



Virginia Family Impact Seminars

**SUBSTANCE ABUSE PREVENTION:
POLICIES, PROGRAMS AND STRATEGIES
FOR VIRGINIA'S YOUTH**

Executive Summary

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Center for Public Policy
Virginia Commonwealth University
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Focus on Substance Abuse Prevention for Youth

The VAFIS evaluations from last year's seminar included a list of potential topics for this seminar. The majority of attendees indicated a preference for a focus on substance abuse prevention, particularly for Virginia's youth (12-17).

Several important questions to consider about youth substance abuse include:

- Are there common characteristics of youth and adolescent substance abusers that might lead policy makers to tailor programs to specific needs?
- What are the effects of youth substance abuse on our communities?
- What youth substance abuse prevention programs work for Virginia's youth and their families?
- Are there policy strategies that have been successful that are realistic in times of fiscal stress?

Mitigating the Costs of Substance Abuse in Virginia (JLARC Rept. 372, 2008)

House Joint Resolution 683 and Senate Joint Resolution 395 from the 2007 General Assembly directed JLARC staff to study the impact of substance abuse on the State and localities.

JLARC staff found that the adverse effects of substance abuse cost the State and local governments at least \$613 million in 2006, incurred primarily in public safety. To mitigate these effects, the State and localities spent \$102 million providing substance abuse services. Most populations that completed substance abuse treatment imposed lower net costs on the State and localities, and the majority experienced better outcomes.

Still, the benefits of substance abuse treatment are not maximized because many Virginians do not seek services, are unable to access them, or do not receive services that are proven effective and best meet their needs. In addition, the majority of offenders do not appear to receive the substance abuse treatment they need despite imposing the greatest costs. To further reduce the costs of drug and alcohol abuse, the State could ensure that existing services are effective, and then consider expanding the availability of substance abuse services.

The National Survey on Drug Use and Health, published by the federal government is quoted as stating the following:

- Recent studies indicate that each class of drugs has a different trajectory from first use to cessation of use, continuation of use without dependence, or dependence upon the drug.
- Illicit drugs refer to marijuana/hashish, cocaine (including crack), inhalants, hallucinogens, heroin, or prescription-type drugs used non-medically.

Three important studies have been conducted in the Commonwealth that together give a picture of the state of youth illicit substance use and dependence. From the Epidemiological Profile conducted by the Governor's Office of Substance Abuse Prevention study (p. 27-33) we learn that,

- One in five 8th graders in Virginia report alcohol use, one in three 10th graders, and one in two 12th graders report alcohol use in the past 30 days.
- One in seven 8th graders, one in five 10th graders, and one in eight 12th graders report marijuana use within the past thirty days.
 - Virginia's current marijuana use by 10th graders continued its upward trend to 20%, compared with the decreasing national rate of use (15.2%).
 - Also, the percent of Virginia 8th graders who report current marijuana use more than doubled from 2000 (6.5%) to 2005 (14.6%).

From the Joint Audit and Legislative Research Commission we learn that "Most populations that completed substance abuse treatment imposed lower net costs on the State and localities, and the majority experienced better outcomes (JLARC, House Document No. 18, 2008.)

We learn from our speakers that there are a number of evidenced-based programs that have demonstrated their program- and cost-effectiveness over the years, and that the cost to youth, their families and the State is less than the lifetime cost of illicit substance dependence.

References:

JLARC House Document No. 19, accessed from <http://jlarc.state.va.us>
On 8/14/09

GOSAP, "An Epidemiological Profile: Substance Abuse in the Commonwealth of Virginia," pp. 27-33, accessed from
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OAS/SAMHSA, National Survey on Drug Use and Health, March 27, 2008
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