

# Prevention Action Alliance

Educate. Empower. Advocate.

House Bill 96

Ohio House Finance Committee

Prevention Action Alliance

March 13, 2025

Chairman Stewart, Vice-Chair Dovilla, Ranking Member Sweeney and members of the House Finance Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to provide opponent on House Bill 96. My name is Frances Gerbig, and I am the Executive Director at Prevention Action Alliance (PAA). PAA is a statewide nonprofit prevention agency based in Columbus, Ohio and has been in existence for over thirty years. Prevention Action Alliance is dedicated to leading healthy communities in the prevention of substance misuse and the promotion of mental health wellness. Our organization offers an abundance of resources, training services, grants, and advocacy opportunities for those who are active in the prevention and mental health fields. The Prevention Action Alliance organization and its staff actively participate in numerous advisory committees, boards, and membership organizations. These include esteemed groups such as the RecoveryOhio Advisory Council, the Great Lakes Prevention Technology Transfer Center (PTTC) Network, the Problem Gambling Advisory Board, the Coalition for Healthy Communities, the Chemical Dependency Professionals Board, and various advisory boards and partnerships with the Ohio Center of Excellence Behavioral Health Prevention and Promotion-among others.

As an important component of the continuum of care, prevention refers to efforts aimed at addressing health concerns prior to the diagnosis of an individual. Prevention is typically categorized into three main types: universal, selective, and indicated. Universal prevention is designed to benefit the entire population by providing general health education and awareness of potential risks, regardless of individual risk factors. Selective prevention targets specific subgroups that are identified as being at higher risk for health issues, often based on demographic or behavioral factors. Indicated prevention focuses on individuals who exhibit early signs or symptoms of a problem, often identified through screening or assessment, with the goal of intervening before the issue worsens. Prevention programs and policies are effective across all stages of life, from infancy to adulthood. Evidence-based prevention offers benefits to everyone, demonstrating that it is never too early—or too late—to address substance misuse and mental health concerns<sup>1</sup>.

*Prevention Education*

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.hhs.gov/surgeongeneral/reports-and-publications/addiction-and-substance-misuse/index.html>

When Issue 2 was passed in 2023, it specified that 25% of the funds would be directed toward mental health and addiction services. However, the current budget only allocates funds to those communities that host dispensaries. PAA maintains that it is important to support all communities, not just those with dispensaries, as reflected in this version of the budget. The impact of legal adult use cannabis is not limited to the host community. It is crucial that local governments are empowered to allocate funds based on the needs of their communities. Additionally, it is essential that revenue from cannabis be used for education, research on its impacts, and support for individuals undergoing treatment and recovery.

Furthermore, PAA recommends investing in prevention education using cannabis revenue. It is important to note that the risk factors for substance misuse are shared for suicide and mental health disorders. Therefore, investment in evidence-based prevention education which builds upon protective factors and resiliency skills will not only positively impact substance misuse, but also protect against suicide, other mental health disorders, violence prevention and enhancing healthy decision making. For every dollar spent on prevention, an estimated \$18 in savings can be generated<sup>2</sup>. We propose that \$750,000 of these funds be allocated for evidence-based, age-appropriate prevention education for K-12 students, colleges, and universities. This should be implemented in partnership with relevant state departments and agencies, including the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services, the School-Based Center of Excellence for Prevention & Early Intervention, the Department of Education and Workforce, and the Department of Higher Education. Prevention education extends beyond cannabis and other substance use prevention, fostering participants' ability to make autonomous decisions that prioritize their health, safety, and well-being. It is also essential that school-based prevention education and activities are a key component of this initiative.

Prevention education should not only focus on cannabis, but also on substance use prevention more broadly, fostering students' ability to make decisions that prioritize their health and well-being. OhioMHAS, along with the Ohio Department of Education and Workforce, must collaborate to identify evidence-based best practices for prevention. Research shows that scare tactics and one-off assemblies are ineffective<sup>3</sup>, which is why we recommend the establishment of an independent committee of Ohio Certified Prevention Consultants to review, vet, and recommend proven prevention curriculums. These curriculums should provide an age-appropriate understanding of a variety of substances, their risks, development of refusal and resiliency strategies, ensuring that prevention programs are implemented with fidelity across schools in Ohio. Selected programs must not only be evidence-based but be responsive to the communities' unique needs and meet the fidelity standards to provide positive outcomes.

In addition to investing in prevention education, it is essential to prioritize workforce development more broadly, ensuring that individuals across various sectors are equipped with the skills and knowledge to address substance misuse and mental health challenges in their respective fields. This includes providing training and professional development for educators, employers, community leaders, and others who interact with youth and adults. By offering resources and ongoing education on prevention strategies, resilience-building, and the identification of early warning signs, we can create a more informed and proactive workforce. Such investments will not only enhance workplace environments but also

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<sup>2</sup> <https://drugfree.org/reports/substance-use-prevention-agenda-2022/>

<sup>3</sup> [https://pttcnetwork.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/WhatDoesNOTWork\\_9\\_2024\\_FINAL.pdf](https://pttcnetwork.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/WhatDoesNOTWork_9_2024_FINAL.pdf)

contribute to a community-wide effort in supporting healthier, more resilient individuals. Strengthening the general workforce in this way will help improve overall well-being, reduce stigma, and foster a culture of support and prevention, which can positively impact outcomes in schools, workplaces, and beyond.

### *Tobacco*

PAA also requests to restore the comprehensive licensing scheme for vapor products, creating a necessary and regulated framework for their sale. By requiring businesses to register with the Department of Health, this policy will hold companies accountable for selling responsibly and complying with state laws.

Currently, there is a significant gap in regulation. While the FDA has approved only 34 tobacco- and menthol-flavored e-cigarette products, over 6,000 illegal e-cigarette products are on the market, representing a staggering 86% of e-cigarette sales<sup>4</sup>. Without regulation, nearly 90% of the products sold are unmonitored, leaving Ohioans unprotected from potential risks. This oversight is critical to ensuring that Ohio's consumers can rely on products with FDA approval and safeguarding public health.

Furthermore, without a tobacco license, there is no way to track vapor product retailers. As it stands, if an establishment isn't selling traditional cigarettes, it falls through the cracks of state oversight. By reinstituting this policy, we can effectively track and regulate vapor product businesses, ensuring a safer market, reducing youth access to these harmful products, and protecting Ohio's public health.

This version of the bill removed the provisions to increase taxes on a wide range of tobacco products, including cigarettes, cigars, nicotine pouches, and emerging products like Zyns. By raising the cigarette tax by approximately \$1.50 per pack and increasing taxes on other tobacco products (OTP), including Zyns, we will generate revenue that can be reinvested into programs focused on preventing tobacco use and supporting individuals who wish to quit.

Increasing taxes on tobacco products has been proven to be an effective strategy for reducing their use, particularly among younger populations. Tobacco companies, including those marketing products like Zyns, continue to target youth with flavored options. By making these products more expensive, we can further discourage their use, helping to protect our young people and reduce the overall health burden caused by tobacco-related diseases in our state.

### *Closing*

Prevention Action Alliance believes these investments in prevention and mental health services will yield significant benefits for Ohio's communities. We strongly support expanding community prevention coalitions and youth-led prevention groups to address substance misuse and mental health challenges, tailoring strategies to each community's needs. It is important to note that there is no direct state funding for implementation or operation costs for community coalitions in Ohio nor do prevention services receive reimbursement for services by insurance providers.

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<sup>4</sup> <https://truthinitiative.org/research-resources/tobacco-industry-marketing/us-retail-sales-data-show-86-e-cigarette-sales-are-illegal>:text=New%20research%20from%20Truth%20Initiative,the%20market%20are%20illegal%20products.

Thank you, Chairman Stewart, Vice-Chair Dovilla, and Ranking Member Sweeney and members of the House Finance Committee for the opportunity to provide written testimony on HB 96. I can be reached at 614-540-9985 with any additional questions.