Ethics in Prevention: Navigating Our Way through Today’s Complex Prevention Landscape

What is our ethical responsibility for ensuring that the people we serve, including people with substance misuse disorders, have a seat at the prevention table?

If a new partner is acting in harmful or biased ways, should we say something? Are we being unethical if we don’t?

Are we allowed to press our congress-people for additional opioid funding or is that considered lobbying?

Can we support an innovative prevention approach that sounds interesting but isn’t evidence-based?

As today’s substance misuse problems grow increasingly complex, so too do the ethical issues they raise. In mid-December, 36 prevention practitioners from across the country explored many of these issues while participating in the online course Ethics in Prevention—a two-week moderated course designed to introduce practitioners to the Prevention Code of Ethics and engage in an ethical decision-making process.

“Ethics is a part of everything we do as prevention professionals. It guides how we work, who we work with, and the nature of our interactions,” explains Course Moderator and Co-Developer Sandra Del Sesto. “This course makes the role of ethics in prevention explicit, and presents an objective approach to making decisions when the ethical lines seem blurry.”

To accomplish these goals, participants explored more than a dozen real-life scenarios, using the six principles of the Prevention Code to guide their decision-making. They also engaged in interactive exercises, reviewed video scenarios, and participated in a series of online forums where they collectively grappled with the course content. The conversation was lively but the group concurred that there were often no easy answers. Wrote one participant, “Anyone expecting a 20-minute, go-through-the-motions cakewalk got quite a surprise!”

Despite the hard work, participants left the training impressed, energized, and better prepared to identify and navigate multiple options when making decisions. “We tend to believe that our moral compass is the best decision-maker possible,” wrote one participant. “But it’s always better to step back, take time to reflect, and consider all the consequences of the decisions we make.”

EDC originally developed the online Ethics in Prevention course in 2015 for SAMHSA’s Center for the Application of Technologies. Since then, nearly 3,000 practitioners have participated.
The course qualifies for 6 contact hours and thus meets the International Certification and Reciprocity Consortium (IC&RC)’s requirement for prevention ethics training. It is the only online ethics course with an IC&RC endorsement.

**PS@EDC will be offering the next Ethics in Prevention on February 11-22.** To register for this and any of other PS@EDC’s other online courses, go to [https://psonline.edc.org](https://psonline.edc.org). Spaces are limited so register now!