



March 13, 2018

Dear Public Health Care and Human Services Committee:

I am pleased to speak in support of the opioid prevention grant pilot program, a proposed Amendment to HB18-1003 (*An Act Concerning Measures to Prevent Opioid Misuse in Colorado*). Considerable focus has been placed on the treatment of opioid misuse at the federal and state levels in the past several years. As my remarks will suggest, it is imperative that resources are also put into preventing opioid misuse before it occurs.

Opioid use has become a public health crisis over the last two decades in Colorado and across America with the advent of the easy availability of prescription opioids. Recent data from the *Healthy Kids Colorado Survey* indicates that approximately 14% of high school students have used prescription drugs without a prescription at some time in their lives. National studies place estimates of the lifetime use of prescription drugs from 11% to 15% in representative samples of high school seniors (<http://www.monitoringthefuture.org//pubs/monographs/mtf-overview2017.pdf>). Findings from one longitudinal study in Washington State using a broader definition of opioid misuse reported rates as high as 34% (Catalano). Opioid misuse is a significant public health problem.

Opioid users are multiple drug users. They are not specialists. Negative consequences including death are produced by the use of multiple drugs often in combination. For example, at age 20 in the Washington State study described above, frequent prescription opioid users were all using alcohol, almost all were using tobacco and marijuana, two thirds were using cocaine, ecstasy, and amphetamines, and almost 20% also used heroin.

The key to reducing the opioid epidemic, is drug abuse prevention.

- Substance misuse causes harm in childhood and adolescence.
- Substance misuse established in adolescence causes harm into adulthood.
- Preventing substance misuse during childhood and adolescence can reduce mortality and morbidity over the life course.
- Treatment and life-saving naloxone will not prevent new uptake of opioids, allowing the cycle of drug abuse and wasted lives to continue.

We know a great deal about the most effective way to prevent substance misuse and other behavioral health problems in young people. We now have a clear understanding of the risk and protective factors that predict opioid misuse and other behavioral health problems. This knowledge has led to the design, testing, and identification of over 60 effective prevention programs and policies in the past three decades. Effective prevention programs are delivered in school, family, and community settings.

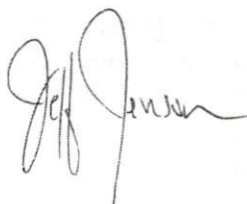
Some prevention programs, notably *Life Skills Training* (Botvin) and *Strengthening Families 10 to 14* (Spath), have reduced opioid uptake. Other programs like *Positive Action* (Guo) and *Promoting Alternative Thinking Strategies* (Greenberg) have been effective in preventing multiple types of substance use as well as behaviors like aggression, bullying, and violence. Passage of the proposed Amendment would provide funding for the implementation of these or other effective prevention programs. Information about tested and effective preventive interventions is available at the *Blueprints*

for Healthy Youth Development (<http://www.blueprintsprograms.com>) and Crime Solutions (<https://www.crimesolutions.gov/about.aspx>) program registries.

Prevention needs to be an important part of Colorado’s response to the opioid epidemic. Effective prevention of opioid abuse is within our reach. Increasing investment in prevention programs and policies that are proven to work is essential to reducing opioid use. Unless more is invested in preventing opioid misuse in the first place, we will never get ahead of this epidemic. For these reasons, I endorse the proposed Amendment to HB18-1003.

Colorado and the nation stands on the threshold of a new age in which costly behavioral health problems are prevented before they do harm. Together, public health and human service professionals can take steps like those proposed in this Amendment that put effective prevention programs into action. *Prevention is the best investment we can make, and the time to make it is now.*

Sincerely,



Jeff Jensen, Ph.D.

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