

Illinois Alliance on Reducing Youth Substance Use
September 11, 2025
2:30 pm – 4:00 pm

The Illinois Alliance on Reducing Youth Substance Use allows stakeholders to:

- Share current youth substance use prevention efforts being implemented in the State of Illinois.
- Share information on best practices to reduce youth substance use.
- Share data and research on efforts to reduce youth substance use.
- Review the Illinois STOP ACT report.
- Unify prevention efforts in the State of Illinois.

MEETING NOTES

2:30 – 2:35 Samantha Alonis, Deputy Director, Bureau of Prevention, Division of Behavioral Health & Recovery, IDHS
Opening Remarks

- *Samantha provided opening remarks and welcomed all to the meeting. Samantha informed the group that this will be her last Alliance meeting, as she will be on maternity leave until December 2025. In her absence, Shantel High will serve as her replacement*

2:35- 3:00 Dr. Nicole Gastala, MD
Evidence-based AUD Interventions/MAR

- Dr. Nicole Gastala addressed alcohol use disorder in adolescents. Dr. Gastala noted that alcohol use often begins early, with about one in 100 adolescents ages 12–13 reporting alcohol use in the past month and one in five reporting use by ages 16–17. She highlighted concerning gender trends, with use decreasing among boys but rising among girls, and emphasized that youth alcohol use is tied to serious risks such as poor educational and employment outcomes, higher rates of mental health conditions, and greater vulnerability to accidents, suicide, and violence. She explained that nearly all youth with alcohol use disorders have co-occurring mental health conditions, which must be addressed alongside substance use. Validated screening tools such as CRAFFT 2.1 and S2BI can support identification, while treatment approaches with the most substantial evidence include family therapy, cognitive behavioral therapy, and motivational enhancement therapy. Although no medications are FDA-approved for adolescent alcohol use disorder, specific off-label options show promise in helping reduce cravings. Dr. Gastala underscored that treatment access is limited and that family and mental health supports are critical in reducing risk and improving outcomes.

3:00 – 3:10 Jody Heavilin, APRC Administrator, Prevention First
New Resources, Recorded Webinar, and Policy Suggestions

- Jody reported that the APRC has released new resources, including *Modernizing Alcohol Taxes* and *Alcohol Compliance Checks*. She also provided a recap of the August webinar on alcohol home delivery impacts. She highlighted six policy priorities featured in the September newsletter: raising alcohol taxes, lowering the DUI blood alcohol threshold to 0.05, regulating zero-alcohol beverages, adding cancer warning labels, placing ABV caps on alcopops, and mandating ID checks for alcohol similar to tobacco laws.
- Jody further asked members to save the date for the joint Alcohol and Cannabis Prevention Policy Summit, which is scheduled for April 13, 2026, in Palatine, IL, and April 14, 2026, in Urbana, IL.

3:10 -3:20 Jake Levinson, CPRC Senior Administrator, Prevention First

- Jake reported that the Cannabis Policy Resource Center (CPRC) is preparing to exhibit at the Illinois Municipal League Conference, where staff will engage with local officials. He noted that CPRC continues to collect and share cannabis ordinances and has recently released a resource, *Communicating About Cannabis*, which is designed to help municipalities communicate with residents about cannabis. Jake also explained that while regulation of derived cannabis products did not advance during the spring session and is unlikely to move forward in the fall veto session, CPRC will continue supporting local communities through resources and webinars.

3:20 – 3:30 Joanne Bilyk-Glancy, Director of Prevention Services, Project Oz Overview of Environmental Scanning

- Joanne presented on the environmental scan conducted by the BN Parents Coalition and Project Oz, which examined nearly 100 retail locations across the county, including grocery stores, liquor stores, convenience stores, smoke shops, and gas stations. She reported that the findings revealed widespread marketing practices targeting youth and women, such as alcohol products branded to resemble familiar non-alcoholic beverages (SunnyD, Crystal Light, Arizona Tea, Mountain Dew), placement of alcohol near food and child-friendly items, and heavy promotion of high-ABV alcopops. The scan also uncovered the sale of Delta-8, Delta-10, THCP, kratom, and other substances positioned alongside ordinary consumer goods, often with store staff unable to explain the products accurately. Many of these items carried strong youth appeal through flavors, branding, and packaging. Joanne concluded by noting that the next steps will include compiling a full report and exploring potential policy or ordinance strategies, such as ABV caps and placement restrictions.

3:30 -3:40 Randyl Wilkins, Mental Health & Youth Engagement Specialist, Prevention First Youth Advisory Board (YAB) updates

- Randyl provided an update on the Prevention First Youth Advisory Board (YAB), which met in person for its annual retreat in August. She explained that the retreat brought together 14 students from across the state of Illinois and emphasized team building, advocacy mapping, and environmental scans, with input from APRC staff. From these activities, four key project ideas emerged: developing financial literacy

resources for youth, creating a how-to guide for establishing youth advisory boards, designing an advocacy toolkit to support youth interested in policy engagement, and building mental health literacy resources for schools and businesses that employ or serve young people. Randyl noted that subcommittees have been formed to advance these initiatives, with the first follow-up Zoom meeting scheduled for September 21.

3:40 – 3:55 Group Announcements

- Paula, representing the Wilmington Coalition for a Healthy Community, announced that the coalition will host a Human Trafficking Awareness event on October 11, 2025, from 2:00 to 4:00 p.m. at the South Island Pavilion. The event will focus on the dangers of online predators and provide resources to raise awareness within the community. She also noted that additional resources were shared during the announcements portion of the meeting, including the 'Screen for Success' tool, caregiver-focused materials, and various prevention campaigns.

3:55 – 4:00 *Samantha Alonis, Deputy Director, Bureau of Prevention, Division of Behavioral Health & Recovery, IDHS* ***Closing Remarks***

- Samantha closed the meeting by expressing appreciation for the guest presentation, the resources shared, and the ongoing efforts of coalition members. She encouraged attendees to continue sharing information broadly and to remain connected during her leave, noting that Shantel and Jody will coordinate upcoming agendas and follow-up resources in her absence.

Shared Resources:

<https://www.screen4success.org/>

<https://www.helplineil.org/app/home>

Tobacco statute requiring ID checks

<https://www.ilga.gov/Documents/legislation/ilcs/documents/072006750K1.htm>

CDC's Free Mind campaign

<https://www.cdc.gov/free-mind/index.html>

Civic education program for youth to review this program:

<https://publish.illinois.edu/sphays/engaging-youth-for-positive-change/>

Youth and Caregiver Resource Center Resources Sign-Up Link

<https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/CZL9FTG>