



SUMMER 2015

# TEEN PERCEPTIONS OF SUBSTANCE ABUSE

REGION 1, TEXAS

PREVENTION RESOURCE CENTER, REGION 1 TEXAS

MANAGED CARE CENTER FOR ADDICTIVE/OTHER DISORDERS, INC

1715 26th St | Lubbock, TX 79411 | 806.780.8300

## THE PRC, REGION 1

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### WHO WE ARE

The Prevention Resource Center (PRC) is a service of Managed Care Center for Addictive/Other Disorders, Inc. We serve the 41 counties of the Texas Panhandle and South Plains Region.

We serve as the central data collection repository and substance abuse prevention training liaison for Public Health Region 1, funded by a grant from the Department of State Health Services.

Our duties are to identify local community, county, and regional data resources that will provide and share data to enhance and maximize data collection and support the central data collection repository efforts.

### OUR MISSION

The purpose of the Prevention Resource Center is to support activities that enhance and improve substance abuse prevention services across Region 1 of the State of Texas. The Resource Center serves as a central repository for data collected throughout Region 1 that will be used to develop a Regional Needs Assessment.

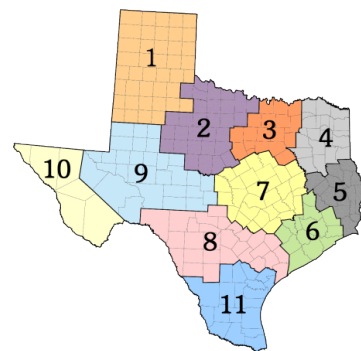
Our specific goals are:

- To provide current, relevant, and community-wide data on substance abuse trends
- To enhance the ability of our communities to more effectively respond to changes in substance abuse trends
- To influence data driven changes in the standards and attitudes within our communities

### OUR REGION

We serve the following counties in West Texas:

- Armstrong, Bailey, Briscoe, Carson, Castro, Childress, Cochran, Collingsworth, Crosby, Dallam, Deaf Smith, Dickens, Donley, Floyd, Garza, Gray, Hale, Hall, Hansford, Hartley, Hemphill, Hockley, Hutchinson, King, Lamb, Lipscomb, Lubbock, Lynn, Moore, Motley, Ochiltree, Oldham, Parmer, Potter, Randall, Roberts, Sherman, Swisher, Terry, Wheeler, & Yoakum.



### HOW WE SERVE OUR COMMUNITY

We serve our communities by providing alcohol, tobacco, and other drug (ATOD) data to schools, colleges and universities, or other community agencies. This is done through **Information Dissemination**

which provides awareness and knowledge of alcohol, tobacco and other drug abuse, and issues and trends through the data collected by the central data repository.

Our **Community-Based Process** aids the community to more effectively provide "TIPS" (Treatment, Intervention and Prevention Services) for ATOD problems through community mobilization, collaboration, coalition building, networking and community empowerment efforts.

Through **Environmental and Social Policy**, we aim to reduce the incidence and prevalence of ATOD in the general population by establishing and/or changing written and unwritten standards, codes and attitudes within the community. This strategy also aims to combat substance abuse and related harms with concerted, community-based and comprehensive efforts to change norms, behaviors, systems and context that contribute to substance abuse problems in our communities.

### TOBACCO STRATEGIES

Our Tobacco Specialist works with tobacco retailers to understand and comply with Texas laws concerning the sale and display of tobacco products. The Prevention Resource Center provides education to tobacco retailers and the media concerning tobacco laws and the harmful effects of tobacco.

### COMMUNITY COOPERATION

The Prevention Resource Center collaborates with other agencies by sharing data about substance abuse issues, trends, planning, training and other activities within our region and state. The Prevention Center coordinates with regional coalitions and supports their prevention efforts.

## Jackie J. Johnson, CPS

Program Director

25 August 2015

### Prevention Resource Center, Region 1

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## INTRODUCTION

Environmental risk factors are characteristics in a person's surroundings that increase their likelihood of becoming addicted to drugs. A person may have many environments, or domains, of influence such as the community, family, school, and friends. Their risk of addiction can develop in any of these domains.

Influential factors in substance abuse disorders include genetic predisposition and prenatal exposure to alcohol when combined with poor self-image, self-control, or social competence. Other risk factors include family strife, loose knit communities, participating in an intolerant society, being exposed to violence, emotional distress, poor academics, socio-economic status, and involvement with children's protective services, law enforcement, and parental absence.

Certainly, adolescents in our region experience these risk factors in different ways that contribute to some deciding to use dangerous substances and often at an early age:

Table 1: Regional Average Age of First Use, TSS 2014<sup>1</sup>

Average age of first use of:						
	Grade 7	Grade 8	Grade 9	Grade 10	Grade 11	Grade 12
<b>Marijuana</b>	11.7	11.9	13.3	13.7	14.5	14.9
<b>Any Alcohol</b>	10.9	11.3	12.1	13.5	14.0	14.5
<b>Any Tobacco</b>	11.1	11.1	12.5	13.5	13.1	14.1
<b>Cocaine</b>	12.4	12.5	13.7	14.0	15.4	16.1
<b>Crack</b>	14.0	12.6	10.8	15.0	15.3	16.0
<b>Steroids</b>	9.4	10.9	9.5	12.7	12.8	15.1
<b>Ecstasy</b>	10.3	11.2	12.7	15.0	15.0	14.8
<b>Heroin</b>	13.0	12.0	10.0	15.0	15.0	16.0
<b>Methamphetamine</b>	9.8	9.0	10.5	16.8	16.8	15.8
<b>Synthetic Cannabinoids</b>	12.2	12.9	13.2	14.9	14.9	15.6

However, research has also demonstrated that exposure to even a significant number of risk factors in a child's life does not necessarily mean that substance use or other problem behaviors will follow inevitably. Many children and youth growing up in presumably high-risk families and environments emerge relatively free of problems. Often these teens have protective factors that balance and buffer the risk factors that contribute to the decision to begin consuming dangerous substances by shaping how adolescents perceive these substances.

This report focuses on how regional adolescents perceive alcohol, marijuana, prescription drugs, and synthetic cannabinoids. Specifically, it examines how regional adolescents (1) perceive the risk of harm in using these substances, (2) perceive how accessible these substances are for them to get, (3) perceive how their peers think about these substances, and (4) perceive how their parents think about these substances. If we can understand how adolescents in Region 1 perceive these substances, parents,

<sup>1</sup> Source: Texas Student Survey, Regions 1-2, 2014

prevention professionals, and other community stakeholders can work to bolster the protective factors and reduce the risk factors in their daily lives.

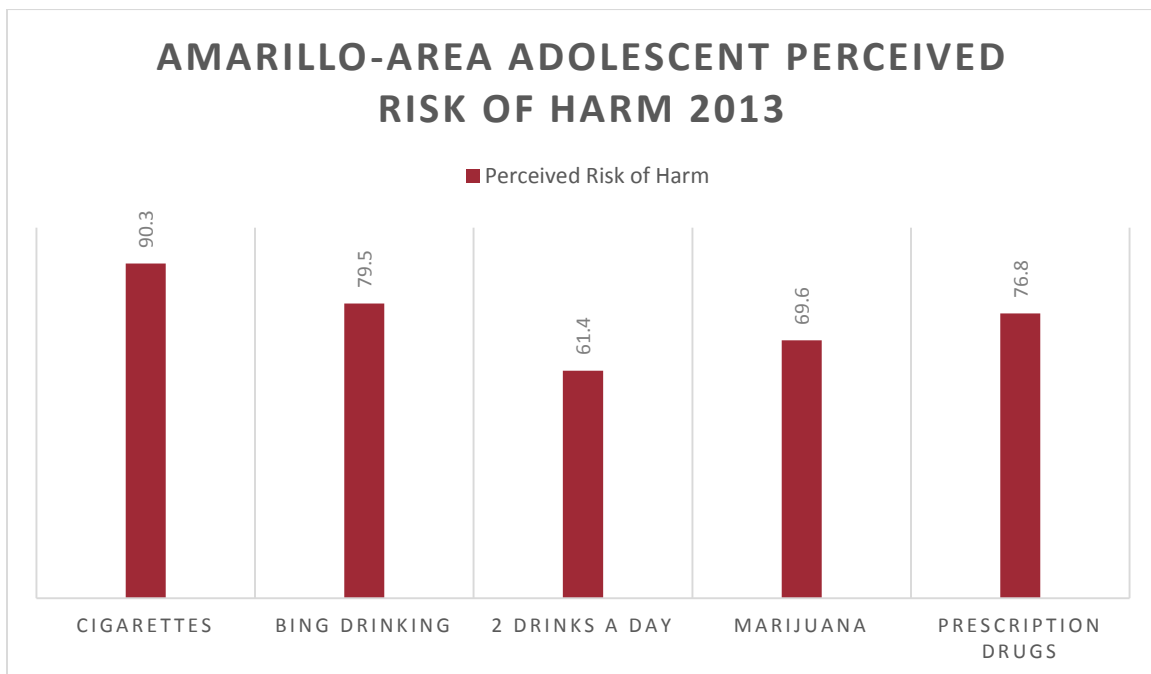
Regional coalitions<sup>2</sup> are working to create environmental changes in how businesses, municipal governments, schools, or other organizations approach substance abuse prevention. These changes can take many forms from changing or enforcing laws concerning the selling of alcohol to minors to convincing school districts to change their policies to allow prevention programs in their schools. These coalitions are always looking for people to help change their communities for the better.

## PERCEIVED RISK OF HARM

An adolescent's perception of the risks associated with substance use is an important determinant of whether he or she engages in substance use. For example, youths who perceive high risk of harm are less likely to use drugs than youths who perceive low risk of harm. Thus, providing adolescents with credible, accurate, and age-appropriate information about the harm associated with substance use is a key component in prevention programming.

Convincing adolescents that ATOD substances are harmful to them is what Youth Prevention is all about. Over all, Texas students report that they believe marijuana to be very dangerous (58.2%) followed by tobacco (56.8%) Interestingly, cigarettes are seen as harmful to 90% of participating students but only 69.6% perceive marijuana, which is often smoked, as a risk to their health.

Figure 1: 2013 TPII Perceived Risk of Harm<sup>3</sup>



<sup>2</sup> A list of Regional Coalitions is available in the Appendix.

<sup>3</sup> Source: Texas Prevention Impact Index, Amarillo 2013.

During regional interviews and focus groups, many participants are surprised to discover that the consumption of marijuana is illegal. Many parents believe that marijuana is similar to alcohol—or even safer than alcohol—and even have expressed sentiments such as “At least it’s not meth” or some equivalent. Many adolescents report surprise at the illegality of marijuana due to all the sites on Facebook and the Internet that discuss how to grow the plants, the places to purchase all required to grow the plants, and where to buy “edibles” which are foodstuffs, often baked goods, with cannabis oil included.

## ALCOHOL

Although 79.5% Amarillo-area adolescents perceive drinking two alcoholic beverages per day as harmful, regional adolescents seem to have a higher perception of risk. All grades considered, 81.3% of regional adolescents report alcohol as either very or somewhat dangerous.

Table 2: Perceived Risk of Harm, Alcohol, TSS 2014

How dangerous do you think it is for kids your age to use alcohol?					
	Very Dangerous	Somewhat Dangerous	Not very Dangerous	Not at All Dangerous	Do not know
<b>All Grades</b>	52.0%	29.3%	12.4%	2.4%	3.9%
<b>Grade 7</b>	65.1%	20.7%	8.5%	1.6%	4.1%
<b>Grade 8</b>	55.2%	26.3%	12.1%	2.2%	4.2%
<b>Grade 9</b>	51.9%	28.9%	13.4%	2.7%	3.1%
<b>Grade 10</b>	47.5%	32.7%	13.3%	2.8%	3.7%
<b>Grade 11</b>	43.7%	35.1%	14.1%	2.9%	4.2%
<b>Grade 12</b>	46.2%	33.7%	13.6%	2.4%	4.0%

## MARIJUANA

Adolescents have been perceiving marijuana use as less dangerous over the last few years. For instance, 75.9% of Amarillo-area adolescents in 2010 reported the use of marijuana as risky while only 69.9% did so in 2013. The perception of risk dropped 6% over four years<sup>4</sup>. Still, 76% of regional adolescents perceive marijuana as either very or somewhat dangerous.

Table 3: Perceived Risk of Harm, Marijuana, TSS 2014<sup>5</sup>

How dangerous do you think it is for kids your age to use marijuana?					
	Very Dangerous	Somewhat Dangerous	Not Very Dangerous	Not at All Dangerous	Do Not Know
<b>All Grades</b>	65.4%	10.6%	8.0%	10.5%	5.6%
<b>Grade 7</b>	72.9%	8.0%	4.4%	5.8%	8.9%

<sup>4</sup> Texas Prevention Impact Index, Amarillo 2013.

<sup>5</sup> Source: Texas Student Survey, Regions 1-2, 2014

<b>Grade 8</b>	71.6%	11.0%	6.1%	8.2%	3.1%
<b>Grade 9</b>	67.7%	13.1%	8.5%	9.0%	1.7%
<b>Grade 10</b>	55.1%	13.8%	12.2%	12.1%	6.8%
<b>Grade 11</b>	48.5%	12.6%	11.0%	21.7%	6.2%
<b>Grade 12</b>	48.6%	14.5%	14.2%	18.5%	4.3%

## PRESCRIPTION DRUGS

Overall, Region 1 adolescents report that the misuse of prescription drugs can be harmful. 77% of Amarillo-area adolescents report them as dangerous<sup>6</sup> while 81% of Lubbock-area teens report the misuse of prescription drugs as a moderate or great risk<sup>7</sup>. Regionally, 89.2% of adolescents report that hydrocodone is either very or somewhat dangerous to use.

Table 4: Perceived Risk of Harm, Hydrocodone, TSS 2014<sup>8</sup>

How dangerous do you think it is for kids your age to use hydrocodone?					
	Very Dangerous	Somewhat Dangerous	Not Very Dangerous	Not at All Dangerous	Do Not Know
<b>All Grades</b>	83.6%	5.6%	1.9%	1.0%	7.9%
<b>Grade 7</b>	82.7%	4.2%	1.1%	1.8%	10.2%
<b>Grade 8</b>	84.5%	3.4%	2.7%	0.8%	8.6%
<b>Grade 9</b>	86.7%	7.7%	1.5%	0.8%	3.3%
<b>Grade 10</b>	80.3%	6.5%	3.0%	1.4%	8.8%
<b>Grade 11</b>	78.2%	9.1%	1.8%	1.0%	9.9%
<b>Grade 12</b>	83.9%	6.9%	3.2%	0.4%	5.5%

Nationally, both teens and parents seem to share similar misconceptions concerning prescription drug misuse and abuse. 16% of parents and 27% of teens believe that using prescription drugs to get high is safer than using street drugs. 33% of teens believe that it is okay to use prescription drugs that are not prescribed to them in order to deal with injury, illness, or pain<sup>9</sup>.

Teens seem to have little idea about the danger of addiction in regard to prescription drugs. 25% of teens say that there is little to no risk in using prescription pain relievers without a prescription and 22% of teens say the same thing about Ritalin and Adderall. In addition, 20% of teens believe that pain relievers are not addictive at all.

## SYNTHETIC CANNABINOIDS

Recently synthetic cannabinoids like Spice, K2, or more locally, “Legal Herb” has garnered much attention in Region 1—and for good reason. Horror stories are common on the local news about people

<sup>6</sup> Texas Prevention Impact Index, Amarillo, 2013.

<sup>7</sup> 40 Developmental Asset Survey, Lubbock Area, 2014

<sup>8</sup> Source: Texas Student Survey, Regions 1-2, 2014

<sup>9</sup> The Partnership at Drugfree.org, April 23, 2013

who die while using these drugs. Thankfully, 89.5% of regional adolescents report that it is either very or somewhat dangerous. This is significantly higher for seniors (92.9%).

Table 5: Perceived Risk of Harm, Synthetic Marijuana, TSS 2014<sup>10</sup>

How dangerous do you think it is for kids your age to use synthetic marijuana?						
	Very Dangerous	Somewhat Dangerous	Not Very Dangerous	Not at All Dangerous	Do Not Know	
<b>All Grades</b>	83.1%	6.4%	2.2%	0.8%	7.5%	
<b>Grade 7</b>	80.6%	3.6%	3.2%	1.5%	11.1%	
<b>Grade 8</b>	81.0%	6.0%	3.2%	0.9%	8.9%	
<b>Grade 9</b>	87.1%	7.7%	1.8%	0.8%	2.6%	
<b>Grade 10</b>	79.5%	8.7%	3.0%	0.7%	8.1%	
<b>Grade 11</b>	79.4%	9.6%	2.9%	0.9%	7.3%	
<b>Grade 12</b>	85.3%	7.6%	1.3%	0.4%	5.4%	

## PERCEIVED ACCESSIBILITY

Adolescents can only use ATOD substances if they have access to these substances. In general, the less able adolescents can find these substances, the less likely they are to consume these substances. Laws exist in order to limit adolescent's access to legal yet harmful substances such as alcohol and tobacco in addition to the banning of illegal substances.

Even though laws exist to restrict access to ATOD substances, adolescents can often find and consume these substances. Enforcing current laws may help limit access or community groups may need to lobby for stronger laws to protect adolescents.

### ACCESS TO ALCOHOL

One way to prevent teens from drinking is to cut off easy access to alcohol. Unfortunately, 46.3% of regional teens report that it is very or somewhat easy to get alcohol. 69.9% of regional 12<sup>th</sup> grade adolescents report that it is either somewhat or very easy to access alcohol.

Table 6: Accessibility of Alcohol, TSS 2014<sup>11</sup>

If you wanted to, how difficult would it be for you to get alcohol?						
	Never Heard of it	Impossible	Very Difficult	Somewhat Difficult	Somewhat Easy	Very Easy
<b>All Grades</b>	22.0%	15.9%	6.0%	9.8%	19.9%	26.4%
<b>Grade 7</b>	31.7%	22.5%	9.2%	9.8%	14.8%	12.0%
<b>Grade 8</b>	18.3%	18.0%	10.0%	11.1%	22.9%	19.7%

<sup>10</sup> Source: Texas Student Survey, Regions 1-2, 2014

<sup>11</sup> Source: Texas Student Survey, Regions 1-2, 2014



<b>Grade 9</b>	15.1%	11.6%	6.5%	9.8%	19.7%	37.4%
<b>Grade 10</b>	14.9%	5.4%	2.9%	12.9%	24.2%	39.8%
<b>Grade 11</b>	7.6%	15.3%	4.1%	11.6%	26.0%	35.4%
<b>Grade 12</b>	10.0%	5.0%	3.3%	11.8%	28.5%	41.4%

In order to limit access to alcohol, communities in Region 1 need to work together with Law Enforcement and Retailers. Many communities have laws on the books but may not enforce them. Many factors, including culture, may contribute to granting access to adolescents to alcohol. Although region-specific data is limited, here is where regional teens report acquiring alcohol:

Table 7: People and Places Texas Teens Get Alcohol, TSS 2014<sup>12</sup>

How often, if ever, do you get alcoholic beverages from...						
	Do Not Drink	Never	Seldom	Most of the Time	Always	
<b>At home?</b>						
<b>All Grades</b>	52.8%	25.5%	15.8%	4.3%	1.6%	
<b>Grade 7</b>	63.5%	25.3%	7.9%	2.9%	0.4%	
<b>Grade 8</b>	55.2%	23.1%	17.3%	2.7%	1.7%	
<b>Grade 9</b>	49.9%	20.1%	21.1%	7.9%	1.1%	
<b>Grade 10</b>	44.9%	29.1%	19.4%	3.9%	2.7%	
<b>Grade 11</b>	47.2%	25.6%	19.6%	3.8%	3.8%	
<b>Grade 12</b>	40.1%	27.7%	21.1%	9.3%	1.8%	
<b>From friends?</b>						
<b>All Grades</b>	49.1%	19.1%	16.2%	11.8%	3.9%	
<b>Grade 7</b>	60.7%	23.8%	7.9%	6.2%	1.4%	
<b>Grade 8</b>	55.4%	17.6%	17.4%	7.4%	2.1%	
<b>Grade 9</b>	49.6%	16.1%	19.2%	12.4%	2.7%	
<b>Grade 10</b>	35.2%	16.5%	25.2%	15.5%	7.7%	
<b>Grade 11</b>	38.2%	10.0%	23.5%	21.6%	6.6%	
<b>Grade 12</b>	30.4%	18.5%	21.6%	21.7%	7.7%	
<b>From a store?</b>						
<b>All Grades</b>	53.5%	38.1%	4.4%	2.7%	1.4%	
<b>Grade 7</b>	66.3%	30.8%	1.4%	1.2%	0.2%	
<b>Grade 8</b>	58.7%	37.7%	2.8%	0.6%	0.3%	
<b>Grade 9</b>	52.6%	42.6%	3.1%	1.1%	0.5%	
<b>Grade 10</b>	44.3%	43.4%	6.4%	4.5%	1.3%	
<b>Grade 11</b>	43.4%	36.5%	11.1%	5.7%	3.2%	
<b>Grade 12</b>	35.8%	45.7%	7.6%	6.1%	4.8%	
<b>At parties?</b>						
<b>All Grades</b>	49.3%	19.8%	10.1%	9.4%	11.4%	
<b>Grade 7</b>	62.4%	23.3%	5.7%	5.8%	2.8%	
<b>Grade 8</b>	56.2%	19.8%	10.7%	9.5%	3.8%	
<b>Grade 9</b>	48.2%	13.2%	13.6%	9.7%	15.2%	

<sup>12</sup> Source: Texas School Survey of Drug and Alcohol Use, Regions 1-2, 2014

<b>Grade 10</b>	36.1%	17.9%	13.0%	15.1%	17.9%
<b>Grade 11</b>	36.9%	15.4%	13.9%	15.3%	18.5%
<b>Grade 12</b>	31.2%	18.0%	13.7%	11.7%	25.4%
<b>Other source?</b>					
<b>All Grades</b>	52.2%	25.1%	11.8%	6.2%	4.6%
<b>Grade 7</b>	64.3%	22.3%	6.2%	5.7%	1.5%
<b>Grade 8</b>	59.6%	21.3%	10.2%	5.1%	3.8%
<b>Grade 9</b>	51.7%	23.5%	12.0%	7.3%	5.4%
<b>Grade 10</b>	40.7%	27.5%	16.2%	10.2%	5.4%
<b>Grade 11</b>	40.5%	23.8%	19.8%	7.5%	8.4%
<b>Grade 12</b>	36.2%	29.0%	17.8%	8.1%	8.9%

The 2013 TPII reports that 39.6% of participating Amarillo area students indicate that alcohol is either very easy or fairly easy to get. In fact, 53.5% of these same adolescents report that alcohol is either likely or very likely to be present at parties. Of regional students responding to the 2014 Texas Student Survey, 20.8% reported that alcohol was either always or most of the time present at the parties the attended over the last year.

### ACCESS TO MARIJUANA

Overall, there is little data on how accessible marijuana is to adolescents in Region 1. However, the 2013 TPII<sup>13</sup> reports that 32.6% of participating Amarillo area students indicate that marijuana is either very easy or fairly easy to get. This is higher than the average for Region 1 as reported by the 2014 Texas Student Survey (29.7%).

Table 8: Accessibility of Marijuana, TSS 2014<sup>14</sup>

If you wanted to, how difficult would it be for you to get marijuana?						
	Never Heard of it	Impossible	Very Difficult	Somewhat Difficult	Somewhat Easy	Very Easy
<b>All Grades</b>	29.1%	24.6%	7.5%	9.1%	11.9%	17.8%
<b>Grade 7</b>	47.1%	27.9%	8.5%	6.8%	4.4%	5.3%
<b>Grade 8</b>	21.6%	34.5%	11.4%	11.3%	8.7%	12.6%
<b>Grade 9</b>	22.1%	23.3%	7.1%	11.0%	14.3%	22.3%
<b>Grade 10</b>	19.0%	16.7%	7.3%	14.7%	16.7%	25.8%
<b>Grade 11</b>	13.7%	21.0%	4.8%	12.0%	20.5%	28.0%
<b>Grade 12</b>	14.5%	13.6%	9.1%	8.5%	20.4%	33.9%

<sup>13</sup> Texas Prevention Impact Index, 2013

<sup>14</sup> Source: Texas Student Survey, Regions 1-2, 2014

## ACCESS TO PRESCRIPTION DRUGS

Teens' ease of access to prescription drugs in their own homes and in the homes of family and friends enables teens to misuse and abuse prescriptions. In fact, four in ten teens (40 percent) indicate prescription drugs are everywhere, while 43 percent indicate prescription drugs are easier to get than illegal drugs.<sup>15</sup>

In general, teens from urbanized, but non metropolitan areas are at the greatest risk for misusing or abusing prescription drugs, followed by rural and then metropolitan areas.<sup>16</sup> However, lax attitudes and permissiveness by parents toward prescription drug misuse and abuse, along with availability, are directly linked to these abuses by teens. Access to prescription drugs is usually found in the family (or friend's) medicine cabinet and teens are more likely to misuse or abuse these drugs if they think that their parents are okay with it, or if they think that any punishment would be less than for using street drugs.

There is little region-specific data on how accessible adolescents feel they are to prescription drugs. However, most parents and grandparents give little thought to how they store their prescriptions—especially expired prescriptions. Some regional coalitions are starting to sponsor prescription collection programs and there seems to be a need. In 2013, the Lubbock VOICES coalition reported that, during their prescription drop off program, **they collected almost 100 pounds of expired prescription medication prescribed during the 1950's and 1960's alone.**

## SYNTHETIC CANNABINOIDS

Recently synthetic cannabinoids like Spice, K2, or more locally, "Legal Herb" has garnered much attention in Region 1—and for good reason. There is little definitive data on how prevalent this illicit drug is and even whether it is legal to purchase. Still, 16.5% of regional adolescents report that it is either somewhat or very easy to get. This is much higher for seniors (27%).

Table 9: Accessibility of Synthetic Marijuana, TSS 2014<sup>17</sup>

If you wanted to, how difficult would it be for you to get synthetic marijuana?						
	Never Heard of it	Impossible	Very Difficult	Somewhat Difficult	Somewhat Easy	Very Easy
<b>All Grades</b>	42.2%	26.2%	8.5%	6.5%	6.4%	10.1%
<b>Grade 7</b>	59.6%	24.4%	7.0%	3.5%	2.6%	2.8%
<b>Grade 8</b>	41.6%	31.7%	11.9%	4.9%	3.6%	6.3%
<b>Grade 9</b>	32.8%	26.3%	10.4%	6.0%	8.8%	15.7%
<b>Grade 10</b>	32.3%	21.3%	7.2%	13.2%	11.3%	14.7%
<b>Grade 11</b>	26.1%	29.5%	9.0%	10.8%	9.5%	15.0%
<b>Grade 12</b>	29.0%	22.3%	12.6%	9.1%	9.3%	17.7%

<sup>15</sup> The Partnership at Drugfree.org

<sup>16</sup> SAMHSA, April 11, 2013

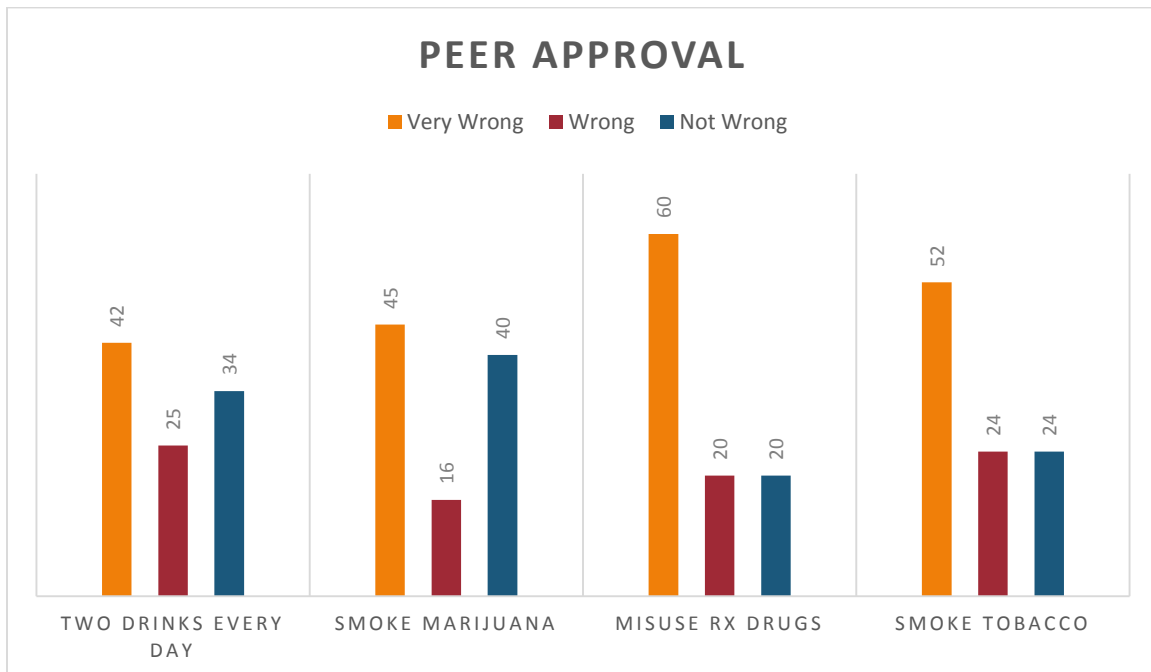
<sup>17</sup> Source: Texas Student Survey, Regions 1-2, 2014

## PERCEIVED ATTITUDES OF PEERS

Social standards and conduct contribute to adolescent substance abuse. In many communities, parents and peers implicitly or explicitly approve of underage drinking or other substance use or misuse. This can take the form of unwritten cultural norms to parents providing alcohol for teens at a social event.

Often adolescents seek the approval of peers for consuming ATOD substances. Peers can contribute to the social norm by implicit or explicit approval of the consumption of these substances in social settings. Alcohol is still the most widely consumed substance by adolescents in Region 1.

Figure 2: Peer Approval, Lubbock Area, 2014<sup>18</sup>



Currently, the Texas Student Survey does not ask participants about peer approval concerning these substances. However, 57.8% of regional adolescents do report that at least a few of their close friends use alcohol and 39.7% have at least a few close friends who use marijuana<sup>19</sup>.

In a recent survey conducted by Hockley County VOICES, 77.56% teens report believing that alcohol use by underage youth is a problem. 31.41% believe that it is a serious problem while 46.15% classify it as a minor problem. 22.44% believe that it is not a problem at all. Still, 63.92% of these participants believe that drinking and driving among youth is a serious problem while 24.68% classify it as only a minor problem. 11.39% believe that underage drinking and driving is not a problem at all here.

<sup>18</sup> Source: 40 Developmental Asset Survey, Lubbock Area, 2014.

<sup>19</sup> Source: Texas Student Survey, Regions 1-2, 2014

In addition, participants rated the likelihood for these reasons that Hockley County youth may consume alcohol:

Table 10: Reasons Adolescents Drink, Hockley County VOICES 2015<sup>20</sup>

<b>Most people my age who drink do so because... (Check all that apply)</b>	
<b>They want to have a good time at a party</b>	84.42%
<b>They are sad or depressed and want to feel better about themselves</b>	38.31%
<b>They wish to rebel and defy their parents, teachers, and other adult authorities</b>	34.42%
<b>They wish to fit in or be accepted by their friends or peers</b>	61.04%
<b>They are bored</b>	41.56%

Interestingly, 66.67% of participants believe that youth are responsible for contributing to the problem of underage drinking. 41.67% believe that parents are responsible while 25.64% believe that alcohol outlets such as bars, restaurants, and liquor stores share blame. 23.08% say they don't know who is responsible for this but 23.72% ascribe some blame to alcohol advertising.

In addition, all Hockley County teens who participated in this survey were asked which of the following prevention programs they would support to decrease alcohol use by youth under the legal drinking age of 21:

Table 11: Ways to Reduce Underage Drinking, Hockley County VOICES 2015<sup>21</sup>

<b>Which of the following approaches would you support to decrease underage drinking? (Check all that apply)</b>	
<b>New and/or stiffer penalties</b>	33.83%
<b>More law enforcement</b>	36.84%
<b>More alcohol education in schools</b>	40.60%
<b>More alcohol education in TV, radio, and magazines</b>	25.56%
<b>More alcohol education online</b>	24.81%
<b>Public presentations by people who have been seriously hurt or impaired by alcohol use</b>	42.86%
<b>Driver's license suspension for youth who drink alcohol</b>	52.36%
<b>Alcohol-free teen night clubs</b>	48.12%
<b>Ban on alcohol advertising</b>	21.80%

## PERCEIVED ATTITUDES OF PARENTS

Often parents contribute to adolescent substance use by approving of, either implicitly or explicitly, their children consuming these substances. Alcohol is usually the commonly supplied substance that adolescents consume.

<sup>20</sup> Source: Hockley County VOICES Survey, 2015

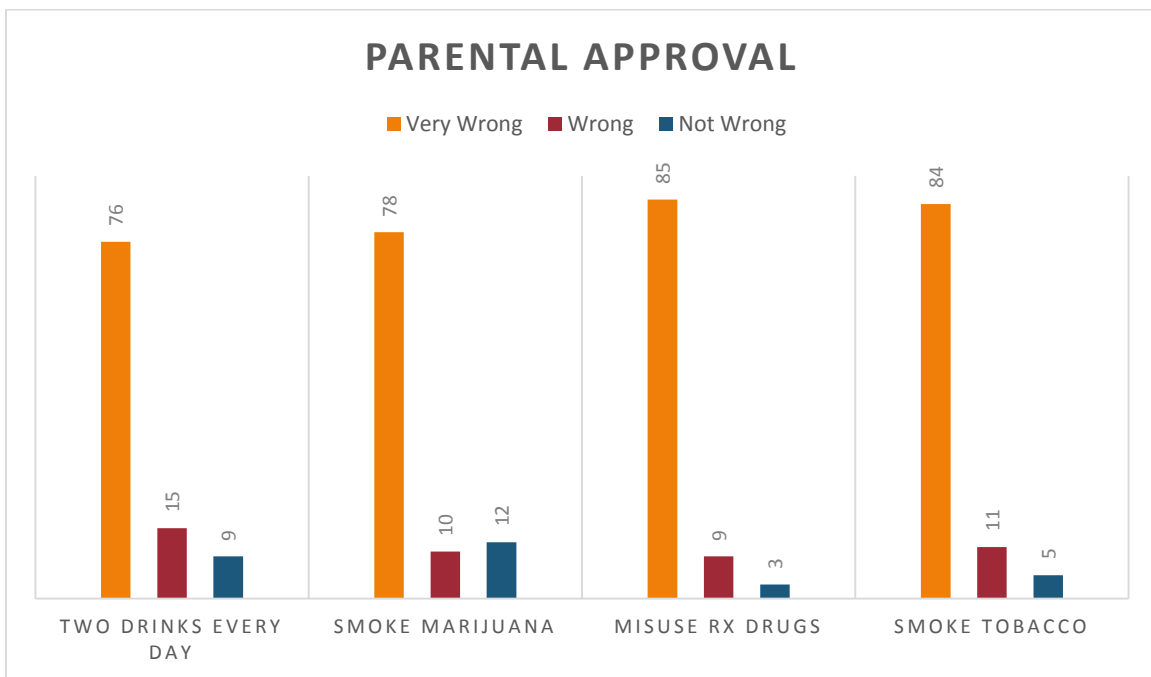
<sup>21</sup> Source: Hockley County VOICES Survey, 2015

In Region 1, the most common complacent attitude among adults about abused substances is that of alcohol. In interviews, many rural communities do not report or prosecute adolescents who consume alcohol. Often, this is because the Law Enforcement Officer knows the family and makes the choice to just take the teen home instead of to jail. Sometimes, communities are indulgent of adolescents who play sports—especially football—and provide a venue to drink as well as the alcohol.

Many adults remember drinking in high school and consider it an implicit rite of passage into adulthood. Unfortunately, adolescents generally have a different view of drinking. In interviews, many adults in Region 1 report that they remember drinking as adolescents in order to feel grown up or more adult. Adolescents, who participated in these interviews with their parents, often report that they drink in order to get drunk. Because adults have a different understanding of the current motives behind regional adolescent alcohol consumption, they may not be motivated to enforce no drinking ordinances.

Surprisingly, prescription drugs are perceived by Lubbock-area adolescents as what parents disapprove of most strongly with 85% saying that parents view it as “very wrong”. However, smoking tobacco is seen as most disapproved of by Lubbock-area parents (95% wrong/very wrong) followed by prescription drugs (94% wrong/very wrong), two drinks a day (91% wrong/very wrong) and finally marijuana (88% wrong/very wrong).

Figure 3: Parental Approval, Lubbock Area 2014<sup>22</sup>



Adolescents typically adapt to the norms of their community. One of the strategies of environmental prevention is to change community norms so that high risk and illegal use of alcohol, tobacco and other drugs is not acceptable.

<sup>22</sup> Source: 40 Developmental Asset Survey, Lubbock Area, 2014.

Norms are not defined strictly as laws or policies. Enforcement of laws and policies are specifically addressed in another environmental strategy. Norms are often unwritten expectations or rules that a community holds, sometimes by default. For example, a community might believe that it's acceptable to provide alcohol to youth at graduation parties as long as an adult is present.

Creating a health-promoting normative environment can include everything from promoting public events that are free from alcohol, tobacco and other drug use to educating community members about the real scope of alcohol, tobacco and other drug abuse within the community.

## ALCOHOL

According to the participants of the Hockley County VOICES Survey, a full 80% of these participants report that they know adults who let minors consume alcohol in their homes<sup>23</sup>. In regional focus groups and interviews, many parents expressed the belief that underage drinking was acceptable as long as the adolescents were supervised or kept from driving drunk. Often, parents who would normally not allow their children to drink alcohol will allow some alcohol consumption on holidays at home.

Regionally, 75% of adolescents report that their parents either strongly or mildly disapprove of them drink alcohol. Interestingly, 8.6% report that they do not know how their parents feel about them consuming alcohol.

Table 12: Perceived Parental Attitudes about Drinking Alcohol, TSS 2014<sup>24</sup>

How do your parents feel about kids your age drinking alcohol?						
	Strongly Disapprove	Mildly Disapprove	Neither	Mildly Approve	Strongly Approve	Do Not Know
<b>All Grades</b>	62.4%	12.6%	11.0%	4.5%	0.9%	8.6%
<b>Grade 7</b>	73.5%	8.4%	3.7%	1.9%	0.8%	11.7%
<b>Grade 8</b>	62.3%	16.7%	10.7%	1.0%	0.2%	9.2%
<b>Grade 9</b>	57.8%	13.0%	14.3%	8.4%	2.0%	4.5%
<b>Grade 10</b>	59.3%	15.0%	14.7%	4.5%	1.3%	5.1%
<b>Grade 11</b>	57.8%	12.5%	14.0%	6.9%	0.9%	7.8%
<b>Grade 12</b>	47.4%	18.9%	19.0%	8.6%	0.5%	5.6%

## MARIJUANA

During regional focus groups and interviews, many adults and adolescents are surprised to find that marijuana use is still illegal in Texas! Some adults expressed a sentiment that marijuana was safer due to it being a natural plant or "at least it's not meth". Some even expressed that they believe marijuana is safer than alcohol for adolescents to consume. This attitude could be interpreted by adolescents as acceptable use or even a permission to use.

<sup>23</sup> Source: Hockley County VOICES Survey, 2015

<sup>24</sup> Source: Texas Student Survey, Regions 1-2, 2014

Regionally, 83.2% of adolescents report that their parents either strongly or mildly disapprove of them consuming marijuana. Perhaps most alarming is that 8.4% of regional 12<sup>th</sup> grade adolescents report that their parents either mildly or strongly **approve** of them using marijuana.

Table 13: Perceived Parental Attitudes about Marijuana Use, TSS 2014<sup>25</sup>

How do your parents feel about kids your age using marijuana?						
	Strongly Disapprove	Mildly Disapprove	Neither	Mildly Approve	Strongly Approve	Do Not Know
<b>All Grades</b>	77.9%	5.3%	5.3%	1.9%	1.5%	8.0%
<b>Grade 7</b>	82.1%	3.2%	1.3%	0.6%	1.0%	11.8%
<b>Grade 8</b>	78.7%	5.2%	7.8%	0.8%	0.3%	7.2%
<b>Grade 9</b>	78.2%	9.1%	4.6%	1.4%	2.3%	4.4%
<b>Grade 10</b>	80.0%	3.8%	6.3%	3.1%	0.7%	6.0%
<b>Grade 11</b>	73.8%	7.4%	7.3%	4.1%	1.4%	6.0%
<b>Grade 12</b>	70.2%	7.7%	9.8%	3.9%	4.5%	3.9%

## PRESCRIPTION DRUGS

Regionally, we have little information about how adolescents perceive their parental approval for prescription drug use. Nationally, parents are talking less to their teenage children about the dangers of prescription drug misuse and abuse as compared to other drugs. Only 14% of teens report discussing with their parents the dangers of prescription drug misuse and abuse, as compared to 81% of teens who report discussing the dangers of marijuana use with their parents.<sup>26</sup>

This decrease in discussions concerning prescription drug misuse and abuse has troubling implications for teens whose behavior is linked to how they believe their parents would react if they were caught abusing or misusing prescription drugs. 23% of teens believe that their parents would not care as much if they were caught misusing or abusing prescription drugs as compared to illicit drugs like marijuana.

In any event, parents may be sending mixed messages to their teenage children concerning prescription drugs. 20% of parents indicate that they have given their teenage children prescription drugs that were not prescribed for them and 17% of parents say that they do not throw away or dispose of old prescription medication.

Here are some other specific parental attitudes concerning prescription drugs from the 2012 Partnership Attitude Tracking Study (PATS):

- 29% of parents say they believe ADHD medication can improve a child's academic or testing performance—even if the teen does not have ADHD
- 20% of parents report that they have given their teen a Rx drug not prescribed for them
- 16% of parents believe that using Rx drugs to get high is safer than using street drugs

<sup>25</sup> Source: Texas Student Survey, Regions 1-2, 2014

<sup>26</sup> The Partnership at Drugfree.org



## CONCLUSION

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This report focuses on how regional adolescents perceive substance abuse. Specifically, it examines adolescent perception of harm, perception of accessibility, perception of peer attitudes, and perception of parental attitudes concerning underage drinking, marijuana, prescription drugs, and synthetic cannabinoids. These perceptions should give parents, caretakers, prevention specialists, and all regional stakeholders a place to start when communicating with regional adolescents concerning the consumption of these substances.

Regional adolescents continue to view marijuana as less harmful even if they do not consume it themselves. Also, these teens are drinking in order to get drunk which is a different motivation that what many regional parents understand to be the purpose of underage drinking. In fact, 80% of Hockley County adolescents report knowing an adult who will let teens drink in their home. Parents and other stakeholders need to address these issues soon.

### KEY FINDINGS

- Fewer and fewer regional adolescents perceive marijuana as harmful.
- 30% of regional adolescents say marijuana is easy or very easy to acquire.
- 90% of regional adolescents say that synthetic pot is dangerous
- Alcohol continues to be considered easy to get by regional adolescents
- 80% of Hockley Co adolescents know an adult who lets teens drink at home
- Many adults misunderstand how adolescents approach drinking today
- 1 in 5 parents report giving their child a prescription drug not prescribed for them
- 94% of Lubbock-area teens report that parents believe Rx drug misuse as wrong
- 27% of regional 12<sup>th</sup> grade adolescents report that synthetic pot is easy to get

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## APPENDIX: REGIONAL COALITIONS

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**Impact Futures** is a drug-free community coalition serving the Amarillo and Canyon areas. Their mission is to provide awareness of substance abuse prevention, intervention and treatment services in the Texas Panhandle. They provide opportunities for collaboration and partnerships with interested members who wish to respond to opportunities requiring a community coalition. Their vision is to ensure a healthier community by building assets, strengthening Protective Factors and reducing Risk Factors in the community.

Members of Impact Futures include representatives of youth and adults, parents, businesses, media, schools, youth and adult-serving organizations, law enforcement, faith-based community, civic and volunteer, healthcare, local government and other non-profit organizations. Together, members provide services and programs that educate people about the dangers of synthetic cannabinoids (and other drugs) in order to prevent the selling and consumption of these substances.

**University Medical Center's Nurses Educating on Illegal Drugs & Synthetics (NEIDS)** is an outreach group of registered nurses that believe synthetic marijuana and other illegal drugs kill and harm too many people. Their mission is to provide education to the public on the health risks and hazards of the use of synthetic marijuana and other harmful drugs.

These medical professionals hope to accomplish their mission by using public service announcements, focused educational offerings to school age children, point of care education, and working with local coalitions against synthetic marijuana. They support new or revised legislation of local and state laws to halt the sale, distribution, and the manufacturing of these synthetic compounds and illegal drugs.

Although a new organization, members of NEIDS are committed to their mission and have recently testified before the Texas Senate Criminal Justice Committee as to the devastating effects of synthetic cannabinoids.

**VOICES of Hockley County**<sup>27</sup> is a community coalition, funded by Texas Department of State Health Services (DSHS), whose purpose is to encourage community mobilization to implement evidence-based environmental strategies with a primary focus on changing policies and social norms in Hockley County to prevent and reduce underage drinking and marijuana and prescription drug abuse. Their mission is to empower communities to create positive changes in attitudes, behaviors, and policies to prevent and reduce at-risk behaviors in youth with a unified focus on alcohol, marijuana, and prescription drugs.

Members of this coalition are people who wish to help youth make better choices. These people are from a wide range of organizations that represent Hockley County. These volunteers include people from civic groups, local churches, city government, medical professionals, school officials, humanitarian organizations, and young people themselves. Anyone who wants to help make Hockley County a better place to live is welcome to join.

VOICES keeps active in the community through several programs aimed at making Hockley County a better place to live. Each year VOICES sponsors the Back-to-School Kickoff where backpacks filled with school supplies are given to students who need them. Twice a year VOICES conducts a Medication

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<sup>27</sup> Volunteers Offering Involvement in Communities to Expand Services (VOICES)

Cleanout where old and expired prescription medication is collected and safely disposed of. Through the school year, volunteers conduct youth prevention programs and other community service projects.

As part of their mission, Hockley County VOICES conducts a community needs assessment that looks at how teens are misusing marijuana, alcohol, and prescription drugs. As part of this, volunteers conducted a survey focusing on how Hockley County teens perceive and consume alcohol.

**VOICES of Lubbock County Community Coalition** is funded by the Texas Department of State Health Services, established for the purpose of assisting the community in developing policies, procedures and activities to prevent youth from using alcohol, marijuana, prescription drugs and other drugs.

Their mission is to empower communities to create positive changes in attitudes, behaviors and policies to prevent and reduce at-risk behavior in youth with a unified focus on alcohol, marijuana and prescription drug prevention. Recently, they have focused on preventing synthetic cannabinoid abuse as well.

**Warriors against Synthetic Pot (WASP)** is an organization dedicated to the eradication of synthetic cannabinoids. Ultimately, they are working to stop the selling and using of these drugs by influencing legislation to increase the legal consequences of pushing these products.

WASP is active at both the local and state levels. In Lubbock, they pushed the Lubbock City Council to action, protested the sales of synthetic pot in front of stores known to sell it, and aided Lubbock police in finding those places that are selling. They have also gone to the Texas State Capitol building and contacted local State Representatives concerning synthetic cannabinoids and they have testified before the Texas Senate Criminal Justice Committee as to the devastating effects of these drugs.

Although this organization originated in Lubbock, another chapter has started in Plainview and other chapters are planned state-wide.

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