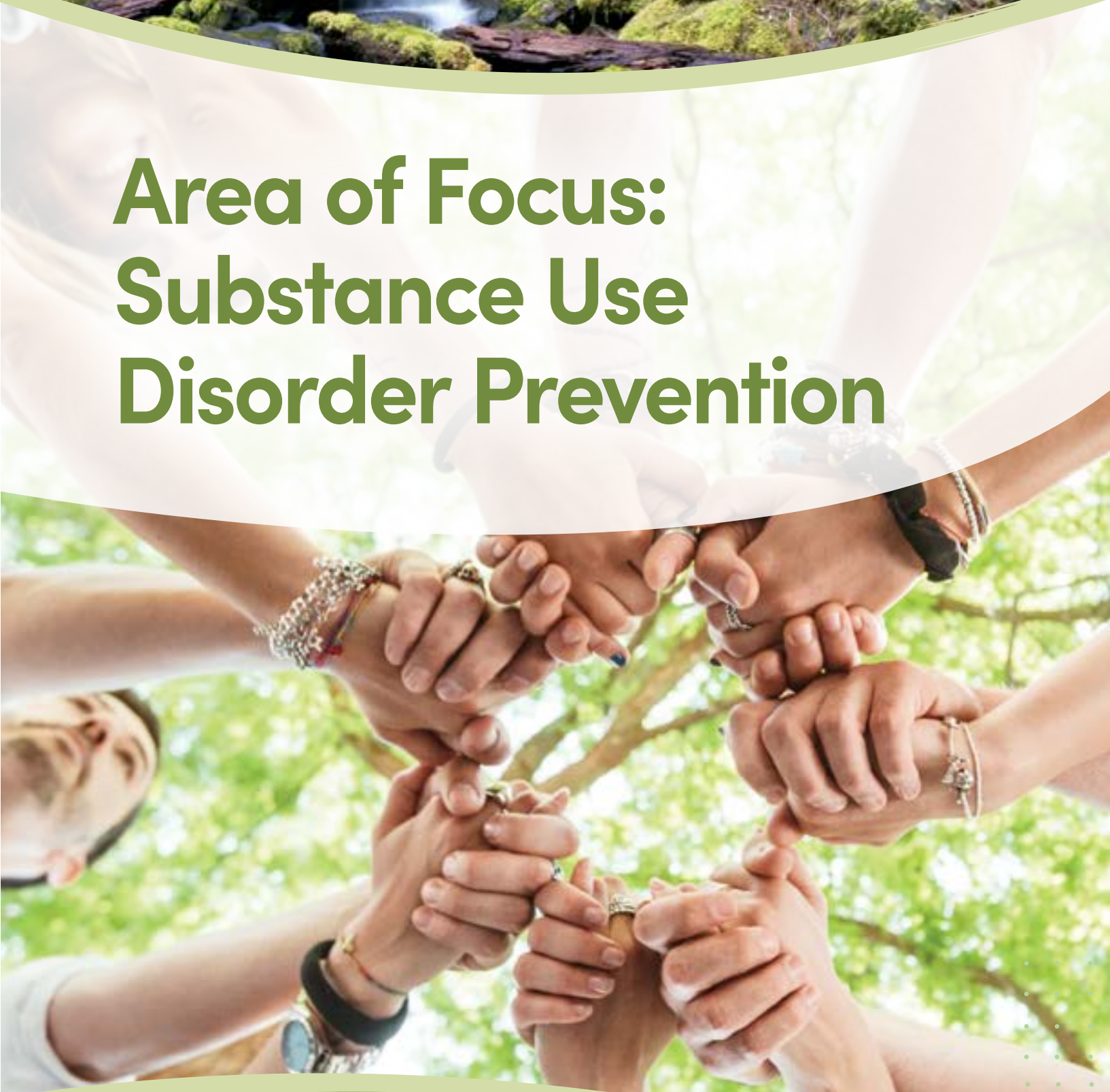




## ENDNOTES

- 1 28.8% less than people without disabilities. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED628628.pdf>
- 2 24% living below the poverty line. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED628628.pdf>
- 3 National Alliance to End Homelessness — Emergency Shelter Learning Series. <https://endhomelessness.org/resource/emergency-shelter/>
- 4 HumanServicesEdu.org — What is Human Services? <https://www.humanservicesedu.org/what-is-human-services/>



# Area of Focus: Substance Use Disorder Prevention

## Substance Use Disorder Prevention

Prevention and treatment for drug and alcohol misuse provided through collaborative, effective, and informed strategies.

**Objective 4.1:** Increase awareness, improve knowledge, and change behaviors to prevent misuse of drug, alcohol, and other substances.

**Objective 4.2:** Reduce the impact of mental health and substance use disorders through misuse and harm reduction strategies that are responsive to the most vulnerable populations.

**Objective 4.3:** Improve treatment and recovery support services to promote wellness and reduce the impact of mental health and substance use disorders.

**Objective 4.4:** Ensure ongoing recovery support services to strengthen whole person wellness.

**Objective 4.5:** Support statewide alignment in planning, implementation, evaluation, and resource allocation across health promotion, prevention, treatment, and recovery efforts.

### DRUG AND ALCOHOL MISUSE:

Use of substance for a purpose not consistent with legal or medical guidelines, as in the non-medical use of prescription medications.

*Healthy People 2030 — Drug and Alcohol Use<sup>1</sup>*

Alaska faces a significant challenge in addressing substance misuse, dependence, and addiction, which has resulted in pronounced impacts on alcohol-induced and overdose death rates over the years from 2014-2023. The situation has been marked by a significant increase in alcohol-related deaths, which more than doubled during this period, culminating in over **286 deaths in 2022<sup>2</sup>**. Equally concerning is the statistic of 1,757 drug overdose deaths across these years, averaging approximately 176 deaths annually. During 2022-2023, the number of drug overdose deaths increased from 247 in 2022 to 357 in 2023, and the drug overdose death rate increased 47%

(33.7 deaths per 100,000 people in 2022 to 49.5 deaths per 100,000 people in 2023). Notably, individuals aged 35-44 experienced the highest overdose death rates, with those aged 45-54 experiencing the second highest rate of **81.8 deaths per 100,000 in 2023<sup>3</sup>**.

The disparities in substance use are evident across various factors such as race, socioeconomic status, gender, age, and geographical location. These disparities contribute to the prevalence, treatment, and outcomes of substance use disorders. Furthermore, racial and ethnic minorities encounter disparities in treatment access linked to systemic inequalities. Geographical disparities also pose significant challenges to all regions, with rural areas facing limited treatment access and urban areas grappling with higher substance misuse rates. Gender-based disparities reveal differing substance use patterns and consequences, which are influenced by societal expectations and stigma.

To effectively address these disparities, a multifaceted approach that considers biological, social, and environmental factors is essential. Additionally, drug prevention programs must be adaptable and responsive to new and emerging drug use patterns, such as the alarming emergence of Xylazine, which has now been detected in 48 out of 50 states in the U.S.

In response to these challenges, the State of Alaska has implemented various programs targeting interdiction, prevention, harm reduction, treatment, recovery, and behavioral health workforce development strategies to combat drug overdose and related harms. Among these initiatives is **Project HOPE<sup>4</sup>**, which distributes naloxone kits and incorporates fentanyl test strips. Project Gabe is another initiative that extends opioid misuse awareness and prevention resources to the fishing industry and other sectors, recognizing occupational industry risks. The State developed a comprehensive communication plan with a multi-prong approach to educate Alaskans to raise awareness about substance misuse.

Engaging high-risk individuals is central to the prevention strategy, and a crisis system-of-care has been established to connect people in behavioral health crises to necessary

## Substance Use Disorder Prevention

resources. Medicaid Waiver services, Project ECHO, and the Prescription Drug Monitoring Program play integral roles in these efforts. The collaboration between State agencies, Tribal, and academic partners further enhance the effectiveness of these programs.

1115 Behavioral Health Reform Medicaid Waiver services support a variety of interventions, including broadened screening and linkage to care. Emphasizing a comprehensive approach to alcohol and other substance use, this area integrates upstream prevention, treatment, and recovery strategies. This approach recognizes the need for a continuum of care that addresses the multifaceted nature of alcohol and other substance use disorders. Central to this approach is the focus on addressing social determinants of health, ACEs, the availability of medication-assisted treatment for alcohol and other substance use disorders, and the demographic disparities in overdose mortality.

Efforts are also concentrated on tailoring interventions to meet the specific needs of different demographic groups. This includes understanding and mitigating the impacts of societal pressures and stigma that can influence substance use patterns and treatment outcomes. Addressing novel substances and concerning trends, such as polysubstance use involved deaths, requires adaptability in prevention programs. This requires continuous monitoring and updating of strategies to ensure they remain effective and relevant.

The collaboration and commitment across various sectors, including healthcare, law enforcement, community organizations, and government agencies are pivotal in these endeavors. Such collaborations facilitate a comprehensive response that not only addresses the immediate consequences of substance misuse but also works towards long-term prevention and recovery. These efforts underscore the importance of a coordinated and sustained response to the complex challenge of substance misuse in Alaska.

In summary, Alaska's response to the substance use crisis is characterized by a concerted effort that spans across prevention, treatment, and recovery, encompassing

a broad range of strategies and programs. The state's approach demonstrates the importance of a comprehensive, adaptable, and collaborative strategy in addressing the multifaceted challenges posed by substance misuse and its associated disparities. As the situation evolves, the ongoing adaptation of these strategies will be crucial in effectively mitigating the impacts of substance use in Alaska.

**Objective 4.1:** Increase awareness, improve knowledge, and change behaviors to prevent misuse of drug, alcohol, and other substances.

- a. **Strategy:** Continue to develop and implement research-based health education tactics.
- b. **Strategy:** Support statewide alignment across primary, secondary, and tertiary substance-related prevention initiatives.
- c. **Strategy:** Create awareness and improve knowledge of how social determinants of health affect substance use across the lifespan.
- d. **Strategy:** Raise awareness and reduce stigma of how individual precipitating factors such as trauma, genetics, and longevity of substance use affect likelihood of substance misuse.

**Objective 4.2:** Reduce the impact of mental health and substance use disorders through misuse and harm reduction strategies that are responsive to the most vulnerable populations.

- a. **Strategy:** Promote awareness and workforce development of misuse and harm reduction interventions across a variety of stakeholders and systems who work with those who are vulnerable.
- b. **Strategy:** Create sustainability of tools such as Naloxone to support misuse and harm reduction efforts.
- c. **Strategy:** Prevent substance misuse behaviors by using practice-informed strategies consistently before substance misuse arises.

## Substance Use Disorder Prevention

- d. **Strategy:** Reduce and prevent substance misuse and addiction-related harms such as overdose, impaired driving, unhealthy relationships, and infectious disease.

**Objective 4.3:** Improve treatment and recovery support services to promote wellness and reduce the impact of mental health and substance use disorders.

- a. **Strategy:** Encourage and expand practice-informed and culturally appropriate interventions.

### RECOVERY AND RECOVERY SUPPORT:

As a process of change through which individuals improve their health and wellness, live self-directed lives, and strive to reach their full potential.

*Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration — Recovery and Recovery Support<sup>5</sup>*

- b. **Strategy:** Enhance early access to care by creating more awareness and knowledge, for the “Screening, Brief Intervention, and Referral to Treatment” (SBIRT) screening across a variety of disciplines and settings.
- c. **Strategy:** Support the use of a standardized, algorithm-based, electronic substance use disorder assessment that is universally accepted across all providers and payer types.
- d. **Strategy:** Strengthen access to case management services for individuals as well as co-occurring substance use disorder, mental health services, and respective case management services.

- e. **Strategy:** Increase provider capacity to support substance use disorder and mental health services.
- f. **Strategy:** Improve transitions of care between providers delivering substance use disorder and mental health supports to those who are referring people to these services.
- g. **Strategy:** Expand Medication Assisted Treatment (MAT) options across a variety of settings.

**Objective 4.4:** Ensure ongoing recovery support services to strengthen whole person wellness.

- a. **Strategy:** Increase awareness of available certified peer supports regarding substance misuse for individuals and family members across the lifespan (i.e., youth, older adults, families).
- b. **Strategy:** Support access to recovery resources, employment, and social-support systems for individuals living with substance use disorder and/or mental illness.
- c. **Strategy:** Improve the education accessibility for people living with substance use disorder and/or mental illness.
- d. **Strategy:** Strengthen healthcare access including physical and mental healthcare for people struggling with substance use disorder and/or mental illness.

### PEER SUPPORT WORKERS:

Encompass a range of activities and interactions between people who share similar experiences of being diagnosed with mental health conditions, substance use disorders, or both.

*Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration — Peer Support<sup>7</sup>*

- e. **Strategy:** Elevate social and community opportunities for people struggling with substance use disorder and/or mental illness.

**Objective 4.5:** Support statewide alignment in planning, implementation, evaluation, and resource allocation across health promotion, prevention, treatment, and recovery efforts.

- a. **Strategy:** Improve cross-departmental collaboration and communication.
- b. **Strategy:** Alignment across use of various technology platforms.
- c. **Strategy:** Increase braided funding sources.

### THE ASAM CRITERIA:

Is a comprehensive set of guidelines that use a holistic, person-centered approach to developing treatment plans for patients with addiction and co-occurring conditions.

*American Society of Addiction Medicine<sup>6</sup>*



## Substance Use Disorder Prevention

### ENDNOTES

- 1 Healthy People 2030 — Drug and Alcohol Use. <https://health.gov/healthypeople/objectives-and-data/browse-objectives/drug-and-alcohol-use>
- 2 286 deaths in 2022. [https://health.alaska.gov/dph/VitalStats/Documents/PDFs/VitalStatistics\\_Annualreport\\_2022.pdf](https://health.alaska.gov/dph/VitalStats/Documents/PDFs/VitalStatistics_Annualreport_2022.pdf)
- 3 81.8 deaths per 100,000 in 2023. [https://health.alaska.gov/dph/VitalStats/Documents/PDFs/DrugOverdoseMortalityUpdate\\_2023.pdf](https://health.alaska.gov/dph/VitalStats/Documents/PDFs/DrugOverdoseMortalityUpdate_2023.pdf)
- 4 Project Hope. <https://health.alaska.gov/drugsandalcohol/opioids/Pages/projecthope.aspx>
- 5 Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration — Recovery and Recovery Support. <https://www.samhsa.gov/find-help/recovery>
- 6 American Society of Addiction Medicine. <https://www.asam.org/asam-criteria>
- 7 Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration — Recovery and Recovery Support. <https://www.samhsa.gov/find-help/recovery>