

conversation starters

WINTER 2026

The newsletter of PreventEd

Sticking to Our Roots

By Jenny Armbruster



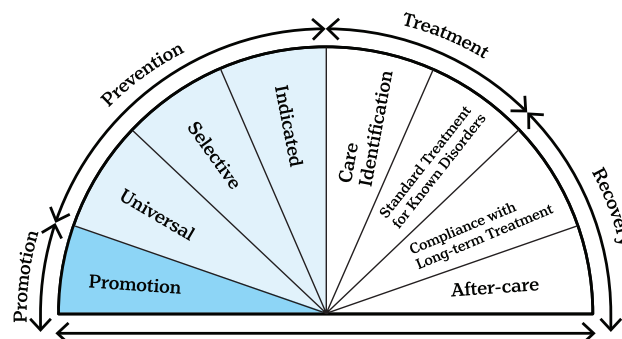
Jenny Armbruster
Executive Director

PreventEd is rooted in PREVENTION. For decades we have been focused on how to prevent the potential harms and consequences of substance use. While the term prevention can be applied across many areas of the substance use continuum, when we generally talk about prevention we are referring to upstream prevention services. Often this can get lost in the conversation as death

prevention, recurrence prevention or other strategies. The Institute of Medicine provides a framework for the continuum of substance use that highlights the role of prevention. So, what is really meant by primary prevention?

When we describe upstream universal prevention services, these are school-based lessons delivered in classroom settings grades K-12. We are not only teaching students resiliency skills to assist in managing relationships and feelings, but also knowledge and skills that are substance specific. This includes education on brain science and the impact of substances on the brain, along with how this impact is more profound for a young, developing brain. The skills learned with this information can be skills on engaging in supportive conversations with a friend or how to identify when someone may be experiencing challenges. In programs like Teen Mental Health First Aid, high school students are taught how to respond when they recognize another young person shows signs of mental health crisis. These universal strategies are sharing the same or similar information with a group of people—a classroom, a grade level or even in a community. PreventEd's community prevention education and coalition work also fall in this category. Our support of local, grassroots efforts supports entire communities to help reduce youth substance use and provide positive protective factors.

Selective prevention strategies typically are programs or supports that are provided to people that may have other risk factors increasing their potential risks of facing challenges with substance use. This may include students that are facing academic or disciplinary consequences at school, or young



people whose families have a history of substance use disorders. PreventEd offers some limited education programs to higher risk populations. These presentations follow the same principles as universal presentations, focusing on the brain science and health impacts of substances while empowering people to recognize signs and symptoms of concerning substance use.

The third category of prevention programs, indicated prevention, applies to early intervention programs that work with individuals who have engaged in risky behaviors, but do not meet criteria for treatment services. These indication prevention services aim to interrupt the progression of development of a substance use disorder. PreventEd's GuidEd program provides this support to young people and their families through individual sessions and educational workshops.

These variety of prevention programs all have the same goals—preventing substance misuse among young people and helping to create stronger communities. PreventEd tracks data and outcomes for all of our prevention programs measuring knowledge gained and changes in behaviors when possible. Prevention is a long game though, often the program's results are not truly realized until years later when there is a reduction in substance use disorder. Prevention requires patience and ongoing investment. Parts of all these programs were potentially impacted in January when the federal government agency, SAMHSA, briefly terminated grant funding. Thankfully the funding was restored, but it reminds us that these programs can face disruption and that disruption has immediate and long-term consequences. For primary prevention programs to remain impactful, we cannot slow down and we must continue to focus on the long-term outcomes. This is what creates sustainable changes in our communities. 🍃

A Life-Saving Training for Teens is in Jeopardy

By Stacie Zellin



Stacie Zellin
Community Strategist III

In conversations around substance use, it is very likely that the topic of mental health becomes part of the discussion. PreventEd recognizes the profound extent to which substance use and mental health are connected, and that is why we also provide teen Mental Health First Aid Trainings (tMHFA). Developed by the National Council for Mental Wellbeing, tMHFA teaches high school students how to identify, understand, and respond to

signs of mental illnesses and substance use disorders among their friends and peers, and then gives students the skills to have supportive conversations with their friends, and get a responsible and trusted adult to take over as necessary.

The call for an adolescent peer-to-

“
Before we begin, I wanted to thank you for coming in. Without these seminars I wouldn't have been able to save my friend. She almost died.

peer training has grown, especially in light of data that tell us that teens are most likely to tell a friend if they are in distress.

PreventEd was proud to be among the first organizations in the country to implement tMHFA, and we successfully trained our first cohort of 11th graders at Northwest High School in 2019 as a part the tMFHA pilot program. When PreventEd was awarded a Mental Health Awareness Training (MHAT) grant via SAMHSA in 2022, the funding was instrumental in helping PreventEd grow tMHFA programming in the St. Louis area. In the 2025-2026 school year, PreventEd has brought tMHFA to 10 schools across 5 counties in the St. Louis region, and trained approximately 3,000 students. Unfortunately, this was the same funding that was abruptly terminated without reason, along with thousands of other SAMHSA grants, in January. The loss of this funding immediately jeopardized the tMHFA programs scheduled for the Spring semester. PreventEd was then glad to learn that the decision to terminate these SAMHSA grants was quickly reversed, but the lapse certainly caused disruption and confusion for our programs and school partners.



More than 100 St. Louis Asian American high school students have been certified through the tMHFA program

Ironically, the day before PreventEd received notice of the grant termination, a staff member shared the following quotes from students she was with that morning:

“Before we begin, I wanted to thank you for coming in. Without these seminars I wouldn't have been able to save my friend. She almost died.”

“I talked to my dad about this program last night, and he said it sounded like it's improving my mental health.”

An unofficial motto of PreventEd is that “we make it work.” Although the funding landscape is very much becoming more challenging, we are working to discover and determine funding paths and puzzle pieces so that these valuable, life-saving programs can continue. In the meantime, we are appreciative of all the individuals and organizations appealing to our local, state, and federal legislators and advocating for stability and continuity for substance use and mental health funding.



UPCOMING TRAININGS

Please visit our website for the most up-to-date event information and registration: prevented.org/events

A Message from Our New Board Chair, Leah Picker



Leah Picker
Board President

Ray Glaser Photography

It is an honor to step into the role of Board Chair at PreventEd, an organization whose mission I admire. I joined the PreventEd Board in 2019 because I wanted to engage more deeply with my community, especially through an organization that resonates personally and meaningfully. Like many, I've seen how substance misuse can affect loved ones. It was through my connections at PreventEd that helped my family navigate

a crisis during a weekend in March of 2023 and allowed a loved one to begin their sobriety journey. This moment amongst others often lead me to reflect: if they had known about or been exposed to PreventEd's resources sooner, could their paths have been different?. This question fuels me to contribute to the organization's work.

What keeps me energized as a board member is the organization's passion and willingness to evolve. PreventEd listens and adapts to the needs of youth and adults, and brings evidence-based programming into schools, neighborhoods, and conversations that

matter. The team – staff to leadership – show up every day with creativity, authenticity, and genuine care. Their work doesn't just change individual lives; it builds healthier communities.

As Board Chair, my goal is simple: to amplify the organization's impact and help ensure PreventEd's services and resources are available to a growing number of people across St. Louis and our surrounding communities.

One thing is clear, as recent as last month, we are entering a new period of funding and resource shifts. We will be leaning on our communities for support more than ever before. I invite you to join us—whether by supporting PreventEd's efforts through direct funding, or sharing our mission with others. I'm excited to partner with fellow board members, staff, volunteers, and supporters as we continue this important work.

Thank you for welcoming me into this role. I look forward to what we will achieve together. 🍷



WE NEED YOUR SUPPORT.

Scan to donate to PreventEd to ensure that our community with continue to have access to our services during this time of uncertainty.



GuidEd by the Numbers

PreventEd's GuidEd Program offers comprehensive screenings, educational workshops, and individual sessions for young people up to age 19 and their families. Thanks to generous funding from foundations and donors, there is no charge for PreventEd's GuidEd Program.

2025 GUIDED OUTCOMES

94%

of GuidEd clients who were referred to treatment or other resources followed up on the recommendation

96%

of GuidEd clients successfully abstained from substance use since their last visit with their counselor

138

GuidEd clients served last year

88%

of GuidEd clients report that they are working hard to change their drinking and drug use



Poster Contest

Cannabis Prevention Through Creative Expression

PreventEd and In The Weeds are hosting a Cannabis Prevention Poster Competition for high school students in the Metro St. Louis Region. The challenge is to create a poster that uses one of several pre-approved facts or statistics about cannabis prevention to spread awareness.

This is a great chance for teens to use their creativity for a positive cause—while also earning recognition and prizes.

Submissions are due March 6th. Scan the QR code for more information!

WHY PARTICIPATE?

- Compete for a cash prize
- The winning design will be featured in a community-wide awareness campaign (social media, schools, and more)
- Have fun and highlight your work in the community!

“

I no longer want to touch a vape or weed. We don't fully know what it will do to us and I knew that before, but I didn't realize it till now. I feel like I knew this already, but this program has helped me come to realization.

- GUIDED PARTICIPANT, 15 YEARS OLD (2025)





52nd Annual PreventEd Spring Awards Luncheon

PreventEd's 52nd Annual Spring Awards Luncheon is scheduled to take place on Friday, April 24, 2026, at the LiUNA Event Center. This event aligns with Alcohol and Drug Awareness month, serving as a testament to five decades of unwavering commitment in combating substance use disorder in the St. Louis Region. We will honor individuals, organizations, and community partners who have played pivotal roles in shaping a substance-free community. It's a great way to recognize many dedicated and accomplished substance use professionals for all their hard work! Our keynote speaker is St. Louis-based musician and owner of Steve's Hot Dogs, Steve Ewing.

SPONSORSHIP OPPORTUNITIES

We invite organizations and individuals to become sponsors, contributing to the success of this momentous event. Various sponsorship levels are available, each offering unique benefits, including VIP tables, prominent ad placements, and recognition across all media platforms. Your support will not only highlight your commitment to a substance-free community but also position your brand prominently in front of a diverse and engaged audience.

HELEN B. MADDEN NOMINATIONS

The Helen B. Madden Award is given to individuals in the seven county region of Eastern Missouri (St. Louis City, St. Louis County, St. Charles, Jefferson, Franklin, Lincoln, and Warren counties) working professionally in the counseling, Certified Peer Specialist (CPS), Certified Alcohol and Drug Counseling (CADC) or related fields addressing and treating substance use disorders. **Do you know someone who deserves recognition for exemplary work in the field of alcohol and drug misuse? If so, let us know! Nominations are due by March 13th.** 📩



**Scan the QR code for sponsorship inquiries,
ticket purchases, and Helen B. Madden nominations!**