



Youth Substance Use Prevention Community Profile and Readiness Report





JCYSUP Community Profile and Readiness Report

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Executive Summary

The Jackson County Youth Substance Use Prevention Initiative was launched to understand and address the factors influencing youth substance use in Jackson County, Colorado. Guided by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration's (SAMHSA) Strategic Prevention Framework (SPF), this assessment examined community perceptions, norms, and readiness to prevent substance use through stakeholder engagement, key informant interviews, youth input, and a community survey.

Community Context

Jackson County is a small, rural frontier community with fewer than 1,400 residents. Economic challenges, geographic isolation, and limited access to behavioral health services shape the local environment in which youth grow up. Despite these barriers, Jackson County is characterized by close relationships, strong community pride, and growing recognition of the importance of mental health and prevention.

Methods and Data Sources

The assessment included:

- A stakeholder meeting with 9 representatives from education, health, faith, law enforcement, and youth-serving organizations;
- Seven key informant interviews, including one youth perspective interview;
- A community survey completed by 62 adults across age groups, capturing local perceptions of youth substance use, adult norms, and prevention priorities.

Data were analyzed thematically and descriptively, emphasizing patterns across sources to identify community strengths, gaps, and readiness for prevention.

Key Findings

- ❖ Youth and adult alcohol norms:
 - Over 88% of respondents personally believed youth under 21 should not drink at all or that even “a few sips” are never appropriate. However, only about one-third thought this was the most common attitude among adults in the community.
 - Similarly, 83% reported their own belief that adults should abstain or limit drinking to one or two drinks per week, yet only 28% believed this reflects the typical community attitude.
 - This significant perception gap suggests that most adults privately hold more protective attitudes than they assume others do—a strong foundation for a Positive Community Norms (PCN) campaign.
- ❖ **Community concern and readiness:**

- Over 80% of respondents rated youth substance use as a major concern, and 73% expressed support for locally tailored prevention messaging. The community demonstrates high awareness and readiness to engage in prevention efforts that emphasize relationships, belonging, and shared accountability.
- ❖ Adult modeling and influence:
 - Across interviews and surveys, adult behavior and community alcohol culture emerged as key influences on youth attitudes. Residents identified a need for adults to model healthy coping, recreation, and communication around substance use.
- ❖ Protective factors:
 - Strong community ties, trusted adults, and high youth participation in extracurricular activities serve as protective factors. These assets provide a foundation for expanding mentorship, belonging, and prevention education.

Interpretation and Limitations

Survey participation represents a snapshot of community perception—responses may be biased toward individuals with strong opinions about youth substance use. Even so, consistent themes across multiple data sources indicate high validity and clear readiness for prevention. The perception-versus-reality contrast underscores the importance of reframing community narratives and amplifying positive norms.

Implications and Next Steps

Jackson County is well-positioned to strengthen prevention through:

- Positive Community Norms (PCN) campaigns to correct misperceptions and highlight healthy majority behaviors;
- Adult-focused education and role modeling initiatives (“Lead by Example”);
- Youth engagement and belonging strategies, including mentorship, sports, and community activities;
- Sustained collaboration and funding to build prevention infrastructure.

Conclusion

The Jackson County Youth Substance Use Prevention Initiative reveals both the challenge and opportunity of small, close-knit communities: while alcohol use remains deeply embedded in local culture, there is strong shared motivation to create a healthier, more connected environment for youth. By aligning adult behaviors, community messaging, and youth supports, Jackson County can transform awareness into action—building a culture of prevention and resilience for generations to come.

Jackson County Community Profile

County Overview

Jackson County, Colorado, is a rural frontier county spanning **1,614 square miles** with a population of **1,379** residents (U.S. Census Bureau, 2023). Walden is the county seat and the only incorporated town, with smaller unincorporated communities including Gould, Rand, Cowdrey, and Coalmont. The county is geographically isolated, bordered by Wyoming to the north and Routt, Larimer, and Grand Counties in Colorado. Moose famously outnumber people, underscoring the county's frontier nature and limited access to neighboring resources, with many communities located more than 60 miles from the nearest town (NWCCOG, 2018).

Demographics

- **Population under 18:** 19.1% (approx. 223 children and youth) (Kids Count in Colorado, 2025)
- **Race/Ethnicity:** 86.9% White; 10% Hispanic or Latino; 1% American Indian/Alaska Native; 8.1% two or more races (U.S. Census Bureau, 2023)
- **Median household income:** \$41,809 (less than half the state median of \$92,911) (U.S. Census Bureau, 2023)
- **Poverty:** 18.2% of all residents, and nearly **40% of children under 18** live in poverty (U.S. Census Bureau, 2023; Kids Count in Colorado, 2025)
- **Education:** 27.5% of adults hold a bachelor's degree or higher (vs. 46.4% statewide) (U.S. Census Bureau, 2023)
- **Veterans:** 17.4% of the population, more than double the state average (U.S. Census Bureau, 2023)
- **Disability:** 11.1% of residents report a disability (U.S. Census Bureau, 2023)

Social Determinants of Health

Jackson County residents experience higher rates of poor mental health days, uninsured residents, and child poverty compared to the state. According to Robert Wood Johnson Foundation's 2022 County Health Rankings and roadmaps, key health-related indicators include:

- **Poor or fair health:** 20% (vs. 14% in CO)
- **Poor mental health days:** 6.0 (vs. 5.3 in CO)
- **Uninsured residents:** 17% (vs. 8% in CO), though improving from 20% in 2020
- **Children in poverty:** 16% (vs. 11% in CO), with Kids Count estimating 39.9% living in poverty (Kids Count in Colorado, 2025)
- **High school graduation:** 84% (vs. 93% in CO). However, with small class sizes of about 10 students per grade, the graduation rate may vary greatly. (Jackson County Public Health Improvement Plan, 2025–2030)

Access to Care

Residents face significant barriers to health care (County Health Rankings, 2022; Middle Park Health CHNA, 2022):

- **Primary care provider ratio:** 1,360:1 (vs. 1,210:1 in CO)
- **Mental health provider ratio:** 260:1 (vs. 200:1 in CO)
- **Dentist ratio:** 1,300:1 (vs. 1,160:1 in CO)
- **75% of residents** reported not receiving needed mental health care in the past year (Middle Park Health CHNA, 2022)

Broadband and Connectivity

Broadband access is a persistent challenge and directly impacts education, health care, and prevention services:

- **Broadband subscription:** 83.3% of households (vs. 93% statewide) (U.S. Census Bureau, 2023)
- **Underserved:** 73.8% of households lack access to modern 25/3 speeds (Colorado Broadband Map, 2024)
- **Unserved locations:** 331 households lack even basic broadband (Colorado Broadband Map, 2024)

Slow, unreliable, and expensive internet further limits access to telehealth, online education, and youth engagement opportunities (NWCCOG, 2018).

Youth in Jackson County

Children and youth represent a significant portion of the county's population:

- **17% of the population are under 18** (approx. 223 youth) (Kids Count in Colorado, 2025)
- School enrollment is small: **144 students PK–12** in the 2024–25 school year (Kids Count in Colorado, 2025)
- **31% qualify for free or reduced lunch** (Kids Count in Colorado, 2025)
- **15% receive special education services** (Kids Count in Colorado, 2025)
- **7% are English language learners** (Kids Count in Colorado, 2025)

Academic achievement is a concern:

- **55% of students** do not meet English standards on CMAS (vs. 56% statewide) (Kids Count in Colorado, 2025)
- **66% do not meet math standards** (on par with the state) (Kids Count in Colorado, 2025)

Social challenges for youth include:

- **Child poverty:** Nearly 40% (U.S. Census Bureau, 2023)
 - **Uninsured children:** 11.9% (Kids Count in Colorado, 2025)
 - **Students skipping school:** 28.5% skipped one or more days in the past month (HKCS, 2023)
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Youth Mental Health

In North Park High School, student-reported mental health indicators show a mix of improvement and concern between 2021 and 2023. The percentage of students who felt sad or hopeless for two or more weeks in the past year decreased significantly from 43.2% in 2021 to 24.2% in 2023 (Healthy Kids Colorado Survey North Park School District 2021, 2023), now closely aligned with the regional (23.1%) and state (25.7%) averages. Similarly, students reporting suicidal ideation dropped from 18.9% in 2021 to 15.6% in 2023, though this remains slightly higher than the region (12.9%) and state (11.1%). Data on suicide attempts is not available for 2023, but in 2021, 8.3% of students reported at least one attempt.

At the middle school level, trends differ. Reports of sadness or hopelessness increased from 20.7% in 2021 to 33.3% in 2023, now above the state average (23.6%). Encouragingly, suicidal ideation among middle school students decreased from 27.6% in 2021 to 16.7% in 2023, which is nearly aligned with the statewide rate (17.4%).

Key Takeaways

- High school students: Sadness/hopelessness improved significantly; suicidal ideation also declined.
 - Middle school students: Sadness/hopelessness worsened; suicidal ideation improved.
 - Suicide attempts: No 2023 data, but 2021 high school rate was above state averages.
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Youth Substance Use

Alcohol, tobacco, and marijuana use reflect nuanced changes (Healthy Kids Colorado Survey North Park School District 2021, 2023). Among high school students:

- Alcohol use increased: 24.2% reported drinking in the past 30 days in 2023, up from 16.7% in 2021. This is higher than the state average (20.5%) but lower than the regional rate (33.4%).
- E-cigarette use decreased: 10% reported use in 2023, down from 19.4% in 2021, and now lower than the region (13.3%) but slightly higher than the state (8.7%).
- Marijuana use data: In 2021, 8.3% reported use in the past 30 days. While 2023 use data is unavailable, perceptions of risk and disapproval rose sharply. In 2023, 87.9% of students saw moderate to great harm from marijuana use (vs. 61.1% in 2021), and 90.9% believed their parents disapproved of regular use.

Among middle school students:

- Lifetime alcohol use rose from 17.2% in 2021 to 24% in 2023, mirroring the state average (24.3%).

- Lifetime e-cigarette use also increased, from 13.3% in 2021 to 24% in 2023, considerably above the statewide average (14%).
- Perceptions of harm and disapproval related to alcohol, tobacco, and e-cigarettes remain high but dipped slightly between 2021 and 2023.

Key Takeaways

- High school students: Alcohol use is rising; e-cigarette use declined; marijuana perceptions show stronger awareness of risk and disapproval.
- Middle school students: Alcohol and e-cigarette use increased; protective perceptions (risk/disapproval) weakened slightly.

Protective Factors

Protective factors paint a mixed picture. At the high school level, a sense of belonging at school increased modestly from 61.1% in 2021 to 62.1% in 2023, still below regional (65.1%) and state (67%) averages. Participation in extracurricular activities was high in 2023 at 81.5%, exceeding both regional (79.3%) and state (66.6%) levels (Healthy Kids Colorado Survey North Park School District 2021, 2023).

However, access to supportive adults declined. In 2021, 77.8% of high school students reported having an adult to turn to for help with a serious problem, but this dropped to 64.5% in 2023, below the region (76.1%) and state (75.4%). Similarly, the percentage of students who felt they could ask a parent/guardian for help fell slightly, from 86.1% in 2021 to 83.3% in 2023.

For middle school students, belonging at school declined from 66.7% in 2021 to 56% in 2023, now well below the state average (65.9%). Participation in extracurricular activities remained exceptionally strong, rising from 92.6% in 2021 to 95.8% in 2023. Access to trusted adults, however, declined significantly, from 89.7% in 2021 to 64% in 2023, also below the state average (73.2%).

Key Takeaways

- High school students: School belonging improved slightly; extracurricular engagement is strong; supportive adult connections weakened.
- Middle school students: School belonging dropped sharply; extracurricular engagement is very strong; supportive adult connections declined substantially

Key Community Priorities

Community health assessments consistently highlight the following **priority needs** in Jackson County (Middle Park Health CHNA, 2022; Jackson County PHIP 2025-2030, 2024):

- Access to mental health services
 - Substance use prevention and recovery supports
 - Social supports, including housing, food security, and childcare
 - Broadband expansion to improve education and telehealth access
-

Summary

Jackson County's small, rural frontier population faces significant economic, health care, and infrastructure barriers that contribute to youth substance use and mental health challenges. High rates of child poverty, limited access to mental health care, and easy availability of alcohol and marijuana create a risky environment for youth. At the same time, protective factors such as strong family connections, community belonging, and the small, close-knit nature of schools and neighborhoods provide opportunities for prevention and resilience.

By using the **Strategic Prevention Framework (SPF)** (SAMHSA, 2025), the Jackson County Youth Substance Use Prevention Initiative will build on these strengths while addressing root causes and risk factors, ensuring evidence-based, community-driven solutions to improve youth health and well-being.

Regional Data for Comparison

Youth Mental Health

Mental health needs among youth are pressing and often go unmet. According to the **Healthy Kids Colorado Survey (2023)** and local health assessments (Jackson County PHIP 2025-2030, 2024). HKCS uses Health Services Rating area 11, consisting of Jackson, Routh, Moffat, and Rio Blanco Counties.

- **24.2%** of students reported feeling sad or hopeless for two or more weeks in the past year
- **15.6%** considered suicide (higher than the state average of 11.1%)
- **5.6%** attempted suicide one or more times in the past year
- **27.6%** experienced poor mental health most of the time in the past 30 days
- **74.7%** experienced the death of a family member or close friend
- **36.9%** had a friend disclose suicidal thoughts in the past year

Protective factors are also present (HKCS, 2023):

- **76.1%** of students reported having an adult to turn to for help
 - **59.1%** felt they could talk to a friend about feelings most of the time
 - **65.1%** felt a sense of belonging at school
-

Youth Substance Use Trends

Substance use among youth in Jackson County mirrors concerning trends statewide, with alcohol, marijuana, and vaping most prevalent (HKCS, 2023).

Alcohol

- **23.5%** binge drank in the past 30 days
- **33.4%** had at least one drink in the past 30 days
- **14.2%** had their first drink before age 13
- **64%** said it would be easy to access alcohol
- **59.4%** have ever had a drink

Marijuana

- **18.9%** used marijuana in the past 30 days
- **33.4%** have ever tried marijuana
- **44.7%** said marijuana is easy to access
- Most common methods of use: **77.6% smoking, 42.6% vaping, 39.5% eating**
- **3.2%** tried marijuana before age 13

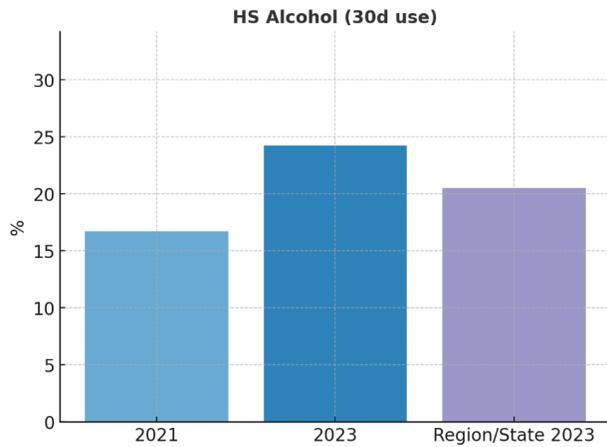
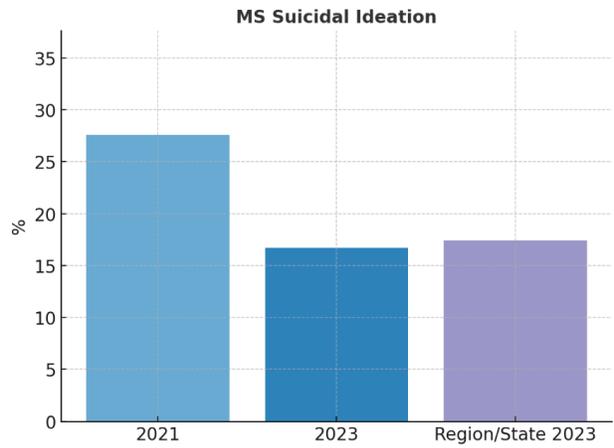
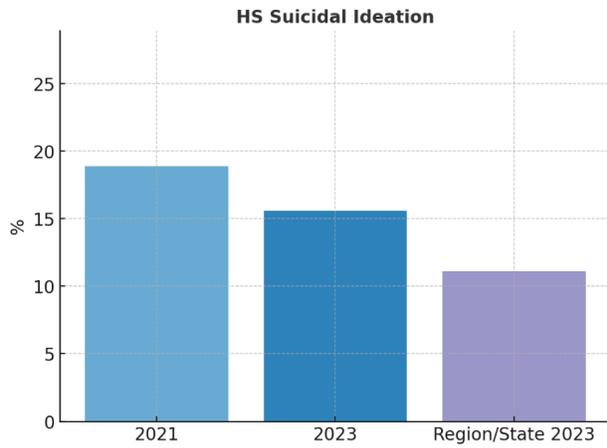
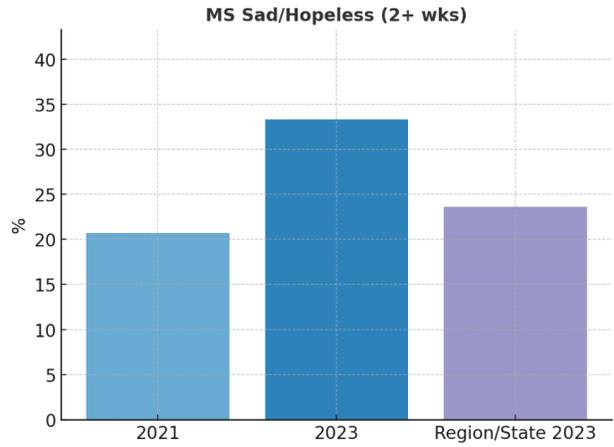
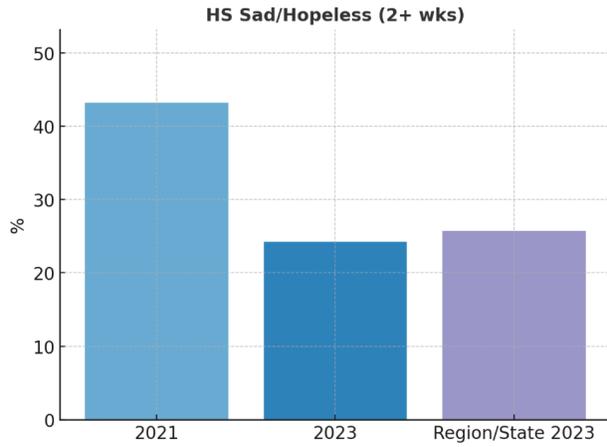
Tobacco & Vaping

- **94.1%** of students did not use tobacco in the past 30 days
- Among users, e-vaping is most common:
 - **50%** reported using because friends or family did
 - **23%** cited flavored products as a motivator

Other Drugs

- Use of harder substances (cocaine, heroin, meth, fentanyl) is very low (<3%)
- **7.9%** reported trying psychedelics
- **5.9%** reported misusing stimulants

North Park School District - Youth Mental Health & Substance Use Trends (2021 vs. 2023)



Methodology

Using the **Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) Strategic Prevention Framework (SPF)**, the Jackson County Youth Substance Use Prevention Initiative undertook a preliminary community assessment to understand local perceptions, risk and protective factors, and overall readiness for prevention.

This initial phase included:

- **Stakeholder meeting:** A facilitated discussion with nine community members to review early findings, validate themes, and identify shared priorities.
- **Key informant interviews (KIs):** Seven in-depth interviews with community members representing diverse sectors—education, law enforcement, healthcare, faith community, youth-serving organizations, and parents.
- **Youth participation:** One youth key informant interview to ensure a youth voice was represented in early readiness assessment.
- **Community survey:** to quantify perceptions, behaviors, and readiness across a broader sample.

Limitations:

Due to factors outside of our control—including a delayed contract award, a federal government shutdown, and state orders to terminate community work by September 29, 2025—the team was unable to complete the full breadth of intended data collection. Despite these limitations, the assessment provides meaningful insights into community assets, challenges, and early readiness indicators.

Future recommendations include conducting a **youth focus group** and a **youth survey** administered through school advisory sessions for middle and high school students. These additional data sources would enhance representativeness and help validate early findings from this qualitative phase.

Stakeholder Meeting Analysis

Introduction & Purpose

The Jackson County Youth Substance Use Prevention Initiative convened a stakeholder kick-off meeting on September 15, 2025, at the River Rock Café in Walden, Colorado. Eleven community members attended, representing schools, health, behavioral health, faith organizations, parents, emergency response, and other sectors. Consultants Jen Fanning and Lindsey Simbeye facilitated the session.

This discussion was the first step in assessing community perceptions, challenges, and assets related to youth substance use. It provided valuable context for understanding readiness and shaping subsequent data collection efforts, including Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) and a community survey. The meeting followed the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) Strategic Prevention Framework (SPF), which emphasizes community engagement, data-driven planning, and capacity building.

Methods Note

The stakeholder meeting notes were analyzed using both deductive and inductive coding. Deductive codes were drawn from SAMHSA’s Strategic Prevention Framework domains, including substance use trends, adult modeling and norms, parent perceptions, communication, protective factors, and community capacity. Inductive coding captured emerging local insights and lived experiences unique to Jackson County. Direct quotes are included where they powerfully illustrate key perspectives, and paraphrased summaries are provided to represent broader themes.

Thematic Summary

Theme	Description	Example Quotes	Implications
Adult Modeling and Community Alcohol Culture	Alcohol use is deeply embedded in social and cultural life in Jackson County. Adults frequently model drinking at community events, creating normalized environments where youth observe substance use as part of everyday life.	<p>“We have a heavy-duty drinking culture.”</p> <p>“Kids’ birthday parties happen at the bar.”</p> <p>“Adults drink at the rodeo and behind the chutes.”</p>	Addressing adult norms is critical for youth prevention success. Prevention messaging must include adults and reframe alcohol use as a community-wide health issue.
Youth Substance Use Trends and Access	Vaping, alcohol, and nicotine pouches are the most reported substances among youth. Youth often access these products through older peers, family members, or local businesses. Online sales of substances like kratom were also mentioned.	<p>“Kids get it from an older friend or family member and sell it at school.”</p> <p>“[Retail stores] and gas stations sell it easily.”</p>	Efforts should focus on restricting youth access, education on emerging substances, and engaging retailers in prevention.

Parent Perceptions, Denial, and Communication Barriers

Parents and adults often minimize or rationalize youth substance use, believing supervision makes it safe. Stigma and fear of gossip prevent open discussion. While some parents seek to normalize dialogue, others resist external input.

“If they can’t control it, they might as well allow it.”

“In our community, we gossip but don’t address the issue head-on.”

“Parents say, ‘Not my kid.’”

Programs should focus on improving parent–child communication skills and reframing substance use as a community concern rather than individual blame.

Protective Factors and Community Assets

Despite challenges, strong community assets exist: dedicated educators, sports and extracurricular programs, church-based activities, and a growing comfort with mental health support. Youth surveys indicate increasing connections with trusted adults.

“We’ve seen a big increase in kids feeling like they have trusted adults.”

“The stigma around seeing a therapist is decreasing.”

Build upon these strengths by promoting trusted adult programs, peer mentorship, and consistent opportunities for youth engagement.

Prevention Gaps and Adult Education Needs

Stakeholders identified a gap in adult prevention education and skills for having sensitive conversations with youth. Adults often feel unprepared or uncomfortable discussing topics like alcohol, vaping, or mental health.

“There’s a real need for events for adults on how to talk to your kids about sensitive issues.”

“Even as an adult with experience and expertise, it’s hard to know how to have those talks.”

Develop adult learning and conversation-based workshops to strengthen parent confidence and readiness.

Community Capacity, Sustainability, and Readiness

Participants expressed frustration about the lack of recreational infrastructure and the cyclical nature of funding. They also described a need for coordination across organizations and concern about sustainability after grant periods end.

“Money comes in and then goes away. Makes all of our programming go away.”

“We have no recreation program. All adult leagues have gone away.”

Invest in sustainable prevention infrastructure, cross-sector collaboration, and alternative community activities for adults and youth.

Summary

The stakeholder meeting revealed a community deeply committed to youth wellbeing but constrained by entrenched norms, limited infrastructure, and fragmented resources. Participants recognized that youth substance use mirrors adult modeling and social culture—particularly around alcohol. Public events, family celebrations, and community gatherings often include visible alcohol consumption, which has become an accepted and expected behavior.

At the same time, participants expressed optimism and a growing awareness of the need for change. Educators and health professionals noted increased openness to mental health support and a measurable rise in students’ connections with trusted adults. Community members also voiced strong support for preventive education that begins earlier in life and focuses on relationships, belonging, and communication rather than punitive approaches.

Barriers to prevention readiness included denial, stigma, and discomfort discussing sensitive issues. Participants acknowledged that adults often condone behavior through silence or permissive attitudes. They also highlighted the lack of alternative activities and the loss of recreation spaces like the local bowling alley, which once offered substance-free outlets for youth and families.

Finally, the discussion underscored a pressing need for sustainability and community collaboration. Stakeholders emphasized that short-term grant funding undermines long-term prevention efforts. They called for coordinated leadership among the school district, county government, and local organizations to sustain programs beyond initial funding cycles.

This initial stakeholder conversation laid the groundwork for the Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) and community survey. Insights around adult modeling, communication barriers, and prevention readiness directly shaped the next phase of inquiry, guiding the development of KII questions that explored these themes in greater depth. The interviews built upon the stakeholder dialogue to validate and expand community perspectives on substance use patterns, protective factors, and readiness for change—together forming a strong foundation for targeted, community-driven prevention strategies in Jackson County.

Key Informant Interview Analysis

In September 2025, seven key informant interviews were conducted with individuals representing **education, health, faith, law enforcement, youth, and parent perspectives**. Six adult interviews were included in the thematic analysis, and one youth interview was analyzed separately to protect confidentiality and maintain balance in the data.

Overview of Findings

Overall, the KIIs revealed both **pervasive risks** and **significant community strengths**. Themes were analyzed inductively and deductively using the SAMHSA SPF framework, focusing on substance use patterns, community norms, communication, and readiness.

Domain	Summary of Findings
Substance Use Trends	Alcohol remains the most normalized and accessible substance for youth, often obtained through parents or social gatherings. Vaping and nicotine pouches (Zyn) are emerging among younger grades (even 4th–5th grade). Methamphetamine presence is a growing concern, with reports of “functional users” and fentanyl contamination.
Community Norms & Perceptions	Substance use, particularly alcohol, is socially tolerated and deeply ingrained in local events and traditions. Parents’ own experiences often shape lenient attitudes toward youth experimentation. However, there is growing awareness and openness to shifting norms, especially among educators and health partners.
Risk & Protective Factors	Protective factors include strong relationships with teachers, coaches, and faith mentors, along with high participation in extracurricular activities (e.g. sports, 4H, Future Farmers of America). Risk factors include limited recreational options (e.g. closed bowling alley), weak enforcement of underage alcohol laws, and stigma that suppresses open conversations about mental health or substance use.
Communication & Education	Adults and youth alike prefer transparent, relationship-based communication. Schools are implementing trauma-informed practices, Botvin LifeSkills, and other evidence-based curricula. However, communication between parents and youth about substance use remains inconsistent.
Prevention Readiness	Stakeholders express readiness for a Positive Community Norms (PCN) campaign and early, locally relevant prevention efforts. There is consensus that prevention should begin earlier—targeting upper elementary and middle school students—and integrate family and community engagement.

Implications

- **Short-term opportunities:** Strengthen parent–school partnerships, expand youth mentoring, and explore supervised recreational spaces.
 - **Mid-term priorities:** Develop and implement a PCN campaign, expand early prevention curriculum, and increase communication capacity.
 - **Long-term readiness goals:** Build sustainable prevention infrastructure, including data-sharing agreements, community coalition growth, and ongoing evaluation.
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Youth Perspective Analysis

A single **youth key informant interview** was conducted with a local middle school student to capture the lived experience and perceptions of young people in Jackson County. This youth narrative was analyzed separately to protect confidentiality and avoid skewing adult data.

Key Themes

- **Perceived Substance Use:** The youth perceived limited use among peers and viewed most classmates as “mostly good.” Awareness of alcohol, vaping, and marijuana exists, but direct exposure is minimal.
- **Trusted Adults:** Teachers and siblings are the primary trusted supports. Youth emphasized that adults should “put their phones down and listen” more.
- **Activities & Belonging:** Values sports, youth group, gaming club, and outdoor recreation (sledding, hunting, shooting sports). Expressed need for **more safe, engaging places to hang out**—especially during winter months.
- **Preferred Messaging:** Prefers funny, relatable, and school-branded prevention messages delivered repeatedly through **YouTube Shorts** and **Snapchat**, with reinforcement in school.
- **Community Perception:** Described the community as small and generally caring, but noted boredom and lack of spaces contribute to risky behavior for some youth.

Implications

- Prevention strategies should **center youth engagement** and **co-create content** with students.
- Programs should use **humor and positivity** rather than fear-based messaging.
- Investing in **youth spaces and recreation infrastructure** could reduce risk behaviors and increase belonging.

- Adults—especially parents and educators—can increase impact by modeling attentiveness and consistent communication.
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Community Survey Analysis

Introduction & Purpose

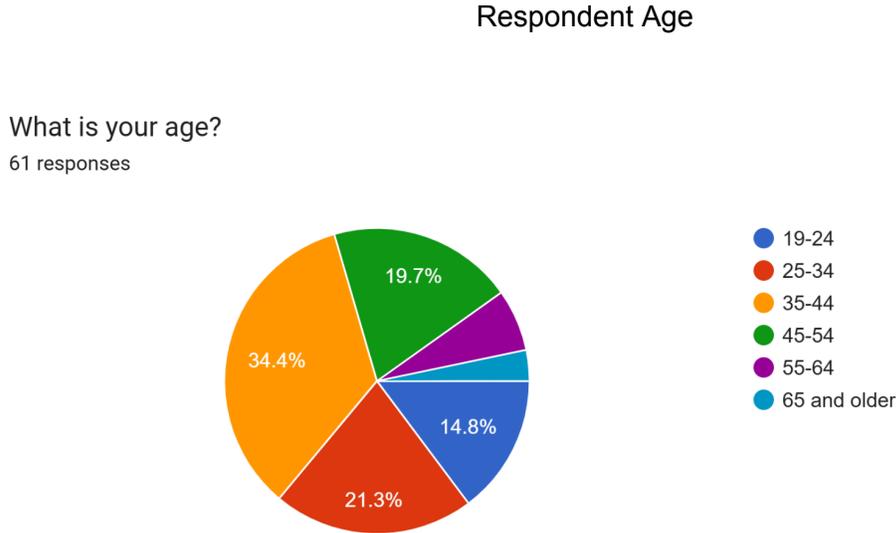
As part of the Jackson County Youth Substance Use Prevention Initiative, a community survey was conducted to assess perceptions, behaviors, and readiness for prevention efforts. The survey was developed and distributed collaboratively by North Park School District, Jackson County Public Health, Grand County Rural Health Network, and the Jackson County Sheriff's Department. Youth-serving organizations such as local sports teams, 4H, and Future Farmers of America also shared the survey link with parents and guardians. Fliers containing a QR code to the survey were posted at key community locations, including the health clinic, grocery store, and other high-traffic areas.

The survey was conducted using Google Forms, selected for its accessibility and compatibility with partner platforms. Responses were collected anonymously, and participation was open to all community members. The goal was to understand perceptions of youth substance use, community norms, and prevention readiness to inform local planning under the SAMHSA Strategic Prevention Framework (SPF).

Methods

A total of 62 responses were received. Questions assessed community concern about youth substance use, perceptions of adult influence, local norms around alcohol, and support for prevention strategies. Respondents varied in age from 19 years old to 65 years and older.

Figure 1. Age of Respondents.



Over two-thirds of respondents (75.4%) ranged in age between 25 to 54 years old.

Quantitative results were analyzed using descriptive statistics, while open-ended responses were coded for emerging qualitative themes. Figures below summarize key findings, and results were cross-referenced with themes from the Stakeholder Meeting and Key Informant Interviews to identify consistencies and readiness indicators.

Key Findings: Quantitative Summary

The following section summarizes quantitative data collected through the Jackson County community survey, which explored local attitudes, beliefs, and readiness related to youth substance use prevention. While the results offer valuable insight into community norms, it is important to recognize that survey responses represent a snapshot of perceptions rather than an exhaustive or statistically representative sample. As with most voluntary community surveys, responses may reflect stronger participation from individuals who feel most passionate—either positively or negatively—about the issue. Nonetheless, the findings provide meaningful direction for prevention planning and illuminate important differences between personal beliefs and perceived community attitudes.

A key insight emerging from the data is the perception gap between how respondents view their own attitudes toward alcohol use and how they perceive the broader community's norms.

- Youth alcohol use: Over 88% of respondents reported believing that youth under 21 should not drink at all or only drink a few sips with family or religious settings. In contrast, only about one-third felt that this belief represents the most common attitude among adults in Jackson County.

- Adult alcohol use: Similarly, 83% of respondents indicated that adults should either abstain or limit themselves to one or two drinks per week, while only 28% believed this reflects the prevailing community standard.

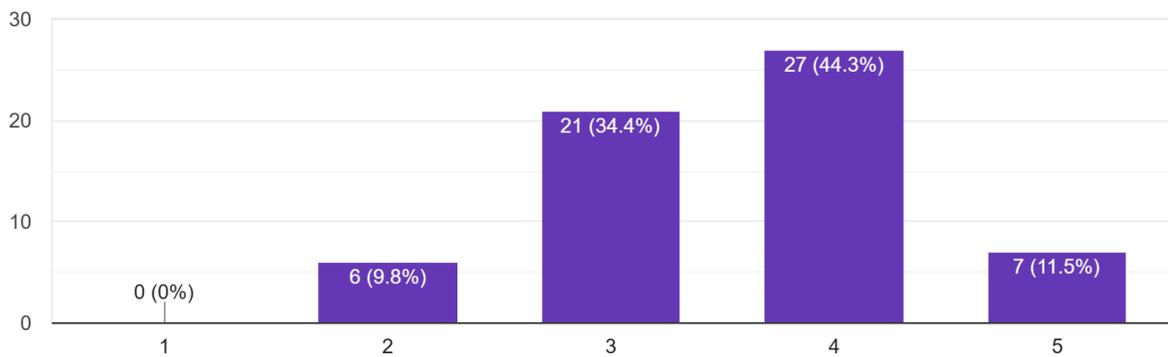
This divergence between personal viewpoints and perceived community norms suggests that most adults privately support stricter limits on alcohol use than they think others do. Such misperceptions are a classic opportunity for a Positive Community Norms (PCN) approach—highlighting the healthy majority to realign community perception with reality and strengthen prevention messaging.

The following figures and Table 1 present detailed quantitative findings, including community perceptions of youth supports, prevention priorities, and readiness indicators.

Figure 2. Adults Support for Youth.

Adults in Jackson County (parents, teachers, coaches, mentors) give youth the support they need to do well.

61 responses

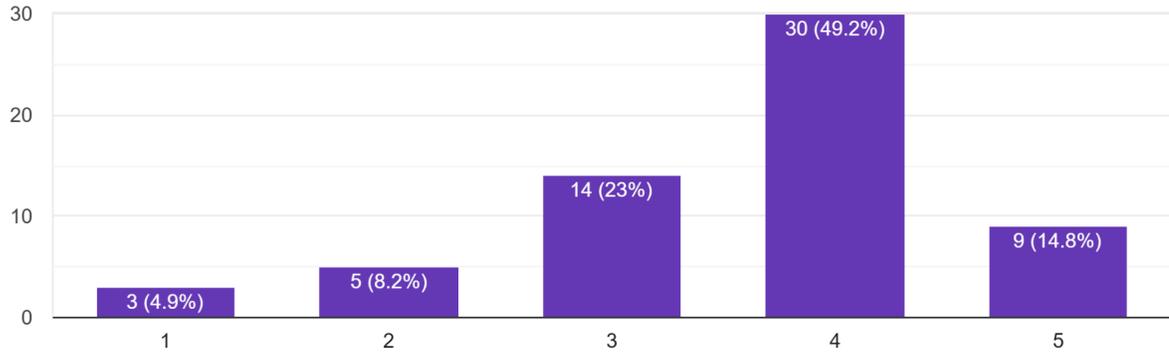


Responses were generally positive, with most participants agreeing or strongly agreeing that adults in Jackson County provide youth with the support they need to do well. This indicates strong perceptions of adult engagement and mentorship as protective factors for youth.

Figure 3. Youth Access to Healthy and Positive Activities.

Youth in Jackson County have healthy and positive activities (like sports, clubs, and groups) that help them feel included.

61 responses

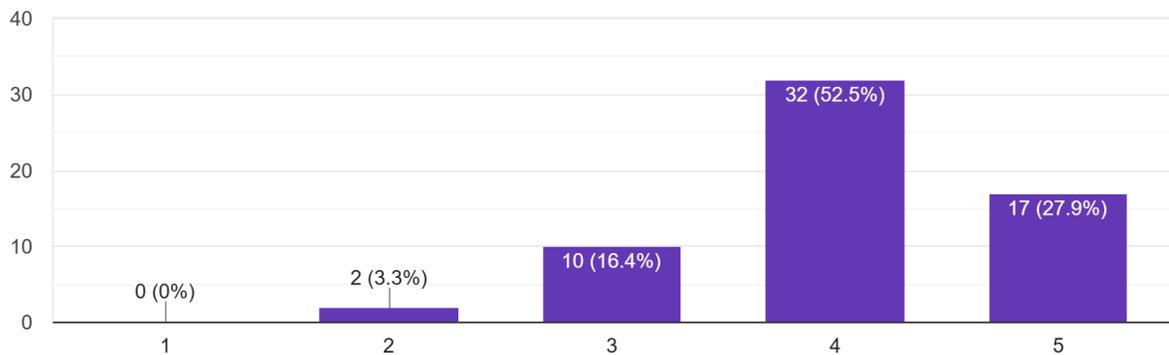


Respondents also expressed confidence that youth in Jackson County have access to health and positive activities, such as sports, clubs, and groups, that help them feel included. These findings highlight the community's existing strengths and the foundation for expanding prevention programming.

Figure 4. Community Concern About Youth Substance Use.

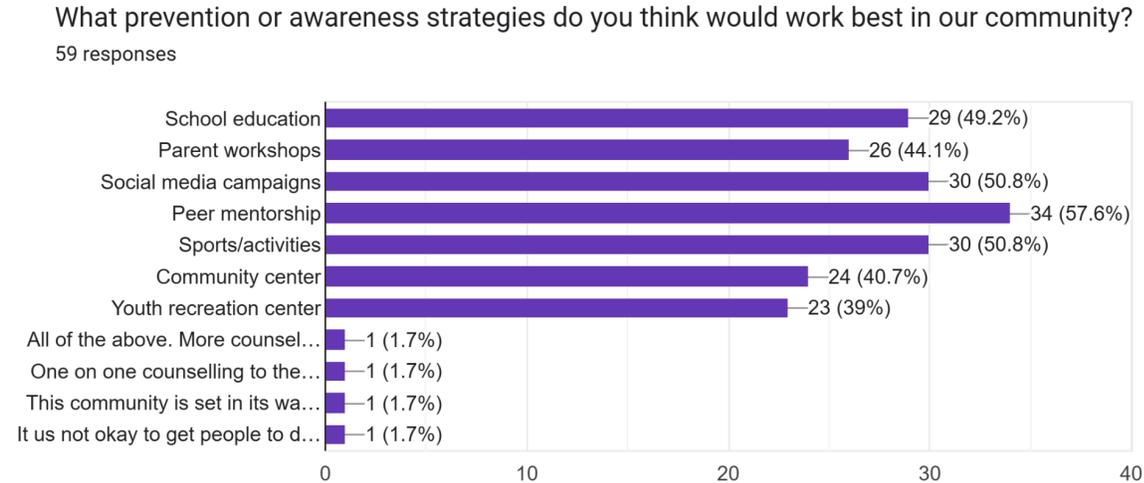
How big of a concern do you think youth substance use (alcohol, tobacco, marijuana, etc.) is in Jackson County?

61 responses



Using a scale of 1-5 (1 = Not a concern, 5 = Very big concern). Most respondents rated youth substance use as a significant concern.

Figure 5. Preferred Prevention Strategies



Peer mentorship, sports and activities, social media campaigns, and school-based education were the most commonly supported prevention strategies.

Table 1. Summary of Key Quantitative Findings

Topic	Summary of Findings
Concern about youth substance use	Over 80% of respondents indicated that youth substance use is a significant concern.
Adult vs. youth engagement	Although no youth participated in the survey, adults reported that there are fewer healthy and positive activities available for adults than for youth. Respondents perceived that youth have more structured opportunities (e.g., school activities), while adults have limited alcohol-free options for connection.
Adult modeling behavior	Although the survey did not directly measure perceptions of adult influence, open-ended comments and stakeholder feedback consistently emphasized that adult behaviors and community norms around alcohol use shape youth attitudes. Many respondents described the need for adults to model healthier

coping and recreation behaviors to strengthen prevention messaging.

Perception vs. reality: beliefs about alcohol and tobacco use

Adults generally hold stricter personal beliefs about underage drinking and tobacco use than they perceive others in the community do. For example, 56% said they set “no alcohol use” rules for their own children, yet only 21% believed most parents do the same. Similarly, most adults believe underage drinking should never occur, but think others are more permissive. This “misperception gap” underscores readiness for Positive Community Norms (PCN) campaigns to correct false norms and reinforce healthy community standards.

Norms around underage drinking

Half of respondents believe most adults think occasional underage drinking is acceptable; only 20% believe most adults think it should 'never' happen.

Preferred prevention approaches

Top strategies included peer mentorship (58%), sports and activities (51%), social media campaigns (51%) and school-based education programs (50%). These preferences emphasize both relational and activity-based engagement for youth prevention

Community readiness

73% of respondents indicated support for locally focused prevention messages, demonstrating readiness for a Positive Community Norms (PCN) campaign. 22% of respondents would like to learn more about a PCN campaign.

Key Themes: Qualitative Summary

Open-ended responses reinforced several key themes identified through the stakeholder meeting and key informant interviews:

- Desire for honest, relatable prevention education that goes beyond 'just say no' messaging.
- Importance of equipping parents with skills and confidence to talk openly about substance use.
- Understanding the importance of adult modeling healthy behavior to influence youth behavior.
- Recognition of mental health, stress management, and belonging as core protective factors.
- Interest in expanding youth activities, mentorship, and positive social spaces.

- Pride in the community’s strengths and a wish to elevate youth voices in shaping solutions.

Community Vision of Success for Youth Substance Use Prevention

The final section of the community survey asked respondents, “*What would success look like for youth substance use prevention efforts in Jackson County?*”

Responses revealed a powerful shared vision rooted in collaboration, open communication, family engagement, and youth empowerment. Participants defined success not only as lower rates of youth substance use, but as a thriving, connected community where prevention is a natural part of everyday life.

Key Themes

1. Collaboration Across Sectors

Many respondents emphasized the importance of partnerships among families, schools, community organizations, and local leaders:

“Success would mean youth, parents, schools, and community organizations all working together to promote healthy choices and open conversations about substance use.”

2. Open Communication and Family Readiness

A recurring theme was the desire for honest, judgment-free conversations about substance use, starting at home:

“Success would look like families feeling comfortable talking about substance use, setting clear expectations, and knowing how to find help if they need it.”

3. Youth Belonging and Connection

Respondents recognized belonging as a protective factor, connecting prevention to inclusion and mentorship:

“Success would mean that youth feel truly connected to their community—supported by mentors, schools, and families who care about them. When young people feel they belong, they’re less likely to turn to substances.”

4. Positive Role Modeling and Adult Responsibility

Several respondents linked prevention success to adult accountability and the need for consistent modeling:

“Youth would be active in extracurricular and school activities and making healthy choices such as not drinking or using tobacco. Ideally, these healthy choices would be

modeled at home by the parents.”

5. Education and Early Intervention

Many participants envisioned a future where prevention is embedded in schools and community programs through education and early action:

“Success would mean that all students have access to honest, age-appropriate education about substance use and mental health, so they can make informed choices rather than learning from peers or social media.”

“Teens getting the help they need early—whether that’s mental health support, mentoring, or positive activities—before substance use becomes a problem.”

6. Community Pride and Hope

Respondents expressed optimism and a sense of collective responsibility for creating a healthy, hopeful environment for young people:

“Success would mean a generation of young people growing up healthy, confident, and hopeful—choosing positive paths because they see a future for themselves here in Jackson County.”

Summary Interpretation

Overall, community members define success in prevention as more than reducing substance use rates—it means building a connected, supportive environment where young people and adults alike have the resources, relationships, and opportunities to make healthy choices. The responses demonstrate strong alignment with the SAMHSA Strategic Prevention Framework’s focus on capacity, collaboration, and cultural competence

Readiness and Implications

The survey results reveal a high level of awareness about youth substance use and a clear desire for community-driven solutions. Respondents recognized the influence of adult modeling and the mixed messages youth receive about alcohol and other substances. Despite these challenges, the community shows strong readiness for coordinated prevention initiatives, particularly those emphasizing positive norms, early education, and family engagement.

Together, the survey findings reinforce themes from the stakeholder meeting and Key Informant Interviews: that readiness exists but must be supported through consistent communication, collaboration, and sustained prevention infrastructure.

Integrated Summary of Evaluation Findings

Over the course of the Jackson County Youth Substance Use Prevention Initiative, multiple complementary evaluation tools were used to assess community readiness, perceptions, and priorities. Together, these data sources — the stakeholder meeting, key informant interviews, youth perspective, and community survey — paint a cohesive picture of both the challenges and strengths that define prevention in Jackson County.

Stakeholder Meeting

The stakeholder kickoff meeting provided the earliest, most comprehensive view of community culture and readiness. Participants openly described Jackson County's strong sense of identity and connection but also acknowledged the deep normalization of alcohol use among adults. This meeting surfaced two essential insights that shaped all subsequent evaluation phases:

1. **Youth substance use mirrors adult behavior.**
2. **Community members desire a healthier, more connected culture but lack consistent structures and spaces to support it.**

Key Informant Interviews (KIIs)

The KIIs deepened understanding of those themes. Participants across sectors highlighted trust, relationships, and adult modeling as central determinants of youth behavior. Interviews revealed readiness for prevention work but also exposed gaps in communication, stigma, and community infrastructure. Respondents consistently described a small but resilient county that values collaboration and is eager for guidance and sustainability in prevention efforts.

Youth Perspective

The youth perspective, gathered through the youth key informant interview, reflected both hope and realism. The young person interviewed identified belonging, trust, and adult relationships as their strongest protective factors, but also noted the challenges of limited social outlets and adult hypocrisy around alcohol use. Their insights underscored the importance of creating youth-centered spaces and peer mentorship opportunities that feel authentic and inclusive. Due to factors previously noted, we were unable to adequately engage youth and more fully understand their perspective. Future work should include as an immediate next step gauging the youth perspective to understand how it differs or supports adult perspectives and adjusting strategic approaches as needed.

Community Survey

The community survey quantified perceptions and readiness themes observed earlier. Most respondents (over 80%) agreed that youth substance use is a serious concern. Adults recognized strong youth supports but reported fewer positive, alcohol-free activities for themselves. Findings revealed a **perception gap** between individual beliefs and perceived

community norms around alcohol and tobacco — indicating readiness for a **Positive Community Norms (PCN)** campaign. Respondents also expressed enthusiasm for school-based prevention, peer mentorship, and social media messaging.

Integrated Insights

Across all evaluation tools, the following cross-cutting themes emerged:

- **Adult modeling is the strongest community-level influence on youth behavior.**
- **Positive Community Norming (PCN) can help align perception with reality and build shared accountability.**
- **Families want support and tools for honest, age-appropriate communication.**
- **Youth connection and belonging are powerful protective factors.**
- **Infrastructure for recreation and prevention is limited but valued.**
- **Readiness is high — the community is aware, engaged, and motivated to act.**

These shared findings lay the foundation for a unified prevention strategy rooted in collaboration, communication, and sustainability.

Community Readiness and Recommendations Report

Using the **SAMHSA Strategic Prevention Framework (SPF)** as a guide, community readiness was assessed across key domains of awareness, leadership, community norms, resources, and knowledge. Jackson County demonstrates high motivation and shared vision, with strong leadership engagement but ongoing challenges in cultural norms, enforcement consistency, and prevention infrastructure.

Community Readiness Overview

Readiness Domain	Current Status	Summary Description
Awareness & Concern	High	Community members express deep concern about youth substance use and strong support for prevention.
Leadership & Collaboration	Moderate to High	Cross-sector partners, including schools, public health, and behavioral health, are engaged and coordinated, though sustained funding is a challenge.
Community Norms & Modeling	Low to Moderate	Alcohol use remains culturally embedded. Many adults support underage drinking in controlled settings. Shifting norms is essential.
Resources & Infrastructure	Low to Moderate	Loss of recreation programs and limited prevention funding hinder progress, but existing partnerships and facilities provide a base for rebuilding.
Prevention Knowledge & Effort	Moderate to High	Increasing participation in prevention education and mental health initiatives reflects growing readiness for sustained, evidence-based prevention.

Strategic Recommendations

The following recommendations synthesize findings from all evaluation tools and are organized by priority area. They emphasize upstream prevention, cross-sector collaboration, and sustainability.

Priority Area	Recommendation	Rationale (Based on Data)	Potential Partners / Lead Agencies
1. Adult Modeling	Launch a “ Lead by Example ” campaign featuring local adults who model healthy coping and social behaviors without relying on alcohol.	Stakeholders and KIIIs identified adult modeling as the most powerful influence on youth norms.	Jackson County Public Health, Sheriff’s Department, North Park School District, local businesses
2. Positive Community Norming (PCN)	Identify misperceptions about alcohol and tobacco norms and implement a countywide PCN initiative to address them, emphasizing that most parents set clear rules and disapprove of underage use, while the majority of students do not use substances.	Survey results revealed a significant gap between personal beliefs and perceived community beliefs.	GCRHN, Public Health, School District, PCN-trained prevention consultants
3. Enforcement & Law Adherence	Collaborate with law enforcement and business owners to strengthen adherence to underage drinking and tobacco laws ; include TIPS training and youth compliance checks.	Stakeholders cited inconsistent enforcement and permissive adult attitudes toward youth drinking.	Sheriff’s Department, County Commissioners, Chamber of Commerce
4. Early Prevention Education	Integrate developmentally appropriate prevention education into the curriculum beginning in middle school, including peer mentoring and skill-building programs.	Youth and adults alike expressed the need for honest, relevant education that begins early and emphasizes coping skills.	North Park School District, School Counselors, Behavioral Health Providers
5. Family Engagement & Communication	Offer family workshops , “trusted adult” training, and toolkits for discussing substance use and mental health at home.	Parents want to support youth but lack confidence and resources; open dialogue was a consistent theme across tools.	GCRHN, School District, Public Health

6. Community Infrastructure & Belonging	Restore recreation programs and alcohol-free community spaces for adults and youth to build belonging and reduce reliance on substance-centered socializing.	Stakeholders noted the loss of adult leagues and social activities as a key contributor to unhealthy norms.	County Government, Parks & Recreation, Local Nonprofits and Volunteers
7. Sustainability & Coordination	Create a countywide prevention coalition to coordinate messaging, data, and funding efforts across agencies.	Repeated concern about grant-driven, short-term programming highlights the need for a unified structure.	County Commissioners, Public Health, School District, GCRHN

Marketing and Media Campaign Recommendation: Two-Generation Positive Community Norms Campaign

Based on assessment results, the implementation of a two-generation (2Gen) positive community norms (PCN) campaign is recommended as a strategic approach for Jackson County. The PCN model is rooted in the Science of the Positive Framework, which provides a systematic method to foster positive, protective norms within organizations, systems, communities, and cultures. By leveraging this framework, the campaign aims to promote healthier behaviors and attitudes across both youth and adults.

The primary focus of PCN is correcting misperceptions regarding community norms—a practice supported by evidence as effective in reducing harm and improving health outcomes throughout the social ecology. This involves highlighting and amplifying the healthy behaviors and beliefs present within the community, rather than allowing inaccurate perceptions to persist and influence actions.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), SAMHSA, and other respected agencies consistently recognize the value of positive norms, social norms, and norms science as evidence-based approaches to prevention. Their endorsement of these methods further strengthens the rationale for adopting a PCN campaign within Jackson County.

Local Examples

As previously noted, Youth and Adult Alcohol Norms in Jackson County demonstrate a classic “*false norm*” and opportunity to amplify the *real* healthy majority community norm.

- **Healthy Behavior:** More than 88% of respondents personally maintained that youth under the age of 21 should abstain from alcohol entirely or believe that even minimal consumption is inappropriate.

- **Misperception Gap:** However, only approximately one-third perceived this view as the predominant attitude among adults within the community.
- **Healthy Behavior:** 83% indicated a preference that adults either abstain or restrict their alcohol intake to no more than one or two drinks per week
- **Misperception Gap:** 67% of individuals believe that adults within the community consume one or more alcoholic beverages per day.

What's Needed

- Create a targeted community norms survey to gather more data from a wider pool of adults and expand upon questions to better measure community perceptions and positive norms for PCN campaign.
- Collect youth data to show the gap between real healthy choices and perceived alcohol, tobacco, and other drug (ATOD) use among peers. Use HKCS if possible or collect independently if HKCS data is suppressed/unavailable.
- Explore additional communication channels beyond social and traditional media, such as schools, community events, organizational/employer meetings, and nontraditional out-of-home (OOH) to reach wider audiences and avoid fatigue.
- Run additional focus groups with youth and adults to keep campaign visuals and messaging aligned with the target audience during development and implementation
- Gather positive adult behavior examples, community reinforcements, and visible examples to strengthen campaign elements like storytelling and calls to action, making advertisements more engaging.

Anticipated Outcomes

The results of the Jackson County Youth Prevention Needs and Readiness Assessment highlight a clear opportunity to strengthen community health through a comprehensive 2Gen PCN prevention initiative. By engaging both youth and adults, this approach builds upon existing community pride and assets to reshape perceptions, influence behaviors, and promote a culture that supports healthy choices across generations.

At its core, the PCN framework recognizes that people often overestimate the frequency of risky behaviors among peers—a misperception that can unintentionally reinforce unhealthy actions. Through sustained, data-driven communication, PCN campaigns correct these false norms by emphasizing the *real*, healthy behaviors that already exist within the community. Over time, as residents see and hear that most Jackson County youth and adults make responsible choices, social expectations shift. This alignment between perceived and actual norms reduces peer pressure, increases protective behaviors, and fosters an environment where healthy decision-making becomes the visible, celebrated standard.

Implementing a PCN campaign will not only reinforce healthy community norms but also achieve the priority outcomes indicated by participants in the assessment, such as:

- Encouraging open, stigma-free conversations about substance use within families.
- Promoting youth belonging, engagement, and mentorship in schools and community spaces.
- Inspiring adults to model healthy habits and support alcohol-free community events.
- Expanding collaboration among schools, families, faith groups, employers, and healthcare providers.
- Reinforcing early, transparent, and culturally relevant prevention education.
- Cultivating hope, pride, and a shared vision for a healthier, more self-assured generation.

In essence, advancing Positive Community Norms in Jackson County is more than a communication strategy—it is a catalyst for long-term culture change. By aligning community perception with reality and amplifying the positive majority, Jackson County can create a lasting ripple effect of health, resilience, and collective well-being that strengthens families today and for generations to come.

Summary and Next Steps

Jackson County's community readiness is strong, anchored in shared concern and the desire for change. The next phase of work should focus on aligning adult behaviors with prevention goals, using **Positive Community Norms** to shift perception and culture. Building family communication capacity, early prevention education, and infrastructure for belonging will create sustainable protective environments for youth.

By integrating these findings into coordinated local strategies, Jackson County can move from readiness to action — transforming awareness into a culture of health, connection, and prevention.

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