



# Strategic Plan

January 2022-December 2024

## Introduction

In 2020, Northeastern Vermont Regional Hospital (NVRH) received a one-year grant from the Vermont Department of Health Division of Alcohol and Drug Abuse Programs to establish the Northeast Kingdom Prevention Center of Excellence (NEK PCE). NVRH and Umbrella, Inc. entered into a consortium agreement to establish two program managers for the NEK PCE. A second year of funding was granted in October 2021. Funding originates with the State Opioid Response Program, (SOR), administered by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA).

One of the objectives for year two of the grant was to develop a strategic plan for the NEK PCE based on the priorities identified in the Needs and Disparities Statement (Appendix A) which was developed during the first year of the project. This strategic plan was developed during the fall of 2021 and is designed to identify specific risk and protective factors and objectives for each of the NEK priorities and strategies to be implemented by the PCE to help achieve these objectives, including strategies for building substance use prevention capacity and infrastructure in the region. Even though the grant is for an additional one-year period, the goals and objectives identified in the strategic plan are intended to be in place for three years. This plan will be used to develop a specific work plan and subgranting approach for each of the three years, and will also be helpful in identifying and developing proposals for future funding.

## Strategic Planning Process

In September 2021 a Strategic Planning Committee was formed which included members of the NEK PCE Advisory Committee. The strategic planning process and committee meetings were facilitated by the NEK PCE co-coordinators, with assistance from Amy Livingston, evaluator with Pacific Institute for Research and Evaluation (PIRE). The Strategic Planning Committee met a total of four times in October and November. During these meetings the Committee provided input on three components that make up the NEK PCE strategic plan.

- A. Vision and Mission Statements for the NEK PCE
- B. Logic models for each of the NEK PCE priorities, and
- C. A funding approach for subgranting to community partners.

## Vision and Mission Statements

**Vision**

The Northeast Kingdom is a healthy, connected, and inclusive community where all people feel valued and safe.

**Mission**

Increase the capacity of local groups and individuals to provide data driven, culturally appropriate, substance misuse prevention through education, workforce development, and grant-making in order to improve the wellness of all people in the Northeast Kingdom.

## Logic Models Overview

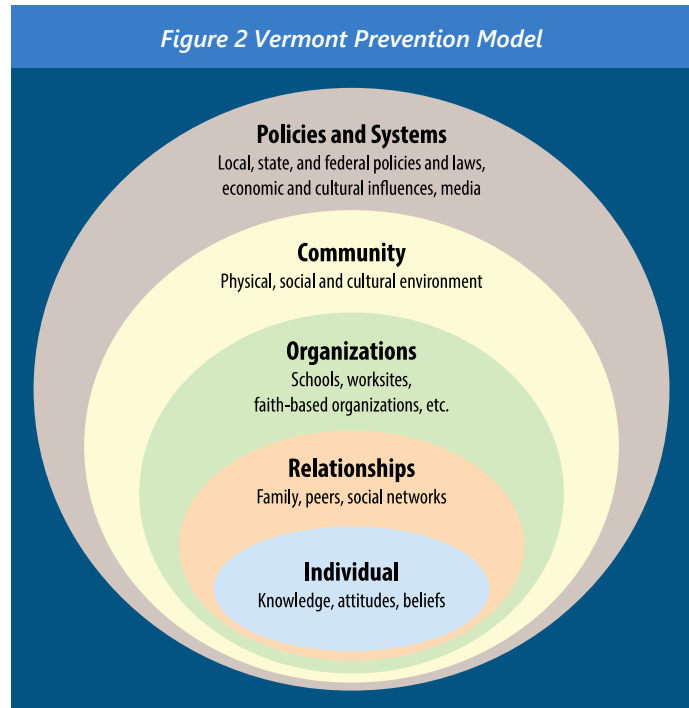
Logic models for eight goals reflecting priorities established through the Needs and Disparities Statement and the building of substance use prevention capacity and infrastructure throughout the region were developed as part of the strategic planning process. These logic models can be found in the Logic Models section below. Each logic model addresses a specific goal and includes related risk and protective factors, supporting data, SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic, and Time-bound) objectives, and strategies for each. **It is important to note that the strategies in these logic models reflect what can be achieved through the Prevention Center of Excellence as a regional entity convening and funding community partners and supporting prevention work throughout the Northeast Kingdom, rather than specific prevention strategies to be implemented at a community level.** As such, there is considerable overlap of strategies within some of the goals.

## Funding Strategy

As one of the primary strategies to address the goals outlined in this strategic plan, the NEK PCE will continue to grant funds to community-based organizations, schools, and other community partners through both noncompetitive and competitive processes. The PCE funding approach follows the steps of the Strategic Prevention Framework (see Figure 1 Strategic Prevention Framework) and also ensures that community strategies are being implemented at all levels of the Vermont Prevention Model (see Figure 2 Vermont Prevention Model).

In funding year 2022, noncompetitive awards will be made to two community coalitions throughout the NEK PCE Region (Newport, and Wells River) to address goals 1-4 of the strategic plan. The Northeast Prevention Coalition in St. Johnsbury has funding from the Drug Free Communities Support Program through 9/29/2025 and will also be addressing goals 1-4 of the NEK-PCE strategic plan using those funds. The NEK-PCE will provide technical assistance to all three prevention coalitions. A competitive process to address goals 5-7 will be implemented through a request for applications.

Current funding from the Vermont Department of Health Division of Alcohol and Drug Abuse Programs ends in September 2022. As a result, funding strategies to address the risk and protective factors and objectives outlined in this strategic plan beyond September of 2022 are dependent on the availability of future funding from the Vermont Department of Health and/or other sources.



# Logic Models

GOAL 1: Reduce youth alcohol use across the region			
Risk or Protective Factor(s)	Supporting Data	SMART Objectives	Strategies
A. Ease of Access	63% of high school students in Caledonia County, 75% in Essex County and 69% in Orleans County believe it is easy to get alcohol (2019 YRBS)	<p><u>Reduce</u> by 5 percentage points in each county the percentage of high school students who report that alcohol is easy to get by 2025 to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 58% Caledonia</li> <li>• 70% Essex</li> <li>• 64% Orleans</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Convene regional learning community for all three coalitions in the Northeast Kingdom on at least a quarterly basis</li> <li>• Provide technical assistance and funding to community coalitions to implement strategies that will address this risk/protective factor</li> </ul>
B. Community Norms	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 55% of high school students in Caledonia County, 57% in Essex County, and 45% in Orleans County believe it is wrong or very wrong for people their age to drink alcohol. (2019 YRBS)</li> <li>• Participants in interviews conducted by the northern Prevention Coalition (Newport) in the fall of 2021 reported that alcohol use is a part of the culture and there is a need for increased accountability for underage drinking for youth and parents.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <u>Increase</u> by 5 percentage points in each county the percentage of high school students who believe it is wrong or very wrong for people their age to drink alcohol by 2025 to:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 60% Caledonia</li> <li>• 62% Essex</li> <li>• 50% Orleans</li> </ul> </li> <li>• By 2025, all three prevention coalitions will have or will maintain regular participation by law enforcement, court diversion, and/or restorative justice partners in their prevention efforts.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Convene regional learning community for all three coalitions in the Northeast Kingdom on at least a quarterly basis</li> <li>• Provide technical assistance and funding to community coalitions to implement strategies that will address this risk/protective factor</li> </ul>

## GOAL 1: Reduce youth alcohol use across the region

### Risk or Protective Factor(s)

### Supporting Data

### SMART Objectives

### Strategies

#### C. Perception of Harm

- 41% of high school students in Caledonia County, 29% in Essex County and 32% in Orleans County believe there is great risk of harm from binge drinking (2019 YRBS).
- Participants in interviews conducted by the northern Prevention Coalition (Newport) in the fall of 2021 reported that alcohol use is an accepted part of the culture, it is “the gateway drug” and “it is not talked about”.

Increase by 5 percentage points in each county the percentage of high school students who believe there is great risk of harm from binge drinking by 2025 to:

- 46% Caledonia
- 34% Essex
- 37% Orleans

- Convene regional learning community for all three coalitions in the Northeast Kingdom on at least a quarterly basis
- Provide technical assistance and funding to community coalitions to implement strategies that will address this risk/protective factor
- Provide technical assistance to schools to apply for school-based prevention funding through Vermont Department of Health, Alcohol and Drug Abuse Programs

## GOAL 2: Reduce tobacco and EVP use for youth and young adults in Orleans and Northern Essex counties

### Risk or Protective Factor(s)

### Supporting Data

### SMART Objectives

### Strategies

#### A. Perceived risk of harm for EVPs

- 26% of high school students in Essex County and 24% in Orleans County believe there is great risk of harm from using EVPs in 2019 (2019 YRBS).
- 63.5% of parents in Essex and Orleans Counties perceived great risk of harm from their child using EVPs nearly every day, which is statistically worse (lower) than the state. (2019 Vermont Parent Survey)

Increase by 5 percentage points in each county the percentage of high school students who believe there is great risk of harm from using EVPs by 2025 to:

- 31% Essex
- 29% Orleans

- Convene regional learning community for all three coalitions in the Northeast Kingdom on at least a quarterly basis (Future Years)
- Provide technical assistance and funding to community coalitions to implement strategies that will address this risk/protective factor
- Provide technical assistance to schools to apply for school-based prevention funding through Vermont Department of Health, Alcohol and Drug Abuse Programs

## GOAL 2:

## Reduce tobacco and EVP use for youth and young adults in Orleans and Northern Essex counties

### Risk or Protective Factor(s)

### Supporting Data

### SMART Objectives

### Strategies

#### B. Ease of access

79% of high school students in Essex County and 77% in Orleans County believe it is easy to get EVPs in 2019 (2019 YRBS)

Reduce by 5 percentage points in each county the percentage of high school students who report that EVPs are easy to get by 2025 to:

- 74% Essex
- 72% Orleans

- Convene regional learning community for all three coalitions in the Northeast Kingdom on at least a quarterly basis (future years)
- Provide technical assistance and funding to community coalitions to implement strategies that will address this risk/protective factor

#### C. Perception of parental disapproval

• 71% of high school students in Essex County and 79% in Orleans County believe their parents would think it is wrong or very wrong to use EVPs in 2019- statistically worse (lower) than the state in both counties (2019 YRBS).

Increase by 5 percentage points the percentage of high school students who believe their parents would think it is wrong or very wrong to use EVPs to:

- 76% Essex
- 84% Orleans

• Among parents in Essex and Orleans Counties who wanted more information on how to prevent their child from using substances, 53.6% identified prevention of EVP use as a topic they would have high interest in learning more about. (2019 Vermont Parent Survey)

- Convene regional learning community for all three coalitions in the Northeast Kingdom on at least a quarterly basis (Future Years)
- Provide technical assistance and funding to community coalitions to implement strategies that will address this risk/protective factor

## GOAL 3: Reduce youth cannabis/marijuana use across the region

### Risk or Protective Factor(s)

### Supporting Data

### SMART Objectives

### Strategies

#### A. Ease of Access

- Percent of students in grades 9-12 that believe it is easy to get marijuana.
  - Caledonia 53%
  - Essex 57% (same as VT)
  - Orleans 62%
- (2019 YRBS)
- 6 towns in the Northeast Kingdom have voted to opt in on allowing retail marijuana sales
- Participants in interviews conducted by the northern Prevention Coalition (Newport) in the fall of 2021 reported that marijuana is easily accessible to youth.

Prevent an increase in the percentage of high school students who report that marijuana is easy to get by 2025. Percentages will stay the same or go down in each county.

- ≤53% Caledonia
- ≤57% Essex
- ≤62% Orleans

- Prevention Center of Excellence Program Manager(s) and/or coalition staff will participate in statewide meetings around reducing youth cannabis/marijuana use
- Convene regional learning community for all three coalitions in the Northeast Kingdom on at least a quarterly basis (future years)
- Provide technical assistance and funding to community coalitions to implement strategies that will address this risk/protective factor

#### B. Perception of Harm

- The percent of students in grades 9-12 that think there is great risk harming from using marijuana
  - Caledonia 30%
  - Essex 26%
  - Orleans 23%
- (2019 YRBS)
- Parents who believe that there is no risk or slight risk from persons their child's age harming themselves physically and in other ways if they Use Marijuana once or twice a week.
  - Caledonia 33.1%
  - Essex/Orleans 29.8%
- (2019 Vermont Parent Survey)

Prevent a decrease in the percentage of high school students who believe there is great risk of harm from using marijuana by 2025. Percentages will stay the same or go up in each county.

- ≥30% Caledonia
- ≥26% Essex
- ≥23% Orleans

- Prevention Center of Excellence Program Manager(s) and/or coalition staff will participate in statewide meetings around reducing youth cannabis/marijuana use
- Convene regional learning community for all three coalitions in the Northeast Kingdom on at least a quarterly basis (future years)
- Provide technical assistance and funding to community coalitions to implement strategies that will address this risk/protective factor
- Provide technical assistance to schools to apply for school-based prevention funding through Vermont Department of Health, Alcohol and Drug Abuse Programs

## GOAL 3: Reduce youth cannabis/marijuana use across the region

### Risk or Protective Factor(s)

### Supporting Data

### SMART Objectives

### Strategies

#### C. Community Norms

- 60% of high school students in Caledonia County, 60% in Essex County, and 50% in Orleans County believe it is wrong or very wrong for people their age to use marijuana. (2019 YRBS)
- The rate of citations for youth marijuana use has been decreasing since 2018, particularly in Caledonia and Orleans Counties, even though rates of youth marijuana use have remained stable or increased.  
  
(Youth Substance Abuse Safety Program Citations Data)

- Prevent a decrease in the percentage of high school students who believe it is wrong or very wrong for people their age to use marijuana by 2025 to:
  - ≥60% Caledonia
  - ≥60% Essex
  - ≥50% Orleans
- By 2025, all three prevention coalitions will have or will maintain regular participation by law enforcement, court diversion, and/or restorative justice partners in their prevention efforts.

- Prevention Center of Excellence Program Manager(s) and/or coalition staff will participate in statewide meetings around reducing youth cannabis/marijuana use
- Convene regional learning community for all three coalitions in the Northeast Kingdom on at least a quarterly basis (Year 1)
- Provide technical assistance and funding to community coalitions to implement strategies that will address this risk/protective factor

## GOAL 4: Reduce young adult prescription drug misuse in Caledonia County

### Risk or Protective Factor(s)

### Supporting Data

### SMART Objectives

### Strategies

#### A. Ease of access

19% of young adults in Caledonia County reported that it was easy or somewhat easy to obtain prescription pain relievers without a prescription in 2020, which is down significantly from 46% in 2018 and slightly higher than the state in 2020 (18%). (2020 Vermont Young Adult Survey)

Reduce by 5 percentage points the percent of young adults in Caledonia who report that it is easy or somewhat easy to obtain prescription pain relievers by 2025 to 14%.

Provide technical assistance and funding to community coalitions to implement strategies that will address this risk/protective factor



## GOAL 4: Reduce young adult prescription drug misuse in Caledonia County

Risk or Protective Factor(s)	Supporting Data	SMART Objectives	Strategies
B. Perceived risk of harm	12% of young adults in Caledonia County reported that there was no risk or slight risk from using prescription pain relievers that were not prescribed a few times a year in 2020, which is the same as in 2018, and slightly higher than the state (10%) (2020 Vermont Young Adult Survey)	<u>Reduce</u> by 3 percentage points the percent of young adults in Caledonia who report that there is no risk or slight risk from using prescription pain relievers that were not prescribed to them by 2025 to 9%.	Provide technical assistance- to the Northeast Prevention Coalition to implement strategies that will address this risk/protective factor

## GOAL 5: Increase supports for LGBTQ+ youth across the region

Risk or Protective Factor(s)	Supporting Data	SMART Objectives	Strategies
A. Mental health challenges	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>65% of LGBTQ+ youth in Caledonia and 63% in Orleans County reported feeling sad or hopeless almost every day for at least two weeks in the past year in 2019 (2019 YRBS). This is two and a half times higher than youth who identify as heterosexual/cisgender.</li> <li>In a statewide survey of LGBTQ+ youth conducted in 2020 by Outright Vermont, the top three words identified when asked what feelings they have been experiencing more/a lot lately were 1) anxious, 2) overwhelmed, and 3) depressed</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><u>Reduce</u> by 10 percentage points the percentage of LGBTQ+ youth in each county who report feeling sad or hopeless by 2025 to:                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>55% Caledonia</li> <li>53% Orleans</li> </ul> </li> <li><u>Increase</u> the number of GSAs in the NEK by 2025.</li> <li>By 2025, at least four youth-serving organizations in the NEK will have participated in PCE sponsored training and technical assistance on supporting LGBTQ+ youth.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Prevention Center of Excellence will implement/fund training on supporting LGBTQ+ youth</li> <li>Request for applications to address this risk factor</li> <li>Support/enhance Gender and Sexuality Alliances throughout the region through the request for applications process</li> </ul>

## GOAL 5: Increase supports for LGBTQ+ youth across the region

### Risk or Protective Factor(s)

### Supporting Data

### SMART Objectives

### Strategies

#### B. Feeling valued and connected to the community

- Only 29% of LGBTQ+ youth in Caledonia and 21% in Orleans County reported feeling like they matter in their community in 2019 (2019 YRBS).
- In a statewide survey of LGBTQ+ youth conducted in 2020 by Outright Vermont, around 40% of youth reported that being able to connect to supportive peers and adults and helpful resources has been worse or harder as a result of COVID-19.
- Participants in interviews conducted by the northern Prevention Coalition (Newport) in the fall of 2021 identified increased supports for and inclusion of LGBTQ+ youth as important to creating a thriving community.

Increase by 10 percentage points the percentage of LGBTQ youth in each county who feel like they matter in their community by 2025 to:

- 39% in Caledonia
- 31% in Orleans

- Prevention Center of Excellence will implement/fund training on supporting LGBTQ+ youth
- Request for applications to address this protective factor
- Support/enhance Gender and Sexuality Alliances in schools throughout the region through the request for applications process

## GOAL 6: Increase mental health supports for youth across the region

### Risk or Protective Factor(s)

#### A. Mental health challenges

### Supporting Data

- 31% of youth in Caledonia, 37% in Essex, and 32% in Orleans County reported feeling sad or hopeless in the past year in 2019 (2019 YRBS).
- These rates are especially high for LGBTQ+ youth across the region (see goal related to supporting LGBTQ+ youth), and for youth of color in Orleans County (43%) (2019 YRBS)
- Over 80% of youth and young adults in Vermont reported that the COVID-19 pandemic has made their mental health worse. ([2020 PACE Vermont study](#))
- Participants in interviews conducted by the northern Prevention Coalition (Newport) in the fall of 2021 identified an increase in mental health issues due to COVID, and a need for increased mental health services and supports.

### SMART Objectives

- Reduce by 5 percentage points the percentage of youth in each county who report feeling sad or hopeless by 2025 to:
  - 26% Caledonia
  - 32% Essex
  - 27% Orleans
- Reduce by 10 percentage points the percent of youth of color in Orleans County who report feeling sad or hopeless by 2025 to 33%

### Strategies

- Request for applications to address this risk factor

## GOAL 7: Create a community where youth feel valued and connected

### Risk or Protective Factor(s)

A. Positive social connection - connectedness to peers and community

### Supporting Data

- Percent of students in grades 9-12 reporting that they matter to their community.
  - Caledonia 55%
  - Essex 59%
  - Orleans 45%
  - Vermont 58%

(2019 YRBS)
- Participants in interviews conducted by the northern Prevention Coalition (Newport) in the fall of 2021 identified the need to increase youth engagement, empowerment, and leadership opportunities.

### SMART Objectives

Increase by 10 percentage points the percent of students in each county reporting that they matter to their community by 2025 to:

- 65% Caledonia
- 69% Essex
- 55% Orleans

### Strategies

Request for applications to address this protective factor

## GOAL 8: Build substance use primary and secondary prevention capacity and infrastructure at the community and regional levels.

### Problem

A. Lack of substance misuse prevention workforce

### Supporting Data

- High turnover and challenge finding qualified prevention professionals. Since 11/2020 there have been 3 Tobacco Prevention Specialists at NVRH. The northern part of the region has also experienced turnover in fiscal agents for grants and prevention staff over the past several years.

### SMART Objectives

- Employ at least 6 interns within local prevention coalitions by 2025.
- Reach at least 60 students with introduction to field of prevention and public health through classroom conversations by 2025.

### Strategies

- Work with local schools/universities to secure interns to work within prevention field in Northeast Kingdom
- Expose Northeast Kingdom youth to field of prevention by creating a classroom presentation/ curriculum on public health career/field

B. Lack of funding in Orleans/ N. Essex Counties

Prevention Center of Excellence is sole funding source as of 10/1/21.

Support coalition in securing additional funding by 12/31/23.

- Provide TA to the Prevention Coalition and ensure funding for staff.
- Identify additional potential funding sources by 9/30/22.

## GOAL 8:

### Build substance use primary and secondary prevention capacity and infrastructure at the community and regional levels.

#### Problem

#### Supporting Data

#### SMART Objectives

#### Strategies

C. Lack of funding in Wells River

- Prevention Center of Excellence is sole funding source as of 10/1/21.

Support coalition in securing additional funding by 12/31/23.

- Provide TA to the Prevention Coalition and ensure funding for staff.
- Identify a fiduciary for the coalition by 9/30/22.
- Identify additional potential funding sources by 9/30/22.

D. Incomplete prevention inventory for the Northeast Kingdom and Wells River

[Prevention Inventory](#)

Update prevention inventory in the NEK by 9/30/22

- Identify who will do the work of updating the inventory (e.g. intern, Prevention Consultants).
- Update inventory to include organizations and/or schools that are addressing the priorities identified in this strategic plan.

E. Lack of training and infrastructure around substance misuse prevention within organizations, schools and groups in the Northeast Kingdom and Wells River

- Applicants from initial funding year needed technical assistance related to workplan and budget development, evidence based strategies and best practices related to substance misuse prevention.
- Only one school applied in the last round for Vermont Department of Health, Alcohol and Drug Abuse Programs funding for schools and did not receive funding.

- Provide at least 6 region-wide trainings by 12/31/23.
- Hold day-long prevention conference by 12/31/23 (dependent on future funding).

- Utilize the prevention consultants from Vermont Department of Health, Alcohol and Drug Abuse Programs to provide training.
- Identify areas of need to be addressed at region-wide prevention conference.
- Plan prevention conference, based on needs in the region.
- Provide TA from Prevention Center of Excellence Program Managers to organizations/schools/groups throughout the NEK as needed.
- Partner with Director of Vermont Department of Health, Alcohol and Drug Abuse Programs to outreach to schools in the Northeast Kingdom to apply for funding.

## GOAL 8:

### Build substance use primary and secondary prevention capacity and infrastructure at the community and regional levels.

#### Problem

F. Lack of centralized, accessible data for the Northeast Kingdom and Wells River

#### Supporting Data

No centralized data platform exists for the region.

#### SMART Objectives

A data dashboard will be created by 4/30/21 that includes at a minimum the indicators identified in the Needs and Disparities Statement.

#### Strategies

- Contract with Pacific Institute for Research and Evaluation to create data dashboard.
- Share draft dashboard with Northeast Kingdom coalitions, VDH staff, and other partners to obtain feedback.
- Train coalition leaders and other community partners on the use of the dashboard.
- Identify responsible party(ies) for updating and maintaining the dashboard.
- Identify funding source(s) for ongoing Clear Impact subscription after initial two years.

# Acknowledgements

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\*Denotes member of the Strategic Planning Committee.

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## Appendix A



# Needs and Disparities Statement

September 2021

In early 2021, Northeastern Vermont Regional Hospital (NVRH) received a one-year grant from the Vermont Department of Health Division of Alcohol and Drug Abuse Programs to establish the Northeast Kingdom Prevention Center of Excellence (NEK PCE). Funding originates with the State Opioid Response Program, (SOR), administered by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA).

One objective of the NEK PCE grant was to review data on youth and young adult substance misuse to identify needs and any gaps for specific geographic areas and/or populations, and then to develop a Needs and Disparities Statement for the region. In June 2021 a Data Committee was formed which included members of the NEK PCE Advisory Committee as well as staff from NVRH and Umbrella, and was led by an evaluator with Pacific Institute for Research and Evaluation (PIRE), to review data for the region and identify priorities for addressing regional needs<sup>1</sup>. PIRE compiled a list of data sources and prepared a presentation of regional data for the committee to review. The Data Committee met a total of three times over the summer of 2021, and reviewed data on substance use/misuse for the state and the NEK from various sources including:

- National Survey on Drug Use and Health (NSDUH)
- Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS)
- Vermont Young Adult Survey (YAS)
- Vermont Substance Abuse Treatment Information System (SATIS)

The committee's review focused on

- Rates of use of specific substances
- Risk and protective factors
- Populations that are experiencing disparities/may need specific focus
- Gaps in resources

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<sup>1</sup> A list of Data Committee members can be found in Appendix A.

Findings and recommendations from this assessment were presented to the Advisory Committee on July 28, 2021 and are described below.

### **Demographics of the Region**

The service area for the Northeast Kingdom PCE includes most of the towns in the three counties that make up the Northeast Kingdom: Caledonia County, Essex County, and Orleans County, as well as the community of Wells River in Orange County. Population sizes for these counties overall and for youth and young adults specifically are presented in Table 1. below.

Table 1.

	Caledonia	Essex	Orleans
<b>Total population</b>	30,324	6,200	26,901
<b>10-14 years</b>	1,887	313	1,581
<b>15-19 years</b>	2,123	339	1,489
<b>20-24 years</b>	1,747	250	1,413

Source: 2019 [American Community Survey 5-year estimates](#)

The Northeast Kingdom has the lowest median household incomes in Vermont: Essex County (\$45,796), Orleans (\$48,826) and Caledonia (\$50,942). Poverty and unemployment rates are higher than state average, but similar to U.S. level of 12.3%. Essex and Orleans Counties lead the state in percent of population in poverty (14.8% and 12.7% respectively) and Caledonia County is also above the statewide rate of 10.1% at 12.3%.<sup>2</sup>

Percentages of the high school populations for each of the regions' counties and the state that identify as LGBT and BIPOC are provided in Table 2. Caledonia and Orleans have a similar percentage of LGBT students to the state, while Essex County has a lower percentage. Caledonia has the highest percentage of BIPOC students in the region, and this percentage is also higher than the state.

Table 2. Percent of high school youth who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, and/or transgender<sup>3</sup>, and students of color: **Caledonia, Essex, Orleans Counties, and Vermont**<sup>4</sup>

	Caledonia	Essex	Orleans	Vermont
<b>LGBT</b>	13%	8%	14%	14%
<b>Students of color</b>	24%	12%	14%	16%

### **Youth and Young Adult Substance Use in the Northeast Kingdom**

Data from the National Survey on Drug Use and Health as well as the 2019 Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) and 2020 Vermont Young Adult Survey (YAS) were reviewed by the Data Committee. Rates of alcohol and marijuana use in Vermont are among the highest in the country for all age groups, including adolescents and young adults<sup>5</sup>. Results for several substance use measures as well as risk and protective

<sup>2</sup> 2019 [Small Area Income and Poverty Estimates \(SAIPE\)](#)

<sup>3</sup> Queer and questioning were not response options on the YRBS, so when referencing YRBS data only the letters LGBT will be used to describe this population.

<sup>4</sup> [2019 Vermont Youth Risk Behavior Survey](#) county reports

<sup>5</sup> [2018-19 National Survey on Drug Use and Health](#)

factors for the three counties in our region as well as the state are included in the data tables below. Rates that are statistically different from the comparison group are noted with an \*.

### Data on Youth Substance Use

Several measures from the YRBS were reviewed by the Data Committee. Table 3. shows rates of substance use for the three counties as compared to the state as a whole. In Caledonia County, rates for most substances were similar or better as compared to the state. Rates in Orleans County were worse than the state for alcohol use, binge drinking, cigarette use and electronic vapor product use. In Essex County, rates are worse for binge drinking and cigarette use.

Table 3. 2019 YRBS High School Measures of Youth Substance Use: **Caledonia, Essex, Orleans Counties, and Vermont**<sup>6</sup>

Measure	Caledonia	Essex	Orleans	Vermont
Past 30-day alcohol use	24%*	34%	38%*	31%
Past 30-day binge drinking	10%*	24%*	22%*	15%
Past 30-day marijuana use	18%*	23%	27%	27%
Past 30-day cigarette use	8%	15%*	11%*	7%
Past 30-day electronic vapor product (EVP) use	24%	35%	34%*	26%
Past 30-day prescription drug misuse	5%	Too few to report	6%	5%

\*County rate is statistically different from the state

These same measures were also examined for differences in specific populations, including white students and students of color, and LGBT and heterosexual/cisgender students. These comparisons are summarized in Tables 4 and 5 for Caledonia and Orleans Counties. The number of students in Essex County is too small to report data by these specific populations.

In Caledonia County, LGBT students were more likely than heterosexual/ cisgender students to have used alcohol, marijuana, and cigarettes, and to have binge drank and misused prescription drugs.

Table 4. 2019 YRBS High School Measures of Substance Use: by populations of students, **Caledonia County**

<sup>6</sup> [2019 Vermont Youth Risk Behavior Survey](#) county reports

Measure	White non-Hispanic	Students of Color	Heterosexual/Cisgender	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender
Past 30-day alcohol use	25%	21%	22%	35%*
Past 30-day binge drinking	11%	7%	9%	20%*
Past 30-day marijuana use	19%	13%	14%	36%*
Past 30-day cigarette use	9%	6%	6%	20%*
Past 30-day EVP use	26%	18%	22%	33%
Past 30-day prescription drug misuse	5%	5%	3%	15%*

\*Rate is statistically different from comparison group

In Orleans County, LGBT students were more likely than heterosexual/cisgender students to have used marijuana, cigarettes, and to have misused prescription drugs. Students of color were also more likely to have used marijuana than white, non-Hispanic students.

Table 5. 2019 YRBS High School Measures of Substance Use: by populations of students, **Orleans County**

Measure	White non-Hispanic	Students of Color	Heterosexual/Cisgender	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender
Past 30-day alcohol use	37%	41%	38%	39%
Past 30-day binge drinking	21%	24%	21%	28%
Past 30-day marijuana use	25%	39%*	25%	45%*
Past 30-day cigarette use	10%	17%	9%	27%*
Past 30-day EVP use	32%	45%	32%	45%
Past 30-day prescription drug misuse	6%	11%	4%	15%*

\*Rate is statistically different from comparison group

### Data on Risk and Protective Factors

2019 YRBS measures of risk and protective factors for high school students across the region were also examined, including perceived risk of harm from using substances, mental health, having an adult at school that they can talk to and feeling like they matter to their community. Table 6 shows these measures for high school students across the region. Significantly more students in Caledonia County think people risk harming themselves by using marijuana and report having an adult they can talk to as compared to the state, which are both protective factors. Fewer students report thinking binge drinking

is risky, and **less than half of students in Orleans County say that they feel like they matter in their community.**

Table 6. 2019 YRBS High School Measures of Risk and Protective Factors: **Caledonia, Essex, Orleans Counties, and Vermont**

Measure	Caledonia	Essex	Orleans	Vermont
Think people greatly risk harming themselves binge drinking	41%	29%	32%*	39%
Think people greatly risk harming themselves by using marijuana regularly	30%*	26%	23%	23%
Felt sad or hopeless in the past year	31%	37%	32%	31%
Report there is at least one adult in their school they can talk to if they have a problem	81%*	81%	79%	78%
Feel like they matter to people in their community	55%	59%	45%*	58%

\*County rate is statistically different from the state

Tables 7 and 8 show these measures for specific populations in both Caledonia and Orleans County. Again, there were too few students to report these measures by specific population in Essex County. In Caledonia County, significantly fewer white non-Hispanic students report risk of harm from marijuana use than students of color, and fewer LGBT students reported risk of harm from marijuana use than heterosexual/cisgender students. **LGBT students in Caledonia were more than twice as likely to report feeling sad or hopeless, and about half as likely to feel like they matter as compared to heterosexual/cisgender students.**

Table 7. 2019 YRBS High School Measures of Protective Factors: by populations of students, **Caledonia County**

Measure	White, Non-Hispanic	Students of Color	Heterosexual/Cisgender	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender
Think people greatly risk harming themselves binge drinking	41%	43%	42%	35%
Think people greatly risk harming themselves by using marijuana regularly	27%*	42%	32%	17%*
Felt sad or hopeless in the past year	33%	26%	25%	65%*

Report there is at least one adult in their school they can talk to if they have a problem	82%	78%	82%	81%
Feel like they matter to people in their community	57%	49%	60%	29%*

\*Rate is statistically different from comparison group

In Orleans County, significantly fewer heterosexual/cisgender students report risk of harm from binge drinking than LGBT students. **Students of color and LGBT students in Orleans County were significantly more likely to report feeling sad or hopeless, and LGBT students were about half as likely to feel like they matter to people in their community as compared to heterosexual/cisgender students.**

Table 8. 2019 YRBS High School Measures of Protective Factors: by populations of students, **Orleans County**

Measure	White, Non-Hispanic	Students of Color	Heterosexual/Cisgender	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender
Think people greatly risk harming themselves binge drinking	32%	38%	29%*	46%
Think people greatly risk harming themselves by using marijuana regularly	23%	23%	25%	11%*
Felt sad or hopeless in the past year	30%	43%*	26%	63%*
Report there is at least one adult in their school they can talk to if they have a problem	80%	73%	80%	72%
Feel like they matter to people in their community	45%	45%	50%	21%*

\*Rate is statistically different from comparison group

### Data on Young Adults

The Data Committee reviewed data from the Vermont Young Adult Survey (YAS), which collects data on young adult substance use from Vermonters ages 18-25. The YAS was conducted statewide every two years between 2014 and 2020 as part of the evaluation of Vermont's Regional Prevention Partnerships grant. YAS data are available at the County level, although due to a low number of respondents, data from Essex County have been combined with Orleans County. Table 9 shows the percentage of young adults reporting use of various substances in 2020.

Table 9. 2020 Vermont YAS measures of Young Adult (18-25) Substance Use: **Caledonia, Essex, Orleans Counties, and Vermont**<sup>7</sup>

Measure	Caledonia	Essex/Orleans	Vermont
Past 30-day alcohol use	57%*	67%	75%
<b>Among Current Drinkers, Past 30-day binge drinking</b>	39%	36%	45%
Past 30-day marijuana use	46%	32%*	46%
<b>Among current marijuana users, those that used 20 or more days in past 30</b>	51%	48%	45%
Past 30-day cigarette use	28%	24%	20%
Past 30-day EVP use	24%	14%	18%
Past 30-day <b>any prescription drug misuse</b>	16%	6%*	12%
Misuse of <b>prescription stimulants</b>	13%	5%	10%
Misuse of <b>prescription sedatives</b>	8%*	3%	3%
Misuse of <b>prescription pain relievers</b>	5%	1%	2%

\*Rate is statistically different from comparison group

Rates of use of most substances among young adults in the region were either similar or below the state rates. One notable exception was the misuse of prescription drugs among young adults in Caledonia County, which was higher across all categories of drugs, and significantly higher for sedatives, as compared to the state. Also of concern is the high percentage of young adult marijuana users who are using 20 or more days per month.

### **Data on Treatment of Youth and Young Adults for Substance Use**

Data from the Vermont Department of Health on treatment by primary substance used was reviewed for both the state and the region. At the state level, marijuana is the leading substance for which adolescents (below age 18) enter treatment by a wide margin (79% of those in treatment), followed by alcohol (12%), other substances (7%), and heroin (2%)<sup>8</sup>.

For all ages in the Northeast Kingdom, the largest number of individuals are in treatment for heroin and other opioids, which has been increasing over the past decade, partially as a result of increased treatment capacity. Alcohol is the substance with the second highest number of individuals in treatment in the region, and this number has been declining. Members of the Data Committee shared anecdotally

<sup>7</sup> [2020 ADAP Caledonia County Community Profile](#) and [2020 ADAP Orleans County Community Profile](#)

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.healthvermont.gov/sites/default/files/documents/pdf/ADAPTreatment-AgeGenderCountyTotal2019.pdf>

that this decline is partially a result of fewer treatment options and fewer individuals seeking treatment for alcohol use disorder, which is of growing concern given Vermont's high rates of alcohol use for all ages.

### **Discussion and Priorities**

Most of the data reviewed was about youth and young adults, and the Data Committee agreed that overall these are the populations on which to focus the majority of prevention efforts in the region, as prevention of substance use and misuse earlier in life greatly reduces the risk of developing problems with substance use as adults. The committee noted that there is a need to enhance treatment options, particularly for problem alcohol use, and to continue prevention efforts across the lifespan, but that the PCE should focus primarily on youth and young adult prevention.

The data reviewed for this needs assessment revealed some significant gaps and disparities within the region, for both geographic areas and specific populations, and some clear prevention priorities emerged.

### **Disparities and gaps**

Rates of youth alcohol use are higher in Orleans County, and youth tobacco and electronic vapor product use are higher in both Essex and Orleans County. The northern part of the region which includes Northern Essex and Orleans County is not currently covered by a tobacco prevention grant. Higher use rates combined with fewer prevention resources led the committee to recommend that the NEK PCE focus on reducing tobacco and EVP use specifically in the northern part of the region.

Rates of young adult misuse of all types of prescription medications are higher in Caledonia County as compared to the state, and significantly higher for sedatives. Focus on reducing prescription drug misuse among Caledonia County young adults was identified as a priority.

It was noted that Youth of Color in Orleans County report higher rates of feeling sad or hopeless than White, Non-Hispanic youth. This is a population that may need particular focus in Orleans County.

The region's YRBS data reveals that LGBT youth have higher rates of substance use and significantly more risk factors and fewer protective factors than their heterosexual/cisgender peers. Of particular concern was the low percentage of LGBT youth reporting that they feel like they matter to their community, and the high percentage who reported feeling sad or hopeless. Supporting LGBTQ youth across the region and working to create a community where youth in general, but in particularly LGBTQ youth, feel valued and connected emerged as very strong priorities for the NEK PCE.

### **Priorities**

As a result of the review of data from the region, the Data Committee and Advisory Committee have recommended that the Northeast Kingdom Prevention Center of Excellence focus on the following seven priorities for the region:

#### **1. Reduce youth alcohol use across the region**

**Rationale:** Alcohol continues to be the most used substance among youth in the state and in the NEK. Rates of adolescent alcohol use in Orleans County are statistically higher than the state.



**2. Reduce tobacco and electronic vapor product (EVP) use for youth and young adults in Orleans and Northern Essex counties**

**Rationale:** Rates of all forms of tobacco and EVP use among youth in Essex and Orleans County are statistically higher than the state. There is currently no tobacco prevention funding in the northern part of the region.

**3. Reduce youth cannabis/marijuana use across the region**

**Rationale:** Though rates of youth past 30-day marijuana use are not higher in the NEK than the state (in fact, they are statistically lower in Caledonia County), they have been trending up over the past several years. With legalization and the development of retail cannabis markets around the state, a focus on prevention for youth will continue to be very important.

**4. Reduce young adult prescription drug misuse in Caledonia County**

**Rationale:** Rates of young adult misuse of all types of prescription medications are higher in Caledonia County as compared to the state, and significantly higher for sedatives.

**5. Increase supports for LGBTQ youth across the region**

**Rationale:** LGBTQ youth have statistically higher rates than their heterosexual/cisgender peers of past 30-day use of almost all substances in Caledonia County, as well as marijuana, cigarettes, and prescription medications in Orleans County. LGBTQ youth are also more than twice as likely to report feeling sad or hopeless in the past year, about half as likely to report feeling like they matter to their community, and twice as likely to report experiencing sexual and/or dating violence.

**6. Increase mental health supports for youth across the region.**

**Rationale:** About a third of youth in the NEK report feeling sad or hopeless. The rates are significantly higher for LGBTQ youth, and youth of color in Orleans County. These data were collected before the pandemic, which has taken an additional toll on youth mental health. There is a clear link between substance use and mental health.

**7. Create a community where youth feel valued and connected**

**Rationale:** Only around half of youth in the NEK report that they feel like they matter to people in the community, and this is much lower among LGBTQ youth.

A document listing each of these priorities, rationale for their selection, and indicators that can be tracked over time to assess progress can be found in Appendix B.

## Appendix A

### NEK PCE Data Committee Members

- Lila Bennett – Journey to Recovery
- Suzanne Legare-Belcher – AHS Field Director, Newport
- Jim Kisch – Passumpsic Bank
- Savannah Williams – Umbrella
- Tina Plazek – NVRH
- Cheryl Chandler – NVRH
- Amy Livingston – Pacific Institute for Research and Evaluation (PIRE)



**NEK PCE Data Committee**

**Summary of priorities and indicators – July 2021**

<b>Priority</b>	<b>Rationale</b>	<b>Indicators/Measures</b>
<b>Reduce youth alcohol use across the region</b>	Alcohol continues to be the most used substance among youth in the state and in the NEK. Rates of adolescent alcohol use in Orleans County are statistically higher than the state.	All 3 counties: YRBS past 30-day alcohol use
<b>Reduce tobacco and EVP use for youth and young adults in Orleans and Northern Essex counties</b>	Rates of all forms of tobacco and EVP use among youth in Essex and Orleans County are statistically higher than the state. There is currently no tobacco prevention funding in the northern part of the region.	Essex and Orleans Counties: YRBS past 30-day cigarette and EVP use, YAS past 30-day cigarette and EVP use
<b>Reduce youth cannabis/marijuana use across the region</b>	Though rates of youth past 30-day marijuana use are not higher in our region than the state (in fact, they are statistically lower in Caledonia County), they have been trending up over the past several years. With legalization and the development of retail cannabis markets around the state, a focus on prevention for youth will continue to be very important.	All 3 counties: YRBS past 30-day marijuana use
<b>Reduce young adult prescription drug misuse in Caledonia County</b>	Rates of young adult misuse of all types of prescription medications are higher in Caledonia County as compared to the state, and significantly higher for sedatives.	Caledonia County: YAS past year misuse of any Rx, YAS past year misuse of sedatives
<b>Increase supports for LGBTQ youth across the region</b>	LGBTQ youth have statistically higher rates than their heterosexual/cisgender peers of past 30-day use of almost all substances	All 3 counties:

Appendix B

	<p>in Caledonia County, as well as marijuana, cigarettes, and prescription medications in Orleans County. LGBTQ youth are also more than twice as likely to report feeling sad or hopeless in the past year, about half as likely to report feeling like they matter to their community, and twice as likely to report experiencing sexual and/or dating violence.</p>	<p>YRBS measures specifically broken out for LGBT youth: 30-day alcohol, marijuana, cigarettes, prescription medications, past year felt sad or hopeless for at least two weeks, feel like they matter to their community, unwanted sexual activity, past year physical dating violence, past year emotional abuse in dating relationships</p>
<p><b>Increase mental health supports for youth across the region.</b></p>	<p>About a third of youth in the NEK report feeling sad or hopeless. The rates are significantly higher for LGBTQ youth, and youth of color in Orleans County. These data were collected before the pandemic, which has taken an additional toll on youth mental health. There is a clear link between substance use and mental health.</p>	<p>All 3 counties: YRBS past year felt sad or hopeless for at least two weeks, same measure specifically broken out for youth of color in Orleans County</p>
<p><b>Create a community where youth feel valued and connected</b></p>	<p>Only around half of youth in the NEK report that they feel like they matter to people in the community, and this is much lower among LGBTQ youth.</p>	<p>All 3 counties: YRBS feel like you matter to people in your community</p>

Note: Though not prevention focused, the Data Committee noted that it is important for the region to address the shortage of treatment options for individuals with problem alcohol use.