

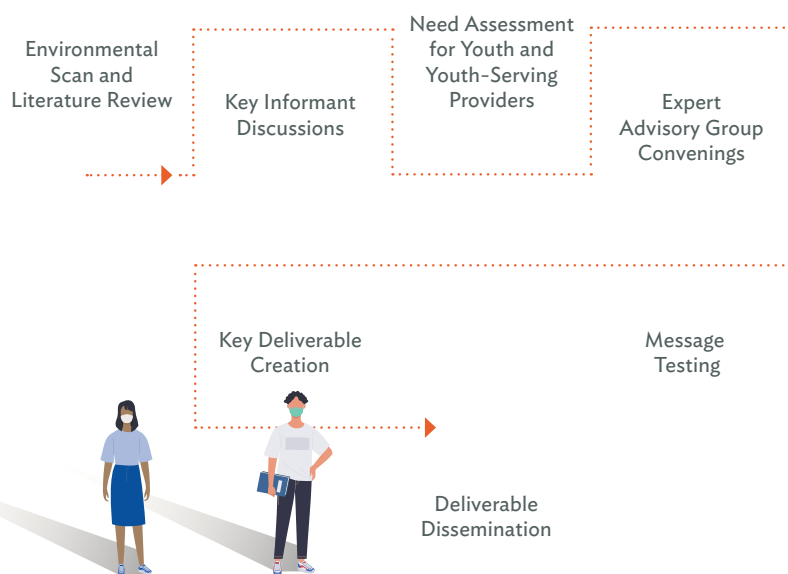
YOUTH SUBSTANCE USE AND MESSAGE DEVELOPMENT DURING COVID-19

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 DEC. 31, 2021



TARGET SUBSTANCES

Alcohol, Marijuana, 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, 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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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

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 to youth?

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

What do providers think youth 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%

Reasons NOT to use substances

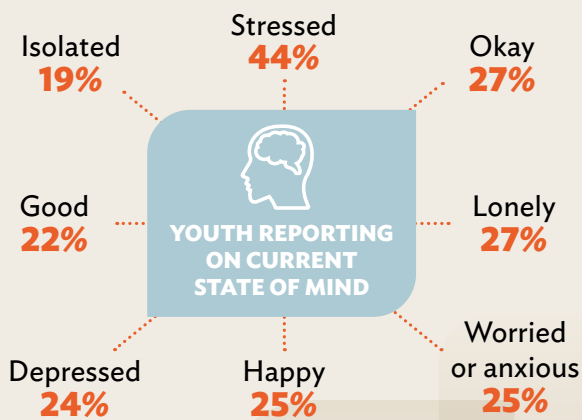
Reasons NOT to use substances	Youth responses	Provider responses
May be bad for their health	36%	10%
Have plans for the future they don't want to mess up	35%	46%
Parents/guardians would disapprove	28%	45%

Reasons to STOP using substances

Reasons to STOP using substances	Youth responses	Provider responses
Could shorten lifespan	48%	4%
Don't want life controlled by addiction	48%	9%
Negative health impact	44%	6%

MESSAGING THEMES THAT RESONATED MOST WITH YOUTH FOCUSED ON:

■ The future ■ Risk of addiction ■ Relationships ■ Activities ■ Self-affirmation



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

Youth's preferred way to communicate	
Face-to-face or in-person	45%
Text	29%
Email	27%

Provider's perception re: most effective way to reach youth	
Face-to-face or in-person	78%
Text	44%
Social media	33%



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

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

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.