

A BROADENED DESCRIPTION OF PREVENTION SCIENCE

Prevention science focuses on the development of evidence-based strategies that reduce risk factors and enhance protective factors to improve the health and wellbeing of individuals, families, and communities. Prevention science draws from a diverse range of disciplines—including the epidemiological, social, psychological, behavioral, medical, and neurobiological sciences—to understand the determinants of societal, community and individual level problems (e.g., trauma, poverty, maltreatment). A central tenet of prevention science is the promotion of health equity and reduction of disparities by studying how social, economic and racial inequalities and discrimination influence healthy development and wellbeing. For well over 50 years, prevention science has generated practices and policies that have improved countless lives throughout the lifespan by:

- A) avoiding negative health and social outcomes (e.g., substance use disorder, academic failure, violence, mental illness)
- B) strengthening conditions that enable individuals, families, and communities to thrive, including innovative mental health and family/community involvement efforts and approaches to discipline that disrupt the disproportionate suspensions and expulsions for students of color and the school to prison pipeline.

The policies, programs, and practices generated by the field have been shown to reduce the incidence and prevalence of individual and community vulnerabilities and to promote healthy lifestyles, including:

1. Promoting daily physical activity and good nutrition to protect against chronic disease;
2. Disrupting pathways to substance use across the lifespan;
3. Improving academic and behavioral outcomes with the expansion of high-quality childcare and early learning and development, and promoting positive and supportive school environments;
4. Enhancing community-wide capacity to attenuate detrimental conditions and increase access to supportive services;
5. Increasing resilience, social competency and self-regulation in order to reduce impulsive, aggressive and off-task behavior;
6. Cultivating positive contexts where teachers, staff, and school leaders advocate for student success, and
7. Supporting the development of healthy relationships to reduce interpersonal, domestic, and school violence.

Moreover, evidence-based prevention strategies that address systemic and structural inequalities in neighborhoods, educational, and criminal justice practices have been developed and implemented.

Examples of related investments include programs that prevent drug use in adolescents, reform educational practices, and support families to reduce the financial and human burden to communities. An integrated delivery system of comprehensive evidence-based prevention strategies that crosses many public sectors (e.g. education, child welfare, juvenile justice, health) has been shown to be cost-efficient and exert wide-scale benefits. Providing research-based guidance and resources to legislative and administrative decision-makers will facilitate the integration of best practices from prevention science into policy.