

Communities That Care

Communities That Care is a community-wide initiative for the benefit of a community's youth. The Communities That Care system provides strategic consultation, training and research-based tools to help a community work together to: a) promote the positive development of children and youth; and b) prevent adolescent problem behaviors—including alcohol and other drug use, delinquency, teen pregnancy, dropping out of school and violence.

The Communities That Care system is based on successful public health models of community action. The Communities That Care system has been designed to guide communities through the five most critical and challenging steps in this process, from community mobilization through outcomes evaluation.

The Communities That Care system is:

- Inclusive
 - It involves all parts of the community in promoting healthy development.
- Proactive
 - It targets predictors of problems, rather than waiting until the problems themselves occur.
 - It identifies and addresses priority predictors specific to your community, to promote positive development before young people become involved in problem behaviors.
- Grounded in rigorous research from a variety of fields including: a) public health, b) criminology, c) psychology, d) medicine, e) education, f) organizational development, g) sociology, and h) social work

Customized to the community

The Communities That Care system is not a “cookie cutter” approach. Each community:

- uses its own data-based community profile
- develops a focused, long-range community action plan for building on existing resources and filling any gaps with new resources
- chooses tested, effective programs, policies and practices that fit its profile, to fill identified gaps.

The Community That Care system helps communities:

- Identify and address readiness issues
 - potential obstacles to a successful community-wide prevention effort.
- Organize and involve all community members who have a stake in healthy futures for young people, by bringing together representation from all of those stakeholders, including: • elected officials • youth • parents • law enforcement • schools • public health officials • agencies and organizations serving local youth and families • the faith community • the business community • residents.
- Bring together diverse community efforts that address youth and family issues, by establishing a shared vision, a common language and a collaborative approach to planning and implementing needed changes.

- Set priorities for action based on a data-based profile of community strengths and challenges.
- Strengthen funding applications, using a community profile that pinpoints the community's specific needs.
- Define clear, measurable outcomes that can be tracked over time to show progress and ensure accountability.
- Identify gaps in how priorities are currently addressed by community resources.
- Select tested, effective programs, policies and practices to fill any gaps.
- Evaluate progress toward desired outcomes.

The Communities That Care system is a community action model, based on years of research and continuous improvement, that:

- Takes a systematic approach to community building
 - all parts of the community are involved (including those with control of resources and those who know how to implement programs), and gaps in existing community efforts and resources are identified. This means the community's financial and other resources are used more efficiently.
- Focuses both on promoting positive youth development and on preventing problem behaviors
 - community needs are identified by assessing predictors both of problem behaviors and of positive youth outcomes: risk and protective factors that have been identified in longitudinal research across a number of fields.
- Helps communities collect the right data
 - by focusing on both risk and protective factors, to create a community profile of these identified predictors.
- Helps communities prioritize predictors based on the community profile.
- Matches prioritized predictors to tested, effective programs, policies and practices that have proven their ability to affect these predictors.
- Helps communities implement and evaluate a community action plan, which increases accountability.

The Research Foundation

One of the hallmarks of the Communities That Care system is that it's grounded in rigorous research from a variety of disciplines. The primary areas of research that form the foundation are:

- the public health approach—a comprehensive, community-wide approach
- demonstrated predictors of problem behaviors and positive youth outcomes—risk and protective factors
- tested, effective programs, policies and practices.

The Public Health Approach — A Community-Wide Approach to Prevention

Research in the public health field has shown the effectiveness of a community-wide approach to public health problems. Heart disease, breast cancer and drunk driving have all been addressed by involving the entire community to promote behavior change. This comprehensive approach has proven successful in changing attitudes and behavior, where other methods have had limited success.

Research has proven that a community-wide approach is effective because it:

- affects the entire social environment

A community-wide approach focuses on both:

- influencing values, practices and policies that promote a safe and healthy community
- changing the conditions that put children at risk for adolescent health and behavior problems.

Because all segments of the community are involved:

- everyone has a part to play.
- no single organization, strategy, person or institution must address the challenges alone.

Programs, policies and practices are integrated into services and activities of existing organizations and institutions, which:

- establishes positive youth development and prevention as an important part of the community's mission
- broadens the community's ability to mount a successful initiative, because funding can be broadened beyond a single agency or organization.