



What is Prevention? Our Definition

Prevention is a pro-active process of promoting supportive institutions, neighborhoods and communities that foster an environment conducive to the health and well being of individuals and families. Prevention may be targeted to specific populations or the larger community by:

- Promoting knowledge, attitudes, skills, values and relationships;
- Promoting personal competence, significance and empowerment;
- Promoting responsibility, judgment, communication and conflict resolution;
- Promoting cultural competency and sensitivity to differences;
- Promoting community-wide asset building initiatives;
- Promoting healthy support systems in families, schools, workplaces and communities;
- Promoting healthy lifestyles and resistance to physical and psychological illness/injury;
- Involving citizens in creating cultural changes related to health and wellness; and
- Counteracting harmful circumstances such as health and safety hazards, isolation, violence, economic hardship and inadequate housing, childcare, transportation, education or social services.

Prevention strategies have the following characteristics which set them apart from other approaches in the health and human services arena:

Active vs. Reactive. Prevention efforts occur before the onset of disease or distress. In this respect, prevention differs from treatment and rehabilitation which are reactive, or responsive to already existing problems.

Needs vs. Problems. While prevention activities can be expected to have an impact on health and social problems, they are aimed at meeting human needs: the needs for survival, protection, love, identity and self-fulfillment.

Focus on Assets. Prevention efforts focus on developmental assets including: commitment to learning, positive values, positive identity, social competencies, support, empowerment, positive expectations and constructive use of time.

Generic Approach. Prevention strategies are less categorical than treatment programs and cut across the traditional disciplines: health, mental health, alcohol and drugs, developmental disabilities, juvenile justice and others.

Personal Responsibility. Prevention is based on the belief that individuals can and should assume more responsibility for their health and that we need to become less dependent on illness care, social welfare and penal systems.

Combined Effort. Prevention activities involve the efforts of a broad cross-section of professionals and volunteers, including: families, employers, peers, schools, agencies, voluntary associations, government employees and elected officials.

Individual/Environment. Prevention recognizes that health involves two dimensions: a personal dimension that includes inherited and behavioral factors, and an environmental dimension. Individuals cannot be healthy in an unhealthy environment.

Cost Effective. Prevention strategies are targeted toward groups and systems rather than individuals. Thus, their cost per person is considerably cheaper than traditional treatment or rehabilitation approaches.

