

February 22, 2021

Dear Middlebury Selectboard,

United Way of Addison County (UWAC) has been the recipient of both State and Federal youth substance use prevention grants since 2016. Since that time, we've been working with community leaders to decrease risk factors that lead to an increased likelihood of adolescent substance use and increase protective factors that make it easy for local youth to make healthy choices.

The intent of this letter is to provide the selectboard and interested community members with the data we have been keeping an eye on since starting this work and to answer some of the questions we've been fielding from Middlebury residents and organizations.

Q. Does UWAC have a stance on the upcoming vote?

A. No. Our Prevention Team is available to Addison County as a resource, funded by a Drug Free Communities Support Program grant (administered by the Center for Disease Control and Prevention) and a Partnership for Success grant (administered by the Substance Abuse & Mental Health Services Administration). We rely on best practices and data from these funders to prioritize public health on a local level, specifically as it relates to preventing youth substance use.

Q. Will introducing a cannabis market increase youth substance use in Addison County?

A. We don't know yet. While some [studies](#) suggest states that have introduced a cannabis market will not see an increase in youth substance use, many experts (including UVM Child Psychiatrist Dr. David Rettew) have noted that there [isn't enough data](#) to support these predictions. Many states that currently have or are considering a retail cannabis market [started with higher rates of youth marijuana use and lower perceptions of risk](#). Dr. Rettew noted in his linked presentation that this is expected to contribute to a slower reported change in youth use (because use is already high). Addison County has some of the highest youth substance use rates in the state ([2019 VT Youth Risk Behavior Survey](#)) and some of the lowest reported perceived risks (with only 28% of Addison County 12th graders reporting that it is wrong or very wrong for someone their age to use marijuana compared to 40% of 12th graders in Chittenden County). Based on all of this, it seems unlikely Addison County would see an *immediate* sharp increase in youth use rates because they're already relatively high.

Q. There is [so much conflicting information out there about youth use rates](#). What indicators should we be paying attention to?

A. Risk factors. [The best indicators we have for future youth substance use are risk and protective factors](#). We know that as risk factors (like low perception of risk, ease of access, and low parental disapproval) fluctuate, youth use fluctuates over time as well. Data is limited

because of the low number of states with retail cannabis, but [California](#), [Colorado](#), and [Washington State](#) have seen an increase in youth reporting risk factors (lower perception of parental disapproval and lower perception of risk of use). In Addison County, 73% of students grades 9-12 report their parents would feel it is wrong or very wrong for a student to use marijuana, which is two percent lower than the Vermont average than the state average (75%) ([2019 YRBS](#)). Statewide youth reported parental perceptions towards adolescent marijuana use has been declining since 2009 (88% in 2009 and 75% in 2019) according to [2019 VT YRBS](#). As these numbers go down, the likelihood of increased youth substance use goes up.

Q. Is there anything more we should know?

A. Our Prevention Team is here for the long haul! While questions about retail cannabis are top of mind right now, we have a lot of other work ahead of us. According to the 2016/2017 [National Survey on Drug Use and Health](#), Vermont drug and alcohol use among 18-25 year olds, ranked the state #1 in illicit drug use (past 30 days), #1 in marijuana use (past year), #1 cocaine use (past year), #1 in alcohol use (past 30 days), #3 in binge alcohol use (30 days), and #2 in marijuana use (past year). [In 2019](#) the survey ranked past month marijuana use among Vermont adolescents (12-17 yrs old) higher than the regional (10.8%) and national average (6.8%) with a reported 14.5%. Our goal is to reduce these numbers, understanding that if we do, we'll see positive outcomes in the health, education, and financial stability of every person in Addison County!

Communities who work collaboratively at prioritizing public health and who [implement policies](#) that promote wellness and safety are more likely to see a decrease in youth substance use, an increase in perceived risks of adolescent drug use, and increased likelihood of positive outcomes. Our Prevention Team is here to help!

With gratitude,

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