

'Just in Time' Learning Modules Support Environmental Change in North Dakota

The North Dakota Department of Behavioral Health's Prevention Division has long believed in the power of environmental strategies to address substance misuse in their state. It understands that focusing exclusively on changing the behaviors of individuals isn't enough; communities also need to create an environment where it's easier for people to act in healthy ways.

To support communities in this work, Community Prevention Specialist Tom Volk knew that the state needed to take the lead. Expecting North Dakota's small, geographically dispersed cadre of prevention practitioners to identify and implement effective strategies on their own, given competing demands and limited resources, would be neither cost-effective nor realistic.

So, he enlisted the help of Prevention Solutions@EDC.

"Our goal was to help practitioners understand the science of environmental prevention, so they could focus on applying it to their work on the ground," said PS@EDC Technical Assistance Specialist Erin Ficker.

To do this, the PS@EDC team created six recorded presentations that practitioners could access online, in their own time, and share with their coalitions members and other key partners—whether these be city council representatives, school superintendents, local physicians, or the Chief of Police.

"Prevention professionals don't operate in isolation so it's important for all the partners to understand prevention science," says Ficker.

The presentations focus on five types of environmental change:

- Reducing retail access, including restricting alcohol discount promotions
- Limiting alcohol promotion, including restricting advertising in public places and alcohol sponsorships
- Preventing prescription drug misuse and overdose, including strengthening prescriber education, pain management practices, naloxone distribution, and effective messaging

- Reducing underage social access to alcohol through, for example, event restrictions, social host liability laws, minimum age restrictions, and texting tip lines
- Changing community norms favorable to drug use using media advocacy, social marketing, and norms campaigns

A sixth presentation explores screening, brief intervention, and referral to treatment (SBIRT) strategies.

The presentations will be posted to North Dakota's prevention website, organized around risk and protective factors—those conditions in a person's life and community that influence their substance use. Practitioners can select a factor, identify those prevention strategies that have been shown to be effective in addressing the factor, and watch one of the recorded presentations to learn more about the strategy. PS@EDC also developed 15 fact sheets that provide additional detail on the strategies.

To allow for rapid production and decrease costs, all the presentations are approximately the same length (30- to 45-minutes long) and share a similar format.

"We understand how to translate abstract concepts into actionable takeaways, and we know how adults learn," says Ficker. "We stayed true to the science while focusing on how practitioners could apply to their communities what we know works best."

To complement the recorded webinars, PS@EDC will be delivering two live webinars for grantees—one on prevention sustainability and a second on strategy implementation.

"North Dakota just funded a new cohort of prevention grantees in October. It will be exciting to see them use the new resources."

To learn more about PS@EDC's work with North Dakota's Department of Behavioral Health and Human Services, contact Erin Ficker at eficker@edc.org.