



DRUG-FREE COMMUNITIES

*Reducing Youth Substance Use
and Strengthening Communities*

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The Drug-Free Communities (DFC) Support Program is the nation's leading evidence-based initiative focused on preventing youth substance use through community coalition-led strategies. Established by Congress in 1997 and administered by the White House Office of National Drug Control Policy (ONDCP), the program funds local coalitions across all 50 states, U.S. territories, and Tribal communities. ONDCP administers the program in partnership with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, which provides grant management, monitoring, and technical support to funded coalitions. Each coalition brings together leaders from twelve required sectors, such as parents, youth, schools, law enforcement, healthcare, and youth organizations, to implement proven, cost-effective strategies that reduce youth drug use, strengthen local partnerships, and build safer, healthier communities.

In 2024, 745¹ active DFC coalitions reached nearly 64 million Americans. By leveraging federal investment with local resources, these coalitions drive measurable reductions in youth substance use over time and foster youths' protective connections to family, school, and community. Youth in DFC communities report significantly lower rates of alcohol and marijuana use compared to national averages. Through education, policy change, and grassroots engagement, the DFC model builds safer, healthier communities and strengthens the nation's long-term resilience to substance use.

¹ This report summarizes national cross-site evaluation findings through August 2024 based on coalitions funded through fiscal year (FY) 2023. Initially, 750 grants were awarded in FY2023, however five of those grants were either returned or suspended.

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2024 DFC IMPACT HIGHLIGHTS



Up to **46% reductions** in youth substance use



63 million Americans reached, including **5 million youth**, across all 50 states, the District of Columbia, and 3 U.S. territories



More than **41,000 community members**, including **9,000 youth**, engaged in prevention efforts



\$94 million federal investment in local communities generating over **\$200 million** in local resources



Every **\$1 invested** in substance use prevention yields an estimated **\$12 to \$26** in long-term savings

PROTECTING AND STRENGTHENING COMMUNITIES

The DFC program has broad national reach, touching millions of Americans through grassroots coalitions focused on preventing youth substance use. Since 2005, approximately 188 million people—56% of the U.S. population—have lived in communities served by a DFC-funded coalition. In 2024 alone, 745² coalitions operated across all 50 states, the District of Columbia, and three U.S. territories, directly reaching an estimated 63 million Americans, including 5 million youth.

FY 2023 DFC Grant Recipients



² Initially, 750 grants were awarded in FY 2023, however five of those grants were either returned or suspended.



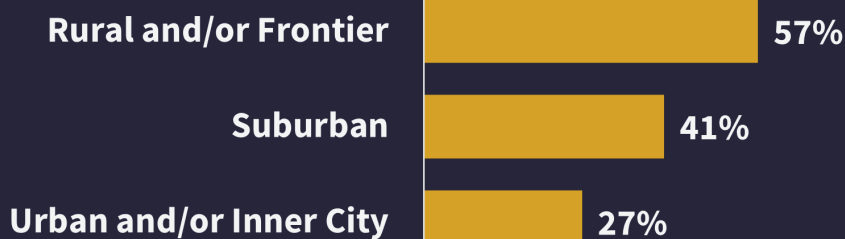
1 in 5

**Americans—
including
1 in 5 youth
—lived in a
community
with a DFC
coalition in
2024.**

SERVING DIVERSE GEOGRAPHIC COMMUNITIES

Coalitions are embedded in diverse geographic settings including rural, frontier, suburban, and urban settings. This allows them to tailor prevention strategies to local needs.

Percentage of Coalitions Working Across Geographic Settings in 2024



REDUCING YOUTH SUBSTANCE USE

The DFC program has contributed to measurable reductions in youth substance. In FY 2023, DFC coalitions reported significant reductions in past 30-day use of alcohol, tobacco, marijuana, and prescription drugs among both middle and high school students, with up to a 46% decrease. High school youth in DFC communities also reported lower substance use than national youth averages, including 14% (DFC) vs. 22% (national) for alcohol and 10% (DFC) vs. 17% (national) for marijuana.

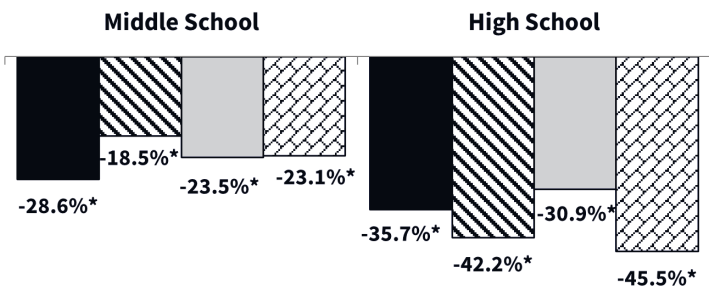
DFC coalitions also helped shift youth perceptions that are critical to prevention. Youth in DFC communities increasingly viewed substance use as harmful and reported higher levels of peer and parental disapproval, key factors known to reduce risk of use.

Research shows that DFC coalitions not only reduce actual youth drug use but also foster community norms and attitudes that sustain long-term prevention.

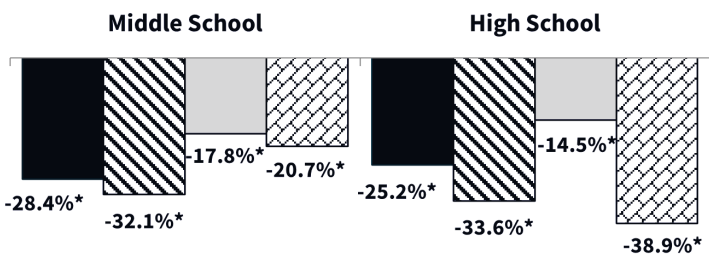


Percentage Change in Past 30-Day Substance Use

Most Recent Cohort of DFC Coalitions - FY2023



All DFC Coalitions Since Inception - 2002



- Alcohol
- ▨ Tobacco
- ▨ Marijuana
- ▨ Prescription Drugs

*Reductions from first report to most recent report are statistically significant at $p < .05$.



FIGHTING THE DRUG AND FENTANYL CRISIS

DFC coalitions are on the front lines of addressing the nation's drug and fentanyl crisis through comprehensive, grassroots approaches grounded in prevention, education, and community mobilization.

In 2024, nearly all DFC coalitions focused on preventing or reducing alcohol, marijuana, tobacco/nicotine, and prescription drug misuse. In addition to opioids, DFC coalitions responded to the youth vaping and fentanyl crisis. For example, DFC coalitions led school and community-based fentanyl awareness events, supported Naloxone access, and helped develop local policies to reduce youth access to synthetic drugs.

By proactively addressing these emerging threats, DFC coalitions are equipping communities, schools, and families with the knowledge, resources, and prevention tools needed to keep youth safe in a rapidly evolving substance use landscape.

SUBSTANCES ADDRESSED IN 2024

ALCOHOL, MARIJUANA, AND TOBACCO:

- 95% alcohol
- 91% marijuana
- 80% tobacco/nicotine

PRESCRIPTION DRUGS AND OPIOIDS:

- 70% prescription drugs
- 67% opioid prescription drugs

EMERGING THREATS:

- 88% working to address opioids with a focus on fentanyl
- 83% youth vaping
- 37% working to address opioids with a focus on heroin
- 10% addressed other emerging drugs including xylazine, Delta-8, and other synthetics

BUILDING COMMUNITY CAPACITY

DFC coalitions are powerful engines of local change, mobilizing community members and youth in evidence-based prevention efforts. By bringing together community sectors, from youth, schools and law enforcement to healthcare providers, faith leaders, and parents, coalitions create the local prevention infrastructure necessary to build healthier, safer communities for youth.

Each coalition serves as a hub for community capacity building, aligning partners around a shared goal of prevention. In 2024, nearly all coalitions (93%) included members from each of the 12 required community sectors, with the Youth and School sectors most heavily represented.



Over two-thirds (69%) of coalitions hosted youth coalitions, an approach linked to higher youth engagement. Nearly half involved youth in decision making. Hosting youth coalitions helped strengthen positive youth connections to their families, schools, and communities, key protective factors to reduce substance use.

Addressing risk and protective factors was a core focus for DFC coalitions, with a strong emphasis on shifting community norms and reducing youth substance use. Favorable attitudes toward youth substance use was identified as the most pressing risk factor, while access to quality schools was the strongest protective factor.

Coalitions prioritized strategies to counter pro-use attitudes and increase peer disapproval through social norms campaigns. Nearly all coalitions used information-sharing strategies, and 85% implemented strategies to reduce access to substances and expand overdose prevention resources.

41,000
Community
Members
mobilized

9,000
Youth
engaged in
prevention
efforts

93%
had active
members
from all 12
sectors

99%
Coalitions
worked with
at least one
school

69%
Coalitions
hosted a
youth
coalition

STRENGTHENING YOUTH MENTAL HEALTH AND RESILIENCE

DFC coalitions take a comprehensive approach to prevention by prioritizing youth mental health and resilience. Central to their strategy is strengthening protective factors like youth connections to family, school, and community, elements proven to reduce substance use. Most coalitions worked to:

- Enhance social-emotional learning,
- Improve school climates, and
- Engage families in prevention conversations.

At the community level, coalitions implement a wide range of strategies to create supportive environments and reduce risk factors. These include:

- Organizing drug-free social events,
- Promoting community-wide campaigns that normalize healthy choices, and
- Advocating for safer environments through improved access to mental health services and stronger community norms.

These efforts contributed to measurable progress. High school youth in DFC communities reported increased peer disapproval of substance use and lower rates of substance use compared to national averages.

DFC Youth Coalitions

A key feature of DFC coalitions comprehensive approach is the role of youth coalitions, which are hosted by more than two-thirds of coalitions. These groups give youth leadership opportunities to plan and implement mental health and prevention activities, from awareness campaigns to peer-led presentations.

Youth involvement in decision-making not only amplifies their voices but also builds self-efficacy and engagement. Coalitions that hosted youth coalitions reported significantly higher levels of youth participation, demonstrating the value of youth-led prevention.



SAVING TAXPAYER DOLLARS

Investing in youth substance use prevention delivers strong public health outcomes and substantial economic returns. The DFC program has significantly reduced youth use of alcohol, tobacco, marijuana, and prescription drug misuse. In 2024, a \$94 million federal investment was more than doubled through over \$200 million in local matching resources, demonstrating the program's cost-efficiency and wide-reaching community impact.

National data further reinforce the value of prevention. A SAMHSA cost-benefit analysis estimates that evidence-based school prevention programs can return up to \$18 for every \$1 invested. If implemented nationwide, these programs could delay or prevent substance use among 1.5 million youth, reduce binge drinking and smoking, and generate more than \$33 billion in lifetime savings—up to \$98 billion when accounting for improved quality of life. These findings affirm that prevention is not only effective, but also a smart and sustainable investment.

Beyond federal funds, DFC coalitions extend their impact by securing significant support from state, local, and private sector partners. This diversified backing enables coalitions to expand strategies, respond to emerging threats, and embed prevention into community systems and policies—strengthening sustainability and enhancing the long-term resilience of the nation's prevention infrastructure.



\$94 million
federal investment in local
communities generated
over
\$200 million
in matching resources
more than doubling the
federal investment.



\$1 invested
in prevention returns an
estimated
\$18
in savings.*

**Miller, T. and Hendrie, D. Substance Abuse Prevention Dollars and Cents: A Cost-Benefit Analysis, DHHS Pub. No. (SMA) 07-4298. Rockville, MD: Center for Substance Abuse Prevention, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, 2008.*



DFC coalitions extended their
impact by securing
additional
**support from
state, local, and
private sector
partners,**
increasing both
sustainability and reach.

WHY THE DFC PROGRAM MATTERS

The Drug-Free Communities (DFC) program remains a cornerstone of the nation's substance use prevention infrastructure—mobilizing communities, empowering youth, and reducing youth substance use across the country. The programs community-driven, youth-centered, and data-informed model offers a proven, scalable framework for lasting public health impact.

DFC coalitions are achieving measurable, community-level change by proactively addressing emerging threats like fentanyl, prescription drug misuse, and youth vaping, while deploying evidence-based prevention strategies that reflect local needs.

The DFC program's measurable reductions in youth substance use, alongside its scalable, community-centered model, demonstrate its unique value as a prevention backbone. Evaluation data shows the program strengthens protective factors, builds community infrastructure, and promotes sustainable change.

DFC program strengthens the nation's resilience by:



Protecting Youth and Families by reducing substance use and building safer communities.



Fighting the Drug and Fentanyl Crisis through local education, prevention, and response.



Empowering Communities to lead their own prevention strategies.



Saving Taxpayer Dollars with high return on investment.



Strengthens National Resilience by fostering a healthier, more secure population.

Together, these outcomes underscore the DFC program's critical role in shaping a stronger, safer future for the next generation.



FOR MORE INFORMATION AND THE FULL 2024 EVALUATION
REPORT, PLEASE VISIT:

www.whitehouse.gov/ondcp/information-resources/