

# Vermont Substance Misuse Prevention Evaluation Summary

## February 2026

In November 2023, the Vermont Department of Health, Division of Substance Use Programs (DSU) contracted with JG Research and Evaluation to evaluate Vermont's substance misuse prevention system. This evaluation provides a point in time snapshot of prevention work and partners.

If you need help accessing or understanding this information, contact [AHS.VSHDSU@Vermont.gov](mailto:AHS.VSHDSU@Vermont.gov).

### Key Terms



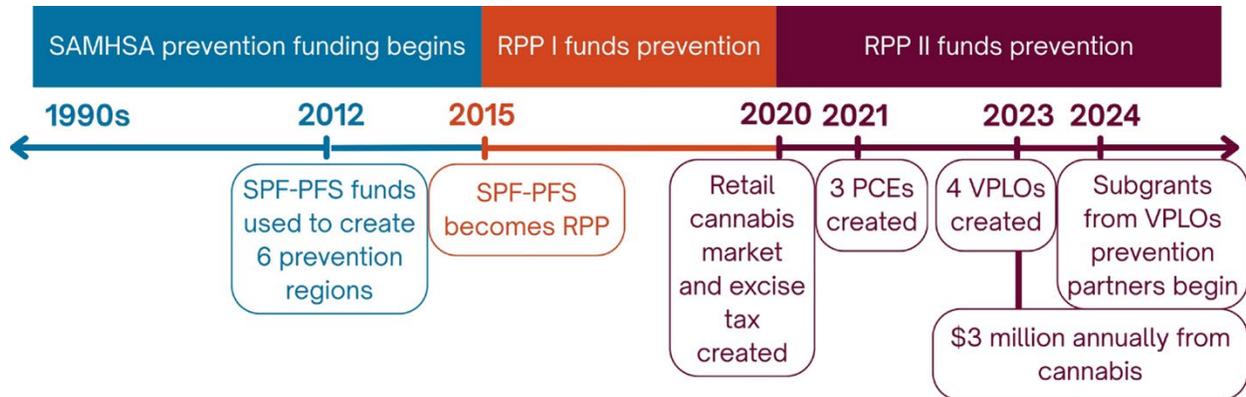
- Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS) – A telephone survey of Vermont adult residents that provides important public health information on areas such as chronic disease prevalence, risk behaviors, demographics, health care access, and preventive behaviors. [Learn more about the Behavior Risk Factor Surveillance System.](#)
- Prevention Coalition - A collaborative group of people, organizations, and partners working together to address substance use and misuse prevention.
- Prevention Consultants – Health Department staff members who reside within one of the 12 health districts within Vermont whose role is to provide information, referrals, training, and consultation on substance misuse and prevention best practices. [Learn more about Prevention Consultants.](#)
- Prevention Partner - A person or organization independently engaged in substance use and misuse prevention or acting as a partner to a Prevention Coalition.
- Vermont Prevention Lead Organizations (VPLO) – Four regional organizations established in 2023 who are responsible for assessment and subgranting, and lead and expand prevention activities in the region. [Learn more about Vermont Prevention Lead Organization.](#)
- Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) – A survey distributed every two years to participating schools around the state where students anonymously share information on their health and risk behaviors. [Learn more about the Youth Risk Behavior Survey.](#)



## Background and Context

At the time of the evaluation, transitions were occurring within the prevention funding structure. Prior to 2023, DSU directly funded prevention coalitions. This changed in 2023 when four Vermont Prevention Lead Organizations (VPLo) were established. The VPLo model is a significant shift in how funding is distributed by expanding the scope and definition of prevention, tying the distribution of prevention funding to regional data and needs and moving funding decisions from the state level to the regional and community level.

### Timeline of Prevention Funding



## Key Findings



### Prevention Consultants are valued in their community

DSU Prevention Consultants (PCs) were identified as important conduits between VPLOs, prevention coalitions, and prevention partners in the region. PCs attend a diverse set of meetings and events that keep them connected to many partners. Interview participants also noted PCs for their ability to provide training and technical assistance and provide key coordination support for the VPLo work.

**“The PC is very involved. I’d say I have personally deepened my reliance on them in the last six months and will continue to lean on them for the next year. The PC is getting involved in a lot of school conversations around the value of the YRBS (Youth Risk Behavior Survey) and priorities for different communities and gently guiding some of those conversations with school administrators and with our coalition members. They were also involved in helping to understand the potential impact of the reduced sale hours policy**

that I mentioned previously. They're great. They show up to all of those Team Prevention meetings, so they are the shepherd of moving that group forward.”

– VPLO representative



### Prevention work includes a wide variety of partners

375 unique organizations were identified as being connected to one or more of the four regional VPLOs.

Organization Type	Number of Connections
Community-based social service organizations	61
Other	61
K-12 education	57
Hospital/Health care organization	23
Local government agency	22
Statewide social service organization	20
Substance misuse prevention organization	20
Prevention coalition	17
Law enforcement	15
Recovery services	14
Afterschool provider	10
Early childhood education/Childcare provider	8
Cultural/ethnic organization	7
Post-secondary education	7
Drug/alcohol treatment provider	6
State agency	6
Religious organization	5
Court/judicial	4
Regional and local planning commissions	4
Restorative justice	4
Senior-serving entity	4



### **VPLOs are expanding prevention to more populations**

Several populations who are at high-risk of the impacts of substance use and who have been underserved are served with VPLO-funded projects including LGBTQIA+, BIPOC, youth, and people who are unhoused. These populations are identified through regional assessment and selected as a focused population through the region's strategic plans.

**“...this funding has allowed for us to really dig into this by offering that funding to certainly all of us [coalitions], but non-traditional partners. That's really important. It's that collective impact piece. So, like I said, we're just really starting to dig into this.”**

**– Prevention coalition representative**

**“Even in the first year, we've been able to address some of the gaps that we're seeing, and we've done that through how we're allocating funding...We noticed in the competitive rounds that there weren't as many programs addressing that population(LGBTQIA+) that applied. And so, we have created a separate non-competitive approach to making sure that we're getting programming out that's serving that particular population.”**

**– VPLO representative**



### **It took time for partners to understand the shift to VPLOs**

There were several misconceptions in the first two years about the structure and approach, and it was difficult for some prevention partners to broaden their concept of prevention. It took time to build a solid foundation for the new structure and help people understand the reasoning for the shift and their role within the new structure. As the work has progressed there is a better understanding of the benefits to this new approach.

**“So far, this approach is what we've needed! It affords the opportunity to engage non-traditional partners and provides both operational and project-**

**based funding. It will continue to evolve as our communities do. We are grateful the State sees the value in prevention.”**

**– Prevention coalition member**

**“I think it's the benefit of really being able to focus in on the strategic plan of our region, and really looking at needs, and doing that with community partners, and being able to fund those needs based on the community input.”**

**– VPLO representative**



## **Trends point to a positive impact of sustained prevention efforts**

Vermont has been investing in substance misuse prevention for many years. Data from the BRFSS and YRBS reveal overall trends in the state that suggest prevention interventions, across the Prevention Framework, may be leading to decreased substance use behaviors. But there is still more work to be done due to policy and legalization changes. **To see population-level outcomes, long-term, consistent, and continuously funded programming is required.**

- 49% of high school students in 2023 tried alcohol, a decrease from 59% in 2013. (YRBS)
- 5% of middle school students in 2023 drank alcohol in the past 30 days, a decrease from 7% in 2013. (YRBS)
- 54% of high school students in 2023 believed they mattered to people in their community, an increase from 50% in 2013. (YRBS)
- 56% of middle school students in 2023 believed they mattered to people in their community, an increase from 54% in 2013. (YRBS)



## **Cannabis trends**

Both prevention partners and K-12 schools identified cannabis as one of the top substances they focused on.

Long-term outcomes demonstrate changes in cannabis use behaviors since legalization.

- 24% of adults in 2023 reported using cannabis, an increase from 11% in 2015. (BRFSS)
- 35% of high school students in 2023 tried cannabis, a decrease from 39% in 2013. (YRBS)
- 8% of middle school students in 2023 tried cannabis, an increase from 6% in 2013. (YRBS)

**“And there are some untapped partners that perhaps we wouldn’t fund that we still need to access. And so, through other funding, we’re working on cannabis retailers as being partners rather than oppositional kind of a thing. So, I think that I said before, we really believe that everybody is a partner, whether they (are) or not. And so, I’m open to all of those pieces.”**

**– VPLO representative**



### **Schools play an important role in prevention**

Prevention Partners consistently focus their work on school-aged youth grades 6 and above. The majority of the school survey participants reported they were doing more than what AOE required in terms of substance use prevention. School survey respondents indicated that funding and staffing were the most important resources that would benefit school prevention activities.

Results of the school survey reinforced the importance of funding on the capacity to provide substance use and misuse prevention.

Just over half of the school survey participants indicated their school collaborates with prevention coalitions or organizations indicating more work could be done to connect schools with more prevention partners and coalitions.

## **How are these evaluation findings useful?**

This evaluation provides a crucial first step in understanding the current landscape of substance misuse prevention in Vermont. By understanding what work is being done and who is connected we are better able to identify the gaps for us to address and the successes we want to continue. Prevention takes time and this evaluation gives us baseline information for future evaluations.