



2008 Data Project Summary July 10, 2009

The Mat-Su Substance Abuse Prevention Coalition (MSAPC) completed its first data project in April 2009. The data project was planned by the Data Committee and conducted by the Co-Occurring Disorders Institute (CODI) through a grant from the Mat-Su Health Foundation. The MSAPC has since analyzed the results and drawn several conclusions as starting points for the development of a borough-wide plan to address substance abuse in the Mat-Su Valley. MSAPC wishes to acknowledge the assistance of various stakeholder groups interviewed and those that participated in the survey conducted by the United Way of Mat-Su (school groups, law enforcement, treatment/medical providers, and the faith-based community). Their insights and observations were incorporated into this summary. Finally, the MSAPC would like to thank the youth that participated in the Alaska Healthy Kids Survey for making this project so informative and useful in our planning.

Alaska ranks number 2 in the U.S. for illicit drug use (2007, National Survey on Drug Use and Health) and #6 in the U.S. for binge drinking (2007, CDC, BFFSS) among adults. This significant pattern is reflected in the rates of substance use among youth in the Mat-Su Valley. In many of the categories of use, the youth in the Valley reported above state averages and national averages. Substance abuse and use trends will undoubtedly change throughout the years. The Mat Su Substance Abuse Prevention Coalition will continue to track usage, trends and respond to these changes.

The 2008 Data Project Report includes data reported into three distinct sections on the Alaska Healthy Kids Survey: Substance Use, Correlates, and Positive Assets. The following includes key findings from those sections:

1. Substance Use

- Mat-Su youth are using a variety of substances and the reported usage is, in most cases, above state and national averages.
 - Examples include: Smokeless tobacco (p. 29), 30 Day Binge Drinking for 11th grade students (p. 39), Marijuana for 11th grade students (p. 41, p. 44), Inhalants (p. 46, p. 49), Methamphetamine (p. 51, p. 53), Cocaine (p. 55-56), Heroin (p. 58) and Ecstasy (p. 61, p. 65).

2. Correlates

This section examined behaviors and attitudes that are associated with substance use.

- Age at First Use: the majority of students initiated their first use of substances between the ages of 11 and 14 (p.79).

- Access: the majority of students report that alcohol, tobacco and marijuana are easy to get (p. 97-100).
- Messages: the majority of parents are talking to their kids about drugs (p. 111) and the majority of students reported seeing anti-drug messages on TV (p. 112).

3. Assets

This section examined the presence of resilience, protective factors and positive assets in youth that are associated with a decrease in risky behavior.

- Positive assets: youth reported high expectations from adults at home (p. 142), caring adults at home (p. 142), feeling connected to school (p. 141), caring adults in the community (p. 144), high expectations from adults in community (p.144), caring peers (p. 146) and goals/aspirations (p. 148).
- Needing improvement: youth reported low views of meaningful participation with adults at school (p. 140), in the community (p. 145) and at home (p.143).

The Mat Su Substance Abuse Prevention Coalition’s review of the data report includes the following conclusions:

Conclusion #1 Youth involvement with substance abuse starts at an early age; well before high school.

Conclusion # 2 Caring relationships, high expectations and meaningful participation with adults are all strongly associated with external assets for youth.

Many individuals and groups may want to specifically attempt to “fix” a particular area of substance abuse. In MSAPC’s purview, MSAPC is committed to focus on the “root causes” of the problem and create strategies address those root causes. MSAPC recommends the following priorities for future Coalition activities and developing the basic community plan:

Priority # 1 Increase meaningful adult and community involvement towards at-risk youth.

Priority # 2 Increase parental involvement in prevention and early intervention measures in the Mat-Su community

Priority #3 Reduce access to substances.

Priority #4 Increase community awareness of issues.

Priority #5 Develop and implement a community plan to address and prevent substance abuse.

In conclusion, MSAPC believes it takes all members of the community working together to affect real, culturally-relevant change in our youth.