

Substance Abuse... Public Enemy Number One

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Closing the Gap, Substance Abuse Prevention: What's Working to Keep Our Youth Drug Free?
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Thirty years ago, the nation declared drug abuse to be “public enemy number one.” With that declaration, the fight began to rid our community of the ills brought on by addiction. Today, the “war on drugs” rages on. According to the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, substance abuse remains the number one health problem in this country. Federal spending on the drug war increased from \$1.65 billion in 1982 to \$17.7 billion in 1999, yet heroin, cocaine, marijuana, and other illicit drugs continue to be widely available. Today, there are more drugs in our communities, and they are available at lower prices and higher strengths than ever before.

Signs of Progress

We are far from eradicating drug usage, but in some areas we are making strides. Drug abuse has taken a disproportionate toll on minorities and the poor, but rates of current illicit drug and alcohol use among minorities are down. Tobacco use is on the decline. Public awareness about the dangers of substance abuse is up. Prevention and treatment strategies are increasingly effective.

We may continually debate the effectiveness of prevention and treatment *versus* drug enforcement—but we know that both are necessary to lessen the impact substance abuse has on our communities and families. We have shown that science-based substance abuse prevention programs can be successful in loosening the stranglehold that drug abuse has on our communities.

In this issue of *Closing the Gap*, we profile prevention strategies, programs, and resources supported by the federal Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration's Center for Substance Abuse Prevention (CSAP). They can be modeled and implemented in a wide variety of settings—reaching a variety of audiences. Their sponsor, CSAP, collaborates with states, communities, social service

providers, and other entities to foster the development of comprehensive, culturally appropriate, prevention programs and systems. These systems are based on sound research, and target both individuals and the environments in which they live.

Strategies We Can Use

These strategies and tools have helped us win significant battles.

Substance abuse prevention programs have been successful not only in reducing drug use, but in enhancing parent-child communication on how to avoid and refuse alcohol, tobacco, and illicit drugs. They have been successful in reducing truancy, delinquency, and school dropouts. They have been successful in strengthening relationships among police, schools, and related organizations. We must continue to expand these programs, and we must continue to expand the availability of effective treatment and recovery services for

alcohol and drug problems—ensuring access to clinically sound, cost-effective, addiction treatment that, in turn, reduces the health and social costs to our communities and the nation.

No one—regardless of race, creed or color—is immune to substance abuse and its harmful effects. OMH and its partners in public health and public safety share a common vision—developing healthy communities. It is imperative that we continue to build on the advances that we've made today, to ensure a drug free nation tomorrow.

For minority health information, call our Office of Minority Health Resource Center at 1-800-444-6472; <http://www.omhrc.gov>. For additional information on the substance abuse prevention strategies and resources profiled here, contact the CSAP at 301-443-0071; <http://www.samhsa.gov/centers/csap/csap.html> or SAMHSA's information gateway, the National Clearinghouse for Alcohol and Drug Information at 800-729-6686 or go to <http://www.health.org> ❖

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