

Preventing Youth Substance Abuse in Portland: A PLAN FOR ACTION

INTRODUCTION

Youth substance abuse in Portland is a problem with devastating consequences for youth, their families, and the city as a whole—including violence, crime, and academic failure. In the spring of 2006, two community groups, the 21 Reasons Coalition (formerly Portland CMCA) and the One Maine One Portland Coalition, came together to develop a plan to address these issues. The plan was created using data from surveys and public meetings with participation from more than 700 community members, including nearly 400 youth, 400 parents, and 100 local groups, as well as national and statewide information about what works and what doesn't.

This report summarizes the priorities for action that will guide the efforts of our two coalitions during the next few years. Our goal is to reduce youth substance abuse rates 20% by 2010, with a focus on the #1 drug of choice among Portland youth: alcohol, followed by the #2 and #3 most used drugs: marijuana and tobacco. To achieve success, we need your help. Please join us!

RESULTS FROM OUR COMMUNITY ASSESSMENT

According to the Maine Youth Drug and Alcohol Use Survey (MYDAUS), Portland has higher rates of youth substance abuse than the state. One out of five Portland 8th graders consume alcohol at least once a month. By junior year, half of our students are drinking on a regular basis. Binge drinking (defined as 5+ drinks in a row) is also alarmingly common, with more than one-third of juniors and seniors reporting bingeing in the previous two weeks. Meanwhile, 38% of seniors report using marijuana during the past month, and 29% of seniors report using tobacco during the past month (2004 MYDAUS). There are much smaller numbers of Portland youth reporting use of other drugs. However, in Portland as across the state, the great majority of youth who report any other drug use (whether it's marijuana, tobacco, prescription pills, psychedelics, cocaine/crack, MDMA/ecstasy, inhalants, stimulants, heroin, or other illegal drugs.) also report using alcohol. Indeed, alcohol is the common denominator for most of our youth substance abuse problem. And when alcohol use goes down, so does other substance abuse.

To assess our community's ability to prevent youth substance abuse, we used a combination of the Risk and Protective Factor

GOAL: To reduce by 20% the percent of Portland students in grades 6-12 reporting use in Maine Youth Drug & Alcohol Use Survey (MYDAUS):

	<i>2004 Baseline</i>	<i>2010 Target</i>
Alcohol-30 day use	36%	29%
Alcohol-2 weeks binge	20%	16%
Marijuana-30 day use	20%	16%
Cigarette-30 day use	15%	12%

The following is an excerpt from the Maine Office of Substance Abuse (OSA) March 2006 State Strategic Plan Selection of Priority Intervening Factors:

As a result of the data analysis and consultation of the research, an initial set of priority intervening factors has been identified. ...

- Enforcement and the perception of enforcement (likelihood of being caught for violation of underage drinking laws)
- Ease of access to alcohol and the perception of ease of access to alcohol (how easy alcohol is to get)
- Parental attitudes and the perception of parental attitudes (parents think underage drinking is "very wrong")
- Parental monitoring and the perception of parental monitoring (likelihood of being caught by parents if used alcohol without permission)
- Social benefits of drinking and the perception of social benefits (likelihood that one would be seen as "cool" if started drinking)
- Adult attitudes in the community, and the perception of adult attitudes in community (adults in the community think underage drinking is wrong)

While all of these intervening factors focus on underage drinking specifically, the PARP analysis described above actually revealed that the same factors tend also to be related to youth marijuana and prescription drug use, two other consumption patterns identified by the epidemiological analysis as priorities for Maine's strategic plan.

Framework used by the Maine's Office of Substance Abuse (OSA), and the "Priority Intervening Factors" identified by OSA's Strategic Plan. We collected information from community members via multiple sources: 1) A city-wide opinion survey, conducted with the participation of 705 people, including 380 youth, and results from a public action forum held on April 26, with input from 50 community members. 2) Portland data from the Maine Youth Drug & Alcohol Use Survey (MYDAUS); and 3) Portland CMCA's random phone survey of 380 Portland parents, conducted in 2006 by Strategic Marketing Services.

Our findings were clear: Our young people are not receiving strong enough messages or support from adults to make healthy decisions.

- **On an individual and family level**, many parents don't feel empowered to deal with the issue of substance abuse. Parents confess they do not have the appropriate knowledge or skills to effectively prevent their teens from using alcohol or other substances. We need more resources and programs for parents, and we need them to be supportive and accessible to all cultures. Even though our community has many wonderful opportunities for teens, we need to do a better job connecting youth with peer groups where substance abuse is not the norm, where they can interact with their parents in a positive way, and where they can explore their interests through positive activities.
- **On a community level**, we need to create an environment that doesn't promote underage drinking and substance abuse. Underage drinking is seen as a cultural norm, an inevitable "rite of passage." Few adults understand the true impacts of alcohol on young people. Alcohol advertising is reaching too many young audiences. Alcohol is too easily available and accessible to youth, both through retail and social sources. In many cases, adults are buying alcohol for minors and hosting underage drinking parties. In addition, not enough people believe they would get caught for breaking the law.

THE SOLUTION: 2 LEVELS OF ACTION

Based on the results of the community assessment, OMOP and 21 Reasons created citizen-led task forces to develop work plans with priorities for action on two important levels:

- **LEVEL 1: HEALTHY YOUTH & FAMILIES**

Work on this level is led by OMOP. Priorities include increasing opportunities for youth involvement and leadership in positive activities; increasing resources and collaboration for parent education and skill-building in an environment that is supportive and accessible to all cultures; and providing more programs that involve parents and youth together.

⇒ For more information or to become involved, please contact Amanda Edgar, Community Health Promotion Specialist: AEDGAR@portlandmaine.gov; (207) 756-8053.

- **LEVEL 2: A HEALTHY COMMUNITY ENVIRONMENT**

Work on this level is led by 21 Reasons. Priorities include reducing alcohol availability & accessibility to youth; strengthening community norms, especially adult attitudes, to support alcohol-free expectations for underage youth; and strengthening enforcement of underage drinking, furnishing, and hosting laws.

⇒ For more information or to become involved, please contact Erica Schmitz, Coalition Coordinator; eschmitz@mcd.org; (207) 773-7737.

PLEASE JOIN OUR EFFORTS!

One Maine One Portland

City of Portland Public Health Division
Health & Human Services Department
389 Congress Street
Portland, Maine 04101
(207) 756-8053

21 Reasons

Medical Care Development
107 Elm Street, Suite 300A
Portland ME 04101
(207) 773-7737
www.21reasons.org