

Developing a Workforce to Support Prevention Efforts and Strengthen Communities: Why and How to do it

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 September 2025

◆ Background & Impacts



In recent years, policymakers have increasingly recognized the value of policies that **prevent harmful behaviors**—like substance misuse, criminal activity, and mental health challenges—**before they take root**. In other words, **prevention efforts address challenges early**.



Prevention **strengthens communities by promoting safety, health, and economic opportunity**, rather than absorbing the high social and financial costs of incarceration or long-term treatment and recovery.



Prevention is also fiscally responsible: **preventing problems saves taxpayers significantly more** than responding after the harm has been done. While appropriate treatment and corrections remain necessary for those already affected, making prevention a priority will create healthier communities, reduce long-term costs, and build a stronger future for the state.



However, to reap these benefits, local communities need a well-trained prevention workforce with the professional skills required to effectively deliver prevention programs. Decades of research inform best practices for creating a skilled, supported, and coordinated prevention system that delivers results.

◆ Steps for Creating an Effective Prevention Workforce

Continue for 7 actionable steps to support Prevention in our communities.



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◆ Step 1 - Define the Mission

Use [needs assessments](#) to clearly define what “prevention” means for individual communities (e.g., substance abuse prevention, violence prevention, etc.).

Identify evidence-based programs to address communities’ specific needs.

◆ Step 2 - Find the Right People

There are many different roles that prevention professionals can have, including **program managers, program implementers, evaluators, and community liaisons**.

Identify current staff with relevant backgrounds in **public health, education, social services, or community organizing**. If those individuals are not already in place, hire staff with those backgrounds or train existing staff accordingly.

◆ Step 3 - Provide Specialized Training

Types of Training: Provide training to staff on capacity building, evidence-based prevention strategies, program planning and implementation, program evaluation, data analysis, community engagement, grant writing and administration, and program sustainability.

Include ongoing professional development to keep up with evolving best practices in prevention, similar to requirements for teachers and healthcare providers. Training options can range in intensity and include:

- Formal certification
- Ongoing professional development
- Training on evidence-based curricula

Training Providers: There are a variety of providers for initial training, continuing education, and technical assistance.

Nationally, there are certification options through [Prevention Technology Transfer Centers](#), [CADCA](#), and the [International Certification & Reciprocity Consortium \(IC&RC\)](#).

Within a state, practitioners can explore options such as those provided by university partnerships, state health departments, and local coalitions.

◆ Step 4 - Build Collaborative Networks

[Build prevention coalitions](#) to increase workforce capacity and share resources.

Connect prevention workers with schools, families, law enforcement, healthcare providers, faith organizations, and local businesses.

◆ Step 5 - Ensure Sustained Funding

Leverage Short-Term Grants Strategically: Use pilot grants to establish program feasibility and demonstrate initial success in affecting short-term outcomes, including improvements in school absenteeism, risk-taking, and attitudes.

Establish Multi-Year Funding Commitments: Recognize that prevention programming requires time to show full impact—initial investments protect against far costlier interventions later.

Implement 3-to-5-year funding commitments that allow programs to build capacity, retain expertise, and demonstrate success in affecting long-term outcomes, including improved health, reduced substance misuse and violence, and financial benefits.

Integrate Prevention into Core Budget Infrastructure: Treat prevention as essential infrastructure, similar to public safety or transportation investments. Consider including prevention workforce and evidence-based programs as dedicated line items in state and local budgets, and/or creating funding mechanisms that survive political transitions and budget cycles.

◆ Step 6 - Evaluate for Accountability

[Track outcomes](#) and monitor [fidelity](#) to ensure programs are working as intended and are serving the appropriate population. Adjust as needed based on data. [Celebrate successes](#) to maintain workforce morale and public support.

◆ Step 7 - Support Workforce Well-Being

Prevention work can be emotionally demanding; support employees by offering peer support groups, reasonable workloads, and competitive salaries. Recognize and reward achievements to reduce burnout and retain talent.

Supporting the prevention workforce will strengthen community resilience by addressing substance misuse, mental health challenges, and related issues before they escalate. It will foster healthier, safer environments where individuals and families can thrive, reducing long-term social and economic costs. Ultimately, investing in prevention professionals will empower communities to build a stronger, more connected, and sustainable future for all.

◆ Additional Resources

Prevention support services: <https://www.chhs.colostate.edu/prc/our-services/>

Research-to-practice tools: <https://www.chhs.colostate.edu/prc/implementation-toolbox/prc-tools/>

Other resources: <https://www.chhs.colostate.edu/prc/implementation-toolbox/resources/>



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