

# Best Practices in Methamphetamine Prevention: *Repackaging What We Already Know*

By Sarah Potter

Countless media reports, law enforcement seizure rates, and treatment admission data highlight the immense concern about methamphetamine production and use in both rural and urban communities in Illinois. Illinois State Police seized 961 meth labs in 2004,<sup>1</sup> even more than California's 673 reported lab seizures.<sup>2</sup> In 2005, Illinois State Police lab seizures rose to 973.

The threats posed by drug use are not new, but the speed with which methamphetamine has spread throughout Illinois creates tremendous challenges for communities. Methamphetamine production and use impose considerable social and economic costs, including: law enforcement and incarceration, addiction treatment, clean-up of clandestine labs, child protection services and placement, medical services, and increases in related crimes such as domestic violence, child abuse and neglect, and property crimes.

Methamphetamine is not the most widely used drug by youth or adults, but the levels of disruption caused by meth continue to prompt significant attention from the media and policy makers at the local, state and national levels. The Illinois Youth Survey reports prior-year use for 12<sup>th</sup> grade students at 2.1 percent in 2004.<sup>3</sup> Some rural counties did not participate in the survey, so use rates in those counties are not reflected in statewide data. One survey covering seven counties in east central Illinois reports a decline in youth prior-30-day methamphetamine use from 8.9 percent in 2002 to 5.6 percent in 2004.<sup>4</sup>

While more data is needed around youth methamphetamine use, prevention professionals must respond to the meth issue by educating our communities on the importance of using best practices to build the prevention infrastructure. Meth certainly poses new challenges for prevention, but it does not require an entirely new prevention approach. We must consider how to repack what we know to be good prevention, using methamphetamine as an opportunity for comprehensive collaboration. The silver lining of this scourge is that it has called to action virtually every sector of the community. In coalition meetings across the state, we have active participation from legislators, judges, law enforcement professionals, farmers, child protection workers, educators, treatment providers, public health officials, and the business community. We have a clear opportunity to mobilize partners around prevention.

There is little empirical evidence around meth-specific prevention approaches. Research on prevention approaches tailored to address the methamphetamine problem is under way in many parts of the country. Evaluation of these projects is forthcoming.

Here are some tips for advancing effective prevention around the methamphetamine issue:

1

**Focus prevention activities for methamphetamine on local data. Prevention programs should address the type of drug abuse problem in the local community.**<sup>5</sup> Examining the local context is critical in tailoring prevention strategies. Collecting

local information around drug use and the nature of the methamphetamine problem will guide you to appropriate strategies. In many communities, youth methamphetamine use rates are low, but still warrant a prevention response. You may find that while youth use rates are low, their perception of availability is higher. This information might lead you to using an environmental prevention approach, rather than classroom-based programming. The National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA) indicates that prevention programs should address the drug use problem in the community. If your local data shows that methamphetamine is an issue, it is important to address it through your prevention planning with a tailored response.

2

**Guide community coalitions through prevention planning; focus on building a collaborative prevention infrastructure.**

Lend expertise to community groups, helping guide them through prevention planning using the strategic prevention framework. In this way, you can engage community involvement and customize your prevention strategies to suit the specific needs of your community. In Kansas, there is tremendous success engaging community members, with 98 percent of people who receive meth information volunteering to work on the issue.<sup>6</sup> The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration's Prevention Platform offers an online resource to walk you through the steps of the strategic prevention framework; it is equipped with tutorials, interactive tools, and customized reports. The Illinois Attorney General's office recently added a Meth Resource Map to its Web site, which includes contact information for community coalitions across the state.

3

**Ensure that media campaigns proceed with caution, focusing on raising awareness of methamphetamine and using messages designed to minimize unintended effects.**<sup>7</sup> Media

campaigns are a sensible way to promote awareness and increase the perception of risk of meth use. The temptation to shock youth with overly dramatic renditions of meth use and graphic images is common. This approach can be seen through highly publicized

campaigns like the Montana Meth Project, with a theme of: Don't do it once, or you'll get hooked. Montana recently released research findings on the \$5.5 million campaign, revealing a 3 percent increase in the number of teens who "strongly approved" of using meth regularly. The study also showed an increase in the number of teens who had recently tried the drug. As prevention professionals, it is our responsibility to educate the media and policy makers about the probability of such unintended effects. There are some media campaigns that do rely on best practices. The Partnership for a Drug-Free America, in conjunction with the White House Office of National Drug Control Policy, recently launched a series of public service ads targeting methamphetamine use. The campaign focuses on mobilizing individuals and community groups to reduce meth use at the local level.

**4 Augment existing prevention programs with methamphetamine-specific lessons.** If local data show meth to be a problem in your community, capitalize on the effectiveness of model programs to reduce substance use by adding methamphetamine lessons to existing programs. The Iowa Consortium for Substance Abuse Research and Evaluation, in partnership with the Iowa Department of Public Health, is conducting outcome evaluation on model programs with added meth lessons. Preliminary findings show positive results in youth use rates from using this approach.

**5 Utilize environmental prevention to counter the impact of methamphetamine.** Environmental prevention can be a valuable asset to areas struggling to respond to methamphetamine. This approach develops or modifies community standards, codes and practices. Environmental prevention unifies prevention work with other fields – a necessity in addressing the broad reach of methamphetamine use. With the goal of reducing the economic, interpersonal, and social costs within the community, this practice yields positive results. The Kansas Methamphetamine Prevention Project is a leader in community-based meth prevention. Its nationally recognized Meth Watch program is designed to reduce availability of meth-making ingredients through a partnership of retailers, community groups, and law enforcement. All program materials are available for use. The Illinois Attorney General, in partnership with the Youth Leadership Institute, has a youth-driven approach to using environmental prevention to take action against methamphetamine. Many community groups across the state are taking a positive line of attack using this program.

**6 Be a source of information dissemination in your community.** There is a wealth of educational materials available about methamphetamine. As a prevention resource, work to ensure that awareness materials are accurate and do not focus on scare tactics.

Methamphetamine prevention activities can make a significant difference in halting the damage imposed by this drug. Sound prevention principles will hold true for all drugs of abuse. The specific challenges of methamphetamine require us to think about how to repackage what we already know to apply it to the current needs of our communities. Being mindful of prevention principles will help avoid the

use of ineffective strategies and ultimately build our relationships with other disciplines. With our continued dedication and thoughtful work, the message of prevention will continue to resonate as we rise to this challenge.

## Resources

SAMHSA's Prevention Platform:  
<http://preventionplatform.samhsa.gov>

Illinois' MethNet: [www.IllinoisAttorneyGeneral.gov](http://www.IllinoisAttorneyGeneral.gov)  
For information about the office's youth-driven prevention approach, send an e-mail inquiry through MethNet.

Ads from the Partnership for a Drug-Free America:  
[www.drugfree.org/meth](http://www.drugfree.org/meth)

Meth modules from the Iowa Consortium for Substance Abuse Research and Evaluation:  
<http://iconsortiumsubst-abuse.uiowa.edu>

Meth-specific lessons and teachers' kits from NIDA:  
<http://teens.drugabuse.gov>

The Kansas Methamphetamine Prevention Project:  
[www.ksmethpreventionproject.org](http://www.ksmethpreventionproject.org)

Free public education materials and meth resources from Prevention First: [www.prevention.org](http://www.prevention.org) or 217.793.7353

For Prevention First's Meth Resource Guide, phone 217.793.7353.

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<sup>1</sup> Bauer, Robert. Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority. Results of ISP, other law enforcement agency quarterly reports, 2005.

<sup>2</sup> NIDA Infofacts: Methamphetamine. 2005. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, National Institutes of Health, National Institute on Drug Abuse.

<sup>3</sup> Illinois Youth Survey: Youth Study on Substance Use. 2004. Illinois Department of Human Services, Chestnut Health Systems.

<sup>4</sup> Youth Risk Behavior Survey. 2004. I Sing the Body Electric.

<sup>5</sup> Preventing Drug Use among Children and Adolescents: A Research-Based Guide. 2003. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, National Institutes of Health, National Institute on Drug Abuse.

<sup>6</sup> Cain, Cristi. A Comprehensive Model for Addressing the Methamphetamine Crisis. Kansas Methamphetamine Prevention Project.

<sup>7</sup> DeMay, Kristen. Tip of the CAPT: Methamphetamine Prevention. CSAP's Western Center for the Application of Prevention Technologies. May, 2005.