



2008 Key Issue Form

1. Title: Promoting the Health and Well-Being of Adolescents

2. Issue Description

There is substantial evidence that an ecological, community-based approach to youth development would improve the opportunities and protective factors that promote the healthy development of adolescents. Adolescence is a critical period for developing lifelong habits and it is important for communities to provide opportunities for adolescents to engage in meaningful activities which encourage positive and health promoting behaviors.

The following selected recommendations from the *New Hampshire Adolescent Health Strategic plan - Supporting New Hampshire Youth, Moving Toward a Healthier Future* (March, 2005) deserve special consideration for Cooperative Extension programming:

- Build the capacity of youth to become healthy, productive adults.
- Help families support the health and well-being of their adolescents.
- Increase community support for adolescent health.
- Encourage collaborations among those working for and with youth.

3. Public value for Extension to address this issue

-Building the capacity of youth to become healthy, productive adults.

"Adolescents who learn to make meaningful contributions to others and to society, and who develop competence, confidence, character, and connection to others and their community, are prepared to become healthy adults (Pittman et al., 2001)."

-Helping families support the health and well-being of their adolescents.

Parents and caregivers are critical to the healthy development of adolescents, and remain the primary source of nurturance, support and information, despite peers and institutions playing an increasingly larger role in their lives.

-Increasing community support for adolescent health.

There are many benefits adolescents receive from meaningful community support and engagement, including occupational learning, leadership opportunities, community service learning, positive peer relationships, development of self esteem, building life skills and promoting healthy behaviors.

-Encouraging collaborations among those working for and with youth.

A focus on partnerships and collaborations among youth-focused programs will result in programming that is more comprehensive and less duplicative in nature.

3. Identify and summarize key data that help make the case that this is a key

The New Hampshire 2007 Youth Risk Behavior Survey yielded the following selected results regarding high school adolescent health issues:

- 25.4% of the students, one or more times in the past 30 days, rode in a car or other vehicle driven by someone who had been drinking alcohol.
- 24.6 % of the students felt so sad or hopeless for almost every day for two weeks or more in a row that they stopped doing some of their usual activities during the past 12 months.
- 11.5 % of the students smoked a whole cigarette for the first time before age 13.
- 19.0% of the students smoked cigarettes on one or more of the past 30 days.
- 8.9% of the students smoked cigarettes on 20 or more of the past 30 days.
- 18.1 % of the students had their first drink of alcohol other than a few sips before age 13.
- 44.8 % of the students had at least one drink of alcohol on one or more of the past 30 days.
- 28.4% of the students had 5 or more drinks of alcohol in a row, that is, within a couple of hours, on one or more of the past 30 days.
- 22.9% of the students used marijuana one or more times during the past 30 days.
- 12.8% of the students sniffed glue, breathed the contents of aerosol spray cans, or inhaled any paints or sprays to get high one or more times during their life.
- 44.7% of the students stated they have had sexual intercourse: (9th grade-26.6%; 10th grade-41.7%; 11th grade-48.2%; 12th grade: 64.3%)
- 34.1 % of the students had sexual intercourse with one or more people during the past three months.
- 64.2% of the students who had sexual intercourse during the past 3 months used a condom during last sexual intercourse.
- 46.9% of the students were physically active for a total of at least 60 minutes or more per day on 5 or more of the past 7 days.
- 14.4% of the students were at risk of becoming overweight (i.e., at or above the 85th percentile but below the 95th percentile for body mass index by age and sex).

The New Hampshire Adolescent Health Strategic Plan - Supporting New Hampshire Youth, Moving Toward a Healthier Future, identifies the following seven guiding principles to provide structure and focus when working together to support the health and well being of adolescents.

1. Adolescence is a developmental period bridging childhood and adulthood.
2. All youth are valuable and have the potential to make positive contributions to our society and become healthy adults.
3. Social conditions that limit adolescents' opportunities and resources make some youth particularly vulnerable.
4. Involving youth as partners enriches our programs and policies and provides opportunities for adolescents to develop new skills and knowledge.
5. Early intervention across the environments where adolescents function improves the likelihood of effectively supporting their health and well being.
6. Problem free is not fully prepared.
7. Program and policy decisions should be made using research-based evidence.

In addition, the *New Hampshire Adolescent Health Strategic Plan* cited that focus groups held with 56 adolescents yielded the following selected results:

- All participants agreed that “being healthy” is more than the absence of disease and that true health is a function of physical and mental well-being. Eating right and being physically fit are important to good health.
- High priority health concerns included sex, STDs and birth control, diet, smoking, drugs and alcohol, and exercise and staying in shape.
- Youth wanted “straight talk” about the issues that concern them and wanted to hear from people with real life experiences to share.

4. How does/would addressing this issue tie into UNH Cooperative Extension’s Mission?

Promoting the health and well-being of adolescents fits well with the UNH mission to strengthen youth, families and communities. In addition, the UNH Cooperative Extension Strategic Plan identifies working in partnership with other youth serving organizations, supporting youth and adults working in partnership, developing community capacity building strategies and building life skills in New Hampshire youth as important components of the scope of the organization.

4. What Extension programs/activities, if any, currently address this issue? For each, please succinctly describe how the program/activity addresses the issue.

Youth as Partners – A process to engage youth in leadership roles with adults

Health Rocks – A program using teens as teachers of decision making skills related to substance abuse

Boomerang – A character education program using teens as teachers

Strengthening Families – A nationally and internationally recognized parenting and family strengthening program found to significantly reduce problem behaviors, delinquency, and alcohol and drug abuse in children and to improve social competencies and school performance. Parents strengthen bonds with their children and learn more effective parenting skills.

Community Youth Mapping - The process of involving and engaging youth and adults in the collection of baseline information about places to go, things to do and special opportunities in the community. Assets are mapped to document existing resources for young people and families in such areas as Art, Food, Counseling, Health, Education, Housing, Emergency Services, Employment and Recreation.

Youth Ventures – A program to support youth entrepreneurship to establish a business with a community benefit.

Community Coalitions for Youth and Families – Cooperative Extension is involved in many community collaboratives with the goal of improving outcomes for youth and families in the community.

5. What other organizations/agencies are currently addressing this issue?

There are many cooperating partners addressing adolescent health issues due to the large scope of the issue. The New Hampshire Prevention Strategic Framework Program, along with the UNH Center on Adolescence will be important units with whom to consult and partner, as well as a variety of other statewide and community groups/collaboratives.

6. If Extension does not currently address this issue, how might we address this issue in the future? (Consider staff capacity, financial resources, volunteer capacity, and potential partnerships with other agencies/organizations, etc.).

Cooperative Extension is currently addressing this issue, though given the professional expertise in the organization, there is potential to be much more engaged.

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Representing: 4-H Youth Development