



# Center for Health & Safety Culture

## Alaska Wellness Coalition Positive Community Norms Executive Summary

by

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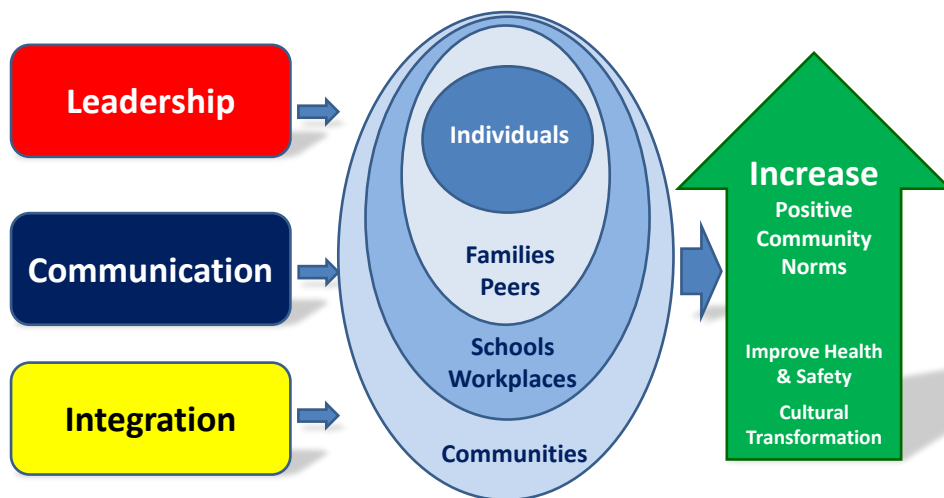
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## OVERVIEW

The Center for Health and Safety Culture at Montana State University provided Guide Service to the Alaska Wellness Coalition (AWC) beginning on July 1, 2014 and ending on June 30, 2015. The goal of this effort was to guide AWC member coalitions in the implementation of the 7-step Positive Community Norms (PCN) process, and to assist these coalitions in their efforts to prepare for a state-wide underage drinking campaign highlighting positive norms of Alaska youth.

The Positive Community Norms Framework, as shown in Figure 1, fosters a cultural approach by recognizing that many different layers in the social environment of a community (Figure 2) impact its culture. It is not enough just to focus on one layer; instead efforts must address all layers to successfully improve health and safety. When all layers share values, beliefs and attitudes, a healthier and safe culture emerges and is sustained over time.



*Figure 1. Positive Community Norms Framework*

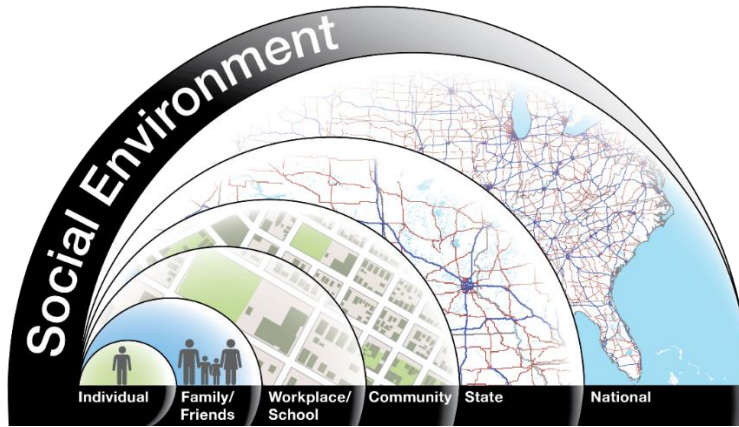


Figure 2. Social Environment Impacting Underage Drinking

The Framework also provides a detailed 7-step process (see Figure 3) to improve health and safety using a cultural approach. Critical to the framework is building skills to successfully navigate these steps. Skills are needed in leadership, communication, and the integration of multiple effective strategies. These steps and skills are applied across the layers within the community (i.e., the social environment also called the social ecology) to achieve changes that result in long-term sustainability. This Executive Summary will highlight efforts relating to each of the three skills, the work completed across the social ecology, and within each of the seven steps of the PCN process.



Figure 3. Positive Community Norms Framework 7-Step Process

## Summary

Significant progress transpired within member coalitions of the Alaska Wellness Coalition between 2014 and 2015. With the mission of reducing underage drinking among youth, communities cultivated local conditions in which prevention efforts were more likely to launch and be sustained. Community coordinators organized and increased the capacity of key stakeholders; engaged in strategic planning processes to ensure priority issues were the focus; assessed local and state data sets; assessed current prevention efforts to ensure there was no duplication of services; planned local communication efforts; pilot tested state-wide communications; and prepared their coalitions with the skills necessary to hear and steer the conversation inspired by the state-wide underage drinking campaign. If prevention efforts across the social ecology continue in future years, transformation of Alaska's culture surrounding underage drinking is likely.

## Introduction

The Alaska Wellness Coalition, assembled in 2010, works to improve the health and wellness of Alaskans. The group's mission is to network local and regional health and wellness alliances through information sharing of state and local data, evidence-based programming, best practices, strategic prevention, current health trends, funding opportunities, and statewide advocacy for health promotion. A significant endeavor of the AWC in 2014-2015 was the development of a state-wide media campaign aimed at reducing underage drinking by highlighting the positive behaviors of youth across the state. With guidance from the Center for Health and Safety Culture at Montana State University, significant progress was witnessed in the preparation of this prevention effort.

The following information is based upon Guide Service provided to eight communities working within the Alaska Wellness Coalition from July 1, 2014 to June 30, 2015. Each community was offered Guide Service in the form of monthly phone calls and email conversations as needed. Some communities engaged fully, using the Guide Service each month, while others only connected periodically. The following communities' efforts are incorporated into this report:

- Anchorage
- Fairbanks
- Homer
- Ketchikan
- Kodiak
- Mat-Su
- Petersburg
- Seward

## Working Across the Social Ecology

In order to truly impact our community's culture, we must work at many levels within the social ecology that surround our focus audience (in this case, underage youth). These levels include: individual, family/peer, workplace/school, community, and society. The examples below showcase local prevention coalitions' efforts to reduce underage drinking across the social ecology.

### **Individual**

- Increased the capacity of local prevention coordinators and coalition members through training (PCN training, Substance Abuse Prevention Specialist Training, Coalition Academy, etc.)

### **Family/Peer**

- Engaged in strategies to increase parent and family involvement in efforts to reduce underage drinking by promoting protective behaviors such as monitoring, restricting access, family rules, etc.

### **Workplace/School**

- Reviewed school health education curricula to ensure substance abuse prevention was incorporated according to state health education standards

### **Community**

- Implemented a social host policy to reduce the number of adult providers of alcohol to youth

## **Leadership Skills**

As practitioners seeking to improve health and safety in our communities, we are leading people to make healthier, safer choices. In this way, our work of improving health and safety is an act of leadership. Successful leaders know they cannot force people to make these decisions. Rather, effective leaders must create the conditions where people choose to be healthier and safer. The following examples illustrate how communities across Alaska grew leadership within prevention leaders, coalition members, and among other stakeholders as well.

- Increased capacity through training of adults and youth
  - Positive Community Norms
  - CADCA Coalition Academy
  - Substance Abuse Prevention Specialist Training (SAPST)
  - Prevention basics
  - [Be You] Campaign presentations
- Established and reviewed the important role of coalition members
- Established a shared purpose among coalition members in order to work together more productively
- Weathered transitions in coalition leadership, as well as, reductions in funding
- Engaged in discussions about sustainability after funding ends

## **Communication Skills**

Communication is a critical tool for teaching, correcting misperceptions, and closing gaps. Communication helps a community better understand an issue, learn how to behave in safer and healthier ways, and gain a better understanding of the positive norms that exist in their community. It is through communication that we tell a new story about our community and its

health and safety norms. It is through this new story that the health behaviors we are seeking can become a part of the culture.

A large focus of the AWC was the implementation of a state-wide media campaign to reduce underage drinking. Communities worked diligently to prepare their local environments for the discussions sparked from campaign messaging. Figure 4 represents the steps that some communities engaged in to prepare for the media campaign.



*Figure 4. Positive Community Norms 7-Step Communication Process*

The following are examples of community prevention efforts aligning with the PCN framework provided by prevention coordinators:

- Gathered key stakeholders to help reduce underage drinking
- Prepared coalitions with education and talking points to hear and steer the messages released with the state-wide media campaign
- Assessed community data sets to determine if local statistics could be used rather than state-wide statistics
- Previous communication efforts helped familiarize local coalitions for the state-wide campaign launch
  - Media campaigns to increase awareness
  - Social norms marketing campaigns
  - Photo Voice
  - Digital Story Telling
- Worked to develop local communication plans to work in conjunction with the state-wide campaign
- Pilot tested state-wide messages with local youth to determine if messages were relevant, attractive, and understandable
- Engaged in campaign awareness efforts at the local level to determine if media efforts reached dosage levels necessary to shift perceptions among youth

## Integration of Prevention Strategies

Mapping a Strategy Portfolio: In each community, there are a multitude of strategies and efforts that address our issues. As prevention leaders, we need to actively engage in strategically managing the allocation of resources for these strategies and efforts. The first step is to develop a clear understanding of all the current strategies and efforts, or to develop a map of our Strategy Portfolio. A few of the AWC coalitions effectively mapped their strategy portfolio and used it to guide prevention discussions throughout their region.

Integration across Prevention Portfolio: Once we have a clear understanding of our Prevention Portfolio, we seek to integrate efforts to avoid situations where strategies may be in conflict, and look for opportunities for collaboration and synergy. The examples below represent opportunities for alignment of current prevention efforts.

- Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACES) Initiatives
- Childhood resiliency
- Community/youth mental health efforts
- Bullying prevention
- Suicide prevention
- Tobacco prevention
- Marijuana legalization and community impacts
- Teen courts
- Social Host Policy
- Alcohol Sales Surveys
- Alcohol compliance checks
- Responsible Beverage Server Training
- Efforts to increase evidence-based curricula within schools

## PCN Step 1 – Plan and Advocate

A local individual, agency, or coalition provides leadership in planning the process outlined in the remaining steps, and advocacy to bring together the key stakeholders. Steps 2 – 7 require engagement by a broad array of stakeholders representing both public and private entities across the social ecology. The AWC coalitions engaged in Step 1 work throughout the entirety of the Guide Service contract. They made great progress in establishing prevention partners, increasing prevention capacity of others, and strategic planning to outline future priorities and goals.

- Integrated work of preventing underage drinking with existing wellness coalition efforts
- Built strong prevention coordinators to lead coalitions
- Strengthened connections with, and increased the capacity of important stakeholders
  - Youth groups
  - Schools
    - Association of Alaska School Boards
    - Superintendents

- Discipline Directors
  - Health Directors
  - School staff
  - Students
- Local elected officials
- Law enforcement
- Media
- Business
- Healthcare
- Native American associations
- Civic Groups (Rotary, etc.)
- Faith groups
- Youth serving organizations
- Military
- Engaged in strategic planning processes to prioritize issues and increase effectiveness
- Developed PCN educational materials to build the capacity of coalition members
- Developed local work plans to reduce underage drinking (and related substance use)

## **PCN Step 2 – Assess Cultures**

Each of the many layers of community have both common and unique values, beliefs, and actions. An assessment of these levels will reveal baseline measures and opportunities to foster alignment as well as gaps needing to be addressed. Assessing culture includes measuring actual and perceived norms as well as mapping existing strategies. The following are examples of efforts relating to the assessment of local cultures:

- Prepared coalitions to discuss local data in relation to state-wide messaging
- Advocated for higher returns of active consent forms from parents
- Gathered local data
  - Community health assessments
  - Stakeholder interviews
  - Hospital admission data
  - Alaska Trauma Registry
  - School Climate and Connectedness Survey
  - Alaska Youth Risk Behavior Survey
  - Alaska Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System
  - Healthy AK 2020
  - Community readiness assessments
  - Law enforcement data
  - Coast Guard data
- Reviewed local data to determine if participation rates were high enough for local messaging
- Prepared stakeholders to discuss local data, as well as, the validity and reliability of the data set



### **PCN Step 3 – Align Purpose and Prioritize Opportunities**

The assessment of the cultures among the many layers of the community will reveal common themes which can align strategies around a common purpose. This common purpose will foster engagement. Furthermore, the assessment will reveal critical gaps in strategies and misperceptions about beliefs and behaviors that inform communication efforts and the selection of strategies. Due to the short duration of this project and the pressing timeline for the media campaign, Step 3 efforts were not discussed during monthly phone calls. The AWC Executive Committee, however, was engaging in this step to inform the state-wide media campaign messaging, as well as, other prevention initiatives.

### **PCN Step 4 – Develop a Portfolio of Strategies**

Based on the prioritization of opportunities completed in Step 3, a portfolio of strategies can be developed appropriate for different levels of the social ecology. Each strategy should be based on the best available science regarding effectiveness and outcomes. Several of the AWC coalitions had existing work plans prior to engaging in Guide Service. These plans detailed the prevention strategies they were implementing to reduce underage drinking and other substance use. The focus of the Guide Service shifted to the area of highest need, the implementation of the state-wide campaign to reduce underage drinking.

### **PCN Step 5 – Pilot Test and Refine**

To make best use of limited resources and optimize outcomes, strategies should be piloted and refined before seeking system-wide implementation. Communication messages should be piloted with stakeholders and focus audiences prior to broad release in campaigns. A few of the local coalitions had the opportunity to engage in the pilot testing of the state-wide Be [You] materials. Feedback was provided to Northwest Strategies to incorporate into media production.

### **PCN Step 6 – Implementation**

Once refined after piloting, strategies should be implemented broadly across the community with ongoing monitoring and evaluation. Communication campaigns are used as a catalyst to cultivate transformation, engage new stakeholders, and initiate new strategies. As the Guide Service contract ended, the state-wide media campaign launched. Communities were beginning to hear and see the messages locally, and were readying their coalitions and stakeholders for conversations sparked from the media.

## **PCN Step 7 – Evaluate Effectiveness and Needs**

Evaluation will facilitate ongoing effectiveness and inform future needs. The process of cultural transformation is never complete; with every cycle, new opportunities to improve health and safety will be revealed and inform future efforts. Evaluation services were provided to the Alaska Wellness Coalition by another contractor.

## **Conclusion**

Coalitions associated with the Alaska Wellness Coalition are poised to reduce underage drinking at a local level if they continue with the progress witnessed between 2014-2015. Key infrastructural shifts have taken place to ensure the right stakeholders are involved and have the capacity to engage in prevention initiatives. Using the state-wide media campaign as a platform for discussions regarding the implementation of strategies across the social ecology will be critical to the transformation of underage drinking across the state.