

*NEW HAMPSHIRE  
GOVERNOR'S YOUTH  
ADVISORY COUNCIL ON  
SUBSTANCE MISUSE AND  
PREVENTION*

2019-2020

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# *INTRODUCTION*

*(WHO WE ARE, A LOOK INTO OUR YEAR, AND OUR  
GOALS FOR THIS YEAR)*

## WHO WE ARE:

The New Hampshire Governor's Youth Advisory Council on Substance Misuse and Prevention (GYAC) was created in 2017 by Governor Christopher T. Sununu. The council serves to offer a youth perspective on the substance misuse crisis in the state and to advise the Governor on relevant issues, such as prescription drug abuse and JUULing. The importance of the voices of youth when approaching such issues cannot be understated. After all, it is the youth who know the habits and minds of their peers best and who are best equipped to reach out to them. This is pivotal when it comes to prevention, but also in identifying problems among youth that are exacerbating the crisis. There are currently fourteen members on GYAC. They are Kaycee Reagan (Chair), Jeffrey Lam (Vice Chair), Grace Lunney (Secretary), Aron Silvestre (Executive Council), Elsa Rogers (Executive Council), Eve Hodgdon (Executive Council), Jayda Bogert, Kayla Bogert, Taryn Fox, Madison Hemingway, Quincy Roy, Evan Piette, Issac Piette, and Kimiya Parker-Hill. Our membership comes from as far North as Littleton and as far South as Nashua.

## OUR YEAR SO FAR:

This year, the Council has focused on the importance of community in fighting this crisis. In doing so, the members have made connections with similarly-goaled institutions and coalitions in their communities. The purpose of this is to spread the work we are doing and to help the members learn more about the specific issues facing their communities, so they can better represent them on the Council. A portion of every meeting is dedicated to discussing these pivotal communications. The Council has also been working with the Legislative Youth Advisory Council of New Hampshire to follow bills related to substance misuse, so that they may advocate for them when they reach the Governor's desk.

## GOALS FOR THIS YEAR:

The current council has centered its work around ideals of education, advocacy, and community partnerships. Because of this, much of their work so far has been in their communities.

Individual members have been reaching out to local coalitions and groups to raise awareness to the issue of substance misuse. This helps the communities and the Council, as we are able to learn more about the needs and cultures of our respective communities, while also expressing our concerns and spreading our message. Through their engagement and discussions, the Council has noticed a lack of education regarding the resources available in the state, especially those for youth. As a result, they have decided to take on the project of creating a youth-specific resource guide. Additionally, they have decided to use their voices as members of the Council to advocate for legislation pertinent to their mission. To do this, they have been working with the Legislative Youth Advisory Council to track and research legislation, which GYAC will advocate for when it reaches the Governor's desk. GYAC is working to become a more active and engaged group. With the help of local and state-wide resources and partners, we hope to spread our message and goals to create a drug-free New Hampshire.

#### COVID-19 UPDATE:

Due to the COVID-19 crisis, the issues that GYAC highlighted months ago to be pertinent and concerning have suddenly become immediate causes of concern. COVID-19 has fundamentally changed the way we live our lives and, because of it, we have seen a change in the support systems and resources youth rely on. Due to an overwhelming amount of free time and increased feelings of isolation and anxiety, the members of the Council have seen an increase in the number of teens who misuse substances. In wake of social distancing, the Council wishes to bring to light the ways in which teens have been impacted by COVID, as we have found that it correlates heavily to the issues we discussed.

As a council we believe that the mental health of our youth is the most pressing cause for concern as their mental well-being has been heavily impacted by social isolation. Because students are no longer in school or their activities, they are no longer able to frequently interact with the adults and friends who supported them in these environments. The loss of their support systems has led to many teens feeling lonely and depressed. This is a time where we are less connected than ever and it has become hard for youth to reach out and get the support and help they need. Additionally, they have been cut off from the resources they relied on. Some students

are not able to see and get help from the counselors and support from professionals that were once available in their schools. For those schools that do have support systems, Zoom or other such platforms are not comfortable or accessible platforms for all. Zoom is also not a suitable replacement for the human interaction and social functions that have been lost. The milestones and loved ones we are missing cannot be replaced by a computer screen. It is a loss many feel deeply and is only adding to the wide-spread feeling of isolation. Compounding this is the fear and apprehension many students feel as they imagine what next year will bring. Members of the council and their peers are feeling deprived of these milestones and important events, and are filled with uncertainty of what the future will bring. This is a cause of enormous stress for many youth.

The stress and worry of this time is causing some teens to turn to substance misuse to quell their negative emotions and as a way to fill their abundance of time. The members have seen a rise in the number of teens misusing alcohol, tobacco products, and marijuana, as well as the number of their peers selling such products. Teens are using these products as a way of self-medicating as they cannot access the resources they previously used when feeling stressed or depressed. Additionally teens are no longer receiving education on substance misuse that they used to get at school by way of speakers and presentations. Because of this, the anti-substance misuse culture cultivated at many schools is slowly being chipped away by time, distance, relevance, and easy access to substances. This crisis shows the importance of accessible resources. We are seeing clearer than ever that when students do not have easy-to-access resources such as those in their schools they turn to substance misuse to cope with their problems.

This is an unprecedented time and we are facing a multitude of unprecedented problems. Through these rough and stressful times we need to shine a light on the increasing issues of mental health and substance misuse. We must be practical and remember that, while we will eventually get through the COVID-19 crisis, the substance misuse crisis will not put itself on pause during this time. If we do not act, we will come out of this crisis only to face a new one that we have allowed to be created, which would be an overwhelming amount of teens misusing substances. We must be proactive during this time. We must make sure teens know that they are

supported and that there are resources out there for them to access. We must let them know that they are not alone.

# *IMPORTANT ISSUES*

*(EDUCATION & DRUG CULTURE, MENTAL HEALTH,  
RESOURCES, TOBACCO USE)*

## SUMMARY

The following are the issues highlighted by the council to be especially pressing and concerning. These range from a lack of alternative activities and resources to the importance of Tobacco 21. The issues concern resources, education and drug culture, mental health, and tobacco use. These issues were carefully chosen by the council at their December meeting, and have since been discussed further and narrowed down. The substance misuse crisis is complex and multi-faceted. It would be nearly impossible to encompass all of its aspects here. The list stems from the experiences of the council members. These are the issues that are dearest to us, and the ones we are most often confronted by in our lives. As such, we hope you take them into careful consideration.

## EDUCATION & DRUG CULTURE

*WRITTEN BY JAYDA BOGERT, KAYLA BOGERT, AND ARON SILVESTRE*

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### *EDUCATION*

Education is a pivotal aspect of prevention. It is vital to foster an environment where teens are aware of the dangers and harms of substance misuse. Education can be delivered to youth in many different forms. Many schools bring in speakers to share their stories about substance misuse, and many schools include a unit on it in their health classes. There are also numerous groups and clubs offered throughout the state and in schools that youth can participate in to learn more about substance misuse or have fun in a drug-free environment. For example, many teens from up North will be familiar with the Youth Leadership Through Adventure Program, which teaches the importance of alternative activities and leadership skills. However, some of the education programs administered to youth have come under fire for being out of date and not factual, like the program DARE. It is important that the education they are given is factual, engaging, and honest. It is important that youth continue to receive new information about substance misuse and its dangers throughout middle and high school, so the information is fresh and relevant. Teaching this information in such a way can help to foster an environment where

teens not only are aware of the dangers of misusing substances, but feel comfortable having open conversations about them.

### *DRUG CULTURE*

The teenage years represent a crucial time in one's life where one is especially vulnerable to new ideas and experiences. Because of that, the environment that teenagers find themselves in is crucial to their development and worldview. In today's world, teens are exposed to a variety of influences, in real life and through the media. These influences can change how teens view substance misuse. When they are exposed to positive influences who have a negative view on substance misuse, teens are less likely to misuse substances both because they are not exposed to them as much and because they will develop a negative view of them. There is no better example of this phenomenon than with the rise of the e-cigarette, JUUL. JUUL was popularized on social media platforms frequented by young people, especially on the platform Instagram. It was advertised by individuals called 'influencers', who run Instagram pages that are followed by hundreds of thousands of people, especially youth. These influencers helped to make JUULing seem trendy and cool and thus its popularity among young people grew. The culture surrounding substance misuse that teens experience influences their opinions and actions. When substance misuse is deemed as acceptable and 'cool', it creates a culture where teens feel comfortable abusing substances or where they may feel pressured too. For that reason, it is important that schools and other environments that teens frequent help to foster an environment where this is not the norm, and that teens are well-educated on the harms of substance misuse.

Due to the new social norms of drug culture, schools should be more open towards conversations about substance misuse. Teachers should not be stopping a productive conversation on drug prevention or casual talk about what the students are experiencing. These conversations should not only be harbored in health class or a special event held at school. Talking to a trusted adult in a classroom setting should be a norm and not looked down upon. Teachers should know the facts and be able to provide support to their students. Health class is not long enough to cultivate a honest conversation on substance misuse. It should, in fact, be a life-long and recurring conversation. Students and teachers should know the facts. This starts with opening the conversation so everyone has the knowledge they need.

## MENTAL HEALTH

*WRITTEN BY KIMIYA PARKER-HILL AND QUINCY ROY*

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### MENTAL HEALTH EDUCATION

Mental health is a major issue in New Hampshire. The Council is especially concerned by a lack of education and access to treatment, as well as the amount of youth using self-medication to cope. Mental health disorders in adolescents affect the ways in which youth learn, behave, and cope with emotions. According to the Department of Health and Human Services, 1 in 5 adolescents are diagnosed with a mental health disorder, with half being diagnosed by age 14. The current social stigma and discrimination around mental health is a factor in the phenomenon where 60% of people with a mental illness will not seek out the help they need. Managing life with a mental health disorder can be difficult and can cause isolation, guilt, and can lead to dishonesty with themselves and others. These factors can lead to self-medicating, creating an urgency for assisting those in need to help individuals receive the treatment necessary.

### STIGMAS

Stigmas are something that comes with the unknown, because mental health is not a physical health issue that can clearly be expressed. It creates an environment where the people dealing with these mental health issues become afraid to talk about their feelings and experience the backlash of stereotypes. Some stereotypes that can be degrading towards an individual are that a teen with depression is suicidal and requires “special” pills that do not pertain to everyone with depression. Stereotypes are not always specific to the mental illness, it can be as general as individuals with mental health issues are expected to change their thoughts and behaviors and keep their diagnosis under control.

### TREATMENT & COPING MECHANISMS

Despite numerous efforts over the years, treatment for mental health can still be hard to access, especially for youth. For many, it can be too expensive to get help by means of seeing a therapist or through medication. Because of this, many youth rely on the professionals in their school to

talk to and to seek help from. However, due to the stigmas associated with mental health disorders, some teens choose not to seek help at all and instead choose to self-medicate or utilize other unhealthy coping mechanisms such as self-harm. This is obviously very detrimental and only leads to the problem worsening. It is critical that youth are able to access the help they need. In terms of the substance misuse crisis, self-medication as a means of coping is actually a means through which the crisis is exacerbated. According to the National Institute on Mental Health, in 2014, 20.2 million people in the US who had a substance misuse disorder, 7.9 million were also suffering from a mental illness. This is called a co-occurring disorder. That is a shockingly large amount of people with one, and it stands as proof that treating mental health in youth is critical to treating the substance misuse crisis. The two are inextricably linked.

## RESOURCES

*WRITTEN BY EVE HODGDON AND KAYCEE REAGAN*

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## *ALTERNATIVE ACTIVITIES*

Alternative activities are activities that engage youth in healthy ways and help to promote civic involvement, healthy lifestyles, community, and recreation. There are a number of activities that fall under this umbrella: from volunteering to taking part in a club, to sports or being a part of local groups like the YMCA or Boys and Girls Club. These activities help to show youth that there are ways to have fun and be involved without using substances. They help to promote safe and drug-free environments, and can be a support system for the youth. As such, they are pivotal to prevention. Youth need environments where they feel supported, encouraged, and where they have room to learn and grow. It is important, therefore, that there is a diverse array of activities available to youth, so they have options when choosing what to partake in. It is also important that such activities are accessible to students, in terms of affordability and their ability to find transportation to the activities. That is why the fostering of clubs at a school is crucial. It is important to note that, while alternative activities can provide a safe and drug-free environment, they are most effective when combined with education about substances.

## *POVERTY*

New Hampshire may have the lowest poverty rate in the country, but many Granite Staters still struggle under low or insufficient incomes. This can exacerbate the issue of getting treatment for a substance use disorder. Inpatient resources, medication, and therapy can all come with a financial burden that some cannot take on (For example, therapy can cost \$60 to \$120 a session. Recovery is a long term process where there is a need for constant support and help, so many people in therapy will find themselves having to go once a week for an extended period of time. This can be too much of a financial struggle for many people). In the Northern part of the state, where treatment is typically farther away, transportation can come at a high cost as well. Cost can be an enormous roadblock on the path to get treatment, and can force some people to try and self-medicate. It is especially important, then, for resources for youth (who often do not have stable incomes or means of transportation) to be more accessible financially and geographically. For this reason, it is helpful to have resources for students in schools such as alternative activities or adults who may be able to help with the barriers to treatment.

## *ACCESS TO TREATMENT*

Ensuring access to treatment is necessary to help youth struggling with substance misuse disorders. There are various treatment centers and resources for adults throughout the state that are easy to navigate using programs like the Doorway, but treatment for youth remains scarce, scattered, and insufficient in comparison. Because of their age and experiences, the needs of a struggling adult and youth widely vary. In New Hampshire, there are no inpatient options for youth, and outpatient resources come with their own barriers. The cost and burden of transportation and treatment, such as therapy, impacts families across the state. As a result, youth must look towards other places for support, like their school or community. Since youth spend most of their day at school, the support schools can provide is critical. The level of support that a school can provide, though, remains dependent on the amount of resources available. Student Assistant Programs, like modified schedules or focus groups, provide a safe space for students to receive support. In addition, alternative activities and clubs are useful, as providing a positive environment helps in prevention and recovery. Some communities also have local coalitions or

other nonprofits focused on adolescent health. Currently, some state and national organizations seek to reach out to affected youth and offer support and treatment through digital apps, overcoming some access barriers. Apps like “My Life, My Quit”, “smokefreeTXT”, and national helplines can provide insight to help youth develop plans to become substance-free and change behaviors. Advancing access to digital resources, especially in rural communities, can make a difference. Despite limited resources focused towards youth, there is potential to expand treatment by focusing on the role of schools, communities, and the significance of eliminating transportation and cost barriers.

## TOBACCO USE

*WRITTEN BY GRACE LUNNEY AND ELSA ROGERS*

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### *TOBACCO USE AMONG TEENS*

Tobacco use (which includes e-cigarettes, vaping products, and traditional tobacco products) among teens has become an urgent public health epidemic. In New Hampshire, tobacco use among teens has been on the decline for the past 20 years, and it is important that we do all that we can to keep that positive trend going. In 2001, 25% of high schoolers smoked cigarettes in New Hampshire. In 2019, the smoking rate among high schoolers has dropped to under 6%. Though this is an amazing decrease and a great step, the sudden appearance of vaping products, such as JUUL, has overshadowed this wonderful progress that our state has made. We are seeing a dramatic increase in the use of e-cigarettes among teens. According to a survey by the Truth Initiative, 27.5% of high schoolers have used e-cigarettes in the past month, compared with only 11% in 2017. As many of us see firsthand within our schools, many high school students have chosen to use the bathrooms as a place to use these products. This causes not only a safety concern, for these are unmonitored areas, but it also causes a huge disruption to the education of other students who chose not to use these products. Some students with older siblings have even gone as far as advertising through social media that they are willing to purchase these products for younger students in exchange for financial incentives. This is particularly concerning, not only because providing these products to minors is illegal, but is also an avenue for abuse of other illegal substances posing an additional threat to the health of these students. We as youth

see the effects these products have on our peers on a daily basis. Many of our peers have developed nicotine addictions from a fad. The “coolness” of JUULing and vaping will fade with time, but the lasting effects of their addiction never will. To further our mission of ending the vaping epidemic, GYAC has voted to support three bills in conjunction with the Legislative Youth Advisory Council.

### *LEGISLATION WE SUPPORT*

GYAC supports SB 248, which proposes raising the age of purchase, use, and possession of tobacco and nicotine related products including e-cigarettes to the age of 21. While we are aware that Congress has passed a national Tobacco 21 law, the passage of SB 248 will reinforce the national law, will align NH with the US law, and make it easier for New Hampshire agencies to enforce the requirement and protect kids. Some have brought up why the language of this bill restricts purchase use and possession rather than just the sale of these products. Currently, statewide laws of tobacco products restrict purchase, use and possession, so for the sake of continuity we feel it is important to keep it as such. Furthermore, if we were to just restrict the sale of these products it would send a message that “as long as you are not the one purchasing it, it is okay to have” which we do not believe to be the case. Finally, by keeping the bill as “purchase use and possession” it is much more retailer friendly because it would not just put restrictions on retailers but also place the accountability in the hands of citizens who chose to possess these products.

GYAC also supports HB 1410. According to a recent survey, 72.2% of high schoolers who use e-cigarettes utilize flavored ones. According to the Truth Initiative, 29% of high schoolers who JUUL do so *for* the flavors. We are worried about the growing number of youth who use e-cigarettes, which grew 78% among high schoolers from 2017-2018. Nicotine in electronic cigarettes primes the brain for future substance abuse, and with more than 2,000 instances of hospitalization and 57 deaths brought about by e-cigarette use, it is our belief that steps should be made to relieve this emergency. The data shows that youth are drawn to e-cigarettes in part because of their appealing flavors such as mango, Fruit Medley, and Creme Brulee. According to

the Surgeon General, 81.5% of underage e-cigarette users said they used e-cigarettes “because they come in flavors I like.”

Another bill we support is HB 1401, which would ban the use of cigarettes or e-cigs in a car when someone who is under 16 years old is present. People in that age group often do not have their own means of transportation, so they do not usually have a choice but to ride in the car where someone is smoking. This exposure to the second-hand smoke can raise the child’s likelihood of nicotine addiction while exposing them to hundreds of toxic chemicals that can cause cancer and other serious health conditions. We support this bill as it protects these vulnerable children.

*GOVERNOR'S YOUTH ADVISORY COUNCIL MEMBERSHIP*

Jayda Bogert, Manchester

Kayla Bogert, Manchester

Taryn Fox, Plaistow

Madison Hemingway, Newport

Eve Hodgdon, Auburn

Jeffrey Lam, Nashua

Grace Lunney, Newmarket

Kimiya Parker-Hill, Manchester

Evan Piette, Littleton

Isaac Piette, Littleton

Kaycee Reagan, Woodsville

Elsa Rogers, Dover

Quincy Roy, Manchester

Aron Silvestre, Goffstown