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 DEC. 31, 2021**

**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, tip sheets, 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**
  - Resources for implementation, making connections and sustaining the prevention messaging.

**INITIATIVE STAFF**
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**TARGET SUBSTANCES**
Alcohol, Marijuana, and Prescription Drugs

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

**FINANCIAL DISCLAIMER:** This project is supported by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) as part of a financial assistance award totaling $2,000,000 with 100% funded by CDC/HHS. The content is that of the author(s) and do not necessarily represent the official views of, nor an endorsement, by CDC/HHS or the U.S. Government.
## YOUTH AND PROVIDERS

Preliminary findings from an online need assessment conducted in January 2021 to include responses from 600 youth (ages 13-18) and more than 700 youth-serving providers.

### Youth perceptions of access and risk from different substances

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

### What matters most to youth?

- **Family**: 60%
- **Friends**: 29%
- **Happiness/quality of life/mental health/health**: 19%
- **Future/goals**: 10%
- **God/religion**: 9%

### Reasons NOT to use substances

- **May be bad for their health**: 36% (youth), 10% (provider)
- **Have plans for the future they don’t want to mess up**: 35% (youth), 46% (provider)
- **Parents/guardians would disapprove**: 28% (youth), 45% (provider)

### Reasons to STOP using substances

- **Could shorten lifespan**: 48% (youth), 4% (provider)
- **Don’t want life controlled by addiction**: 48% (youth), 9% (provider)
- **Negative health impact**: 44% (youth), 6% (provider)
COVID-19 limited access due to shifting to virtual service delivery, which 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.

Methods of communication have drastically changed. During the pandemic, 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.

TOP RESOURCES providers think would be useful in building their capacity to better serve and communicate with youth are the following:

- Digital platforms/social media tools
- Peer groups/clubs
- Resources for use in schools (videos, interactive documents)
- Mechanisms for youth to ask questions anonymously
- Stories of people with lived experience

YOUTH REPORTING ON CURRENT STATE OF MIND

- Stressed 44%
- Okay 27%
- Lonely 27%
- Worried or anxious 25%
- Isolated 19%
- Happy 25%
- Good 22%

PROVIDERS PERCEIVED DRIVERS OF YOUTH SUBSTANCE USE DURING COVID-19

- 44% Coping, escapism, self-soothing
- 33% Boredom or curiosity
- 29% Isolation, lack of connection or support

Provider’s perception re: most effective way to reach youth

- Face-to-face or in-person 78%
- Text 44%
- Social media 33%
- Email 27%
- Face-to-face or in-person 45%
- Text 29%
- Email 27%