



California's Prop 64 Youth Education, Prevention, Early Intervention and Treatment Fund

Designing effective investments that promote equity and prevent substance use among youth.

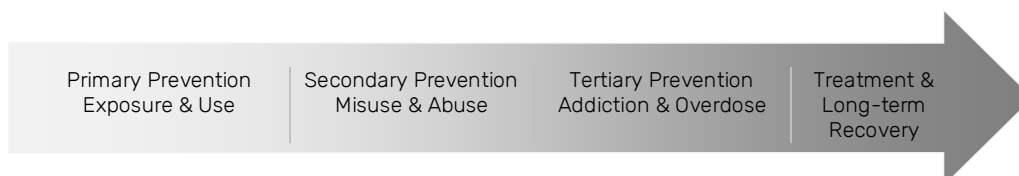
New revenue generated through California's Proposition 64—the Control, Regulate, and Tax Adult Use of Marijuana Act—offers a unique opportunity to promote health, safety, and wellbeing among youth, and advance racial and health equity. Through the newly created Youth Education, Prevention, Early Intervention, and Treatment Account (referred to below as the Youth Fund), we can address the underlying conditions that contribute to substance misuse, including community trauma.

This brief offers a framework for thinking about substance use prevention and describes critical components of successful youth-focused initiatives. It also highlights examples of successful community-based programs in California and strategies that prevent and reduce exposure to and use of substances in the first place.

We recommend that agencies and departments tasked with administering the \$119.3 million allocated to the Youth Fund for FY 2019-20, as well those receiving other Prop 64 dollars earmarked for youth prevention efforts, incorporate the components outlined in this brief as they design their programs and initiatives. This includes the Department of Health Care Services, Department of Education, Department of Public Health, California Natural Resources Agency, and Board of State and Community Corrections.

What is a primary prevention approach, and how can prevention support health and equity?

Along the trajectory of substance use and addiction, there are multiple opportunities to intervene, including preventing exposure, preventing people from progressing from substance use to misuse, and preventing the onset of addiction, overdose, and other harms associated with misuse (including, in the case of some substances, preventing overdose deaths).



Framework: Substance abuse trajectory of prevention¹

While substance use programs often emphasize treatment, education, and individual behavior change, the most effective prevention approaches intervene earlier, focusing on preventing substance use before it occurs by addressing policies, systems, and environments that influence substance use. Focusing on youth presents a valuable opportunity to take this kind of primary prevention approach—that means promoting healthy behaviors and environments to prevent illness, injury, and other harms.

When it comes to substance use, a primary prevention approach includes strategies intended to reduce exposure and use and prevent addiction. As the legal marijuana industry emerges in California—driven by large corporations seeking to expand their reach through tactics like ramping up advertising and introducing new marijuana products—primary prevention approaches will be critical to head off increased rates of problem use and addiction. Tobacco control programs, for example, have proved most effective when they include multicomponent primary prevention efforts that integrate programmatic and policy initiatives—including policy to prevent initiation and secondhand smoke exposure combined with mass-reach health communication interventions and other initiatives to mobilize communities—to influence social norms, systems, and networks.²

Currently, our state’s health system invests much more heavily in substance use treatment than prevention. While we need to ensure that treatment is available for everyone needing assistance, treatment alone will not prevent increases in marijuana use and dependence, and cannot address the underlying inequities that contribute to substance misuse in the first place.

Examples of primary prevention strategies designed to reduce exposure to and use of substances include:

- Zoning regulations and other policies to prevent location and concentration of businesses that sell harmful substances like dispensaries, vape shops, and liquor stores in communities of color and near youth-serving organizations and institutions
- Social, cultural and peer networks and activities to increase social connection
- Faith-based, school and community campaigns to reduce stigma and increase awareness of substance use
- Healthy alternatives including arts, culture and recreational options for youth and families; community revitalization of parks and open spaces
- Community and economic development that includes quality housing, access to transportation, workforce development, entrepreneur and job training and placement, and ensures the community’s basic needs are met

Elements of Successful Initiatives

While priorities and issues of focus vary from community to community, successful youth-focused primary prevention initiatives share common features that contribute to impact, outcomes, and sustainability. Below, we describe five major recommendations for initiatives funded through Prop 64.

1. Design initiative structure, processes, and outcome measures to intentionally advance racial and health equity.

Prop 64 revenues should prioritize communities most impacted by the War on Drugs, particularly African-American communities, as well as Latino, immigrant, and LGBT communities that have suffered disproportionate arrests and convictions for marijuana-related and other drug crimes. For decades, this inequitable enforcement regime drove families into poverty, separated parents and children, and placed huge obstacles to gaining employment, securing housing, and pursuing education for those with felony drug convictions—all of which contribute to health inequities. An effective equity-focused primary prevention approach will need to recognize and address the role of widespread trauma, and the need for solutions that build protective factors, opportunity, and agency for youth in impacted communities.

2. Acknowledge and include healing as a starting point.

Individuals and communities harmed by the War on Drugs need space and resources to connect, heal, and build agency for collective action.³ Individual approaches to healing include trauma-informed care and mental health services. At the community level, healing may take different forms, including healing circles and vigils or instituting restorative justice practices and community dialogues that acknowledge transgressions and identify solutions for moving forward.

Mental health practitioners, youth workers, teachers, and community organizers have noted the importance of recognizing the pain young people and communities as a whole, have endured over generations and the value of lifting up voices that have often been missing or silenced. Many communities around the country have developed healing approaches that draw on culturally-based knowledge and practices. Some of the most effective strategies are based in indigenous, Black, and Latino cultural practices, values, and traditions. By engaging community members across generations, these practices help communities reconnect to, reaffirm, and celebrate cultural identity. Vibrant cultural spaces and events support community connection and wellbeing, offer alternatives to substance exposure and use among youth, and support healing.

3. Incorporate a robust focus on strengthening community environments.

Community environments—the social, physical, and economic conditions in communities—have tremendous influence on the stressors that people experience in their daily lives, including the risk and likelihood of experiencing substance misuse and addiction.⁴ An effective primary prevention approach to substance use is rooted in addressing the community determinants of health (below) that shape whether communities will be healthy, safe, and equitable.⁵

Investments that improve community determinants foster health and safety in the first place, protecting against substance misuse and addiction and building resilience in neighborhoods that have been most impacted by the War on Drugs. Strengthening community determinants allows communities to address the systemic and structural inequities that shape living conditions and experiences through changes in institutional policies, practices, resource

allocation, and decision-making processes. By ensuring a comprehensive approach, strengthening community determinants also complements and increases the effectiveness of focused services and programs, such as such as healing circles, afterschool programs, and home visiting.

Examples of community determinants of health:

Socio-Cultural Environment:

- Social networks & trust
- Participation & willingness to act for the common good
- Norms & culture

Economic Environment:

- Education
- Living wages & quality jobs
- Local wealth/assets

Physical or Built Environment:

- What's sold & how it's promoted
- Look, feel, & safety
- Housing
- Parks and open space
- Air, water, & soil
- Getting around
- Arts & cultural expression

Efforts to strengthen community determinants of health typically require collaboration and multi-pronged strategies. Some communities may apply for a grant to support a larger community change strategy with multiple funding streams that bring together the multisector partners needed to implement the strategy. Allowing organizations to work together to submit a collaborative application under a lead agency and prioritizing collaborative proposals during application review will facilitate community initiatives that foster healthy community environments.

4. Create space for youth-driven, locally tailored approaches rather than a one-approach-for-all-model.

There is no one-size-fits-all approach to prevent substance use among youth. Tailored solutions take into account the assets, resources, strengths, and culture of each community. Youth and individuals who work with youth have a central role to play in identifying and implementing effective strategies and interventions.

Prop 64 dollars can support programs where young people can gather, build capacity, define the agenda for their community efforts, and engage with local leaders and mentors to help advance their vision for a healthy community. Within tobacco control programs, for example, youth engagement and leadership have become a cornerstone of comprehensive prevention efforts. Successful programs include youth education and training on tobacco control and the

policy process; policy development and advocacy focused on changing community environments; media advocacy; and, counter marketing to fight pro-tobacco influences.⁶ This kind of approach works to protect youth on multiple levels by:

- Providing valuable opportunity for young people to engage with one another and assume leadership roles within their community. Strategies that develop the skills and abilities of young people are an investment in their health and wellbeing, since youth with more developmental assets are more resilient and are less likely to engage in high-risk behaviors.
- Focusing efforts on strengthening those community determinants that youth identify as supportive of young people's health and wellbeing, which results in community infrastructure that promotes the health and safety of *all* youth.

5. Invest in community-rooted organizations with experience supporting youth leadership, organizing, and advocacy.

In many communities impacted by the War on Drugs and mass incarceration, community organizations with deep roots in their community have developed programs and models for positive youth leadership development that are grounded in racial and health equity and responsive to youth interests and priorities. These programs build youth skills and capacity, strengthen social connections, and facilitate civic engagement that enable young people to be agents of change in their community. Prop 64 investments in community-rooted organizations would benefit from the infrastructure and networks already in place, while allowing organizations that typically operate on extremely tight budgets to broaden and deepen their impact through investments in youth leadership development and community infrastructure that will have a sustained impact beyond the life of the grant.

To ensure the program works for small nonprofits, including nonprofits affiliated with tribal communities, the grant program needs to have a simple application process, provide at least 33% of funding upfront, allow for at least 25% in indirect costs, provide technical assistance for groups during the request-for-proposal process, and have simple reporting requirements.^a Often grant programs require onerous, time-consuming application and reporting processes that ultimately take energy and resources away from the real work and that are difficult to manage for smaller nonprofits. The state can also add value to funded community organizations and demonstrate program success by providing evaluation support that documents the impact of youth initiatives and builds the evidence base for youth leadership programs that strengthen community conditions and advance health equity and racial justice.

Community Profiles: Successful Programs in California

There are many strong examples of community-rooted organizations across the state that employ an approach that aligns with the elements described above. To illustrate what these qualities look like in action, we selected several examples of programs at community-based organizations that exemplify culturally-relevant and youth-focused primary prevention.

^a Recommendations for upfront funding, the indirect rate, and technical support to apply for grant funding came from a consensus process of high capacity, equity-focused community-based and statewide nonprofit organizations.

1. Inglewood: Social Justice Learning Institute

The Social Justice Learning Institute (SJLI), in Inglewood, CA, is dedicated to improving the education, health, and well-being of youth and communities of color by empowering them to enact social change through research, training and community mobilization. It knows that everyone must be afforded equal opportunity in order to achieve equitable treatment. SJLI's core values reflect the belief that community change must involve active leadership and engagement of community members and young people, privileging their ideas, voice, and leadership. SJLI's programs fall into three main categories: educating students in order to disrupt the school to prison pipeline; improving community infrastructure and resources; and building capacity for community members to advocate for justice.

One of SJLI's core education programs is Urban Scholars, whereby students participate in a social justice youth development curriculum to help them graduate from high school, enroll in college or achieve gainful employment and utilize their agency to create a better community. Students explore topics such as post-traumatic growth and healing, critical consciousness, identity development, and social justice, in classes designed to align with academic competencies in core subjects. In just over 10 years, the Urban Scholars program has graduated over 1,200 youth in California, with over 95% of Urban Scholars graduating from high school, 87% enrolling in college, and 11% securing jobs. The program currently operates in the Houston Independent School District (HISD), through the City of Houston's Houston Health Department's My Brother's Keeper initiative.

One highlight that demonstrates this program's real-world impact took place in 2014, when Urban Scholars students took their program learnings outside the classroom and successfully organized to help pass Prop 47, which reduced nonviolent drug felonies to misdemeanors. Reflecting on his experience working on this measure, LeQuan Muhammad, an Urban Scholars alumnus said, "I didn't feel like it was just for me...there's a whole gang of us from the same area who are all affected. My passion now is to create economic change for everyone I come into contact with, even though I don't know them." As SJLI's impact broadens, from individuals leading change in their communities to Urban Scholars coming home as college graduates, we will certainly see greater change and improvements in communities where youth deserve the chance to thrive.

2. Richmond: RYSE Center

Based in Richmond, California, the RYSE Center has built a safe space to lovingly support youth as they transform systems, building towards a Richmond that is free of violence and equitable for all. Richmond is a racially diverse city located in West Contra Costa, where youth aged 14-24 make up 58% of the population, and is the 3rd most densely populated city in the County. The region's youth bear the burden of multiple systemic inequities and face persistent dehumanization, stigma, and criminalization by schools, police, media, community and public systems.

In contrast to this, RYSE seeks to center youth as assets, cultivating in them the emotional, physical, and political tools and resources to heal from these traumas, construct their own narrative, and work toward systemic change. RYSE's programs fall into four key areas: education and justice; youth organizing; media, arts, and culture; and community health. RYSE's community health program works across multiple issue areas, from LGBTQ+ advocacy to food justice, consistently addressing the racial and socioeconomic inequities that lie at the root of health problems. In its mental health services, RYSE employs an integrative

community mental health model, grounded in racial justice and the self-identified needs and priorities of young people, to deliver counseling and case management. These services are always trauma-informed, culturally-relevant, and healing-centered, and counselors work in partnership with youth to develop goals around physical, mental, and emotional health. Youth can access these services in multiple ways – by themselves approaching RYSE staff, or through referrals by partner agencies or family members.

RYSE's commitment to working on the continuum from direct services to systems change gives youth the opportunity to heal through internal processes – like therapy – and external action for change. One RYSE member, appreciating this duality, said, "Here I am encouraged to aim high, not only in my personal dreams but also in my fight for social change. Everyday being at RYSE I am reminded of the beauty, brilliance, and resilience that our communities bring. I am reminded that I am loved in my entirety." RYSE provides space for members to build community with each other at the Center, and supports them as they work to build a stronger community for all of Richmond, cultivating loving relationships to grow loving power to build loving systems.

3. San Diego: United Women of East Africa Support Team

In the City Heights neighborhood of San Diego, the United Women of East Africa Support Team (UWEAST)'s Hub provides space to build mental health supports with, by, and for young men of East African descent. City Heights has the largest population of Somalian refugees in California, and UWEAST was formed by East African women seeking to connect with each other and advance their health and education. After a string of suicides among young men highlighted the impacts of trauma in their community, they realized the need for culturally-specific healing and social supports for their youths who were struggling with the challenge of adjusting to a new country and culture and limited educational and economic opportunity.

Together with youth, UWEAST developed a peer-led and culturally literate wellness Hub. The Hub provides a safe space for youth to start and deepen relationships, and serves as a site for programming that includes career and educational coaching, job training, leadership development, and referrals to faith-based and culturally competent services. Hub staff, who are also community members, work with the youth to advocate for ways to improve their community environment – for example, decreasing the number of hookah lounges in the neighborhood and raising awareness about the harmfulness of tobacco through a youth-led messaging campaign.

One of the young men born and raised in City Heights who attends the Hub describes it as "a safe haven" for youth exposed to adverse community experiences and trauma, saying, "I am forever grateful because if it wasn't for UWEAST, I may have not been in the position I currently am in [as a college student]." Through providing physical space to build relationships, and programming to develop leadership from within the community, the Hub produces hope, healing, and collective power for action.

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