

# Planning for Prevention

## A Guide to Community Health Initiatives



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Please note that this guide was published in the fall of 2018 and updated in the spring of 2021 with the most recent data at that time. Most recent data reports have been delayed in publishing due to the health department's response to COVID-19. For the most up to date version of this guide, please visit the “Resources & Publications” section at [nrpcvt.com](http://nrpcvt.com) where the online version will be updated annually with data and new research, as well as live links throughout the document.

## Introduction

In collaboration with Franklin County Caring Communities, the Northwest Regional Planning Commission (NRPC) has developed *Planning for Prevention – A Guide to Community Health Initiatives*. The intent of the guide is to provide information to local municipal officials and volunteers regarding the community health challenges facing the Northwest region and to help municipalities find the community health-related tools they need. Development of the guide was funded in part by a Regional Prevention Partnership grant awarded by the Vermont Department of Health.

In 2015, the Lamoille County Planning Commission, in partnership with Healthy Lamoille Valley, created *A Primer on Planning for Prevention*. The goal of the project was to improve substance abuse prevention and to ensure early intervention for Lamoille County youth to reduce alcohol misuse. Since then, communities in Lamoille County have implemented both regulatory and non-regulatory activities to reduce youth substance abuse. Lamoille County's project serves as inspiration for this guide.

### Primary Threats to Community Health

In the Northwest region, there are three primary threats to community health: substance misuse, chronic disease, and mental health challenges. These three issues are interconnected. Each creates economic burdens and negatively impacts the health of regional citizens and their quality of life. This guide focuses on how communities can mitigate the impact of these three primary threats to public health in the region.

### Substance Misuse

The first section of the guide focuses on the threat of substance misuse. For the purposes of this guide, the terms “substance misuse” and “substance use disorder” refer to the recurrent use of alcohol, tobacco, and/or drugs, causing impairment, such as health problems, disability, and failure to meet major responsibilities at work, school, or home.<sup>2</sup>



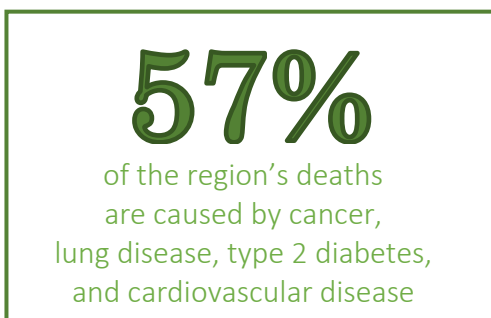
In the Northwest region, substance use among youth is very prevalent and a strong indicator for future misuse or dependency. 55% of high school students (grades 9–12) in the region have drunk alcohol, 15% of high school students have binged on alcohol in the past 30 days (binge drinking is defined as having four [females] or five [males] drinks in one sitting), 22% of high school students have smoked a cigarette, and 20% of students have used marijuana in the past 30 days.<sup>1</sup> Additionally, 754 residents from the Northwest region were treated for use of heroin and other opiates in 2019, and this number has been rising for four years.<sup>22</sup> This data highlights the need for stronger substance use prevention in the region.

### Chronic Disease

The second section of this guide focuses on access to healthy foods and physical activity, which directly impacts an individual's health and well-being. The term “built environment” of towns refers to characteristics such as proximity to a grocery store or supermarket; safe, open



spaces for people in the community to be active; and opportunities that engage the community in physical activity. These are all areas where municipalities can implement healthier community practices and prevent higher chronic disease rates.

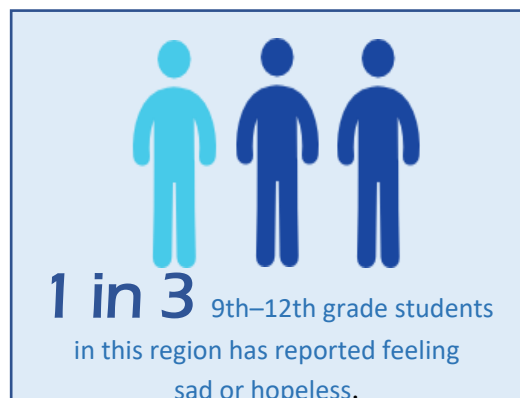


In the Northwest region, 57% of adult deaths are caused by chronic diseases such as cancer, lung disease, type 2 diabetes and cardiovascular disease.<sup>4</sup> One in six adults in the region has been diagnosed with lung disease, and four out of five adults do not eat the recommended serving of fruits and vegetables per day.<sup>4</sup> More than half of the region's premature deaths result from behaviors that can be prevented. This is a public health issue that must be addressed within communities.

### Mental Health

The last section focuses on understanding and improving the mental health of the region's residents. In this guide, the term "mental health" is defined as an individual's emotional, psychological, and social well-being.<sup>3</sup>

In the Northwest region, one out of three high school students has reported feeling sad or hopeless in the past year.<sup>1</sup> 12% of high school students have made a suicide plan, and



14% of residents in Franklin and Grand Isle Counties reported feeling frequent mental distress in the past 30 days.<sup>27</sup> However, prevention efforts can effectively be used to intervene earlier and prevent crisis situations, as well as increase the quality of life and well-being of community members.

In the remainder of this guide, the issues of substance misuse, wellness, and mental health in Northwest Vermont are explained in greater detail, including information about the economic and social impacts these health threats have caused in local communities. Each section provides examples of how municipal officials and volunteers can implement improvements to the municipal plan and take other types of non-regulatory and regulatory actions. This guide is not meant to be prescriptive but rather a tool for municipal action. The examples included in this guide are not exhaustive and are meant only for consideration and inspiration. Users of this guide will likely need to adapt and tailor examples to meet the needs of their municipality.

## Figure 1: The Municipal Plan

The municipal plan, generally referred to as the town plan, is the principal policy document that guides municipal government decisions. It establishes the vision and goals of the municipality. It also provides a pathway for achieving those goals. The plan is the foundation for both regulatory and non-regulatory municipal actions and provides a basis for the following: local land use regulation, the capital budget, natural resource conservation strategies, and a range of community and economic development programs. Health-promoting language in the municipal plan can lay the foundation for future community decisions and investments.

**Vermont’s planning statute:** Vermont law states that municipalities may choose to adopt a municipal plan, although they are under no statutory requirement to do so. Duly adopted plans can be used to guide development and serve as evidence in Act 250 and Section 248 hearings, but only municipalities with approved plans are eligible for certain state programs. A community choosing to adopt a municipal plan must, at a minimum, include the 12 elements listed in [Vermont’s municipal planning statute \(Title 24, Chapter 117\)](#).

Regulatory and non-regulatory activities can be used by municipalities to promote and implement community-wide health initiatives.

**Regulatory implementation:** Actions by a governmental entity that creates laws, rules, or ordinances to achieve a goal or enact a policy. Examples include zoning and subdivision bylaws, local road design standards, and enactments negotiated as part of project development approval.

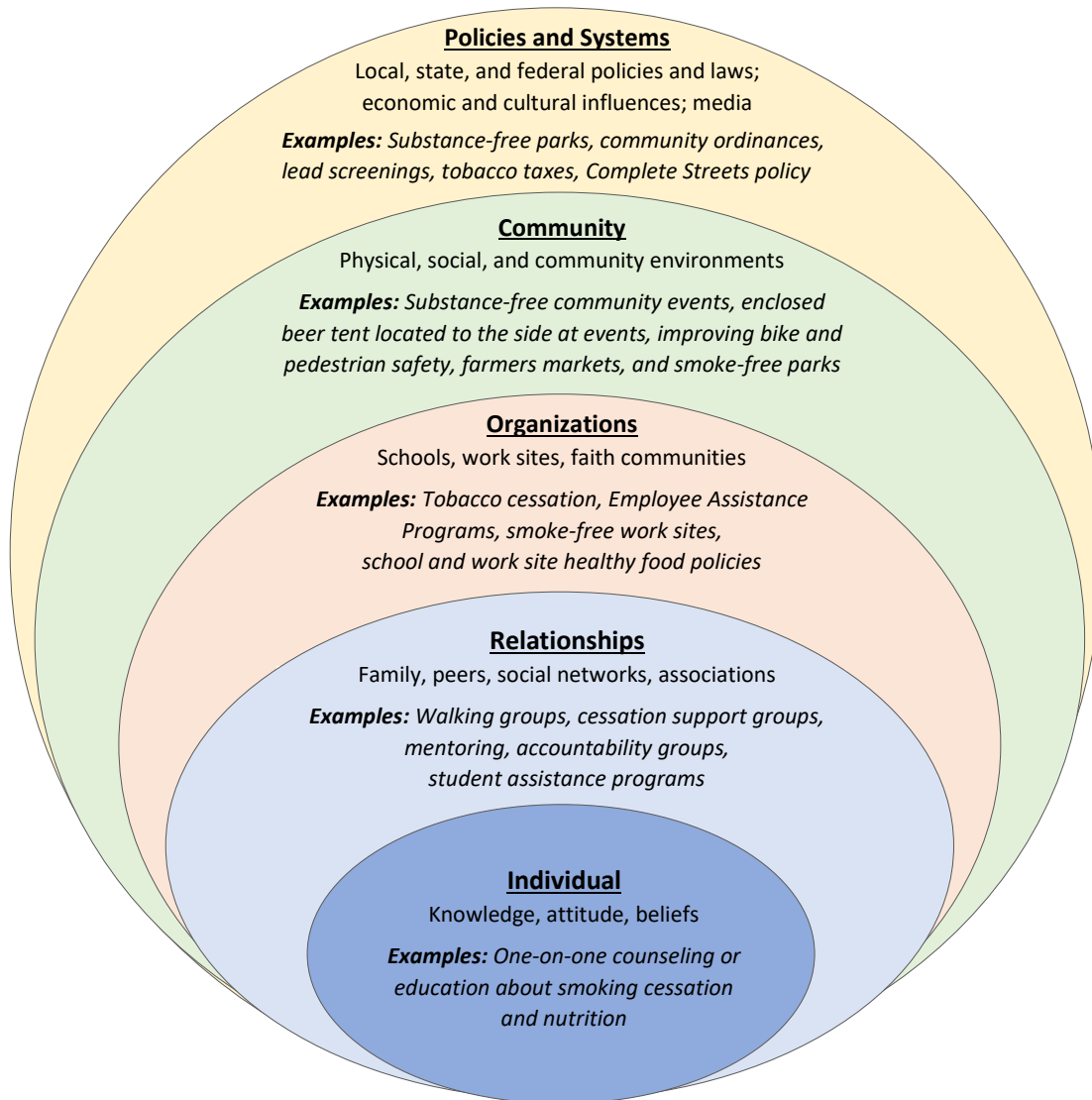
**Non-regulatory implementation:** An act by a citizen, civic group, or governmental entity to achieve a goal or enact a policy through means other than the creation of laws, rules, or ordinances. Examples include building more sidewalks and creating more parks.

## Social-Ecological Model

In developing this guide, the Northwest Regional Planning Commission used the [Social-Ecological Model](#). This model is used by the Vermont Department of Health to comprehensively approach improving the health of and reducing disease among Vermonters (see Figure 2).

The Social-Ecological Model addresses the large-scale policies and systems in Vermont that impact community health as well as the small-scale risks and conditions that affect an individual’s health. This guide aims to address only the “Policies and Systems” and “Community” parts of the model. These are the levels at which municipal officials and volunteers can most effectively help improve community health. However, it is important to understand that long-term improvements to community health outcomes will only come through a holistic and comprehensive approach to changing behaviors at all levels of the model.<sup>5</sup> Truly addressing the three primary threats to community health in the Northwest region will require not only the actions of governmental officials, volunteers, and nonprofits, but also the actions of individuals and families in the region.

**Figure 2: The Social-Ecological Model**



## Substance Misuse

### Background

The data presented throughout this guide is focused on youth substance use. One of the most accessible and regionally specific data sets is the Youth Risk Behavior Survey, which is administered to middle and high school students and available with county and supervisory union level data on the [Vermont Department of Health's website](#). Research shows that targeting substance misuse prevention among youth greatly reduces the chances that they will struggle with substance use disorders as adults.<sup>3</sup>

**33%**

of high school students  
in the region  
have tried marijuana<sup>1</sup>

### What does the data say?

- 59% of 9th–12th grade students in Franklin and 50% in Grand Isle County have ever drunk alcohol, while 34% and 27%, respectively, drank alcohol in the past 30 days.<sup>1</sup>
- 22% of 9th–12th grade students in Franklin County and 17% in Grand Isle County have smoked a cigarette, and about 11% and 7% of students smoked in the past 30 days.<sup>1</sup>
- 37% and 28%, respectively, of 9th–12th grade students have tried marijuana, and 23% and 16% of those students have used it within the past 30 days.<sup>1</sup>
- 754 residents from the Northwest region were treated for using heroin and other opiates in 2019.<sup>23</sup>
- 38% of young adults (ages 18–25) binge drank in the past 30 days in the Northwest region.<sup>23</sup> This is decreased from 2018 and is lower than the state rate of 45%.<sup>24</sup>
- 21% of the region's young adults smoke cigarettes, and 4% of young adults in the region have taken a prescription drug without a prescription.<sup>24</sup>

Alcohol, tobacco, and marijuana are addictive substances, and their use can lead to long-term use and misuse, especially when they are used before 21 years of age.<sup>5</sup> These substances can contribute to poor decision making and risky behavior that can have long-term economic impacts on both the individual and the community. A culture “normalizes” the use of a substance by making it a regular, accepted, and expected part of life. When this happens, the perception of harm from those substances decreases among young people. An adolescent's perception of the risks associated with substance use is an important determinant of whether he or she engages in it. For example, youths who perceive a high risk of harm from using alcohol are less likely to use alcohol than youths who perceive a low risk of harm.

The overall national opioid dispensing rate declined from 2012 to 2019, and in 2019, the dispensing rate had fallen to the lowest in the 14 years at 46.7 prescriptions per 100 persons (total of more than 153 million opioid prescriptions). In 2019, Vermont's opioid dispensing rate was 36.9 per 100 people, below the national average.<sup>26</sup> More than 111 Vermonters died in 2019 from opioid-related causes. Fentanyl accounts for 86% of opioid deaths in 2019.<sup>24</sup> Addiction is a lifelong chronic disease. Young people are most at risk, and the costs are high for those addicted, their families, and all of us.

*People who begin drinking before age 15 are four times more likely to develop alcohol dependence than those who begin drinking at age 21.<sup>5</sup>*

### Economic Impacts of Substance Use

Substance misuse prevention practices do not have the ultimate goal of eliminating all consumption of substances or business from restaurants and breweries that benefit from selling alcohol products. However, there must be room in the discussion to address the misuse of alcohol products as well as tobacco, marijuana, and other drugs. Costs are associated with the misuse of substances in healthcare, emergency services, and criminal justice resources, in addition to the loss of productivity. Specifically, underage substance use of alcohol, marijuana, tobacco, and illegal drugs has negative economic impacts.



## Economic Impacts

Stopping substance use before it starts or before it becomes misuse saves Vermont tax dollars:

- Evidence-based school prevention programs can save Vermont \$18 for every \$1 invested.<sup>6</sup>
- Combined with school prevention, every \$1 invested in evidence-based programs that support strong family connections can save Vermont between \$3 and \$11.<sup>6</sup>
- In 2019, 3.6 million of Vermont's state budget was spent on substance misuse prevention, while 4.5 million was spent on intervention, and 40 million was spent on treatment.<sup>25</sup>

### Negative Impacts of Substance Misuse:

**Employment:** Substance misuse can lead to an increase in missed days at work, increased workplace accidents, decreased productivity at work, and higher health insurance costs for the employer.

**Health:** Addiction and abuse cause or contribute to more than 70 other conditions requiring medical care, including cancer, lung disease, heart disease, HIV/AIDS, cirrhosis, pregnancy complications and fetal abnormalities, and trauma.

*In 2019, 53% of driving deaths in Franklin County and 25% in Grand Isle County were attributed to alcohol-related incidents.<sup>27</sup>*

**Public safety:** Substance misuse contributes to an increase in motor vehicle crash fatalities, suicides, domestic violence situations, and unintentional injuries, increasing law enforcement and emergency service costs.

**Education:** Youth substance users tend to perform poorly in school, develop self-esteem issues, and engage in riskier behaviors. Substance use is also associated with failure to complete high school or college.

#### Quick Fact:

- Tobacco use places a massive burden on the Vermont economy, costing the state \$348 million in direct healthcare expenditures each year.<sup>8</sup> These costs consist of medical resource utilization, which includes the consumption of inpatient, outpatient, and pharmaceutical services within the healthcare delivery system.

## Policy and System Changes – Municipal Opportunities

Municipalities can adopt policy and system changes in three focus areas: municipal plans, non-regulatory activities, and regulatory activities. These resources are not meant to be comprehensive or exhaustive. Municipalities may choose to focus efforts on addressing their municipal plan by updating data, goals, and language, or they may implement a regulatory or non-regulatory initiative. This guide is intended to aid municipalities in thinking about their approach to community health promotion and is not a list of efforts they must follow.

### Municipal Plans

A municipal plan is a document that most municipalities in Franklin and Grand Isle Counties have formally adopted. The intent of the document is to provide a comprehensive vision for the community's future. A municipal plan is primarily used to create goals and policies related to land use and development. However, a municipal plan can also address any other goals, policies, or actions envisioned by the municipality, including addressing threats to community health. For more information about municipal plans, see Figure 1.

Most municipal plans in the region and state do not adequately address community health because it's not a required element of such plans. However, municipal plans can be used to combat substance misuse in communities and to create an environment where substance misuse is minimized. This can be done by setting goals, providing education, and creating action steps.

Many resources exist to aid in the assessment and planning processes. Organizations such as the Northwest Regional Planning Commission, Franklin County Caring Communities, RiseVT, and the Franklin Grand Isle Tobacco Prevention Coalition can assist municipalities. Additionally, the Vermont Department of Health provides many examples, initiatives, and data reports.

#### **Assessing Substance Misuse in a Municipal Plan:**

- Identify the current rates of substance misuse reported in your municipality or county. County-level data is available through the NRPC's Data Scorecards at [nrpcvt.com](http://nrpcvt.com).
- Review recent figures on youth behavior and substance misuse reported at the supervisory union level. This is available through the [Vermont Department of Health](http://Vermont Department of Health).
- Assess the number of substance-free events in your community. Take inventory of how alcohol plays a role in your community. Make a list of all of the alcohol-free events offered. List the activities and opportunities for teens that are substance free. Take stock of the condition of municipal parks. Do signs prohibit alcohol or tobacco consumption? Are the parks easily visible and accessible, or are they neglected or overgrown? Do schools post substance-free signs or zones?
- Research the number of substance-related crimes in your community.
- Conduct a Health Impact Assessment to aid in the decision-making process. More information on how to do this is available through the [Vermont Department of Health](http://Vermont Department of Health).
- Research how surrounding towns in the region are handling similar issues.
- Review prevention language in the current municipal plan and identify places to add information about substance misuse prevention.

These examples focus mainly on the “Goals and Policies” section of a municipal plan and serve as starting points for municipal officials to consider. Sample language for municipal plan adoption is focused on the “Action” section of a municipal plan and can be found on page 26 of this guide.

#### **Quick Facts<sup>8</sup>**

- An estimated one-third of teenage experimentation with smoking can be directly attributed to tobacco advertising and promotional activities.
- Two-thirds of tobacco-using youth report using non-cigarette tobacco products such as e-cigarettes, cigars, and chew because they like the flavors.

### **Non-Regulatory Activities**

Municipalities can engage in non-regulatory activities beyond the municipal plan that can support substance misuse prevention efforts. The following examples could be easily implemented in local communities:

- Have municipal officials regularly participate in educational and training opportunities. This would enable local decision makers to be more informed about issues in the community and equip them with the knowledge of possible solutions.
- Promote an environment where both community leaders and parents/guardians set a positive example of substance consumption.
- Organize town highway department staff and community volunteers to remove visual clues of alcohol use on highways (e.g., remove beer cans and boxes lining the road).
- Educate community retailers about alcohol and tobacco advertising in their stores and its effect on youth (e.g., minimize signage, especially what is seen from outside; place alcohol on shelves above eye level; place tobacco products behind the counter where they can’t be easily seen). More information can be found at [counterbalancevt.com](http://counterbalancevt.com).
- Provide alternative sponsorship ideas for events and encourage hosting organizations to make events substance free.
- Encourage positive behaviors and a responsible culture regarding substance use. This includes encouraging designated drivers, providing education on responsible consumption, and creating substance-free environments for youth.
- Implement a sharps disposal program for the safe disposal of needles. The Northern Tier Center for Health (NOTCH) in Enosburg, through its partnership with Vermont CARES, is a great example of a successful program that is preventing needles and syringes from being littered throughout the community.
- Implement a prescription drug disposal program. Setting up drop boxes or drop-off locations is essential for the safe disposal of unused or unwanted drugs and will help ensure drugs don’t get into the wrong hands, pollute waterways, or harm wildlife. Current disposal sites in the region include the St. Albans Police Department, the St. Albans State Building, the Swanton Police Department, Northwestern Medical Center, the Vermont State Police Barracks, the Richford NOTCH, and the South Hero Pharmacy.

## Spotlight: Healthy Retailer Practices

Ensuring that retailers remain economically viable while focusing on prevention efforts isn't a zero-sum situation. Voluntary "healthy retailer" practices entail a non-regulatory approach that focuses on encouraging healthy food products, such as fruits, and de-emphasizing tobacco and alcohol. Additional examples are listed below. For more information on healthy retailer practices and for access to free resources, visit [www.healthvermont.gov](http://www.healthvermont.gov).

**Location of alcohol in stores:** Lessen product visibility in the store by repositioning alcohol to the back of the establishment, installing surveillance cameras near alcohol coolers, eliminating floor displays, and separating alcohol from juice, soda, and other beverages.

**Signage inside packaged goods establishments:** Reduce the number of signs displayed that are supplied free of charge to establishments for product advertising. Eliminate signage that associates alcohol with other activities, such as driving.

**Signage placement:** Raise the height of alcohol or tobacco signs so they are at an adult's eye level, not at a child's eye level.



Price Chopper in St. Albans (and across the region) serves as a strong model of healthy retailer policy. The store places all tobacco products behind the customer service desk and behind solid cabinet doors. There is no power wall advertising or glass front. This approach ensures products are only visible and sold to those who come in and request them, which greatly reduces youth exposure to tobacco and encourages healthy behaviors for community members.



### Regulatory Activities

Regulatory activities such as municipal ordinances and bylaws impact and guide the decisions of individual citizens. The ability of a municipality to adopt, amend, repeal, and enforce ordinances is granted by the state under [24 VSA § 1971](#). Municipalities are generally enabled to adopt regulations to ensure the "public health, safety, welfare, and convenience" within the community per [24 VSA § 2291](#).

There is no "one size fits all" approach to regulatory measures. Municipalities must decide what types of regulatory activities would work best in their community and are realistically within the community's ability to effectively enforce. Communities should always keep in mind that the goal of substance misuse prevention regulation is to decrease the rate of substance misuse, especially use among youth.

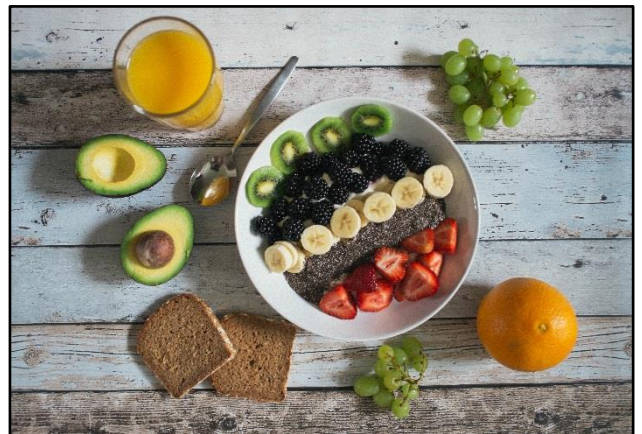
### Examples of Municipality Regulatory Activities

- Designate municipal events as substance free. Doing so decreases the normalization of alcohol use in the community.
- Designate municipal facilities as substance free.
- Enforce existing regulations that decrease or deter substance use.
- Restrict alcohol-related advertising placement.
- Adopt policies or ordinances that limit alcohol consumption in public places.
- Prohibit alcohol and tobacco use in public parks, recreation areas, and/or all municipality property.
- Limit the location and density of alcohol outlets in concentrated areas.
- Implement distance requirements between alcohol/tobacco outlets and sensitive locations such as schools, hospitals, daycare facilities, playgrounds, parks, alcohol treatment facilities, teen centers, and churches.
- Restrict alcohol outlet density. For example, new alcohol outlets will not be permitted within 300 feet of an existing alcohol/tobacco outlet. The town selectboard is the municipal Liquor Control Board and issues liquor licenses.
- Restrict the placement of signage in retail establishments.
- Restrict the hours of operation by alcohol establishments.
- Establish a minimum insurance requirement for on-site alcohol establishments.

## Building Healthy Communities: Supporting Access to Healthy Foods and a Healthy Community Design

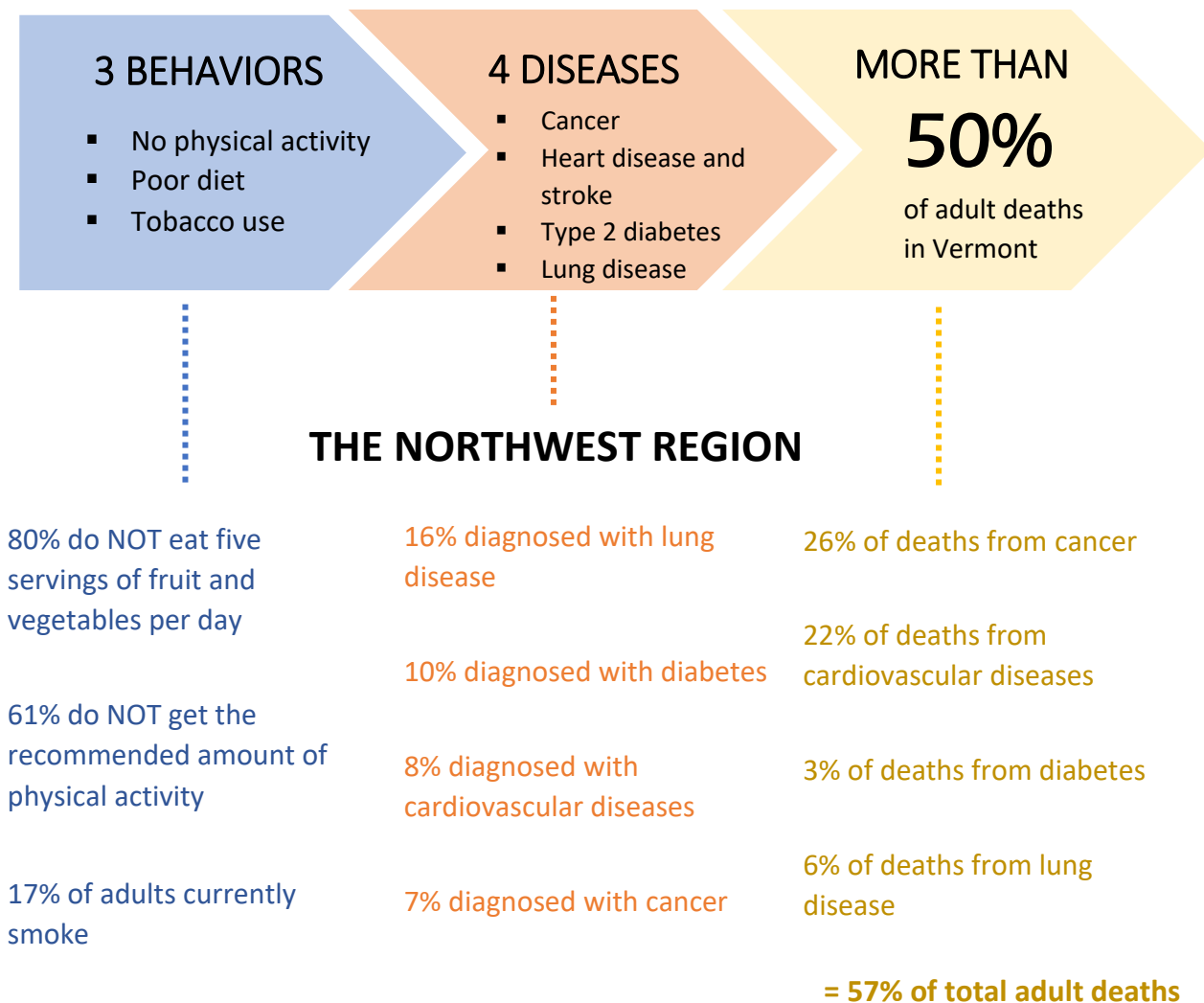
### Background

Lack of physical activity, poor nutrition, and tobacco use are three behaviors that contribute to the development and severity of chronic disease. 43% of adults ages 20 and older are obese in the Northwest region,<sup>29</sup> making them more susceptible to chronic diseases, such as type 2 diabetes, high blood pressure, heart disease, stroke, gallbladder disease, osteoarthritis, sleep apnea, and some cancers. The Vermont Department of Health has launched the 3-4-50 campaign, which addresses the three behaviors that lead to four diseases that contribute to more than 50% of adult deaths in the state and in the Northwest region (see Figure 3). Due to many resources being diverted to the COVID-19 response, not all data is published and up-to-date. However, the problem still remains urgent and in need of prioritization by municipalities.





**Figure 3: 3-4-50 in the Northwest Region<sup>4</sup>**



### Economic Impacts of Chronic Disease

Vermonters today are more likely to die from a largely preventable disease than an infectious disease. Chronic disease affects the state's economic future, with an estimated cost of more than \$2 billion across Vermont in 2017.<sup>11</sup> The total projected cost of chronic disease from 2016-2030 across the state is \$79 billion.<sup>11</sup> Chronic disease has detrimental economic impacts, including increased healthcare costs and decreased productivity and life expectancy. The workforce is ultimately impacted by the depleting quality and quantity of the labor force. However, when the population has good health, economic growth rates increase. Workforce productivity rises by reducing incapacity, disability, and workdays lost. Good health also increases an individual's economic opportunities and level of education, and it frees up costly resources that would otherwise be spent on treatment.<sup>12</sup>

## Policy and System Changes – Municipal Opportunities

Communities that are built to support physical activity, safe walking and biking, use of public transportation, and easy access to fresh foods help people lead healthier, more active lives.<sup>9</sup> This approach links traditional concepts of planning (e.g., land use, transportation, community facilities, parks and open spaces) with health themes (e.g., physical activity, public safety, access to nutritious food, air and water quality, mental health, and social equity). Additionally, the overall health of a community is influenced by making the healthiest choice the easiest and most accessible choice for all—regardless of age, ability, and income. Implementing healthy community design strategies requires strong engagement, understanding, and action by a wide variety of community partners.<sup>9</sup>

### Healthy Communities See<sup>10</sup>

- A twofold increase in daily recommended physical activity in walkable communities
- A 35% increase in physical activity when inviting, safe environments for exercise exist
- Lower overweight and obesity rates with access to fresh and healthy foods
- Reduced secondhand smoke exposure and increased quit success with smoke-free places

Decisions made by government, businesses, and institutions have an important impact on shaping the conditions in the built environment. Transportation and land use, investments in commercial and residential developments, and the location of schools and work sites ultimately influence the distances people travel to work, the convenience of purchasing healthy foods, and the safety and attractiveness of neighborhoods for walking and using parks and trails.

Towns may choose to adopt any of the key strategies proposed by the Vermont Department of Health.

### Key Strategies Include<sup>10</sup>

1. Add health-supporting language to the town plan.
  - Restrict the sale of tobacco near schools and playgrounds.
  - Require green space, gardening space, or sidewalks in new housing and commercial developments.
2. Define action strategies.
  - Support mixed-use development that includes no-smoking ordinances in public areas.
  - Create bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure.
  - Maintain smoke-free parks, recreation areas, and open spaces.
  - Increase access to healthy foods.
3. Design “complete” streets and roadways.
  - Consider the safety of all road users: walkers, bicycles, wheelchairs, public transportation, and cars.



4. Maintain and promote places to be active.
  - Include parks, recreation facilities, and open spaces.
5. Increase access to healthy foods.
  - Dedicate space for community gardens and farmers markets.



Municipalities can adopt policy and system changes in these three focus areas: municipal plans, non-regulatory activities, and regulatory activities.

Many of the proposed examples of opportunities that towns can implement in their community are included on the Vermont Department of Health’s community sign-on form found on its [3-4-50 website](https://www.healthvermont.gov/3-4-50). You can visit [www.healthvermont.gov/3-4-50](https://www.healthvermont.gov/3-4-50) to explore the many resources for healthy community design and complete the sign-on form for your community.

## **Municipal Plan**

When reviewing a local plan or policy, consider these questions:

- Is there explicit language to promote and protect human health?
- Does it give priority to increasing opportunities for physical activity, walking, and biking?
- Does it aim to increase access to fresh and healthy food?
- How could additional health language be added?

Health-promoting language in the town plan lays the foundation for future community decisions and investments. Implementing healthy community design is not a short-term project. These changes require engagement, understanding, and action by many people in the community. Developing new connections among community members and organizations is an essential first step in bringing the public health perspective—together with new approaches, skills, and resources—to the community design process.

### **Assess:**

- Identify existing community efforts that fit with some of the municipality’s goals or strategies. Programs such as Safe Routes to School, growth center and downtown designations, Farm to Plate, and Farm to School initiatives may provide the foundation for collaborative action. It is far easier to join an existing effort than to start a new one.<sup>9</sup>
- Address existing community concerns and needs first, in order to build trust, relationships, and goodwill for future efforts. Assess community capacity and readiness for investments, and assess the status of infrastructure for active daily living and healthy foods. Look for signs of your community’s capacity and readiness.<sup>9</sup>

- Review existing local plans and policies to determine how well they support health, active daily living, and access to healthy food. This can be done by reviewing existing inventories and maps or conducting walk, bike, and community food audits.<sup>9</sup>

Creating easy and safe walking, biking, and affordable public transportation options to access municipal services, employment, schools, parks, and recreation and open spaces is essential for promoting physical activity and healthier lives. Municipal plans can be an appropriate place to create a foundation and vision for these goals in the community, as well as include initiatives the community should focus on first.

### Non-Regulatory Activities

The municipal plan is not the only non-regulatory approach that can influence healthy community design. The following are examples of wellness measures that municipalities could implement to lessen the burden of chronic disease and improve the health of their community:



- Organize free and accessible health and fitness community events.
- Conduct a community walk/bike audit.
- Promote local resources for active living and healthy eating.
- Regularly assess the condition of parks and recreation facilities, maintaining or improving them as needed.
- Install bike racks in frequently used public places.
- Establish a Safe Routes to School program.
- Conduct retailer audits on access to and promotion of tobacco, alcohol, and other unhealthy products.
- Establish a local review process to ensure Complete Streets concepts are used in all transportation projects.
- Establish or support a farmers market or community garden.
- Create shared-use agreements with schools for public access when school is not in session.
- Create a connected, community-wide network of bike lanes, sidewalks, and crosswalks.
- Improve the visual appeal of public spaces with planting, lighting, benches, artistic bike racks, and wayfinding signs.
- Add a permanent town budget line item for recreation investments.

State law encourages Vermont municipalities to support smart-growth principles through growth center legislation passed in 2006 ([24 V.S.A. §§2790-91](#)). This law allows towns to designate appropriate growth areas and provides incentives for compact growth.<sup>9</sup>



## RiseVT and Community Partnerships

RiseVT works with individuals, families, schools, businesses, and municipalities to encourage the adoption of healthy lifestyles, and it is a great resource to Franklin and Grand Isle Counties. Its team of wellness specialists help municipalities assess their community's needs and foster and amplify initiatives to solve issues—building healthier and safer places to live, work, learn, and play. RiseVT can



assist municipalities in assessment, public engagement, promotion, signage, municipal plan language, grant opportunities, economic revitalization, education, celebration, and regulations, and it can connect the municipality to resources and facilitate partnerships. The following are examples of successful RiseVT initiatives and/or partnerships with municipalities:

- **Smoke-free parks:** These initiatives include the development of effective signage and youth engagement in prevention efforts.
- **Walkability/bikeability:** These initiatives nurture support to build sidewalks and safe areas to bike in order to encourage increased physical activity and safe routes to school. Recently, Highgate, Swanton, Alburgh, and St. Albans all implemented sidewalks to support walkability efforts in their communities.
- **Health coaching:** RiseVT offers free health coaching to individuals, organizations, and community groups.
- **Breastfeeding-friendly spots:** St. Albans City is now a breastfeeding-friendly city. RiseVT worked with the Vermont Department of Health, the city, business owners, and the public to create safe places for women to feed their children in the city, which can be easily identified by signage.
- **Healthy food options:** RiseVT supported the St. Albans City pool in its efforts to change the culture to supply healthy food options. The pool now only sells healthy snack items. RiseVT provided resources to supply refrigerators to house fresh vegetables and fruits, as well as blenders to make smoothies. For more information, visit [risevt.org](http://risevt.org).

For more information, visit [risevt.org](http://risevt.org).



### Spotlight: Swanton Enhancement Project



The Swanton Enhancement Project (SEP) is a great example of creating, implementing, and supporting healthy community design initiatives that generate community engagement and better prevention practices. The process and vision for Swanton emerged through an extensive survey and prioritization process that took place throughout 2013, in addition to the efforts of engaged community members who led the project's efforts. The SEP started by assessing community members' views about Swanton's assets, challenges, and opportunities to determine the community's needs. After conducting surveys and public meetings, the results were used to form steering committees and prioritize actions. The many collaborations with teams from RiseVT, the Vermont Department of Health–St. Albans, and task forces



addressing the prioritized areas of focus (1. outdoor recreation; 2. arts council; 3. economic development; 4. substance abuse prevention; 5. downtown traffic, walkability, bikeability) contributed to the success of the SEP. A [Community Visit](#) by the Vermont Council on Rural Development advanced the vision of the SEP. The Town and Village of Swanton also included this initiative in the municipal plan, outlining the vision for Swanton. Each task force has had success in community forums, events, and projects related to their area of focus. One project example is Safe Routes to School, which addressed paving, crossings, and challenging intersections affecting youth who walk or bike to school. For more information, visit [swantonenhancement.org](http://swantonenhancement.org).

## Regulatory Activities

There are three primary focus areas when considering possible regulatory activities for healthy community design: concentrated mixed-use development; parks, recreational facilities, and open spaces; and fresh and healthy foods.

### Quick Facts:<sup>9</sup>

- Studies show a 35% increase in physical activity among people who live in communities that have inviting, safe environments for walking, exercise, and play.
- Safety measures, such as traffic calming or clear street crossings, encourage exercise: 43% of people who live within 10 minutes of a safe place to walk meet physical activity recommendations.
- Narrow streets and slower speeds provide safety—drivers move faster on wider roads.
- Slowing traffic from 30 to 20 mph reduces injuries to pedestrians by more than 70%.
- Slowing traffic from 40 to 20 mph improves a person's chances of surviving being hit by a car from 5% to 85%.

### Concentrated Mixed-Use Development:

Building residential, retail, industrial, medical, and educational facilities close together creates walkable communities and encourages people of all ages and abilities to make physical activity a part of everyday living. Local zoning bylaws can require concentrated mixed-use development, which can create a greater opportunity for physical activity and healthy food choices. It also concentrates infrastructure investments (e.g., sidewalks and bike paths), creates options for public transportation, maintains green space, reduces air pollution, and promotes greater social interaction.<sup>9</sup>

### Quick Fact:

- People who live in walkable, mixed-use communities are more than twice as likely to be physically active 30 minutes or more each day, compared to those who live in communities oriented to motor vehicles.<sup>9</sup>

### Parks, Recreational Facilities, and Open Spaces:

Access to recreational facilities (such as parks and green spaces, outdoor sports fields and facilities, walking and biking trails, public pools, and playgrounds) supports active and healthy living with safe places to play and socialize. Access to these places is affected by distance from homes or schools, cost, hours of

operation, and available transportation.<sup>9</sup> Creating ordinances around meeting these needs can better serve community members. For example, mandating new sidewalks in the local zoning bylaws to ensure safe access to parks, lengthening hours of operation of all municipal parks/facilities to ensure equitable access among working populations, or eliminating cost associated with any municipal parks/community centers, are all regulatory actions a municipality could consider.

**Quick Facts:<sup>9</sup>**

- Increasing access to or creating new places for physical activity can increase the percentage of residents who are physically active by 25%.
- People who live within one-quarter mile of a park are 25% more likely to be physically active.
- Having a network of well-connected trails to community destinations removes some barriers to physical activity.

**Fresh and Healthy Foods:**

Fresh and healthy foods are essential for a healthy diet. Lack of access to affordable fresh produce and nutritious foods contributes to obesity and associated health problems. Key strategies for expanding access to healthy food and local food production include creating zoning that allows for farmer's markets and community gardens, and/or adopting zoning regulations that incentivize the creation of new community gardens.<sup>9</sup> In addition, edible landscaping is another effective tool municipalities could use. Edible landscaping uses community spaces (parks, gardens, rooftops, etc.) for both aesthetic value and consumption. Instead of traditional landscaping, food that can be consumed by the public for free can be planted. This can provide more food for individuals in the community that may be food insecure. It also provides youth and adults with a greater connection to and knowledge of food production and agriculture. Municipalities could also consider some non-regulatory approaches, such as, support for community-based agricultural enterprises, and incentives for retailers to offer healthier foods.

**Quick Facts:<sup>9</sup>**

- Rural, low-income, and underserved communities are less likely to have larger food markets that offer a variety of fruits, vegetables, and other healthy foods.
- Having a grocery store in the community is linked to higher fruit and vegetable consumption and lower prevalence of overweight and obese residents.

**Examples of Municipality Regulatory Activities:**

- Establish and promote mixed-use development ordinances requiring ease of access, transportation choices, green space, sidewalks, etc.
- Require healthy food options at all municipal snack bars, vending machines, and town-sponsored events.
- Consider mandates around replacing half of the flower beds or trees in parks with edible landscaping options, such as apple trees, greens, vegetables, and berries. Doing so will provide aesthetic value while producing more food for food-insecure individuals within the community.

## Mental Health

### Background

The impact and effects of substance misuse and chronic disease on a community have been presented in detail in this guide. However, mental health is highly integrated and interconnected with these health and well-being issues. Too often mental health is separated from physical health, creating silos in how communities can approach these issues, when in fact the prevention and community design solutions are similar.

The World Health Organization (WHO) defines mental health as a state of well-being where a person is aware of his or her own abilities to cope with everyday stressors, work productively, and make contributions to their community. To ensure that all residents are actively contributing to their community, mental health must be addressed and preventive measures should be taken. Mental health is often given attention after challenges arise and when community members have not been connected to the right treatment and resources. Instead of only addressing mental health through intervention, municipalities can begin to use prevention efforts to intervene earlier and prevent crisis situations, as well as increase the quality of life and the well-being of community members.

**12%**  
of 9th–12th  
graders in the  
region have made  
a suicide plan<sup>1</sup>

### What does the data say?

- 14% of residents in Franklin and Grand Isle Counties reported feeling frequent mental distress in the past 30 days.<sup>27</sup>
- 1 out of 3 (approximately 35%) high school students in the region has reported feeling sad or hopeless in the past 30 days<sup>1</sup>
- 45% of Northwest Region young adults report feeling down, depressed, or hopeless in the last two weeks.<sup>29</sup>
- On average Northwest Region adults report 4.3 poor mental health days in the past 30.<sup>27</sup>
- Racial or ethnic minority Vermont adults are twice as likely as white, non-Hispanic adults to report poor mental health.<sup>14</sup>

### Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs):

The concept of ACEs comes from a groundbreaking study that showed the relationship between adverse childhood experiences and later onset of chronic diseases, mental illness, substance abuse, and poor health and quality-of-life outcomes for adults.<sup>14</sup> The ACE Study was a collaboration between the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and Kaiser Permanente's Health Appraisal Center in San Diego, which surveyed adults about their experiences in childhood. ACEs include 10 types of abuse, neglect, and other trauma experienced in childhood. ACE questions are asked of an adult about his or her own childhood experiences. One experience counts as one ACE. The innovative findings from ACEs can change the way mental health challenges are addressed within a community. Preventing ACEs means also preventing

chronic disease, mental health challenges, and substance misuse in adults, saving the community money and resources while improving the population's quality of life.<sup>18</sup>

### **Developmental Assets:**

The Developmental Assets model comes from the Search Institute's research on 40 positive experiences and qualities that influence youth development. It is the most widely used approach to positive youth development and equipping youth with the resilience and skills they need to grow into healthy community members as adults.<sup>17</sup> Studies show that the more assets young people have, the less likely they are to engage in a wide range of high-risk behaviors and the more likely they are to thrive.<sup>17</sup> The full list of Developmental Assets can be found on [www.search-institute.org](http://www.search-institute.org). The 40 assets are divided among eight categories: Support, Empowerment, Boundaries and Expectations, Constructive Use of Time, Commitment to Learning, Positive Values, Social Competencies, and Positive Identity. Municipalities can develop an understanding of these assets and what their youth need to be successful and thrive, and then implement strategic programming and initiatives to better equip their communities to support assets, prevent mental health challenges, and promote well-being.



### **Quick Facts:**

- 58% of Vermont adults reported having one or more ACE.<sup>15</sup>
- Life expectancy decreases by 20 years when there are six or more ACEs present.<sup>14</sup>

## **Economic Impacts of Chronic Disease**

The mental health status of individuals can have a direct impact on how they perform at work and school, how many days of work and school they miss, and how able they are to contribute to the community. Mental health crisis intervention, emergency response, and emergency room costs are all additional costs associated with mental health challenges.

A study in early 2019 found that mental illness will cost the world 16 trillion dollars by 2030. Furthermore, 12 billion working days are missed every year due to poor mental health.<sup>32</sup> Additionally, \$83 billion in productivity losses and \$25 billion in healthcare costs have impacted the U.S. economy.<sup>18</sup> This is an extremely important global and national issue that can be combated locally. Every region has a responsibility to the community to become informed about how to prevent mental health challenges.

Intervening before crisis situations happen will decrease the economic burden of challenges that arise and contribute to an overall better served population, equipping the community with the services and resources it needs to thrive.

## **Policy and System Changes – Municipal Opportunities**

The Social-Ecological Model recognizes that although individuals are responsible for making healthy choices, behavior change may be more likely when the environment supports individual efforts. Providing mental health services to individuals seeking them is not the only way to address mental health challenges. Municipalities can support prevention efforts through the “Policies and Systems” level of the model shown on page 7. Municipalities can adopt policy and system changes in these three focus areas: municipal plans, non-regulatory activities, and regulatory activities.

*Providing mental health services to individuals seeking them is not the only way to address mental health challenges.*

### **Municipal Plans**

Municipalities should consider adding mental health–supporting language to their municipal plan’s “Goals and Policies” and “Action” sections. This will lay foundational ideas that will facilitate more opportunities for mental health prevention efforts, combat the stigma that is often present, and connect the community to resources offered. Mental health is often siloed from physical health or other prevention efforts addressed in municipal plans. However, to completely address the health and well-being of a population, mental health must be considered. Additionally, many prevention efforts for physical health are also effective at preventing and treating mental health issues, such as increasing physical activity and eating healthier. Creating mental health language in the municipal plan will also help support many of the regulatory and non-regulatory activities suggested below. See page 26 for sample plan language, including goals and actions.

### **Non-Regulatory Activities**

Research shows the strong influence a person’s environment has on his or her mental health. Just as healthy community design can improve the population’s physical health, it can also improve individuals’ mental health and overall well-being. Creating built environments that support mental health is an essential strategy. Open spaces such as trails, bike paths, and walkable communities provide opportunities for individuals to be outside and actively engaged with their community. This is one example of how healthy community design can reshape how people live, work, and play.

### **Trauma-Informed Approach:**

Establishing and integrating a trauma-informed approach to addressing mental and substance use disorders is important not only for individuals, but for communities as well. The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) defines a trauma-informed approach as one in which people realize the prevalence of trauma, recognize the impact and responses to trauma, and resist practices that could cause more harm.<sup>30</sup> Building resilient and trauma-informed communities is essential to improving public health and well-being. Communities can be places where traumatic events occur, and they can also help keep us safe. They can be a source of trauma or buffer us against the negative effects of adversity. Communities can collectively experience trauma much like individuals do, and they also can be a resource for healing.<sup>30</sup> Municipalities can use the principles outlined in Figure 4 to include trauma-informed language and initiatives in communities.



**Figure 4: SAMHSA’s Six Principles of a Trauma-Informed Approach**

Safety	Prevents violence across the life span and creates safe physical environments
Trustworthiness	Fosters positive relationships among residents, City Hall, police, schools, and others
Empowerment	Ensures opportunities for growth are available for all
Collaboration	Promotes involvement of residents and partnership among agencies
Peer Support	Engages residents to work together on issues of common concern
History, Gender, Culture	Values and supports history, culture, and diversity

Trauma-informed approaches are already being successfully implemented across the country. For example, Potrero Hill in San Francisco implemented the Trauma Informed Community Building model, which focused on promoting community-building activities that encouraged engagement and healthy living. The community saw mental and physical health improvements as a result of participation in community-building activities. Additionally, the program provided gift card incentives, which increased participation and helped low-income families.<sup>31</sup> For more examples of way communities succeed with trauma-informed approaches, explore



[SAMHSA’s series, Spotlights on Six Trauma-Informed Resilient Communities.](#)

### **Northwestern Counseling & Support Services (NCSS) and Community Partnerships:**

Northwestern Counseling & Support Services is located in St. Albans City and serves as the region’s designated mental health agency for Franklin and Grand Isle Counties. NCSS offers knowledge and expertise in mental, social, and behavioral health. The organization provides services to and establishes partnerships with local schools, communities, homes, offices, and hospitals.<sup>28</sup> NCSS aspires to link individuals and communities to services proactively, avoiding crisis situations. Municipalities could use NCSS as a resource and partner in providing mental health services as well as facilitating training, forums, and other educational opportunities, both community wide and for town decision makers. Municipalities should not feel overwhelmed or alone in tackling these prevention efforts; initiatives are most successful when collaboration takes place.

### Opportunities to Lessen the Burden of Mental Health Challenges

- Hold community forums to educate the public on mental health challenges and to allow the community to provide feedback to town officials.
- Implement education and training opportunities for town planning commissions, selectboards, decision makers, and community organizations with NCSS staff.
- Create and/or support already established community centers (libraries, recreation departments, churches, teen centers, etc.). Shared spaces that invite community members in can decrease isolation and loneliness among individuals. Such spaces also support town events and groups and encourage community interaction.
- Hold showings of the documentary *Resilience* to educate town officials, as well as the community at large, on ACEs. Create a space to hold a dialogue or forum after film showings to provide opportunities for better understanding. NCSS owns this film and can present the film and/or staff a dialogue.
- Establish a local partner meeting between NCSS, town officials, and other community organizations and partners. This will enable resources to be shared, create more informed decisions, and integrate mental health support within communities.
- Promote physical activity with open spaces, trails, bike paths, sidewalks, walkable communities, parks, etc. Increasing physical activity is a primary way to prevent or decrease anxiety and depression.<sup>19</sup>

### Regulatory Activities

Examples of regulatory activities municipalities may consider include:

- Establish local policies or protocols on referrals to services when making arrests. This requires working with the local police/sheriff to refer families to resources available when an arrest is made within the household.
- Assess and address substandard housing through local policy and zoning solutions (if present in the community). Tenants who suffer from the various impacts of unsafe and unhealthy housing conditions experience increased healthcare usage, mental health problems, disruption to school and work, and homelessness. The threat of eviction and lack of affordable housing options often prevent tenants from reporting rental housing health code violations.<sup>20</sup> Policy should focus on strengthening town health officers' authority to issue orders and enforce them, and should make it unlawful to re-rent an apartment if the landlord has not complied with the orders.
- Consider locally supporting statewide legislation on ACEs. Vermont has several bills (H.281, H.508, S.90) that include policies such as dedicated staffing to support ACEs efforts, expanded home visiting programs, and task forces and committees to assess current policies and recommend improvements, as well as incorporating ACEs screening into primary care.<sup>21</sup>

## Municipal Plan Goals and Policies – Sample Language

The following sample language may be modified to fit your municipality's needs. These broad statements are intended to provide a starting point for tailoring goals to your community in order to reduce the risk and lessen the burden of substance misuse, chronic disease, and mental health challenges. You may choose to use them, modify them, or create your own when revising your plan.

### General Health and Wellness Policies

- Ensure a safe community that is committed to fostering the health and well-being of all residents.
- Encourage the highest level of personal health for every community member through programs that support healthy lifestyles, reduce risks, and create access to quality healthcare services regardless of age, income, or ability.
- Enhance education on substance use, chronic disease, and mental health prevention for children, adults, and families.
- Support efforts to create an outreach program to link community members to health providers and services.
- Ensure that accessible and affordable alcohol and drug treatment programs are available.
- Provide diverse, meaningful programming with an emphasis on community health and wellness. Examples include targeting alcohol-free, cross-generational activities for families, teens, and seniors.
- Address the contributors to substance misuse, chronic disease, and mental health challenges by developing and/or requiring comprehensive programs and education about nutrition, physical activity, access to healthy food, and other prevention efforts outlined in this guide.

### Substance Misuse and Mental Illness Prevention Goals

- [Municipality] will support strategies that reduce the stigma associated with addiction and mental health problems.
- [Municipality] will implement efforts that promote continuity of care for people affected by their own or another's substance use or mental health problems. This includes collaborating on education, screening, intervention, treatment, and recovery services.
- All community events shall be alcohol, tobacco, and drug free.
- Alcohol advertising shall be limited so that its exposure to the public outside an establishment is minimized.
- [Municipality] supports new economic growth. However, establishments that serve equal proportions of food and alcohol are encouraged over establishments only serving alcohol.
- [Municipality] will participate in regional youth substance prevention groups that discourage underage substance use.
- [Municipality] will work with public and private mental health practitioners, as well as the region's designated agency, Northwestern Counseling & Support Services, to create an action plan that addresses mental health issues, especially substance misuse disorders.

## Chronic Disease Prevention Goals

- [Municipality] will create and maintain recreational facilities and opportunities for all community users—with special attention to the needs of handicapped, youth, elders, those with low incomes, and people from a variety of ethnic groups who may not be current substance users.
- [Municipality] will increase the availability of and access to groceries, farmers markets, and community gardens to expand healthy eating options for lower income Vermonters.
- [Municipality] will provide incentives to food retailers for offering healthier food and beverage choices in underserved areas.
- [Municipality] will provide incentives for the production, distribution, and procurement of foods and other products from local farms.
- [Municipality] will pursue joint use agreements for community use of school facilities for physical activity, recreation, community gardens, and farmer's markets.
- [Municipality] will build relationships and implement procedures that make community health a priority.
- [Municipality] will encourage patterns of land use, transportation strategies, and street design to promote walking, biking, and public transportation. [Municipality] will also support access to fresh and healthy foods for all.

## Land Use Policies

- Commit to achieving sustainable land use practices that support a healthy year-round community and a thriving, vibrant visitor-based economy.
- Encourage land use policies and zoning revisions that disperse alcohol outlets throughout the community to minimize oversaturation and locate them away from schools, daycare centers, and concentrations of youth.
- Include parks, trails, and open spaces when considering future development within the community.
- Integrate health considerations—including mixed-use development, walkable/bikeable neighborhoods, and increased green spaces—into planning and zoning decisions.

## Land Use Goals

- [Municipality] will provide access to parks, shared-use paths and trails, or open spaces within a reasonable walking distance of most homes.
- [Municipality] will protect primary agriculture soils and work with agricultural specialists to assess exceptional soils and locations for local food production and distribution.
- [Municipality] will require gardening spaces in housing and commercial development projects where sufficient space is available. If space is not available on individual lots, [Municipality] will make provisions for community gardens within walking distance of all new development.
- [Municipality] will identify all public vacant properties that could be used for community-supported agriculture, community gardens, and farmer's markets.

- [Municipality] will implement zoning, policies, or ordinances to prevent businesses that sell tobacco or tobacco paraphernalia from locating near schools, parks, religious institutions, child care facilities, and other family-oriented areas.
- [Municipality] will prohibit substance use on town property including vehicles, parks, and recreation facilities.
- [Municipality] will utilize Health Impact Assessments in the evaluation of future land use decisions and projects.
- [Municipality] will protect open space for recreational use.

## Communication and Collaboration Policies

- Improve coordination and communication with other groups providing prevention services—including local schools, law enforcement, and public health partners—to minimize programming conflicts or duplication and to maximize the efficient and effective use of facilities as well as service delivery.
- Strengthen coordination between public safety groups, schools, and nonprofits to support education, awareness, and prevention programs.
- Support partnerships to create year-round safety education and prevention programs and to secure funding, including expanded school programming.
- Improve coordination and communication between the planning commission and selectboard so that each board's planning is consistent with the others and with the overall goals outlined in this guide.
- Work with local and regional healthcare partners to develop, implement, and align community health priorities through a community health assessment.
- Encourage participation in activities and funding for prevention efforts.
- Incorporate shared-use trails in development planning to connect communities, schools, and other facilities and to increase residents' options for physical activity.

## Municipal Plan Implementation – Sample Language

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A municipal plan without recommendations for implementation is only as good as the intention behind it. Vermont's planning statute even includes a required element: a recommended program for the implementation of the plan's objectives.

Offering suggestions for implementation allows town decision makers the opportunity to prioritize implementation activities, identify potential partners to do the work, and establish a time line to complete the implementation. There is room for creativity when identifying implementation activities. Consider the following points: What must happen in order to achieve the goal? What is the community trying to change? Who will carry out the activity? What is the time frame in which to accomplish the activity: one year, five years, 30 years out? The following page contains a list of language to use when creating prevention policies.



## Education, Outreach, and Community

- Foster greater inclusivity and participation in cultural events among the spectrum of community residents and visitors.
- Make arts and culture, including live programming, visible in the community streetscapes and landscapes.
- Encourage recreational and cultural programs that support personal growth, enhance family relationships, and encourage civic involvement.
- Model best practices related to promoting healthy communities at all municipal facilities and events (e.g., providing nutritious foods and ensuring that events are substance free).
- Create incentives for substance-free, family-friendly community events.
- Explore expanding community policing and neighborhood watch programs.
- Educate the community regarding the connection between improved child development, ACEs, and success in school and life.
- Establish reliable funding to provide public safety operations to meet growing public needs and unfunded mandates related to public safety.
- Educate the community about the importance of environmental and lifestyle risk factors, and provide free or low-cost programs to help reduce those risks.
- Require that a portion of the transportation budget be apportioned for pedestrian and bicyclist amenities, including street traffic-calming measures, street lamps, sidewalks, and bike racks.

## Healthcare Systems and Services

- Ensure that residents of all ages and abilities have access to a comprehensive mental health and substance misuse system that addresses acute and chronic mental health needs.
- Ensure that accessible and affordable mental health screening and treatment are available.
- Create a seamless system of services for families to support their children's positive development from birth through school age.
- Determine and address the need for improved access to substance misuse disorder recovery programs.
- Promote the use of recovery support services to help people recover from addiction.
- Ensure that all residents' basic healthcare needs are met with adequate access to primary care.

## Collaboration

- Strengthen partnerships and communication between healthcare agencies and providers to enhance community health programming, cohesive case management, and electronic communication.
- Continue collaboration and communication between the town and district health offices.
- Collaborate with local, regional, and state organizations that work with children and families to increase access to preventive care for children in all mental health areas.
- Collaborate with local, regional, and state organizations to implement these policies.
- Create a safe transportation system by arranging for public transit options at events associated with alcohol consumption.

## Resources and Services in the Northwest Region

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Below is a comprehensive list of resources, services, and organizations in our region. These are potential partners when considering any of the initiatives provided in this guide. Additionally, many of these organizations provide resources and services to individuals and communities.

### Planning/Zoning

**Northwest Regional Planning Commission (NRPC)** – [www.nrpcvt.com](http://www.nrpcvt.com)

The NRPC helps local municipalities through education, technical assistance, grants, and funding, and it aids municipalities in their planning efforts as authorized by Vermont planning laws.

**Vermont League of Cities and Towns (VLCT)** – [www.vlct.org](http://www.vlct.org)

The Vermont League of Cities and Towns is a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization that serves Vermont's municipal governments. The League provides educational workshops and consulting advice for municipal officials; information for the public; support for legislation; comprehensive insurance coverage; and the Municipal Assistance Center for consultations.

### Public Health Promotion

**Franklin County Caring Communities** – [www.fcccp.org](http://www.fcccp.org)

Franklin County Caring Communities works with community partners to identify and implement strategies to prevent and reduce substance abuse, especially among youth and young adults, and equip individuals, families, and the community at large to create healthy, substance-free environments where everyone can thrive.

**Franklin Grand Isle Tobacco Prevention Coalition** – [FGI's Facebook](#)

The coalition exists to reduce the use of tobacco and exposure to environmental tobacco smoke through comprehensive, collaborative community efforts. It hosts many informative and interactive events within the community.

**Hunger Free Vermont** – [www.hungerfreevt.org](http://www.hungerfreevt.org)

Hunger Free Vermont works to end the injustice of hunger and malnutrition for all Vermonters. It offers many resources and services for food access.

**Northwest Vermont Healthy Roots Collaborative (HRC)** – [healthyrootsvt.org](http://healthyrootsvt.org)

The Healthy Roots Collaborative is an emerging regional food systems program supporting the growers, producers, and consumers in Franklin and Grand Isle Counties. Healthy Roots provides programs and services for both consumers and producers in the northwest corner of Vermont that focus on food education, access, and infrastructure.

**RiseVT – [risevt.com](http://risevt.com)**

RiseVT is a community collaborative to encourage healthier lifestyles, improve the quality of life, and lower healthcare costs where we live, work, learn, and play. RiseVT offers many educational and interactive community outreach events.

**United Way of Northwest Vermont – [www.unitedwaynwvt.org](http://www.unitedwaynwvt.org)**

The United Way provides numerous resources to the community with the goal of investing in solutions that will make the greatest impact and meet community needs.

**Vermont Department of Health (VDH) – [www.healthvermont.gov/local/st-albans](http://www.healthvermont.gov/local/st-albans)**

The district public health office delivers a wide range of public health services and supports healthy lifestyles where we live, work, and play. VDH can provide many resources, specifically in Healthy Community Design.

## **Children and Family Resources**

**Abenaki Nation at Missisquoi-- [www.abenakination.com](http://www.abenakination.com)**

Abenaki Nation at Missisquoi is a Native American Tribe and First Nation located in Swanton, Vermont. The Abenaki Nation at Missisquoi mission is to engage in efforts which will promote and sustain a strong, healthy, and united community for the members of the Abenaki Nation. It is further our purpose to improve the quality of life for the tribal members we serve by identifying, addressing, and working to decrease gaps in service and treatment across the spectrums of health, human, and social services.

**Franklin Grand Isle Building Bright Futures (BBF) – [buildingbrightfutures.org/franklin/about](http://buildingbrightfutures.org/franklin/about)**

BBF is a statewide nonprofit, public/private partnership focused on improving the well-being of young children and families by improving the system that serves them. BBF offers many programs that connect families to services.

**Franklin Grand Isle Restorative Justice Center – [www.fgirjc.org](http://www.fgirjc.org)**

The Franklin Grand Isle Restorative Justice Center is a local intervention program that works to restore crime victims and communities to health and wholeness after experiencing unlawful behavior. It requires offending participants to engage in restitution and support changes in their lives toward making better decisions and becoming productive citizens. The organization serves the towns of both Grand Isle and Franklin Counties.

**Prevent Child Abuse Vermont – [pcavt.org](http://pcavt.org)**

Prevent Child Abuse Vermont promotes and supports healthy relationships within families, schools, and communities to eliminate child abuse. It offers a variety of programs and services free of charge to Vermont parents and families.

**Vermont Child Care Information Services – [www.brightfutures.dcf.state.vt.us/vtcc](http://www.brightfutures.dcf.state.vt.us/vtcc)**

This is the place for parents, early childhood and afterschool programs, and professionals to get answers to questions about child care and the services available to help ensure that high-quality child care is available to every child in Vermont.

**Vermont Child Care Providers Association (VCCPA) – [www.vccpa.org](http://www.vccpa.org)**

VCCPA is a nonprofit, professional organization offering peer support for Vermont’s child care providers. Its website states, “Our mission is to, ‘Represent child care providers & promote professional connections,’ in order to achieve our vision that all of, ‘Vermont’s children thrive,’ through quality care & experiences.”

## **Healthcare Services**

**Franklin County Home Health Agency (FCHHA) – [www.fchha.org](http://www.fchha.org)**

FCHHA provides a full range of home healthcare, hospice, and support services for people of all ages. It offers new families breastfeeding support, skilled nursing and pediatric rehab therapy, sustained nurse home visiting, and the Nurse Family Partnership® program. FCHHA helps keep our community healthy through flu and foot clinics and offers free support groups for those who are grieving.

**Howard Center- <http://www.howardcenter.org/>**

Howard Center offers a range of services for mental health, substance misuse treatment, and developmental disabilities for children, adults, and families. Their mission is to “improve the well-being of children, adults, families, and communities.”

**Northwestern Counseling & Support Services (NCSS) – [www.ncssinc.org](http://www.ncssinc.org)**

NCSS acts as the designated agency for mental health services for the residents of Franklin and Grand Isle Counties. It ensures access to high-quality services that promote healthy living and emotional well-being.

**Northwestern Medical Center (NMC) – [www.northwesternmedicalcenter.org](http://www.northwesternmedicalcenter.org)**

NMC serves Franklin and Grand Isle Counties by providing a wide array of both healthcare services and community resources.

## **Economic Assistance/Services**

**3SquaresVT – [www.vermontfoodhelp.com](http://www.vermontfoodhelp.com)**

3SquaresVT is a federal USDA program administered in Vermont by the Department for Children and Families Economic Services Division that puts healthy food within reach. The program helps everyone who qualifies, including individuals, families, seniors, and people with disabilities.

**Champlain Valley Office of Economic Opportunity (CVOEO) – [www.cvoeo.org](http://www.cvoeo.org)**

CVOEO addresses fundamental issues of economic, social, and racial justice and works with people to achieve economic independence.

**Champlain Housing Trust (CHT) – [www.getahome.org](http://www.getahome.org)**

Throughout Chittenden, Franklin, and Grand Isle Counties, CHT manages 2,200 apartments, stewards 565 owner-occupied homes in its signature shared-equity program, offers homebuyer education and financial fitness counseling, provides services to five housing cooperatives, and offers affordable energy efficiency and rehab loans.

**Franklin County Industrial Development Corporation (FCIDC) – [www.fcidc.com](http://www.fcidc.com)**

FCIDC is a private, nonprofit development corporation sponsored by the State of Vermont and Franklin County businesses and municipalities. The mission of FCIDC is to strengthen our economy through the creation and retention of new jobs and build a business environment suitable to host capital investment.

**Franklin County Regional Chamber of Commerce – [www.frcrcvt.com](http://www.frcrcvt.com)**

The Franklin County Regional Chamber of Commerce provides members with simple, yet essential, resources and benefits with which to strengthen and grow individual businesses and, in turn, our local economy.

**Franklin/Grand Isle Community Action – [www.cvooe.org](http://www.cvooe.org)**

Franklin/Grand Isle Community Action operates outreach offices in the towns of Richford, Alburgh, and Grand Isle. Each location provides a wide range of important services to the low-income residents of Vermont's Champlain Valley, including housing assistance, emergency fuel and utility assistance, emergency food shelves, transportation assistance, food stamp outreach, and other locally based services.

**Franklin–Grand Isle Workforce Investment Board – [kathy.lavoie2@myfairpoint.net](mailto:kathy.lavoie2@myfairpoint.net)**

The Franklin–Grand Isle Workforce Investment Board offers adult education and training for employment skills and upgrades, customized training for employers, and classes geared toward giving adult students the education needed for improved career prospects.

**Northwest Family Foods – [northwestfamilyfoods.org/index.html](http://northwestfamilyfoods.org/index.html)**

Northwest Family Foods is a food shelf serving Franklin and Grand Isle Counties. Additionally, it connects residents with many other resources and has locations throughout the counties.

**Samaritan House – [www.samaritanhouseinc.com](http://www.samaritanhouseinc.com)**

Samaritan House is a nonprofit organization that provides emergency shelter and transitional housing to people without other options or resources within the Vermont counties of Franklin and Grand Isle.

**Turning Point of Franklin County – [turningpointfranklincounty.org](http://turningpointfranklincounty.org)**

Turning Point of Franklin County is a community center for people in recovery from alcohol and substance abuse, addiction, and addictive behaviors. Located in St. Albans, Turning Point provides a safe, substance-free environment populated by people in recovery who offer peer support at no cost.

**Vermont Food Bank Commodity Supplemental Food Program (CSFP) – [www.vtfoodbank.org/share-food/csfp](http://www.vtfoodbank.org/share-food/csfp)**

The CSFP is a USDA nutrition program that offers free monthly nutrition information and nutritious foods to income-eligible senior citizens.

**Vermont State Housing Authority – [www.vsha.org](http://www.vsha.org)**

The Vermont State Housing Authority has been in the business of providing critical housing assistance in Vermont for 49 years.



**Voices Against Violence** – [www.voicesagainstvviolence.org](http://www.voicesagainstvviolence.org)

Voices Against Violence and Laurie's House provide free and confidential crisis intervention, support, and advocacy services to victims and survivors of domestic and sexual violence in Franklin and Grand Isle Counties.

**WIC** – [www.healthvermont.gov/family/wic](http://www.healthvermont.gov/family/wic)

WIC helps you and your family be healthy and thrive by providing access to healthy foods, nutrition education and counseling, and breastfeeding support. If you're pregnant, a caregiver, or a mom with a child under five, WIC is right for you!

## **Continuing Education Resources**

**Community College of Vermont (CCV)** – [ccv.edu/location/ccv-st-albans](http://ccv.edu/location/ccv-st-albans)

CCV recognizes students have busy schedules and strives to meet those needs by offering both day and evening classes. Student resource advisors, financial aid counselors, tutors, and staff are ready to provide students with individualized support.

**Vermont Adult Learning** – [www.vtadulthoodlearning.org/franklin-grand-isle-counties](http://www.vtadulthoodlearning.org/franklin-grand-isle-counties)

Vermont Adult Learning offers services in basic skills education, a High School Completion Program, GED preparation and testing, English Language Learner (ELL) classes, WorkKeys Certificate, work readiness, and college transitions.

## **Community Engagement Resources**

**Lake Champlain Access Television** – [lcatv.org](http://lcatv.org)

Lake Champlain Access Television is a not-for-profit public, educational, and governmental access television facility committed to serving the needs of our communities by providing a free forum for the expression and exchange of ideas and information, a link to local government and schools, and a resource for education and training.

**Northwest Access TV** – [northwestaccess.tv](http://northwestaccess.tv)

Northwest Access TV has been providing residents and organizations of Highgate, St. Albans, Sheldon, and Swanton with opportunities to express their opinions and reach out to their community since 1999. The facility offers professional recording equipment, editing suites, and a production studio to be used free of charge in the creation of programming for its Public Access Channel 15 and Government Channel 16, as seen on Comcast Cable.

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