Implementation Recommendations and Considerations

NATIONAL COUNCIL
for Mental Wellbeing

This brief guide is designed to provide recommendations for youth-serving providers and community-based organizations (CBOs) and coalitions planning to communicate with youth about substance use prevention using the Getting Candid: Framing the Conversation Around Youth Substance Use Prevention toolkit. It includes strategies around goal setting, process improvement and considerations for how and where materials may be deployed within communities served. The implementation recommendations provided in this guide are not "one size fits all" and should be adapted accordingly, as implementation will look differently depending on whether it occurs at the individual or organizational level.

ABOUT THE TOOLKIT

The National Council for Mental Wellbeing, with support from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), is leading an initiative to better understand and address youth substance use during the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond. A collection of activities were conducted to assess the effects of the pandemic on substance use risks and drivers among youth – including an environmental scan and literature review, key informant discussions, multiple online needs assessments with youth and providers, and convening an expert advisory group – to identify how to support providers and CBOs in order to have conversations with youth around substance use prevention. The Getting Candid: Framing the Conversation Around Youth Substance Use Prevention toolkit is the culmination of these efforts.

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 toolkit 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. Specifically, the toolkit seeks to:

1. Provide guidance around prevention messaging, including Do's and Don'ts, when communicating with youth.

2. Provide materials to support implementation, make connections and sustain prevention-related activities.

TOOLKIT PRODUCTS

The toolkit offers materials for providers and CBOs to aid in substance use prevention messaging efforts. All materials share the common goal of empowering providers to talk with youth about alcohol and other drugs. Below is a brief overview of the inventory of toolkit topics that may be implemented as-is or customized for use when communicating with youth about substance use prevention:

- **Substance use prevention messaging.**

- **Safely communicating with youth.**

- **Techniques for engagement.**

- **Sharing information with youth.**

- **Making connections.**

- **Implementation and sustainability.**

USING THE TOOLKIT: PLANNING FOR IMPLEMENTATION

Define the Audience. Defining the intended audience is critical for successful implementation planning, as the audience impacts goals and strategy. Toolkit materials were developed for use with youth ages 12-18; however, implementation could be direct or indirect or to subpopulations within this age group. For example, an organization or provider may focus primarily on training adult staff in effective messaging with youth using toolkit materials (indirect) or may focus on messaging only to youth in middle school (direct, subpopulation). Defining the audience will help determine which resources within the toolkit will be used and how to best deploy them.

Create Goals and Objectives. Goals should be aligned with organizational mission and define the long-term outcomes that will be achieved through implementation, while objectives are actionable measures of short-term impacts that drive progress towards the goal. Choose goals that are SMART: Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Realistic, and Time-bound.

Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI) is a systematic process of collecting data as a means of gathering information to turn that information into knowledge in which to engage and activate others. A valuable aspect of CQI is Plan-Do-Study-Act (PDSA). This is an iterative four-step problem solving process for testing a change to determine whether it is an improvement.

These rapid cycle tests of change typically start on a very small scale by being short in duration, with only a few staff and resources. This allows for quick input on what works and what doesn't. The follow-up cycles allow for steady and iterative improvements, building capacity for sustainable changes.
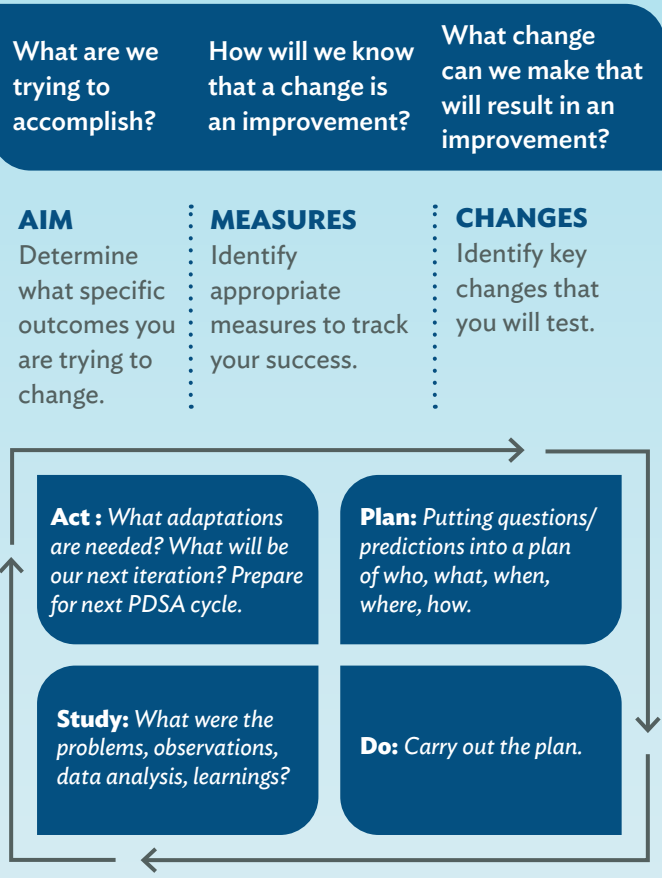
Evaluating the impact of the work is important for understanding what worked and what did not and should be used to improve future implementation initiatives. When developing evaluation metrics, consider tracking the number of participants engaged in implementation activities, collecting qualitative feedback, and conducting "knowledge checks" with community members.[4]

- ***Example Goal:*** Increase youth awareness of the physical and mental health impacts of the use of various substances.

- ***Example Objective (CBO):*** Increase the percentage of adults working with youth within the community who are knowledgeable and equipped to deliver effective messaging on the impacts of substance use to youth.

- ***Example Objective (Provider):*** Increase the utilization rate of the communication pathway when interacting with youth.

Choose goals that are SMART:

S — **SPECIFIC**

M — **MEASURABLE**

A — **ATTAINABLE**

R — **REALISTIC**

T — **TIME-BOUND**

The Model for Improvement

What are we trying to accomplish?

How will we know that a change is an improvement?

What change can we make that will result in an improvement?

AIM
Determine what specific outcomes you are trying to change.

MEASURES
Identify appropriate measures to track your success.

CHANGES
Identify key changes that you will test.

Act : *What adaptations are needed? What will be our next iteration? Prepare for next PDSA cycle.*

Plan: *Putting questions/ predictions into a plan of who, what, when, where, how.*

Study: *What were the problems, observations, data analysis, learnings?*

Do: *Carry out the plan.*

Implementation Strategy. Create an action plan that defines a strategy to deploy resources within communities served. The plan should include a timeline with specific tasks, defined and assigned responsibilities, and measured progress towards goals and outcomes.[2] Ideas of activities that could be part of an action plan are included in the **Implementation Strategies and Tactics Section below.** Other things to consider within an implementation strategy include:

- ***Conducting a baseline assessment of the community served.*** A baseline assessment of health conditions and behaviors, resident demographics, available resources in a community and its readiness for implementation can be used to determine outcome goals and inform an action plan. It can also highlight strengths and areas for improvement while serving as a reference point for assessing outputs and outcomes post implementation. If conducting an assessment is not possible, consider using existing data, such as past surveys or national assessments.[1] The National Council recommends using **Youth MOVE National's Community Youth Resource Mapping** to identify resources and opportunities available to youth across communities.

- ***Partnering with youth-focused organizations or advocates.*** Collaborating with youth-focused organizations and advocates that youth trust and frequent is important when implementing materials. These partnerships can amplify messages, serve as referral sources, help identify funding sources, improve connections with community members through joint marketing efforts and enhance understanding of important challenges and opportunities within the community. The toolkit's **Resource Referral Planning Guide** can be used to help youth-serving providers and CBOs identify referral partners within their community.

- ***Engaging youth.*** Involving and gaining the unique perspective of youth – who will be most impacted by the work – can help promote engagement in the implementation activities. Youth can help to identify the platforms and locations best suited to reach other local youth, test messaging to ensure it resonates and is inclusive, and become individual messengers of youth substance use prevention.

- ***Ensuring inclusivity of your implementation plan.*** When planning and implementing the toolkit, it's important to recognize the diversity of the community served. Identify potential barriers and facilitators to community engagement, such as resident demographics (age, income and language), level of community infrastructure, accessibility factors such as rural isolation or urban/suburban transportation challenges, information gaps and literacy level to minimize barriers and maximize facilitators where possible.[3]

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[1] Implementation Resource Guide. (2018). Retrieved from https://www.cdc.gov/physicalactivity/downloads/built-environment-implementation-resource-guide.pdf

[2] Implementation Resource Guide. (2018). Retrieved from https://www.cdc.gov/physicalactivity/downloads/built-environment-implementation-resource-guide.pdf

[3] Community Planning Toolkit Community Engagement. (2014). Retrieved from https://www.communityplanningtoolkit.org/sites/default/files/Engagement.pdf

[4] Implementation Resource Guide. (2018). Retrieved from https://www.cdc.gov/physicalactivity/downloads/built-environment-implementation-resource-guide.pdf

USING THE TOOLKIT: EVALUATING AND SHARING SUCCESS

During and after implementing the [Getting Candid: Framing the Conversation Around Youth Substance Use Prevention](#) toolkit, conduct evaluation activities and revisit the goals and objectives used to measure the impact of the work. Use the baseline data that was gathered and used for the goals and objective setting process to determine if the desired results were achieved.

Aim to integrate improvements into a long-term community-wide effort. Post-implementation, focus on sustainability as it creates and builds momentum to maintain community-wide change.

Share Your Success. The toolkit was developed and intended for broad distribution and grassroots implementation, so the initiative wants to hear about your success! The National Council encourages the sharing of implementation successes in communities served during and after implementation by emailing metrics and stories to GettingCandid@TheNationalCouncil.org. The National Council wants to hear about quantifiable results, such as the number of people trained and materials distributed or shared, as well as personal stories. The results might even be featured in National Council newsletters or events.

IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGIES AND TACTICS

Host Community Events and Activities

- Partner with organizations to host a community health and wellness fair.

- Collaborate with organizations to host a back-to-school giveaway.

- Host an all-ages movie night at a local park, business or community center.

- Host a game show night and adapt a popular TV game show (e.g., Jeopardy!) at a local business or community center about topics related to the community or youth substance use prevention.

- Sign up to be a vendor at the local farmer's market to build relationships with community members and provide direct access to resources and information.

- Invite youth in the community to submit (possibly for a prize) a song, poem or art piece which describes their community, changes they would like to see or topics related to substance use prevention. The materials can be used in marketing and promotional services.

- Partner with community advocates or local government officials to host a public forum around youth substance use prevention.

- Hold a "meet and greet" to meet and build a relationship with community members.

- Create or partner with an organization to develop a youth group or program in the community serviced.

Start an Outreach Campaign

- Create an [anonymous automated text outreach campaign](#) where youth can submit questions and receive facts about substances, wellness tips and information about helplines.

- Volunteer to speak or present about youth substance use prevention at local schools.

- Create a website where community members can learn more about the practice or organization. Ask community partners to include a link to the site and vice versa. Incorporate an anonymous portal onto the website where youth can submit questions about substances and substance use.

- Submit a pitch for youth to be interviewed about youth substance use prevention efforts on local radio or news stations.

- Create social media accounts to engage and communicate with youth in your community. The toolkit's [Social Media Concepts and Social Media Tip Sheet](#) resources share best practices for commonly used social media platforms, tips for leveraging each platform's unique features and sample posts that youth-serving providers and CBOs can share on social media platforms to engage youth in their services.

- Identify and participate in community-related conferences and forums.

- Build relationships with community members that youth trust to amplify the work. For example, put up fliers or offer resources at places youth frequent in the community such as local shops and recreational programs.