

Integrating Project Amp into States' Adolescent Prevention and Early Intervention Initiatives

Project Amp is a young adult peer-based substance use prevention and early intervention model designed to prevent and reduce substance use among youth at low-to-moderate risk. In Massachusetts and in other states across the country, Project Amp has played an important role in closing service gaps and advancing the goals of state behavioral health agencies.

Project Amp supports the goals of state substance use directors by expanding connection to peer support and enhancing key prevention and early intervention strategies — like [youth screening, brief intervention, and referral to treatment \(SBIRT\)](#). Project Amp can be implemented in schools and health settings as an adaptation of [youth SBIRT](#) or as a universal or targeted substance use prevention and early intervention offering, independent of a SBIRT framework. With its focus on adolescents, Project Amp is an innovative model that can help to stop addiction before it starts and reduce the health, social, and economic consequences of drug and alcohol use disorders for generations to come.

Project Amp uses the power of peer support to maximize the positive outcomes of youth SBIRT, a problem identification and referral model that the [National Association of State Alcohol and Drug Abuse Directors](#) has identified as a key prevention strategy.

Project Amp's Key Components




- Flexible, youth-centered curriculum for use in school, health, community, and virtual settings
- Evidence-based skills include peer support, motivational interviewing, screening, and brief intervention
- Early results indicate that Project Amp helps to reduce youth substance use, improve stress management, and build healthy coping and self-efficacy

When used as a near-age peer-based adaptation of youth SBIRT, Project Amp starts with a validated screening tool. Youth who screen at low to moderate risk are connected to peer mentors who deliver the Project Amp curriculum over 4-6 sessions (i.e., an extended, peer-delivered brief intervention).

Prior to Project Amp, person-centered peer supports have been underutilized in youth substance use prevention and early intervention models. This model leverages the unique strengths of young adults in recovery by offering skilled, developmentally appropriate peer support services to youth as a prevention strategy. By sharing their own experiences of substance use and related challenges, mentors help adolescents recognize risks early on, build awareness and motivation to change, and garner the personal skills, strategies, and support needed to do so¹. The Project Amp curriculum supports the development of a meaningful bond between young adult mentors and adolescent participants, and helps youth identify goals, social supports, strategies for stress reduction, wellness and risk factors, and myths and facts about alcohol and other drugs.

Project Amp has been [pilot tested in six locations](#), including schools and healthcare settings, with

Program Site	Brief Mentorship Intervention	Community Supports
<p>Schools, School-based Health Centers, or Health Centers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Connect low to moderate risk youth to Project Amp through screening, or other referral and engagement pathways • May host on-site or virtual mentorship sessions, or do so via a community partner • Provide supervision to mentors, directly or via community partner 	<p>Project Amp: Amplifying Our Futures</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Project Amp mentors are young adults in recovery (ages 18–30) • Mentors meet with youth participants 4-6 times over 1-2 months • Sessions focus on: interests, strengths, and goals; social and community supports; stress, alcohol and drug use; and other topics related to wellness 	<p>Positive Social Networks in the Community</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mentors help to identify and facilitate connections with relevant community supports • Mentors may serve as a bridge to other, ongoing services and supports • Supports might include youth-specific prevention, treatment, or recovery resources; or recreation, social, school-based, faith-based, and other community resources


Mentors engage youth to help them connect with Project Amp, complete the sessions, and consider if additional supports are needed

additional research currently underway. Initial results indicate that the program is effective at reducing substance use, improving stress management, and helping young people develop healthy coping mechanisms.

Supporting the Behavioral Health Workforce²: Project Amp’s Impact on Implementation Sites

In addition to benefiting youth participants, Project Amp mentors provide needed skills and serve as an added resource to schools, health centers, and other settings that serve adolescents with behavioral health needs³. Research on SBIRT implementation has illuminated barriers to success for numerous settings, including lack of knowledge and skills specific to youth substance misuse and limited organizational capacity to screen, follow up, and link youth to services and supports⁴. A 2019 implementation study concluded that Project Amp mentors add capacity to schools and healthcare

Project Amp Pilot Study: Initial Findings

Youth participants described Project Amp as enjoyable and fulfilling, and reported positive experiences with near-age peers, noting that they did not feel judged, their mentor had similar experiences to them, and that they felt understood. Youth also reported reduced substance use, improved stress management, and greater capacity to deal with difficult situations.

Project Amp mentors generally felt that the program was helpful for adolescents at risk of developing problematic substance use behaviors, and cited benefits to their own recovery and professional development.

Staff at implementation sites shared that Project Amp was a helpful resource for youth. They noted that mentors held genuine conversations about sensitive topics, and served as positive role models.

settings by delivering person-centered peer supports, conducting outreach, engagement, and follow-up⁵, and offering services and supports that are outside the scope of physicians, nurses, and other clinicians⁶.

Massachusetts School-Based Pilot

In 2016, Massachusetts became the first state in the country to mandate SBIRT implementation in all public middle and high schools. Since then, the state has trained all school nurses on screening and brief intervention, and schools have reached more than 375,000 students. As the state continues to collaborate with schools to implement the mandate, key lessons continue to emerge, including the need for additional tier two services to support students who screen at low-to-moderate risk. Many nurses

have requested additional programming and support for this group of students, feeling as though a one-time brief intervention is insufficient in meeting their needs but not knowing how best to engage them or make referrals.

In 2019, the Massachusetts Bureau of Substance Addiction Services launched a pilot to implement Project Amp in 13 schools across the state. Through this pilot, the state has trained young adult peer mentors at A-CRA provider agencies to deliver the Project Amp curriculum. Youth advocates who supported the SBIRT mandate are encouraging the continued adoption of Project Amp, as the model has emerged as an opportunity to close this gap in services, better support school nurses, and ensure youth at low to moderate risk have additional programmatic support.

Endnotes

1. K.L. Paquette, et al. (2019). A framework for integrating young peers in recovery into adolescent substance use prevention and early intervention. *Addictive Behaviors*. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.addbeh.2019.106080>
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6. Davidson, L., Bellamy, C., Guy, K., & Miller, R. (2012). Peer support among persons with severe mental illnesses: A review of evidence and experience. *World Psychiatry*, 11(2), 123–128. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.wpsyc.2012.05.009>.



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