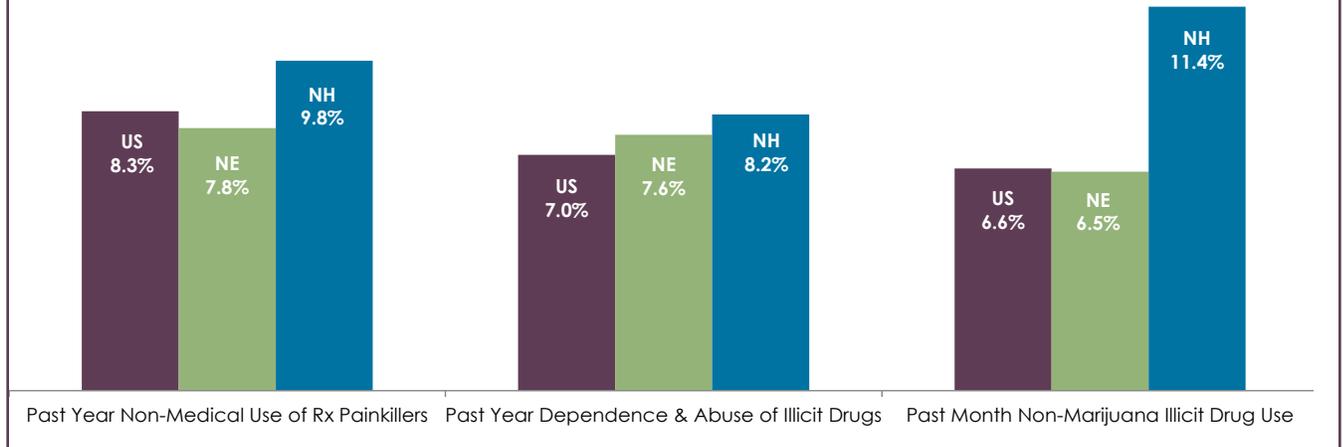


YOUNG ADULT USE AND DEPENDENCE (NSDUH 2014)



conducted by 11 of the 13 regions, reflecting the voices of 366 young adults who are currently NH residents. As a compliment to the focus groups, the Center, in collaboration with the Pacific Institute for Research and Evaluation (PIRE), developed a web-based survey for young adults aged 18–30. The survey was promoted mainly through the use of Facebook ads which targeted New Hampshire residents in the target age bracket. A total of 4,334 surveys were completed; these data were then weighted using regional 2010 census data so that the data presented are representative of all young adults across the State.

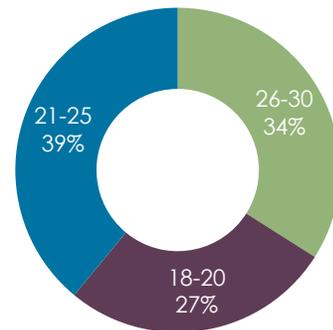
SELECTED DEMOGRAPHICS

- 50.4% Male
- 91.9% Caucasian
- 29.7% Enrolled in school/college/training
- 84.8% Employed full or part-time

GOALS OF THE YOUNG ADULT ASSESSMENT

1. Identify opioid misuse prevalence among 18–20, 21–25 and 26–30 year olds to define baseline numbers and to use for evaluation of future program implementation.
2. Identify alcohol misuse (binge drinking) prevalence among 18–20, 21–25 and 26–30 year olds to define baseline and to use for evaluation of future program implementation.
3. Identify factors related to use of opioids and binge drinking that could inform strategy development.

Age Range of Survey Respondents



The *Voices of New Hampshire Young Adults Assessment* report (available at <http://nhcenterforexcellence.org/>) is organized based on the themes and discussion threads that came out of the focus groups and the survey results. A summary of the key themes and messages follows.

Themes and Key Messages

“I have a lot of hope for New Hampshire because I feel like we are working on creating a ‘new,’ revitalized New Hampshire together.”

COMMUNITY

Community and the characteristics, dynamics, and functions of a community play an essential part in the lives of young adults. It is their environment, their network of personal relationships, and their home. Young adults in New Hampshire want to be heard, and appreciated being asked for their perspective. They desire to be connected with their communities, and many stated that they want to be engaged in their community but have trouble with availability or affordability of activities. They recognize the need for and value of family support and the role of friends. They are in an unusual position and play a dual role in the community as both a parent and child at the same time. As one participant stated, people are “more likely to go to friend because you’re afraid of disappointing family.”

“Drinking can stem from boredom, which might be why New Hampshire has a high rate of drinking, because there isn’t much else to do.”

PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

The built environment plays a vital role in societal attitudes. Participants expressed ambivalence about living in New Hampshire which can contribute to their decision making. Many young adults voiced concerns about inaccessibility to physical amenities, social groups, and lack of transportation services; not all young adults engage in outdoor activities. People who don’t want to be outdoors lack activities to engage in and may be potentially vulnerable as a result.

JOB OPPORTUNITIES AND GROWTH

Young adults are at a pivotal time in their lives; some are engaged in higher education, others are developing early experiences and foundations in trade, industry, and professions, all while trying to navigate through social and developmental challenges of young adulthood. Many expressed an interest in moving out

of state to access opportunities that don’t exist in New Hampshire.

Young adults contend with the influence of social media on perspective of expectations and the pressure to achieve status. They have a sense of entrepreneurship and desire to move up in their world but face economic challenges. They want educational opportunities to translate into work opportunities but often lack awareness about what is available to them. There was also a sense that the opportunities available provide low wages and few to no benefits.

“My sense of hope lies in my education and the education of other young adults in New Hampshire.”

“[It’s] difficult to find consistent employment that pays enough to be stable. Seasonal employment makes it hard to get by. [It’s] difficult to move out and live independently because [of] not making enough.”

GENERATIONAL DIFFERENCES

Despite the technological and educational advancements in our society, young adults are still facing economic and social barriers today and consequently restricting physical, family, career, and economic success. Participants recognize that a strong family structure contributes to better choices and more stable foundation but it is not as prevalent in their generation. There was a perception by some that they are more likely to be burdened by financial hardship and won’t have what their parents had. On the other hand, many expressed that they are more optimistic and open than past generations even while expressing concerns about how their sense of safety has changed and that there are heightened concerns about safety and security.

“I would like to own a house and have children, but I’m concerned my wages will not be enough/increase enough to facilitate that. I know that it will take longer to obtain those things compared to my parents.”

MOST COMMON SOURCES OF HOPE:

- Friends, family, and community
- Opportunities for growth and learning
- Seeing others succeed
- Sense of control over one's life

MOST COMMON SOURCE OF DISCOURAGEMENT:

- Economy or finances
- Poor work ethic and immaturity of their generation
- Government, politics, and world events
- People disrespecting each other

SENSE OF HOPE OR OPTIMISM

Hope and optimism are identified as character strengths, represent a focus on future aims, and are directly related to having a sense of purpose. Overall, the strongest sources of hope expressed across the focus groups were friends, family, and community—specifically being supported or involved in community. There was awareness of the inter relationship between substance use and a sense of hope or hopelessness as well as the impact of feeling undervalued. The attitudes and language of the general population plays a role in encouraging or discouraging young adults.

“Support from my family, friends [is] a huge source of hope; seeing others get through hard times gives you hope.”

PERCEPTION OF SUBSTANCE MISUSE

Attitudes and perception of substances as a problem in the community may predict rates of actual use by young adults. For example, a theme that came from the focus groups was that binge drinking is very common and generally accepted on college campuses while, comparatively, it was less socially acceptable in the general community. This is reflected in the actual rates of binge drinking by college-going young adults, which were higher than their non-college working peers. It was broadly recognized that drinking has become normalized and there is a lack of understanding about binge drinking and the consequences. It was expressed that it is easier to find a party than a healthy activity. The primary concern among young adults is the rise in heroin use and how it is reaching into younger generations because it is cheap, very easy to access, and becoming normalized. Discussions also focused on the role stigma plays in help seeking behaviors. As one participant stated, “some people are too embarrassed to get help. Asking for help would disclose their problems.”

“Drinking isn't that much of a problem, it's the heroin. It's ok to drink, but if you are drinking every day, then that is too much. Most of the people I know just party on weekends. They are hung over; it's just what happens.”

SUBSTANCE USE

New Hampshire's young adults reported higher rates of binge drinking in the past 30 days than the Northeast region or the country as a whole (*NSDUH 2014*). Over a third of the survey respondents indicated they had binged on alcohol, smoked tobacco, and/or used marijuana in the past month. However, about half of the young adults surveyed stated that they have not misused alcohol, used tobacco, marijuana, cocaine, club drugs, or prescription drugs without a doctor's orders in the past month.

“I think [young adults] are so glad to get away from their families, and all the rules, that they overdo it and just let go.”

The young adults concur that workplace culture can strongly influence the substance use among their working peers. Similarly college students may be at higher risk for substance use and misuse due to their affiliation with college parties, fraternities, or athletics. It is essential to consider the various lifestyle choices that young adults make—such as starting a family, going to college, relocating away from family and friends—when developing strategies to address substance misuse.

“Most would consider themselves social drinkers because they only drink with their friends. But, that means everyone is a social drinker here at [my college].”

CONSEQUENCES OF SUBSTANCE MISUSE

Understanding young adults' perception of the risk of harm as well as their awareness of the consequences of substance misuse is central to developing strategies and policies that directly respond to the population most at risk. The participants indicated that they are attuned to the consequences. Being exposed to misuse directly and seeing the impact on others was a deterrent for many. They are aware of the impact on job access and opportunities and on social relationships.

Alcohol use is still seen as a rite of passage, but there is a line they don't want to cross. Sixty percent (59.8%) perceive moderate or great risk of binge drinking once or twice a week. Nearly ninety percent (87.8%) perceive moderate or great risk from using prescription drugs without a doctor's orders.

"Everyone knows someone who has died of an overdose. Dealers are greedy and are cutting heroin with other drugs. Friends are losing everything, going to jail, and dying. An addict's personality changes and they lie and steal from the people they love the most."

STRESS COPING MECHANISMS

Stressors are highly present within the lives of today's young adults, and each individual—not just young adults—has his or her own stress threshold as well as their own strategies and coping mechanisms for being able to effectively and safely cope with this stress. Awareness about the relationship between stress and substance use was expressed by the focus group participants. Substance use was often referred to as a means of escape as pressures increase during the transition after high school.

One-quarter (25%) of the survey respondents indicated that they felt sad or hopeless in the past year, and 12.5% said they seriously considered suicide. Substance use/misuse is a method of personal protection from external stressors, and it was suggested that prevention messaging that emphasizes coping mechanisms start and well before high school.

"In the collegiate atmosphere, substances are used and abused for many reasons. Although it might make sense to take something to stay up later or to focus more intensely, this abuse is detrimental to the mind, body, and spirit of anyone involved. There must be a way to encourage students and educators to provide work, complete work, and assess work in a more relaxed tone. Life is too precious for all of this stress that leads some students to use and abuse substances."

COMMUNICATION APPROACHES

Communication among peers and parents is essential in promoting shared thoughts, ideas, and knowledge among the youth and young adults. By encouraging open communication among young adults, this creates positive relationship building and understanding within families and communities at large. In the era of fast and modern technology, youth and young adults are more connected with peers, friends, and family through social media and texting. The majority of the young adults communicate with peers and parents using social media, texting, and face-to-face. The findings of the focus groups indicated that New Hampshire young adults prefer using social media and texting while engaging with their friends, and family communication usually relies more on in-person conversations. One person stated simply, "*My mom likes calls.*"

"I think this [survey] was a good idea, I'm glad the ad was put on Facebook because I think a lot of young adults still use it. I don't know if there is any sort of focus group or face to face portion of this, but I think young adults would also enjoy open discussion about the topic."

“When we first got away with drinking or using drugs and we did not die, we began to think that everything else we were told about alcohol and drugs did not apply to us. I got an A+ on a test after smoking marijuana; I felt like I was in control.”

KEY STRATEGIES

According to the Substance Abuse Mental Health and Services Administration (SAMHSA), New Hampshire residents aged 18–25 reported the highest rates in past month of illicit drug use than any other state (*SAMHSA Behavioral Health Barometer, NH, 2014*). The participants discussed key strategies and proposed recommendations to address the substance use epidemic in the State. Below is a list of suggestions and ideas to consider from the participants as the State embarks on strategic planning to address substance misuse among emerging and young adults.

1. Education should start early and information about other drugs, in addition to alcohol, should be provided.
2. Avoid fear-based messaging and mixed prevention messages (you will become an addict or die if you use) which conflict with their actual experience (it wasn't that bad).
3. Mental health and coping with stress should be part of the curriculum.
4. Peer-to-peer messages are perceived to be more effective and to have greatest impact.
5. Stigma prevents communications, strains relationships, and creates psychological burden preventing help seeking, treatment, and recovery.
6. There is a need for a comprehensive approach and collective response.

7. Young adults are more trusting of medical providers due to confidentiality laws and are not as willing to talk with family because they do not want to let them down.
8. Young adults are encouraged that law enforcement are shifting to help them rather than prosecute them.
9. They want to see real effort from state/ local government and to feel that they are working for the “common man.”
10. Include young adults in the decision-making and planning process.

“[I am] Glad these (focus) groups exist, educating, helping. It's wicked important to feel like my opinion matters. I can give the inside perspective; I don't have to lie.”

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