



Prevention works.  
Treatment is effective.  
People recover.

While 2022 felt like a year of rebuilding, 2023 has been a year of momentum. In DSU's Annual Overview, we share the priorities that guide our work, our year's accomplishments and our continued commitment to closing gaps in substance use service access, quality and outcomes for all Vermonters.

Our efforts to establish, enhance and expand prevention, harm-reduction, treatment and recovery services to equitably meet the needs of Vermonters are data-informed and responsive to changing landscapes and new opportunities. Expansions to services covered by Medicaid (1115 Waiver) and allowances for contingency management to improve treatment adherence are on the horizon for improving our treatment system. The new Vermont Prevention Lead Organization regional structure will provide coordination of prevention services in the state. To address the nationwide labor shortage continuing to impact the substance use disorder field, DSU is participating in a federal learning collaborative.

This year, I have stepped into the role of Division Director for DSU after almost 3 decades at the Health Department. I am eager to continue to strengthen the continuum of care alongside the dedicated staff at DSU and partner organizations across the state.



**EMILY TRUTOR**  
**DSU DIVISION DIRECTOR**

## **Introducing our new director, Emily Trutor!**

Emily started her journey with the Vermont Department of Health as an administrator in 1996. During her 28-year tenure with the Department, Emily has led the evolution and enhancement of operations, programs and systems to help DSU work better for Vermonters.

Emily's intimate understanding of the division's resources, operations and programming and long-established relationships within the department, across the agency and among substance use disorder partners in the system of care has her well-situated to lead DSU's priorities to provide comprehensive, inclusive, accessible, compassionate and supportive care to our community.



**DSU DIVISION DIRECTOR,**  
**EMILY TRUTOR**

# Division of Substance Use program priorities

Our mission is to prevent, reduce and eliminate the problems associated with alcohol and other drug use. By working in partnership with other public and private organizations, we plan, support and evaluate a comprehensive system of services. Our work is guided by priorities that help us move closer to our mission and are based on the principles that substance use disorder is a health issue that requires a holistic, person-centered, data-driven approach over the long-term.



## Priorities:



Close gaps in service access, quality, and outcomes



Strengthen public information and messaging to reach high need audiences



Invest in prevention services that build community capacity and connection



Increase capacity of treatment system to treat substance use disorder & co occurring disorders



Incorporate harm reduction practices into service provision



Invest in recovery supports in the community



Enhance internal and external workforce using evidence-based recruitment, professional development, and retention strategies & improve efficiency of operation



Throughout this document, you will see this information icon. Click it to access more detail on the topic.

Learn more at [HealthVermont.gov/DSU](https://HealthVermont.gov/DSU)



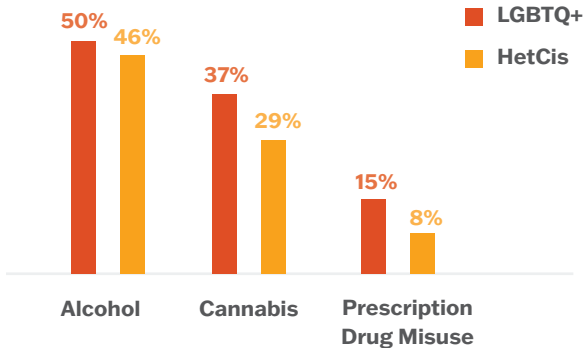
# Close gaps in service access, quality and outcomes

## LGBTQ+ youth

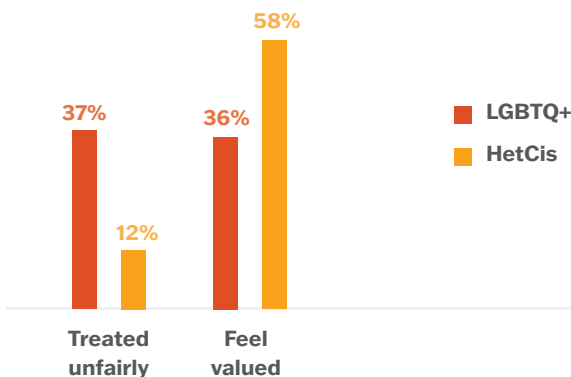
LGBTQ+ youth in Vermont report higher rates of substance use and feelings of disconnectedness from their community. (**Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS)**)

We teamed up with **Outright Vermont** to host a webinar for community prevention organizations to explore collaborating with Gender and Sexuality Alliance (GSA) student groups to support LGBTQ+ youth.

## Lifetime use



## Community connectedness



**LGBTQ+:** Transgender, lesbian, gay, bisexual, other sexual orientation, and questioning or unsure if they are transgender  
**HetCis:** Heterosexual and cisgender  
 Source: **Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS)**

## Communities vulnerable to substance use

To better understand how **VT Helplink**, Vermont’s alcohol and drug support center, was reaching communities vulnerable to substance use due to unfair marginalization, we conducted an equity assessment to learn from the people we are trying to reach. Key themes will inform enhancements to better serve more Vermonters, including:

- Community and social connection
- Holistic and collaborative system of care
- Case management and navigation of services
- Awareness of VT Helplink as a resource
- Tailored services considering race, sexuality, language and socio-economic status to increase access and remove bias

“For me to be vulnerable enough to share my story or my needs takes a lot. Having to be vulnerable in that way with white folks, and folks that do not have an understanding of white supremacy or privilege is hard. Sometimes what I receive is actually more damaging than if I didn’t get the resources at all.”

**BIPOC FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANT**



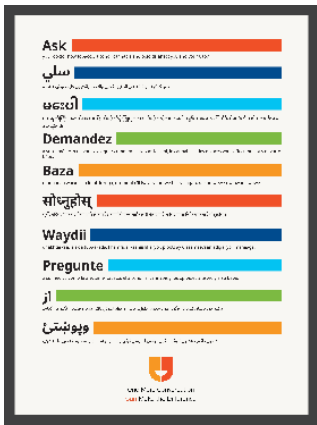
# Strengthen public information and messaging to reach high need audiences

## Perinatal Vermonters

**One More Conversation**, encouraging health care providers and perinatal patients to discuss substance use, developed a poster with 10 languages to support patients who speak languages other than English.



One More Conversation  
Can Make the Difference



## Overdose Prevention

During the summer, when opioid overdose tends to increase, **KnowOD** provided tips on how to reduce and reverse overdose, while **VT Helplink** promoted access to resources like naloxone and fentanyl test strips.

We shared findings from our harm-reduction research related to opioid use as part of the **KnowOD** campaign at the **National Conference on Health Communication, Marketing & Media**. This campaign has been an effective strategy for educating young adults on the risks of procuring and using opioids in social settings.

## Cannabis education

A new **Let's Talk Cannabis** video was developed to provide information about the health impacts of cannabis use and Vermont's cannabis laws.



ALMOST

# 976 thousand

CLICKS, VIDEO VIEWS, AND ENGAGEMENTS FROM STRATEGIC KNOWOD AD PLACEMENTS.

# 3,655 new visitors

TO [KNOWODVT.COM](https://www.knowodvt.com) DUE TO CAMPAIGN MESSAGING, EXCEEDING BENCHMARK GOALS.



# Invest in prevention services that build community capacity and connection

## Youth prevention programming

### Vaping

We teamed up with the Health Department's Division of Health Promotion and Disease Prevention to support community organizations addressing cannabis and nicotine vaping by youth 21 and younger.

- In the first year, vaping prevention education reached 161k+ youth.

### Junior Teen Institute (JTI)

We supported middle school students interested in attending the Vermont Junior Teen Institute, a weekend of youth leadership workshops.

### School grants

21 school districts and supervisory unions were granted funding to provide substance use prevention, education and early intervention services

 [Learn more about our community grants and school prevention programs](#)

## Drug disposal

Our drug disposal program continues to provide Vermonters with easy, free and convenient ways to safely get rid of unused and unneeded medication.

 [Learn more about our drug disposal program](#)

### Kiosks

- 27k lbs of medication disposed of through community kiosks.

### National Take Back Day


- 64 locations around the state participated, collecting over 2k lbs of medication.

### Mail-back envelopes

- Over 4,300 mail-back envelopes have been ordered for free by Vermonters.
- Vermonters can now order free mail-back envelopes through [VT Helplink](#).
- We teamed up with the Department of Disabilities, Aging and Independent Living to provide free mail-back envelopes with “Meals on Wheels”.

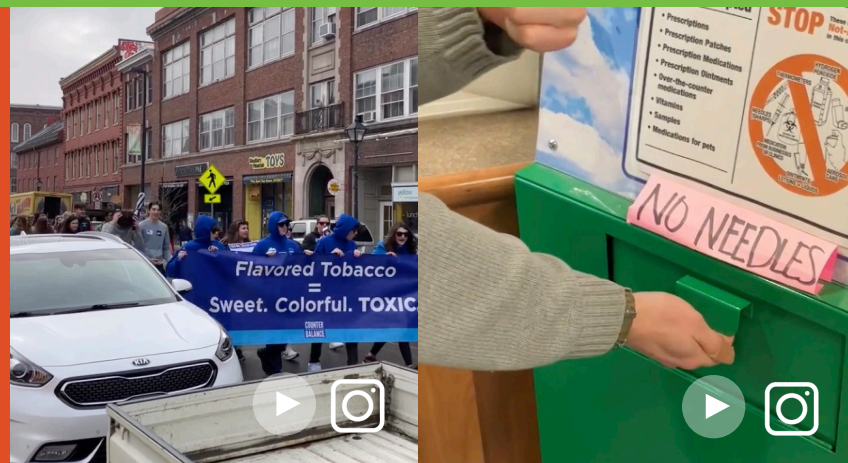
## Did you know...?

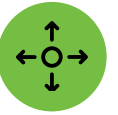
To optimize regional assets, the new Vermont Prevention Lead Organization (VPLO) structure is a regional approach to coordinating prevention strategies in Vermont.

 [Learn more](#) about the VPLO.

**Over 100 people participated** in Prevention Day at the Capitol Plaza in Montpelier on April 6th. Join us next year!

APRIL 3 2024





# Increase capacity of treatment system to treat substance use disorder & co-occurring disorders



**VT Helplink** continues to provide alcohol and other drug support and referral. Vermonters can now access free naloxone, fentanyl test strips and mail-back envelopes through the support center.

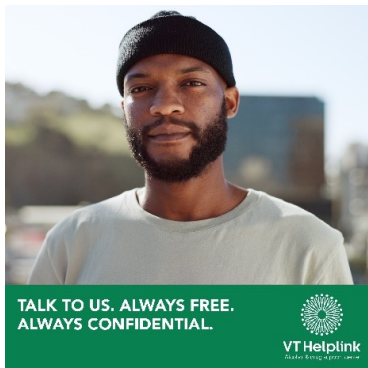
In one year VT Helplink received:

- 1,000+ calls and online chats
- 28k+ website visits

Of the people who call or visit VT Helplink:

- 52% indicate alcohol use as the primary substance of concern
- 26% indicate opioid use
- 12% indicate stimulant use

 [Learn more about VT Helplink](#)



## Preferred Treatment Providers

We **certify and evaluate** substance use disorder treatment providers to ensure quality of evidenced-based care. Services provided include inpatient, outpatient, medication for opioid use disorder (MOUD), school-based, individual, group and family to meet the varying needs of Vermonters.

## Alcohol use

Alcohol-attributable deaths and years of potential life lost each increased by 36% between 2017 and 2021. (**Alcohol-related deaths among Vermonters**)

Vermont older adults report using alcohol at significantly higher rates than the US. (**Alcohol use among older adults**)

## Stimulant Use

More Vermonters are being diagnosed with stimulant use disorder. (**Stimulant misuse in Vermont**)

- Stimulant use among Vermont high schoolers has decreased.
- Hospital visits related to stimulant use have increased.
- Fatal drug overdoses involving stimulants have increased.
- More people are seeking treatment for stimulants.

alcohol use disorder


IS THE MOST COMMON SUBSTANCE USE DISORDER IN VERMONT.

24%

OF OLDER ADULTS REPORT AT-RISK DRINKING.

## Did you know...?

We are working with treatment providers to accommodate Vermont's new Medicaid 1115 waiver expansion that allows more treatment services than ever to be covered by Medicaid.

 [Learn more](#) about the system of care enhancements.



## Incorporate

# harm reduction practice into service provision

### Overdose prevention

#### Naloxone distribution

We work the Health Department's Division of Emergency Preparedness, Response and Injury Prevention to support community **naloxone (Narcan®) distribution** through three programs: Narcan® Kit, Harm Reduction Pack and First Responder Leave Behind Kit. (**Naloxone Distribution and Administration 2022 Annual Report**). Vermonters can also now order Narcan® by **mail**.



[Learn more about our naloxone distribution program](#)

#### **Community naloxone and EMS naloxone distribution and administration quarterly reports:**

- The Health Department distributed 68,827 doses of naloxone through the Narcan® Kit and Harm Reduction Pack programs.
- Community naloxone was reported to reverse 152 overdoses.
- EMS administered naloxone to 886 patients.
- EMS documented distributing 577 naloxone Leave Behind Kits to patients and their families.

### CDC's Overdose Data to Action (OD2A) grant

We implement, support and track opioid overdose prevention activities through this federal grant, such as:

- Syringe Services Program (SSP) case management
- Training for first responders
- Opioid prescribing tracking
- Naloxone distribution and training
- **KnowOD** messaging
- **Social Autopsy Report**

### Social Autopsy Report

Findings from this report indicate that Vermonters who died of an overdose were more likely to work in construction than any other industry. To address this, the Division of Emergency Preparedness and Injury Prevention teamed up with the Association of General Contractors to provide opioid and suicide prevention education and resources.



[Learn more about our Overdose Data to Action grant activities](#)

61%  
overdose

FATALITIES WERE AT HOME OR AT A FRIEND'S HOME, SHOWING HOW IMPORTANT IT IS FOR LOVED ONES TO CARRY NALOXONE. (2020)

152  
overdose reversals

WERE ATTRIBUTED TO NALOXONE DISTRIBUTED TO THE COMMUNITY.





## Vermont has the highest prevalence of cannabis use in the U.S. (Cannabis data report)

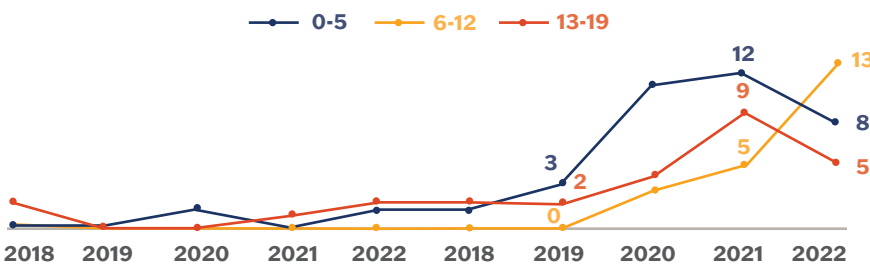
- Hospitalizations and emergency department visits associated with cannabis use have increased.
- Poison center calls related to cannabis exposure increased.

### Beyond substance use

Vermont’s substance use disorder services are an access point to other services and supports.

Sexual and domestic violence resources were included with Harm Reduction Packs (HRP) by Turning Point Center of Bennington. Through this distribution method at least 8 women who were victims of human trafficking reached out for assistance noting that they had received the information from a HRP.

### Cannabis-related calls to the Northern New England Poison Center have increased for Vermont children ages 6-12.



### Responsible cannabis use

We purchased 3,000 lockable storage bags to be distributed, free of charge, through select cannabis retailers, which include information on keeping children and pets safe by properly storing cannabis with links to [Healthy at Home](#).

# 4,600+

PEOPLE CONNECTED WITH SYRINGE SERVICES PROGRAMS' OUTREACH WORKERS, 1,200+ OF WHOM HAD NEVER UTILIZED THESE SERVICES BEFORE.

### Did you know...?

We have a comprehensive approach to addressing opioid and stimulant use.



**Learn more** about our opioid and stimulant response initiatives.



# Invest in recovery supports in the community

Oct 2022 – Sept 2023

- 1,600+ Vermonters connected with Recovery Coaches in Emergency Departments across the state
- 1,300+ parents in recovery received family-focused recovery coaching

## Recovery Coaching

Recovery Coaches are people in recovery, allies, or family members who have been trained to guide a person on their path to recovery.



[Learn more about recovery coaching](#)

We funded wrap-around recovery services for people needing transportation and housing assistance:

- 1,500+ rides to recovery related activities
- 1,500+ rides to employment
- 120+ vouchers for recovery housing (Oct. 2022 - Sept. 2023)



[Learn more](#) about recovery housing



During the summer's flooding, organizations providing substance use services throughout the state were able to continue to provide services, with the exception of one location in Barre where flooding was significant. DSU also teamed up with the Health Department's Division of Emergency Preparedness, Response and Injury Prevention to provide access to Narcan® and other resources in areas most impacted by flooding.



# Enhance workforce using evidence-based recruitment, professional development, and retention strategies

## Trainings & Learning Collaboratives

**1,712**  
participants

**96%**  
of participants reported increased knowledge/skill

**700**  
participants in 9 advanced opioid use disorder learning collaboratives

**59**  
Vermonters were given scholarships to attend the New England School of Addiction and Prevention Studies and the New England School of Best Practices in Addiction Treatment

**15**  
case managers, nurses and physicians working in the Department of Corrections facilities were trained on medication for opioid use disorder (MOUD)

**26**  
Vermont State University clinical **mental health counseling master's program** students were trained on Vermont's substance use disorder system of care

We are dedicated to supporting system-wide recruitment, retention and professional development enhancements to ensure people who are experiencing, or at risk of, substance use disorder have access to care that is staffed with a highly skilled workforce.

We are developing training to support helping people adhere to treatment through motivational contingency management.

## Workforce Development Calendar

Find trainings, conferences and other learning opportunities for the substance use field.

[HealthVermont.gov/  
SubstanceUseWorkforce](https://www.healthvermont.gov/substanceuseworkforce)



[Learn more about our workforce development activities](#)

ALMOST 400 UNIQUE GRANT AGREEMENTS IN PLACE WITH COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS, SPENDING

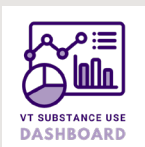
**\$56,000,000+**

TO PROVIDE SUBSTANCE USE SERVICES ACROSS THE STATE.

**89** core competency trainings supported

EXAMPLES: CANNABIS USE AND POTENTIAL RISKS FOR YOUTH, SUBSTANCE-INDUCED PSYCHOSIS, FOUNDATIONS OF WORKING WITH YOUTH, MOTIVATIONAL INTERVIEWING, CLINICAL SUPERVISION, AND RECOVERY COACH ACADEMIES

# Informing strategies with data



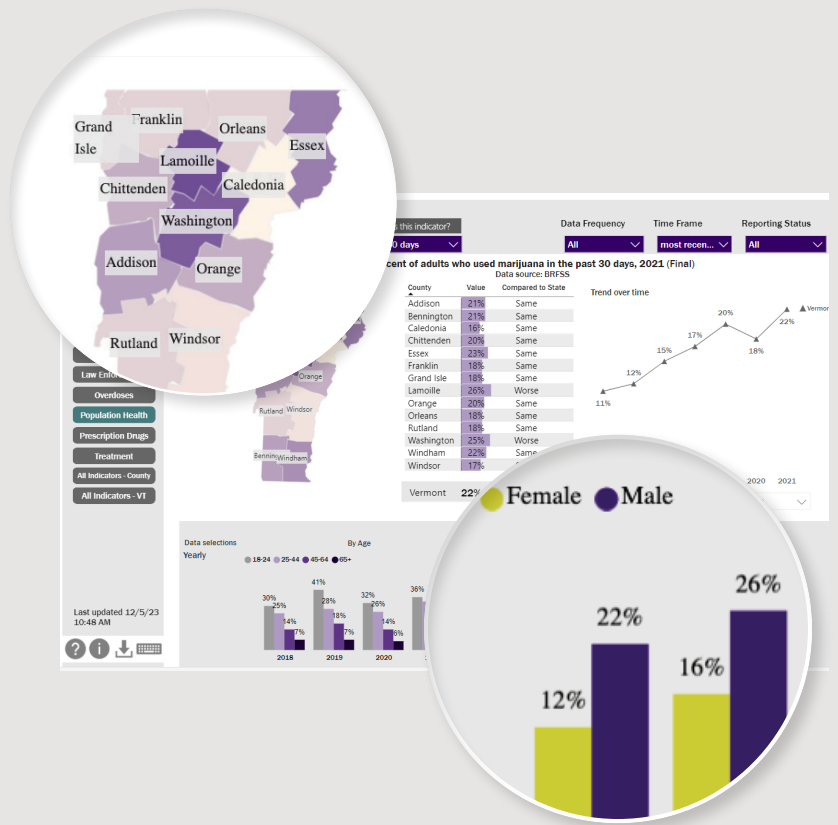
## New Substance Use Dashboard

The dashboard displays current and historical state and county-level data on a range of substance use indicators from multiple data sources. Its interactive layout can be used to inform and support prevention, treatment and recovery community-level substance use initiatives. [HealthVermont.gov/DSUDashboard](https://HealthVermont.gov/DSUDashboard).



## Substance Use Data & Reports

Find data briefs, reports, assessments, evaluations, survey results and other publications on alcohol, opioids, cannabis and overall substance use in Vermont—and analyses that inform and evaluate our efforts on addressing substance use.



### Connecting you to the services you need.

If you or a loved one is struggling with alcohol or drug use, visit

[VTHelplink.org](https://VTHelplink.org)  
or call 802-565-LINK for free and confidential help.

For more information, visit [HealthVermont.gov/DSU](https://HealthVermont.gov/DSU)

### WE MOVED!

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