



Advanced Prevention Training: Communicating the Value of Prevention Participant Workbook

August 21, 2025

Telling the story of prevention and communicating the benefits of our work is essential to continued funding and support. Developing and providing community leadership with clear tailored messages supported by research and data requires a team effort, initial message development, and clear goals.

Group Brainstorm

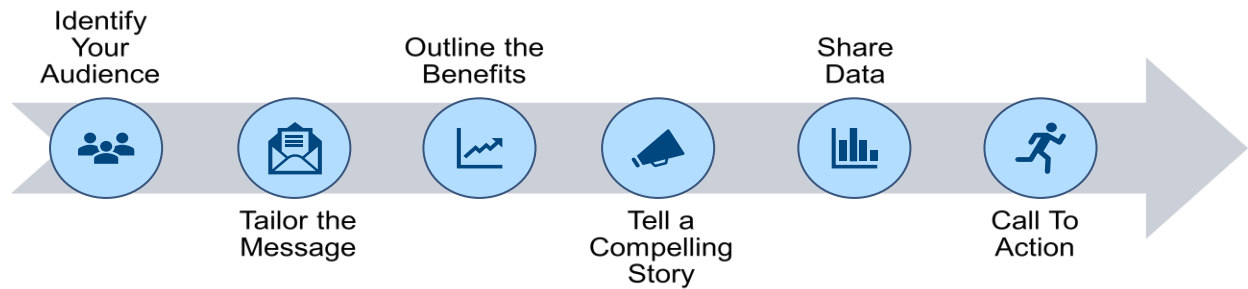
1. Could your best friend (or anyone in your life) explain your job or prevention?
☐ Yes
☐ No
2. How would they describe it? What keeps them from understanding prevention?

What We Know About Prevention

The goal of our work is not just the work of prevention, but also to build support and bridge the gap between our knowledge and that of community members and leaders. For prevention to be successful, community support and understanding is essential. We know:

1. Prevention helps people develop the knowledge, attitudes, and skills they need to make good choices or change harmful behaviors.
2. Prevention professionals work with groups, communities, states, and entire populations.
3. It can sometimes take years to see the results of prevention work in the community.
4. Evidence-based prevention is proven to be effective in reducing substance misuse, changing attitudes, and increasing community health and quality of life.
5. There is data and research to back up the impact and effectiveness of prevention.

How Do We Tell the Story of Prevention



Identify Your Audience

Individual Reflection #1

1. Who in your community needs to know about prevention? Name at least 3.
2. Why do they need to know about prevention?

Who is Your Audience and What do they Need to Know?

Who?	What?
Lawmakers	Prevention works
Community members	Health benefits
Public officials	Builds safer communities
Parents	Makes economic sense
Youth	
Partner agencies	
Others?	

Get to Know Your Audience

To develop an impactful message, you need to understand your audience. You may need to reach out to others to help you better understand the audience's motivation and preferred communication style. Consider the questions below when developing your message for each audience.

- Where do they sit in the community?
- How does your work overlap?
- How does substance misuse impact them? Their constituents? Their work?
- What benefits might be compelling to them?
- Will stories or data be most impactful to them?
- What is the best form of communication with them?

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Small Group Work #1

Discuss and share the following in your small group.

- Who specifically do you want to reach re the value of prevention?
- Why do you need to reach out to them?
- What do you hope to achieve?

Outlining the Benefits of Prevention

There are many documented benefits of prevention that show how our work improves the lives of communities and individuals.

Health Benefits

- **Reduced Risk of Chronic Disease**

Heavy and even episodic alcohol use increases risk for cardiovascular conditions such as hypertension, atrial fibrillation, heart attack, and stroke.ⁱ

Despite drops in overall cardiovascular disease deaths from 1999-2019, cardiovascular disease deaths in which substance use was cited as a contributing factor increased an average of 4% per year from 1999-2019.ⁱⁱ

Alcohol was a factor in 65% of the deaths from cardiovascular disease, followed by opioids, cocaine and other illicit drugs.ⁱⁱⁱ

Alcohol-related cancer claims approximately 20,000 American lives annually. The health risks associated with alcohol are dose-dependent: the more one drinks, the greater the danger.^{iv}

Reducing alcohol consumption can directly prevent cancer and the associated healthcare costs, which can be considerable over time.^v

If we assume even modest average treatment costs (e.g., \$50,000–\$100,000 per case), the direct medical cost for 20,000 cases could range from \$1–2 billion annually.

- **Improved Brain Development in Youth**

Early use of alcohol, cannabis, and tobacco has been shown to impair memory, learning capacity, and executive functioning in adolescents.^{vi}

A family-centered school prevention model demonstrated long-term reductions in alcohol, tobacco, and marijuana use among middle school students, safeguarding cognitive development during a crucial stage of brain maturation.^{vii}

- **Lower Rates of Injury and Death**

Social Benefits

- **Healthier Families**

Families are the first line of defense against youth substance use. Decades of research show that when families are engaged, supportive, and equipped with effective parenting strategies, youth are far less likely to initiate alcohol or drug use.^{viii}

Family-centered strategies are proven to reduce youth substance use and antisocial behavior.^{ix}

Parental monitoring and supervision are among the most effective protective factors against early substance use. Parental monitoring and communication reduce youth alcohol use.^x

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Skills like rule-setting and positive reinforcement can be strengthened through prevention programs.^{xi}

- **Reduced Risks for Future Generations**

Prevention helps interrupt intergenerational cycles of substance use by empowering parents and youth with skills and support. Programs that engage families also improve youth behavior and decrease antisocial activity.^{xii}

- **Healthier and Safer Neighborhoods, Communities and States**

Substance use affects neighborhoods, schools, and public safety. Prevention programming strengthens the social fabric by connecting young people to mentors, safe spaces, and supportive adults outside the home.^{xiii}

Community connectedness is linked to reduced substance use. Mentorship programs provide youth with positive role models and accountability. For example, the Big Brothers Big Sisters Mentoring Program was associated with a 46% lower likelihood of illicit drug use initiation among participants.^{xiv}

Creating “third places”—safe, supportive environments outside of school and home—gives youth alternative paths to belonging and identity development.^{xv}

Economic Benefits

- **Lower Healthcare Costs**

Substance use contributes significantly to emergency room visits, hospitalizations, and long-term chronic disease care.^{xvi}

Prevention efforts that delay or reduce substance use lower the need for costly medical interventions. Every \$1 invested in substance use prevention saves up to \$65 in future medical costs.^{xvii}

- **Lower Social Services Expenditures**

Substance use is closely linked to increased demand for child welfare services, housing assistance, disability services, and unemployment benefits. In 2023, 32% of child welfare cases related to parental drug use.^{xviii} Prevention programs reduce these needs by stabilizing families and supporting youth before they engage in harmful behavior.

- **Improved Educational Attainment**

Long term economic stability for individuals and communities is tied to the continued education of youth and young adults. Youth who avoid substance use are more likely to attend and complete school, perform better academically and pursue post-secondary education.^{xix}

- **Positive Return on Investment**

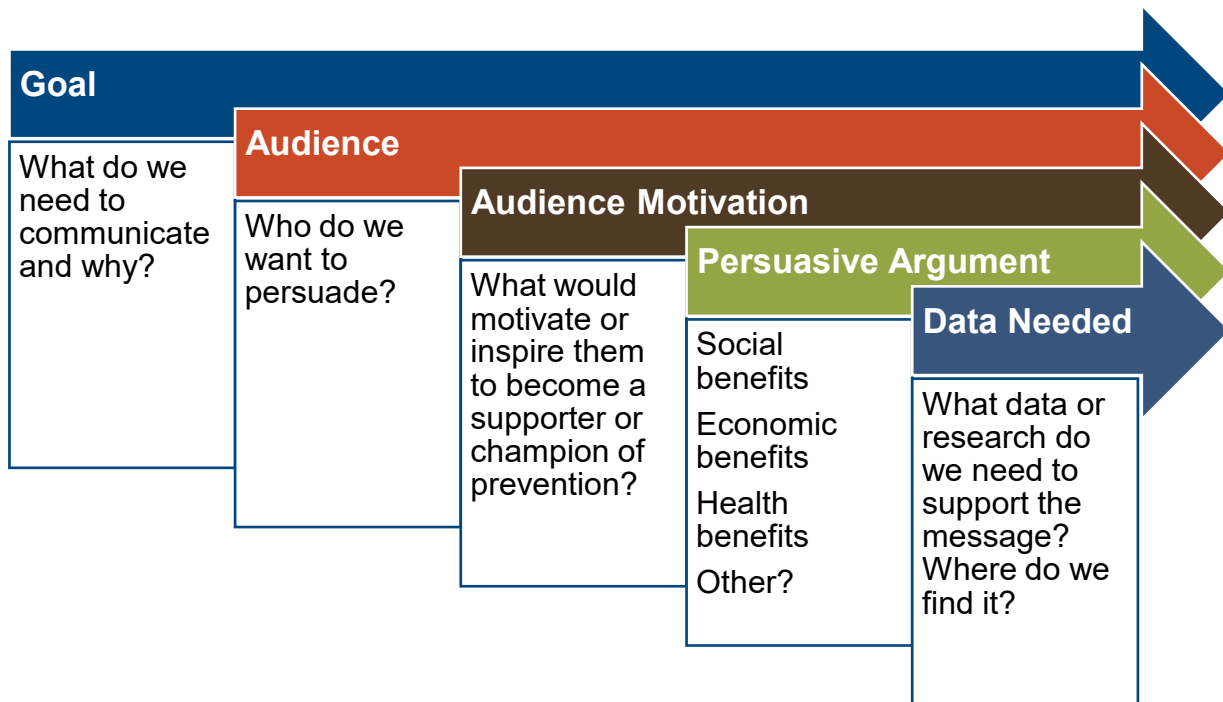
For every \$1 spent, communities can expect \$2 to \$20 in savings, depending on program type, population served, and local context.^{xx}

In Minnesota, evidence-based prevention programs showed benefit-cost ratios ranging from \$1.36 to \$63 per dollar invested.^{xxi}

The Good Behavior Game, a classroom-based prevention strategy, showed a return of \$62.80 for every \$1 spent. These savings come not only from avoided healthcare and justice system costs, but also from increased productivity and improved quality of life for participants and families.^{xxii}

Making a Strong Case

Regardless of where or how you deliver your message, you must have a well-prepared, thought-out message that includes the key components of a compelling pitch.



Message Development Planning Worksheet

Below is a table that you can use to begin gathering the information and thoughts and tasks you will need to develop a customized message for your audience. Remember, each audience will need a unique, tailored message.

What is our goal?	
Who is the audience?	
What is their motivation?	
Type of information to highlight?	
Is there a story that illustrates the benefits and/or speaks to their motivation?	
Where can we find those data?	
What other resources do we need?	

Data and Stories

Data and stories are important ways of communicating the benefits of prevention. Below is a list of possible sources of data and information.

- State data from local surveys regarding substance use
- Hospitalization and emergency department admissions due to substance use
- Poison control calls associated with substance use
- Arrest and citation data associated with substance use
- School disciplinary actions or treatment referrals for substance-related concerns
- Other state/local resources

Stories of personal or community experiences are often best found in our conversation with partners, participants, those with lived experience, and other community members. We can also collect stories from our peers in the field. Sharing success stories and experiences with each other is a way to help paint a picture that is more personal and relatable than just statistics and research findings. For some audiences, stories are a key part of creating a compelling message.

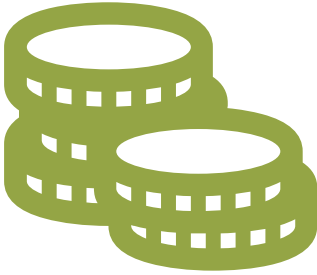
Small Group Work #2

In your small group, use the information in your worksheet and the Google slides for your group to complete the message worksheet for your selected audience.

- Develop a goal.
- Consider audience motivation and data needed.
- Develop a draft message.

You may also record your responses in the *Message Development Planning Worksheet* above.

Sample Messages



Business Leaders

Workers with prescription medication use disorder were more likely to change jobs and average significantly higher rates of unscheduled leave than their peers.

Over the past 10 years, our prevention efforts have reduced prescription drug misuse and overdose by 10%.

This work has a positive and measurable impact on productivity, profitability, and economic stability in the community.

**Provide citations and additional resources.*

School Board Members

We have been providing substance misuse prevention services in the school district for the past 15 years. These efforts have maintained or decreased the use of substances among our students.

The link between youth substance use and negative student outcomes is well documented. * In our community efforts to increase graduation rates and improve student mental health, substance misuse prevention assists the schools to meet these goals.

Our efforts have reduced the age of first use by X%. Additionally, students have an increased perception of harm related to cannabis and alcohol use which reduces their likelihood of use.

**Provide citations and additional resources.*



Ideas for Moving to Action

- ☐ Meet with colleagues, coalition members, or partners to discuss your goals for increasing the knowledge of prevention among community leaders.
- ☐ Print a copy of the Message Development Worksheet and work through it for one leader in your community.
- ☐ Watch the recording of our [Prevention Works webinar](#).
- ☐ Review the return on investment data on [Washington State's website](#).
- ☐ Review [The Return on Investment of Substance Use Prevention](#) resource from the Central East PTTC.

Resources

Prevention Works Webinar

A 90-minute webinar explores national and state level data points from middle and high school youth to make the case that Prevention Works!

Washington State Institute for Public Policy's Benefit-Cost Results

This interactive website provides benefit-cost analysis results for a variety of public policy issues including substance misuse prevention programs.

The Return on Investment of Substance Use Prevention

This resource created by the Central East PTTC provides engaging infographics on the costs of substance misuse compared to the cost of prevention efforts.

Substance Abuse Prevention Dollars and Cents: A Cost-Benefit Analysis

A 2008 resource from SAMHSA for use by policymakers and other leaders to help inform decision on prevention funding.

Pitching Prevention: Explaining the Importance of Prevention through Effective Messages

A 90-minute webinar recording that provides insight and information on how to tell your story and promote prevention in your community.

You Gotta Hear This! Developing an Effective Elevator Pitch

A resource created by the Strategic Prevention Technical Assistance Center to walk you through the development of a good "pitch."

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