

Project Prevent: To quickly engage the Bartholomew County community in understanding and sharing the facts about opioids and the consequences of inappropriate uses via impactful asset building and prevention-focused initiatives especially focused on youth (pre K – 25 years of age). Initiatives can be aimed at the entire family (including non-traditional forms of family).

Prevention includes a wide range of activities — known as “interventions”. These interventions aim to reduce risks or threats from opioids. There are three categories of prevention: primary, secondary, and tertiary.

Project Prevent is intended to support primary prevention initiatives though consideration will be given to proposals that are also secondary and tertiary interventions.

Primary prevention

Primary prevention aims to prevent disease or injury before it ever occurs. This is done by preventing exposures to hazards that cause disease or injury (addiction), altering unhealthy or unsafe behaviors that can lead to addictions, and increasing resistance to addiction should exposure occur. Examples include:

- education about healthy and safe habits (e.g. education about opioids)
- sharing the message that addiction is a disease
- helping develop assets and life skills to make it less likely a young person will choose risky behaviors

Secondary prevention

Secondary prevention aims to reduce the impact of addiction that has already occurred. This is done by detecting and treating addiction as soon as possible to halt or slow its progress, encouraging personal strategies to prevent relapse and implementing programs to return people to their original health and function to prevent long-term problems. Examples include:

- screening tests to detect early signs of addiction followed by early intervention
- screening tests to detect likelihood of making risky choices followed by an intervention that helps diminish those risks

Tertiary prevention

Tertiary prevention aims to soften the impact of ongoing addiction that has lasting effects. This is done by helping people manage long-term, often complex health and social problems (e.g. problems with familial relationships, housing, and employment) in order to improve as much as possible their ability to function, their quality of life and their life expectancy. Examples include:

- support groups that allow members to share strategies for living well
- vocational rehabilitation programs to retrain workers for new jobs when they have recovered as much as possible

Going “upstream”

To help explain the difference, take this example. Let’s say you are the mayor of a town near a swimming hole used by kids and adults alike. One summer, you learn that citizens are developing serious and persistent rashes after swimming as a result of a chemical irritant in the river. You decide to take action.

If you approach the company upstream that is discharging the chemical into the river and make it stop, you are engaging in primary prevention. You are removing the hazardous exposure and preventing rashes in the first place.

If you ask lifeguards to check swimmers as they get out of the river to look for signs of a rash that can then be treated right away, you are engaging in secondary prevention. You are not preventing rashes, but you are reducing their impact by treating them early on so swimmers

can regain their health and go about their everyday lives as soon as possible.

If you set up programs and support groups that teach people how to live with their persistent rashes, you are engaging in tertiary prevention. You are not preventing rashes or dealing with them right away, but you are softening their impact by helping people live with their rashes as best as possible.

For many health problems, a combination of primary, secondary and tertiary interventions are needed to achieve a meaningful degree of prevention and protection. However, as this example shows, prevention experts say that the further “upstream” one is from a negative health outcome, the likelier it is that an intervention will be effective.

Project Prevent is working towards reaching greater numbers of Bartholomew County residents that are further “upstream.”

Source: *At Work, Issue 80, Spring 2015*: Institute for Work & Health, Toronto [This column updates a previous column describing the same term, originally published in 2006.]