educational courses.

Key project deliverables will provide crucial prevention guidance around:

- ▶ Prevention messaging
 - What to say (best practices in prevention, substance use, support resources, mental health, etc.);
 - How to say it (best practices in engagement and rapport building, persuasion, motivation, and health communications).
- ▶ Available resources and partnerships

INITIATIVE STAFF

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YOUTH

Preliminary findings from an online need assessment conducted in January 2021 to include responses from 600 youth, ages 13-18.



Substance	“Very easy” to get	“Much easier” to get during COVID-19	“Great risk” of harm from this substance
Alcohol	19%	14%	37%
Tobacco	19%	11%	47%
Cannabis (THC)	18%	11%	38%
Prescription drugs	10%	6%	47%
Illicit drugs	5%	4%	74%

What matters most	
Family	60%
Friends	29%
Happiness/quality of life/mental health/health	19%
Future/goals	10%
God/religion	9%

Reasons they RECALL not to use substances	Reasons youth choose NOT to use	Reasons youth choose TO use substances	Reasons youth choose to STOP using
Death, negative health implications, brain damage (50%)	May be bad for their health (36%)	Friends or others are doing it (42%)	Could shorten lifespan (48%)
Damage to life/future (12%)	Have plans for the future they don't want to mess up (35%)	To cope (42%)	Don't want life controlled by addiction (48%)
Hurts family/relationships (9%)	Parents/guardians would disapprove (31%)	They enjoy it (33%)	Negative health impact (44%)

State of Mind	
Stressed	44%
Okay	27%
Lonely	27%
Worried or anxious	25%
Happy	25%
Depressed	24%
Good	22%
Isolated	19%
Optimistic	15%
Sad	13%
Excited	11%
Angry	9%
Pessimistic or fearful	5%

PROVIDERS

Preliminary findings from an online need assessment conducted in January 2021 to include responses from more than 700 youth-serving providers.

Providers perceived drivers of youth substance use prior to COVID-19

Peer pressure/wanting to seem cool	56%
Coping, escapism, self-soothing	39%
Family dynamics and/or trauma	25%
Access	14%
Boredom or curiosity	12%
Isolation, lack of connection or support	5%
Societal or cultural norm	2%

Providers perceived drivers of youth substance use during COVID-19

Coping, escapism, self-soothing	44%
Boredom or curiosity	33%
Isolation, lack of connection or support	29%
Lack of normalcy, structure or in-person interaction	11%
Peer pressure/wanting to seem cool	8%
Family dynamics and/or trauma	8%
Less supervision, accountability, consequences	8%

What do providers think young people care about most?

Peers, fitting in/acceptance, appearance	37%
Friends, community, family	31%
Feeling supported, respected, understood, heard	15%
Their phones, technology, social media	11%
Safety and basic needs	10%
Money, success, achievement, future	8%
Managing stress, overcoming obstacles, mental health	6%

TOOLS

96% of providers are open to using new technologies and service modalities and **88%** would like training on how to use them.

68% of providers say resources are accessible to help them understand and use effective messaging to engage youth on substance use while **32%** say these resources are not accessible or they are not sure.

ENGAGEMENT

48% of providers say youth have less access to their programs and **51%** say they are able to provide less programming and services to youth as a result of COVID-19.

During COVID-19, video chat is by far the top way providers are communicating with youth. In-person is a top way of communicating for **35%** of providers now compared to **93%** prior to the pandemic.



COVID-19

Limited access due to shifting to virtual service delivery has been the primary challenge to engaging youth during the pandemic.

51% of youth-serving providers have had less youth program and services offerings during COVID-19.