



October 2026

Substance Use Prevention Month

Prevention Starts with Connection

A Message from our Medical Director



Jennifer Michaels, MD, FASAM
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Understanding Substance Use Disorder as a Health Condition

October is an opportunity to recognize the importance of substance use prevention and to consider how each of us can help support healthier individuals, families and communities.

When we think about prevention, it's easy to think only about preventing substance use. But prevention is much broader than that. It is about

strengthening the factors that help people stay healthy, connected and resilient throughout their lives.

Supportive relationships, stable housing, meaningful work and activities, access to health care, education, community connection and a sense of purpose all play a vital role in a person's well-being. So does having someone who notices when we're struggling, listens without judgment and helps us find support.

Mental health and substance use are deeply connected. People may turn to substances to cope with stress, trauma, anxiety, depression, loneliness or other challenges. Recognizing those challenges early and connecting people with appropriate support makes a meaningful difference.

Prevention also means creating communities where people feel comfortable asking for help. Stigma prevents people from reaching out, while compassion and understanding open the door to care. We do not need to have all the answers to make a difference. Sometimes prevention begins with a simple conversation:

How are you doing?* or *What can I do to help?

At the Brien Center, we believe there should be no wrong door when someone needs behavioral health or substance use support. Whether someone is seeking help for the first time, supporting a family member or continuing a journey of recovery, connection to the right care at the right time matters.

During Substance Use Prevention Month, I encourage all of us to reflect on the positive impact we can have on others. Check in with someone you care about. Listen without judgment. Learn about available resources. Encourage someone to reach out for support when they need it.

Prevention often begins with connection, compassion, and knowing that help is available.

Jennifer Michaels, MD

Medical Director

The Brien Center

The National Picture

Substance use affects individuals, families and communities across the country. The latest national data from the **2025 National Survey on Drug Use and Health (NSDUH)**, released by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) in July 2026, provide a current snapshot of substance use in the United States.

BY THE NUMBERS

162.8 million

People age 12 and older used tobacco, vaped nicotine, drank alcohol or used an illicit drug in the past month.

47.5 million

People age 12 and older used an illicit drug in the past month.

61.6 million

People age 12 and older used marijuana in the past year.

4.0 million

People age 12 and older experienced an opioid use disorder in the past year.

56%

Of people age 12 and older reported some form of tobacco, nicotine vaping, alcohol or illicit drug use in the past month.

A Message of Prevention

Numbers like these help us understand the scope of substance use, but prevention is not only about statistics.

There is also encouraging news.

Most young people do not use substances.

According to SAMHSA's prevention resources, among youth ages 12–17:

- **79% had never had an alcoholic drink.**
- **81% had never used tobacco or vaped nicotine.**
- **76% had never used an illicit drug.**

Prevention is about strengthening the things that help young people and adults make healthy choices and navigate challenges: supportive relationships, safe and stable environments, connection to family and community, meaningful activities, education and access to care.

It is also about recognizing concerns early.

A conversation, a caring question or simply letting someone know that help is available can be an important first step.

Prevention Is Everyone's Work

Families, schools, health care providers, community organizations, employers and behavioral health professionals all have a role in prevention.

At the Brien Center, prevention is part of a larger continuum of behavioral health and substance use care. Whether someone needs information, support, treatment or help navigating services, **there is no wrong door to asking for help.**

Prevention starts with connection.

Recovery starts with hope.

And help is available.

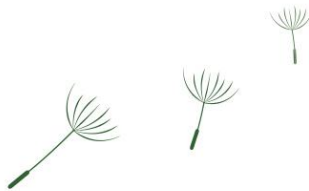
Sources: Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, 2025 National Survey on Drug Use and Health; SAMHSA Substance Use Prevention Month resources.



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Need Support? We're Here.

If you or someone you care about is struggling, don't wait. Call us.
We offer a full continuum of care for mental health and substance use
recovery — from crisis intervention to outpatient therapy and beyond.

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www.briencenter.org

Scheduling: 413.499.0412

24/7 Crisis Hotline: 800-252-0227

We are here to help.

—The Brien Center Team

"It's comforting to know there are organizations like The Brien Center that prioritize both parent and child well-being from the very beginning."

– Brien Center Client

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