



How the Current Policy Landscape Can Facilitate an Earlier and Broader Approach to Prevention

Linda Richter, PhD

Vice President, Prevention Research and Analysis

Traditional focus of prevention efforts

The goal of prevention is to mitigate **risk factors** and strengthen **protective factors** within the **individual, family, and community**

Yet, traditional approaches largely:

- Target the child, ***not parents, schools, and communities***
- Focus on risk, ***not on promoting health and resilience***
- Begin in adolescence, ***not early childhood when the roots of risk and resilience are planted***
- Address a small portion of relevant factors, ***not the broader social determinants of risk and protection***

A broader approach to bolster traditional efforts

Building on research on **social determinants of health** and **adverse childhood experiences (ACEs)**, a broader approach to prevention enhances traditional interventions by **supporting families:**

- **Family** stability, security, & functioning
- **Parenting** skills & support
- **Child** resilience, opportunities, & well-being

Family

Income, food,
housing, healthcare
stability & security

Improved functioning
to reduce domestic
violence, separation,
divorce

Accessible &
effective treatment
for mental illness &
addiction

Parents

Communication and
monitoring skills

Reduced modeling of
substance misuse &
child exposure to
addictive substances

Skills and support to
prevent child abuse &
neglect

Children

Mental & behavioral
health, resilience

Physical health, nutrition,
exercise

Peer & adult relationships

Connection to school &
community

Sense of hope &
opportunities for the future

What it will take

Structural changes that facilitate **healthy and stable families** by:

- Ensuring income, food, housing, healthcare **stability** and **security**
- Offering **quality childcare** and **paid family leave** to reduce family stress
- Increasing **access to affordable and quality treatment** so that children grow up in a household unscarred by addiction and mental illness
- Supporting parents to improve **parenting skills**
- Nurturing **childhood health, education, resilience, and hope** through community, school, and home safety, connections, and opportunities

Seems daunting, but current policy initiatives can help

Recent and proposed **federal policies** – addressing the opioid epidemic (e.g., CARA, CURES, SUPPORT), COVID relief (e.g., CARES, CAA, ARP), and through the proposed Build Back Better Act – **present an unprecedented opportunity** to boost existing prevention efforts by investing in structural changes to the **earlier and broader determinants** of risk and protection

Examples of policies to improve family stability and security

Family income, food, housing, healthcare stability and security:

- Enhanced child & dependent care tax credit (ARP)
- Child care and development block grants (CARES, CAA, ARP)
- Child nutrition programs (CARES, CAA)
- Homeless assistance grants (CARES, CAA, ARP)
- Expanded Medicaid coverage (ARP)

Improved family functioning

- Family violence prevention and services (CARES, CAA, ARP)

Treatment for mental illness and addiction

- Community mental health services block grant (CAA, ARP)
- Substance abuse prevention and treatment block grants (CAA, ARP)
- Parity enforcement (CAA)

Improved parenting skills

- Maternal, infant, and early childhood home visiting program (CAA, ARP)



Examples of policies to improve child health and resilience

Child health, education, and opportunities:

- Elementary and secondary school emergency relief fund (CARES, ARP, CAA)
- Project AWARE - school-based mental health services (CAA, ARP)
- Community mental health services block grant (ARP)
- Suicide prevention programs (ARP, CAA)
- Social-emotional learning (SEL) initiative (CAA)
- Pediatric mental health care access program (ARP)
- Head Start (CARES, ARP, CAA)
- Preschool development grants (CAA)
- Child nutrition programs; SNAP; WIC (CARES, ARP, CAA)

Monitor and affirm effects on youth substance use risk

- Expand reporting requirements in grants and programs funded through these policies to **monitor and evaluate** the longer-term impact on youth substance use and addiction risk
- Help **establish an evidence base** for expanding traditional prevention efforts to include social determinants of risk and protection
- **Break down silos** and **encourage collaboration** between substance use prevention and other fields that promote childhood health and resilience

By intervening earlier and more broadly, we can promote child health, prevent youth substance use and addiction, avoid future drug epidemics, and reduce the damaging consequences of addictive substances on future generations