



Youth Sport Programs that Address Substance Use

In 2015, the Canadian Centre on Substance Abuse conducted an environmental scan of youth sport programs that address substance use. Stakeholders had identified a need for an overview of how sport is being used in the field of youth substance use prevention. The intended audience for the scan includes practitioners working within a youth- or sport-based field who might be interested in developing or incorporating a sport-based substance use prevention program into their organization, as well as researchers in the fields of youth substance use prevention or positive youth development and sport. This document provides a brief summary of the full report on that environmental scan.

What Are the Goals of This Scan?

The purpose of the environmental scan of youth sport programs that address substance use was:

- To pull together all North American youth programs that were based in sport and contained a substance use component;
- To examine whether these programs reduce substance use among youth (ages 10 to 24); and
- To summarize and share what the research shows to be effective prevention program components to help program developers create or use community or sport programs to reduce substance use among young people.

Why Is This Issue Important?

Sport is one of the most common activities in which youth are involved: more than 80% of youth ages 3 to 17 participate in some form of sport. Because of this participation rate, sport programs could help prevent and reduce substance use by young people.

We do not have a clear view of the ways substance use and sport affect each other. Some research shows that being involved in sports can decrease the use of certain drugs, such as marijuana. Other research shows that playing an organized sport can lead to an increase in the use of alcohol. Many factors, such as type of sport, sport experience and the presence of a coach, are involved. There has been no research done of the effect that sport has on drug use among Canadian youth.

The Main Findings of the Scan

Some sport programs have been shown to be effective in reducing the use of some drugs. The results of the scan highlight programs that rely on evidence-based practices and include key considerations for developing future programs based on the program evaluations reviewed in the scan. The program evaluations included in the scan suggest that sport programs that have the following features are more likely to be effective in reducing drug and alcohol use among youth:

- Involve a peer-to-peer component;



- Have a team component, which is generally not available in other environments;
- Involve a coach or parent in program administration;
- Provide youth with an achievable alternative to risky behaviour;
- Include campaigns, posters and advertisements, designed with youth in mind, to correct youth perceptions of social norms;
- Target unhealthy behaviour at the community level;
- Offer personalized health screening, feedback and counselling to guide youth in behaviour change; and
- Are targeted to a specific subgroup of youth (e.g., participants on sports teams).

The following table shows which of the programs that were evaluated include the features found to be effective in reducing substance use.

	Peer-to-peer	Team component	Coach/parent involvement	Alternative to risky behaviour	Correcting social norms	Community level	Screening and counselling	Targeted at subgroup
Athletes Targeting Healthy Exercise and Nutrition Alternatives								
Athletes Training and Learning to Avoid Steroids								
Anabolic Steroid Education Intervention								
Steroid and Nutrition Education Program								
eCHECK UP TO GO web-based intervention								
Campus-wide education on student drinking norms								
Smokeless Tobacco Cessation Intervention								
Student Athlete Testing Using Random Notification								
Project Sport								
First Choice Physical Fitness Program								
Multilevel Community-based Intervention								
Athletic Prevention, Programming and Leadership Education								

Limitations

The lessons learned from the environmental scan of youth sport programs, although promising, were based on evaluations of a small number of programs. To develop more concrete best practices for sport programs addressing substance use, it would be necessary to continue to evaluate new or other available programs.

It is possible that not all relevant programs were picked up during the environmental scan. Some program information might not be evaluated or available online. Also, it cannot be verified that all relevant programs were submitted by recipients of the request for information.



Evaluations of the programs were conducted in specific environments, with certain populations and in varying contexts (e.g., sport type, implementation factors). These specifics might mean that findings are not generalizable across all programs.

Some of the programs included in this scan are no longer being administered. Reasons as to why these programs ceased implementation were not available at the time of the scan.

To Learn More

- Check out the full environmental scan technical report as well as other CCSA reports on our [Sport and Youth Substance Abuse Prevention](#) webpage.
- Join the Canadian Sport and Youth Substance Abuse Prevention Network by sending an email to youth-jeunes@ccsa.ca requesting to be added to the distribution list.
- Join the conversation and [our group](#) on LinkedIn and Twitter to help create a healthier society, free of the harms of substance use, by following @CCSACanada.

