



Jackson County Youth Substance Use Prevention Initiative

Community Profile and Readiness Report

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 two generation 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 multi-generational approaches:

- 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.

Next steps include planning and implementing the initiatives mentioned above, as well as engaging youth to better understand their perspective and needs and adjust planning efforts accordingly.

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.