



National Prevention Science Coalition

to improve lives

The National Prevention Science Coalition to Improve Lives (NPSC) was formed as a vehicle to facilitate the use of prevention science findings and evidence-based practices to improve social conditions that otherwise contribute to poor mental, behavioral and physical health. The NPSC is composed of over 700 scientists (representing over 75 universities and organizations), educators, clinicians, practitioners, communications specialists, policymakers and advocates. Domains of interest include inequalities and disparities, mental health, substance misuse, poverty, juvenile justice, child development and welfare, violence, and police-community relations, just to name a few.

Over the past 30 years, prevention science has identified key environmental and social factors that harm wellbeing, along with several programs, practices, and policies shown to reduce harm. The Institute of Medicine issued a report in 2009 about what prevention science has achieved. It noted that society now has the knowledge to ensure that virtually every young person arrives at adulthood with the skills, interests, values, and health habits they need to lead productive lives in caring relationships with others. We created the NPSC to help convey this knowledge into the public arena.

Effective strategies for preventing behavioral and health problems come from the accumulated research about the risk factors that lead to problems, and the protective factors that prevent them. Prominent among these risk factors are deleterious environmental conditions such as poverty, economic inequality, and discrimination, conditions that increase stress, conflict, and coercive relationships. Neuroscience, epigenetics and behavioral science converge in showing that stress and conflict contribute to the development of most of the psychological and behavioral problems that reduce quality of life and contribute directly to inflammatory processes that lead to poor health and premature death.

With this knowledge, prevention scientists developed programs and policies to prevent multiple problems. At least 16 family-based programs have been shown to significantly improve the quality of family life and prevent many problems (e.g., antisocial behavior, anxiety, depression, alcohol and other substance misuse, risky sexual behavior, school absences, and academic performance). Numerous tested and effective school-based interventions can prevent multiple problems, from early childhood into adulthood. In addition, more than 40 policies have proven benefits in increasing families' economic and social stability.

Extensive analyses of the costs and benefits of these programs indicate that most cost far less than reactive approaches and they save in reduced healthcare, criminal justice, and educational costs, and in increased income to recipients. And perhaps of greatest importance is the potential for the principles that underlie effective interventions, once infused into our mindsets and daily practices, to have an enduring impact on subsequent generations.

We know the science exists to improve lives on a population level. The challenge is to make this knowledge accessible to the public, as well as to policymakers and administrators in federal, state, and municipal agencies that can use it to improve public policy. Few are aware of the wealth of rigorous and replicated research findings generated by prevention science. The NPSC is committed to informing policymakers and the public about the need to widely implement effective preventive interventions and fully embrace their principles by applying them in our daily interactions with children and youth.

NPSC Closes the Gaps

NPSC addresses the major obstacles that often discourage policymakers from drawing on prevention science to formulate effective policies. Major barriers include:

- Research on prevention science is captured in academic journals where findings are presented in technical language. NPSC educates policymakers and the public through user-friendly briefings, policy papers, Op-Eds, fact sheets, and other means that make research accessible;
- The volume and complexity of new research is daunting. NPSC helps policymakers to distill and analyze key research, making it relevant to conditions in the districts they represent or regions over which they have jurisdiction;
- Policy makers lack access to scientists and researchers who can interpret new research on prevention science and draw connections to public policy. NPSC members include internationally prominent experts on the prevention of all of the most common and costly problems. We make ourselves available to policy makers and their staff for consultation and advice;
- Members of Congress and their staff lack personal relationships with researchers, which studies have found is an impediment to the use of research by policymakers. NPSC works to promote relationships between policy makers and researchers based on mutual trust and respect;

- Research findings often remain in single domains such as neuroscience or social psychology. NPSC grants policy makers access to multidisciplinary teams who can draw on various fields of study, analyze the best data, and make recommendations to strengthen specific policy proposals; and
- Policy makers have limited access to objective, non-partisan sources of information and analysis on policy. Policymakers embrace NPSC as a source of nonpartisan information and advice which is transparent, honest, impartial, and free of any preconceived policy agenda.
- There are many settings that present opportunities for “knowledge mobilization”, one of three key goals for the NPSC. We offer resources, informational materials, and expertise to school districts, community groups and stakeholders, primary care settings, foundations, and others that play a role in the nurturance of our children and youth.

Accomplishments

Since its creation in 2013, the NPSC has made significant progress in advancing the case for prevention. It has:

- Created a coalition of more than 50 nationally prominent organizations to promote prevention. A list of these organizations is available at <http://www.npscoalition.org/affiliations>.
- Provided training to increase the capacity of NPSC members and scientists to advocate for prevention. We conduct workshops and provide information for their use in developing connections.
- Hosted more than 18 Congressional briefings. In 2017, topics included the prevention of violence against women, childhood poverty, home visiting, police-community relations, budgeting for evidence-based prevention, and the prevention of human trafficking. Visit <http://www.npscoalition.org/congressional-briefings> for a complete list of topics.
- Published numerous essays in outlets such as the *New York Times*, *Huffington Post*, *Baltimore Sun*, *JAMA*, *This View of Life*, and others, plus scholarly papers and books designed to promote greater use of prevention science.
- Provided consultation and technical assistance to the federal Evidence-Based Policy Making Commission and to state and local governments and healthcare and human services agencies regarding implementation of evidence-based prevention.

Strengthening Our Impact

Scientific evidence of what works holds the key to preventing problems that can ruin lives and devastate communities. Prevention science, which aims to eliminate problems before they take root, has the ability to place children and youth on the track to lead productive and healthy lives. The extensive expertise of NPSC members across multiple disciplines enables us to advise foundations and policymakers regarding implementation of effective practices and policies with potential to prevent the entire range of psychological and behavioral problems. However, we lack the resources to fully execute our educational, advocacy, and communication strategies. We are now seeking funding to expand our efforts to:

- Increase staff time to respond to policymakers’ requests for information and advisory at the national level.
- Provide training for prevention scientists to educate policymakers and the public.
- Build coalitions, partnerships, and relationships with organizations, stakeholders, and end-users to increase impact and sustainability of preventative solutions.
- Create model legislation to reduce exposure to adverse social determinants of behavioral health problems informed by evidence from prevention science.
- Replicate model programs that have established an infrastructure for the systematic diffusion of evidence-based practices on state and local levels.
- Increase our capacity to communicate with nonscientific audiences about the potential of prevention science to improve lives.

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